

place a statement about the high quality of its chicken at the KFC website. Trying to source the rumors, after all, is an onerous undertaking. Fighting them is tantamount to shadowboxing. "Unfortunately, on the Internet, there is no truth filter."

## UNH CRIES FOWL

UNH, however, has little to lose by making a squawk. "There isn't any study," spokesperson Kim Billings announced to the media. "We're in the middle of hosting the presidential debates & we start getting these calls about KFC." The school also uses its website to refute the story. "Kentucky Fried Chicken Hoax" reads one of its page headers, which deflates the bogus rumor this way:

"An active Internet hoax of the urban legend type falsely claims that KFC is using genetically engineered organisms instead of chickens." It outlines the hallmarks of a hoax:

- a) **well-known subject** (KFC);      b) **timely topic** (genetic modification of animals & plants;
- c) **spin**, from the improbable to the impossible;      d) "As an extra touch of **false verisimilitude**, there is a vague reference to a study at the University of New Hampshire!"

Urban legends, says UNH, appear mysteriously and spread spontaneously in varying forms. They also contain elements of humor or horror and make good story telling. "UL often have a basis in fact (e.g., KFC no longer uses "Chicken" in its name), but it's their life after the fact that gives them particular interest."

## ¶ OF RELATED INTEREST: KFC FINDS UNIQUE PUBLIC SERVICE NICHE

Company gives "Colonel's Way" awards to seniors with attitude. Because founder Harland Sanders started his chicken empire when he was 62 & had little more than a good recipe for fried chicken & a \$105 Social Security check, KFC honors others of advanced years who show similar spirit. Last year's winners gathered at the World Chicken Festival in Kentucky and were honored by Tony Randall & other senior celebs. Winners also got \$5,000 & a trip to New York City. Nominators get \$1000.

## ITEM OF IMPORTANCE FOR PRACTITIONERS

- ¶ **1 Of The 9 Ways PR Impacts The Bottom Line Is By Removing Executive Isolation.** A prominent case illustrating this principle is the unexpected early retirement of Coke CEO Douglas Ivester. If *The Wall Street Journal* & *Fortune* have it right, he had a tin ear for human nature & the environment around him. As *WSJ* put it: "The job of running a giant company like Coca-Cola Co. is akin to conducting an orchestra." What brought him down was "tone deafness in his handling of a series of small crises." What the maestro must know at all times is what's going on in every section of his orchestra. That's why they're needed, despite the professionalism of each player. And why they constantly cast their gaze across the ensemble. But this raises a question about Coke's pr staff. Their job -- maybe the greatest impact they can have -- is to see that the CEO doesn't become isolated. Tho there has been turmoil & turnover in pr there in recent times, did staff accept this responsibility? Or even know it is part of the job? Maybe they did their best, but the CEO was tone deaf to them, too. If so, or if the pr dep't upheavals were his doing, probably Ivester sealed his fate all by himself. Another reason wise execs stick very close to their pr pros. (Copies of reportage from [pr](#))

## STOCK MARKET REVOLUTION SHOWS AGAIN PSYCHOLOGY RULES (I.E. PR) & INDIVIDUAL INVESTORS REIGN; WHAT IT MAY MEAN

The market's "fate is determined by more variables, many of which are *non-quantifiable & economically non-sensible*," writes one investment researcher. He finds:

- "The massive popularity of the stock market for fun (sic!) & profit, enabled by minimal costs of (on-line) trading, has made psychology a significant factor for investors" (See [pr](#) 6/28/99)

With 80 million Americans holding stocks, the measures favored by traditional investors & Wall Street pros are pushed aside by individuals making their own decisions. How else explain the seemingly ridiculous P/E ratios of hi-tech shares? This suggests 3 trends for pr:

1. **The e-world may indeed empower individuals** to overwhelm even the most established structures, so the current amalgamation of big companies may not lead to the power & control the Robber Barons amassed a century ago. Maybe suits against AT&T & Microsoft are unnecessary
2. **PR must devise quantifiable non-financial measures** for evaluating org's -- before someone else does (like accountants, lawyers or legislators). Future success or failure is predictable by *psychological* measures like customer loyalty, employee engagement, org'l culture, etc. It is pr efforts that create these, so the profession should create the measurements
3. **Investor relations moves back to the realm of overall pr programming**, & isn't a "specialty" able to be practiced only by a few "experts" usually linked to the treasurer's office. They can talk to the analysts & institutional investors (as can any pro with a little backgrounding) but that gang may not control the market now. Individual investors may

Whether or not it ever lives up to the unbelievable hype, the web & its e-partners are not only creating work for practitioners -- but by giving control back to individuals may also reunify pr into the totally integrated unit it must be for real effectiveness.

## PR HYPE BUILT STOCKS TO "NON-SENSIBLE" LEVEL. WILL REALITY SET IN?

Says one analyst about the hysterical *initial* response to the AOL-Time Warner merger: "At some point, you have to wonder where consumers will get the time to watch, read & click more than they do now?" This merger illustrates a clash of 2 trends impacting pr: 1) ability to influence the psychology of the market for e-stocks, vs. 2) overwhelming overcommunication & overbusyness that limits use of e-products. One more example of the centrality of pr in every issue of presentday society.

MANAGER-IN-TRANSITION ROLE INCLUDES "COMMUNICATOR" BUT MANY ARE UNPREPARED; TREND OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR PR

Today's manager, often plucked from the production floor because of high performance, faces a host of challenges unique to the current organizational climate:

- Decentralized structures (can mean staff members are spread all over the globe)
- Diversity (people from varying backgrounds & cultures)
- Round-the-clock operations

Some managers rarely see many of the people they supervise. Yet they're expected to communicate effectively with all of them while still maintaining output. Often, communication is not a discipline for which these types are trained. "Terrific performers who are not skilled in communication or oriented to manage people are often promoted," noted Alison Davis at the PRSA Conference in Anaheim. "They are asked to effectively communicate complex topics cohesively & effectively. They are also asked to gather ideas, and to listen."

- Listening & collecting input can be the most challenging tasks of all for these mgrs, she finds

At a session titled "Helping Managers Communicate," Davis said that more than ever, managers are needed to bridge the gap between the top tiers of an organization & staff. Many, however, feel unprepared for the job. This is where the effectiveness of sound counsel comes to play. "We can't give them more hours in the day, but we can give them more tools, training & techniques."

SHOWING EMPLOYEES THEIR WORTH THRU MANAGER-AS-COMMUNICATOR

2 specialists in mgmt-staff com'n offer case studies. Amy Damianiakes, dir com'n for cellular company Air Touch, devised a

program called "Talk it Up." Based on studies showing workers trust their mgrs to interpret the company line & news for them, TIU is a com'n guide. "Employees rely on mgrs to put company news into context for them," she says. TIU shows managers step by step how to do this. Elements:

1. **Easy to read, Power-Point format** e-mailed to mgrs; who are encouraged, not required to use it
2. **Core message:** "Air Touch is a great place to work." Goal is to get employees to enjoy their jobs
3. **Find out in face-to-face-meetings if employees are able to uphold Air Touch promise** (a set of customer service credos). If not, why? What are the obstacles? What can be changed?
4. **Show employees how they impact the bottom line.** "The quarterly earnings report is an opportunity to help employees focus on how the company is doing & how they see themselves within the results."
5. **Give lots of credit where credit is due.** "Celebrate success at staff meetings. Name people by name. If areas need work, offer encouragement, support, suggestions."
6. **Listen to suggestions.** "Listening builds trust." Subsequent meetings can demonstrate to employees how management listened & effected change where change was required.

DIVING INTO DIALOG

Cindi Kurczewski, mgr, airport customer svc, Delta Airlines (Atlanta) helps mgrs deal with a 70,000-person global workforce that operates on a variety of shifts & schedules. Despite this, quality has to be top drawer. "The airline industry is a tough industry, under a lot of scrutiny," she says. As with Air Touch, Delta surveys indicated employees prefer to hear news from immediate supervisors. But these managers are a "silent majority" not particularly adept at com'n.

"The Delta family was a dysfunctional family, but we still pulled it together. We found that com'n was breaking down at the team leader level. They needed skills." Com'n tools already in place included regular e-mailed briefing notes, a monthly divisional publication & leadership tools. These, however, were not being fully utilized or taken seriously. "We wanted to address the accountability factor -- **how can we make this group responsible for communication?**"

- Delta developed a 2-year, 6-module program called "SCUBA" (because the company thought the sports-oriented theme would appeal to the mostly male mgmt staff)
- It's a **self-study course** so mgrs can use it whenever & wherever in the world they are. Also, Delta figured, independence would foster accountability & making mgrs accountable was the main goal
- After a **kick-off party** with a scuba-diving theme & fun self-assessment exercises (such as 2-way mirrors so team leaders could see themselves), participants were ready for the first module: "Dive In." They had to fill out a commitment card reminiscent of the safety card divers fill out upon certification. "We got 9,000 out of 15,000 returned. We were very excited"
- **Subsequent modules** featuring tips & techniques come to mgrs every other month
- A **second assessment** raised mgrs to the level of "certified communicator," then Kurczewski's group brought team leaders together with their front-line employees for dialog & feedback.

"We love SCUBA," says Kurczewski. Plans are in the works for a SCUBA2 for new mgrs & as a refresher course for SCUBA graduates.

FIGHTING ON-LINE TANTAMOUNT TO SHADOW-BOXING; KFC KEEPS LOW PROFILE ABOUT BOGUS RUMOR, UNIVERSITY CONFRONTS IT

Chicken giant KFC (Louisville) -- formerly Kentucky Fried Chicken of Col. Sanders fame -- is fighting on-line rumors that it stuffs its product with faux fowl. "It's basically pure science fiction," dpr Mike Tierney told prr. Rumors being passed via e-mail claim the Colonel uses genetically manipulated organisms grown in test tubes. "They have no beaks, no feathers & no feet," says the rumor. It cites a U New Hampshire study for the information.

KFC KEEPS ITS BEAK TO THE GROUND

KFC has decided not to duck the issue, but deal with it on a call by call basis. "Our **tenet is to listen & respond to the voice of our customers**," says Tierney. "We hope to arm them with the facts" when they inquire. But the company is doing little to acknowledge the rumors, save