

4. **Unpreparedness** for vulnerable issues that can stunt credibility
5. **Focusing on profit** potential instead of core business activities

Gartenberg offers a training program for companies and works with pr firms and departments, soliciting their input before launching the customized program. (More from him at 914/637-0072 or mediatrain@ggpro.com)

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Next Time You Need to Explain Unfair Media Coverage to Your Boss or Client**, you can now quote a journalism icon – Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame. The news business, he told a college audience, “is becoming a freak show. We’re increasingly losing our way. Journalism has less & less to do with truth & reality & totally lacks context. Media bears little resemblance to the community it serves.”

¶ **The MIT Pres. Who Apologized (pr last week) Understands Big Picture PR in Other Ways.** When Chuch Vest got the prestigious job amid heavy competition in '90, he persuaded his retiring predecessor & the provost to stay in place for a few months. He used that time to go face-to-face with hundreds of faculty & administrators. “I would come in here 5 days a week & just meet from morning to dinner, for an hour each, asking them what they thought the big issues were,” he told the writer of a profile. Comments an MIT insider who competed for the job: “All of us (other candidates) were strong personalities with fixed agendas. But the faculty wanted someone who could listen. Chuch went around campus with a fat notebook & interviewed hundreds of people about what needed to be done. I’ve never seen anything like it.” The last statement is probably true, given the usual approach of college presidents. But there’s a huge lesson here for CEOs of any org’n.

¶ **Latest Global Cultural Effect: “Indipop” and other Bombay-based fancies on the rise.** Brandfutures Group says that with a billion people & growing, India is exerting an increasingly weighty influence on pop culture. “Its literacy rates are low, but a large & committed English-speaking community of expatriate computer gurus is helping connect Indians at home with the world beyond.” Getting big are Indian eateries, pop music & film. “Indipop music has invaded British & US night clubs & major entertainment labels have spent \$50 million marketing it to a wider audience.” “Bollywood,” the country’s film industry, is becoming a going global concern.

WHO’S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. PRSA/Nat’l Capital Chapter’s top Thoth Award winners: Outstanding Personal Achievement to counselor Paige McMahon; Diamond Award for Chapter Service to counselor Mike Rothenberg.

NOMINATED. By petition for PRSA office: counselor Joann Killeen, current nat’l treas, for

chair-elect, & Jeff Julin (MGA Com’ns) for at-large board seat. They will oppose nominating committee selections Art Stevens (Publicis Dialog/Lobsenz-Stevens) for chair-elect & Carole Gorney (Lehigh Univ) & Mike Jackson (Dow Corning) for the board seat.

RELIGION: IT ISN'T POLITE TO TALK ABOUT IT IN COMPANY, BUT INCREASINGLY IT IS A FACTOR PRACTITIONERS MUST DEAL WITH

Religious groups are a potent political force. Many issues boil down to a religious viewpoint – and spawn religious activism. Religions once not prevalent in the US are now here in force.

■ **Consider: Halloween is coming up.** You plan to throw a costume party for employees or their children – or sponsor one for disadvantaged kids perhaps. Or you have a Halloween party in your school, or books about it in your library. Are you prepared to fend off an attack from certain religious groups who believe All Hallows Eve is a ceremony of the Wicca (witches) religion?

It sounds so improbable. Halloween has been a fun tradition for so long. But some cities have cancelled trick-or-treating under pressure from those who think it devil worship.

■ **Have any Muslim employees?** Their beliefs require prayers, on a prayer rug, facing Mecca, 5 times daily – wherever they are & whatever they’re doing at the appointed times. Courts have ruled this practice is a right under the First Amendment – and pr pros must not only see that these employees’ rights are cared for, but also earn understanding for them from non-Muslims in the workforce in order to avoid discrimination or morale issues

RELIGION INFLUENCES ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOR

Modern role models for activism in religious circles

are African American clergy. Martin Luther King, after all, was a minister, as are Jesse Jackson & numerous other civil rights leaders, both black & white. The current activism against Atlanta companies including Coke, Georgia Power & Lockheed Martin is led by the black ministerial ass’n there. How do these companies pr staffs deal with issues that may be preached from the pulpit every Sunday?

This persuasion method has an ancient & honorable history. Pulpits & churches were major communication & activism points in fomenting & carrying out the American Revolution. Ditto on both sides of the Civil War. The history of the 16th C. is one of religious contention – leading to inhumane violence & wars. Yet as the Middle East, India, Northern Ireland & other places demonstrate, humankind is still engaged in this behavior – ironically, behavior that all religions preach against!

When abortion clinics are bombed & doctors murdered, it appears the US is not immune to religious fanaticism. White supremacists, anarchists, Neo-Nazis & preachers of anti-Semitism or racism often are organized into small, independent “churches”. Religious groups picket to change school sex ed or science curricula. Ponder these recent events for possible influence on stakeholders of your org’n:

1. The older generation of Catholic priests, taking their lead from the Second Vatican Council, liberalized church practice & became social activists – for the poor, minorities, immigrants,

workers & other disadvantaged groups. They were community organizers – but complain the younger priests of today have turned away from such social missions to far more conservative attitudes, especially on topics like the role of women. What problems might this cause for you?

- 2. Sen. Lieberman’s vice presidential candidacy has added a new element to religion in politics. It isn’t just Southern Baptists like Pat Robertson & Jesse Falwell any longer. What impact will this have: aiding tolerance & pluralism, or creating religious distrust & division? Whichever eventuates, how might this impact the issues of your industry, sector or org’n?
- 3. While a coalition of rabbis ran a fullpage ad in *NYTimes* last month urging improved relations between Christians & Jews, the Vatican Curia at the same time issued a statement relegating Jews & all non-Catholics to secondary status (pr 9/11). In the nation’s march toward inclusivity, played out most successfully in the workplace & marketplace, what might be the impact of this apparent clash?
- 4. The head of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs recently offered a formal apology to the Native American community for attacking “your religions, your languages, your rituals & your tribal ways.” The govt’s treatment of tribes over the past century & longer is a well told tale, but this was the first apology offered. Simultaneously in Canada “cultural abuse” of Indians by schools run by Catholic, Anglican, United & Presbyterian churches over 100 yrs have lead to lawsuits which may bankrupt those denominations. How will church members & the public react?

Many other instances where religion is the actual or underlying factor in a potentially issue-shaping or issue-creating situation could be cited. For practitioners, who must work amidst the social & cultural environment whatever it may be, religion can no longer be considered something not to be discussed in polite company.

PRACTITIONER OFFERS GUIDELINES FOR LEADERSHIP

Just use the word “leader” as an acronym, suggests Paul Giuliano, Executive Com’ns Group (Englewood, NJ).

- 1. Listen with your ears and eyes wide open, to what is being said and unsaid, especially during stressful times. “Determine the true problem with interoffice squabbles, client upset or project derailment. Take the time to fix it at that moment.”
- 2. Examine problems, consider them from the perspective of others. “Never play favorites or jump to conclusion.” Find the solution that’s best for the individual and the group.
- 3. Assist others in learning from mistakes. “Don’t chew people out for errors – go over what went wrong, where others could have helped and how the situation should be handled in the future.”
- 4. Develop fair policies and solutions. “When you need to make a tough call, explain how you arrived at your decision, why you think it’s best.” [Transparent com’n]
- 5. Encourage employees by providing tools, resources and assurance to do the best job. Give extra responsibility and gently push them to advance into more demanding roles. “If you allow people to grow, they’ll reward you with better performance and increased loyalty.

- 6. Recognize good work, praise the positive in every worker. “Do not overlook flaws, but give approval whenever possible.” [Positive reinforcement]

“A leader’s job isn’t to gain everyone’s approval; an effective leader motivates those who can help in achieving the desired outcome of a project or mission.”

STATE AGs DROP CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING INVESTIGATION

Attorneys General from 14 states & DC who last year called for a nat’l code on the subject – especially when NPOs are beneficiaries or otherwise involved – have decided that raising the issue has solved the problem for the time being. Of concern was “the advertising of commercial products using the names & logos of nonprofit org’ns.” Other forms of promotion than just paid space or time are included in their use of the word “advertising”.

- But the AGs stress that they will continue to monitor this & all aspects of cause marketing where NPOs lend their names & logos to commercial entities

Most states have laws regulating what nonprofit – & thus non-taxed – org’ns can do that involves & may benefit profit-making entities. But laws differ widely, and after noting several abuses the AGs wondered if a nat’l code was needed. 2 considerations for practitioners:

- 1. Know the laws of each state any cause marketing will be conducted in. Critical statements from a source like the AG’s office quickly turn your pr opportunity to a pr nightmare
- 2. Ass’n practitioners need to realize that regulators are keeping a close eye on any attempts to cross the line between nonprofit & for-profit. Formal internal guidelines or policies are a good defense or, at least, a form of issue anticipation

HOW DOT-COMS SHOULD PITCH TO THE MEDIA – AVOID THESE RED FLAGS, WHICH APPLY TO ANY ORG’N SEEKING COVERAGE

According to media rels specialist Gerry Gartenberg, the sell of simply being a dot-com is fading fast. “We’re a media training firm specializing in getting dot-coms (especially their CEOs) ready for prime time,” he told pr. “Think a journalist will scamper to sing your dot-com’s praises simply because it’s Web-based, ultra creative and planning an IPO? Think again.”

He says reporters and editors in any medium want people to understand the time pressure, the hunger for hooks, a human dimension, and above all, powerful quotes and sound bites. He’s identified “red flags” for dot-coms to avoid when pitching to journalists. Rules apply to “brick and mortar” companies also.

- 1. The tendency to **hard sell the site**. The message is the medium – find something newsworthy
- 2. **Too much about “hardware,”** not enough talk about consumer/business needs
- 3. **Overlooking a particular reporter’s needs** and clues that could help mediate the reporter/company relationship in a favorable way