

Employers' fear of legal action from accidents & sexual harassment charges stemming from excessive drinking is borne out by court dockets. Of org's that have holiday parties, 70% serve alcohol. To avoid trouble:

1. Invite spouses/significant others/families
2. Limit number of drinks for each person
3. Hire a professional bartender who knows when & how to say "no more"
4. Provide taxi service/hotel rooms

Reports say the holiday cocktail bash seems to be "going the way of the 3-martini lunch," that is, out. Could this be the effect of waning team spirit or loyalty factor, i.e., why get drunk with a bunch of co-workers (perceived as family, in the old days) when you can do it with friends or family?

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Message Strategy Case: Sen. Thurmond's Great Retort.** At 98th birthday celebration of the oldest & longest-serving US senator, his response to a reporter on his 90th birthday was remembered. "Can I expect to see you on your 100th birthday," he was asked. Thurmond looked him up & down & said: "Well, you look fit enough to me. If you eat right & drink right, you ought to be around to see me then." This rhetorical device is called transference, or boomeranging. You respond by answering as if you were the questioner or critic, transferring the question or criticism back onto the other person.

¶ **She May Be Controversial But "Dr. Laura" Puts Ideas Out There Neatly.** 2 that pr pros could use in their practices: "*Integrity is its own reward*" for corner-cutting mgrs or clients; & "*Gratitude is an attitude*" for the many occasions when good work or supportive behaviors are taken for granted. This ability to craft memorable phrases for ideas of incontrovertible wisdom may explain why she has many die-hard fans who stick with her no matter how much she's criticized.

¶ **Increasingly, Org's Want Com'n & Personal Skills for Execs.** Earnings in the tank? Many beleaguered companies are sending execs to school to learn how to recognize & correct flaws – their own. Center for Creative Leadership (Greensboro, NC), RHR Int'l (Phila) & Personnel Decisions Int'l (Mpls) are 3 that specialize in "personal management." Biz schools are also increasing their offerings in this area. Enrollees include senior execs in line for the top job, or CEOs themselves. The schools are able, without inhibition, to do something employees can't do – criticize the boss. "Sometimes people closest to you are the people you dismiss the fastest," Patrick Parker, sr exec, Zhone Technologies (Oakland) told *NYTimes*. "Participants in the program don't love you, they don't hate you, they're not paying your rent. They will give you pure feedback." But isn't this precisely what pr pros should do – one reason sr mgrs & clients sometimes ask, "Whose side are you on, anyway?"

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. Public Affairs Council officers: Nick Franklin (PacifiCare Health Systems, Santa Ana), chair; Ann Richardson Berkey (McKesson, San Francisco), chair-elect; Holly Hassett (Hershey Foods, Hershey, Penn), vice chair; Jeff Lane (Procter & Gamble,

Cincinnati), vice chair; Susan Neeley (Ass'n of American Medical Colleges, DC), vice chair; Eric Rennie (Hartford Financial Services Group, Hartford, Conn), vice chair; Faye Gorman Gaul (Dow Corning, DC), treasurer; Doug Pinkham, president.

MACRO TRIGGERING EVENT LOOMS: ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN, FOR WHICH EVERY ORG'N WILL NEED A RESPONSE PLAN

Got yours ready? You'll need it if economic boom is slowing, as many economists now say – or even stalling & heading for recession – as some experts fear. Even if it doesn't happen anytime soon, its *potential* occurrence demands a ready response strategy & tactical plan.

- If income falters, how can pr shore up **customers or donor** loyalty? Maintain customer delight?
- If layoffs or cutbacks of other kinds occur, precisely how will you prepare **employees & mgrs**?
- If community relations & social responsibility projects must be defunded, how will you retain the support of **beneficiaries & partners** during tougher times – when their unfaltering 3rd party advocacy may be essential?
- If you have environmental cleanups, worker lawsuits, labor issues or regulatory demands, what pr measures will be required to let you maintain **reputation & stakeholder/stockholder confidence** when funds to resolve the issues may not be available – but the public looks for scapegoats, as they inevitably do when economies sour?
- How will you **protect your CEO** from becoming a scapegoat – especially in publicly held corp's where analysts who couldn't run a newsstand will be demanding results a wizard couldn't deliver?
- In **public agencies & schools**, how will you build support for your inability to do the much more that will be expected, even demanded, of you – when funds are not available?
- In **healthcare** – already in financial meltdown from inadequate funding, inefficiencies, profiteering by some segments & public outrage at efforts to cut costs – if this is the situation in boom times, how will you manage pr in harder times?

Some org's will be hurt. Others can make it an opportunity. Most will have some of each. Strategic thinking *before the event* permits you to find some creative silver linings no matter how bad things may get. No pro wants to cry wolf or deliver bad news – but this is a main chance to make 2 key points:

1. PR is not only the early warning system for potential problems, but also the crafter of potential solution strategies *before the damage is done*
2. Economic downturns more than anything else involve fear, inability to seize opportunity, demand for instant & transparent information & other *human nature considerations* only pr can handle

Interestingly, pr's major ally here can be the CFO – who without doubt is now spending considerable effort attempting to discern whether the warning signals will eventuate.



UNTIED APRON STRINGS BECOME ELECTRONIC LEASH ON TEENS; WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRIVACY, FOR PR & FOR YOUR ORG'N?

Irony: as technologies such as cell phones allow teens more freedom, they also help parents keep better track of their wandering youth. Many popular trends have started with youth in recent decades –personal computers & use of ATMs, e.g. So this one bears watching for its impact on what may be the major issue of the new decade – privacy in a connected world.

Already, parents can be e-mailed details of a transaction as soon as a teen makes a credit card purchase. Caller ID identifies where kids' calls are coming from. A plethora of new devices will allow even more invasive monitoring, report *The Wall Street Journal* & other sources:

1. **Homing devices.** Soon companies like SnapTrack and Trimble Navigation will turn cell phones into homing devices so parents know where kids are
2. **Live video cams in computers** by Xanboo, Inc, let parents see just who enters and exits the house. Same program has motion sensors, notifying parents at work when front door opens
3. **Electronic snapshots of computer usage.** It's hard for a kid to enjoy on-screen porn knowing a program called "Spector" is intermittently taking pictures of the computer screen, allowing parents to replay the action later
4. **Video to cell phone.** PacketVideo will soon offer a technology that sends streaming video to parents' cell phones
5. **Other tracking devices.** Qualcomm is coming out with a global positioning system that will be embedded in cell phones & personal organizers so parents can view maps that locate children
6. **Ultimate invader.** Applied Digital Solutions will soon launch Digital Angel, which can be imbedded in cell phones, bracelets, luggage. Not only will it tell where a child is located, but can even record heart rate & body temperature. The company also has a patent for a device that can be surgically implanted beneath the skin for sick or disabled kids

DANGER IS IT WON'T STOP WITH TEENS

This seems ok when the goal is helping working parents see that latchkey kids stay out of trouble. But consider this: a Korean company has developed an entire line of devices purported to be

more accurate than standard lie detectors – & *also be stealthy*:

- While polygraphs analyze physiological reactions such as changes in pulse rate, the Handy Truster works on the principle that when people lie, the blood flow to their vocal cords is restricted by stress. The gadgets can be held in-hand (say, in the pocket) for face-to-face conversation, or chips can be planted in phones

Device was first used by the Israeli military, then marketed in the UK – & is now distributed in the US by Lie Busters (Galt, Calif). Company told pr it hasn't heard yet from groups concerned about privacy issues. "We haven't had any negative feedback whatsoever. It's a neat little gadget."

Damage to pr: Always first to be lost when privacy is invaded is trust. Which org'n today can withstand any more distrust & skepticism?

OPPORTUNITY FOR NPOs: PROMOTE GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE HOLIDAY GIVING & VOLUNTEERING TO SERVE, NOT SELL, PUBLICS

Employers may find this a service to workers. Or promote it as part of community relations. Independent Sector (IS) reports 109 million people volunteered & over 70% of households reported charitable contributions last year. Holidays are an especially inspired time.

- "Many civic minded citizens will spend part of the holiday season distributing food to the homeless, shopping for the elderly, buying presents for underprivileged children or donating money to causes near to their hearts," reminds IS pres Sara Melendez.

I.S. GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

A few that NPOs might want to strategically promote – to help potential donors (& themselves):

1. **Budget for giving.** Plan it right into your budget as with any other financial activity
2. **Be informed.** Ask questions, including the specific name of solicitor & org'n, how much of your gift will go to overhead, the specific project your \$ will support. Millions are fraudulently raised each year as the holiday spirit loosens purses
3. **Know how much is really tax deductible.** If you receive a premium in exchange for your gift, (book, tote bag, etc.), your tax deduction is reduced by the fair market value of your premium. You can return the item if you want to claim full deduction
4. **Keep the right records.** For gifts under \$250, a canceled check is enough. For larger gifts, you need receipt

FOR VOLUNTEERING

1. **Combine goals.** Look for volunteer activities that will help you achieve other goals. If you always wanted to take a cooking class, volunteer at a food bank that teaches cooking. Trying to build a portfolio of graphic arts projects? Help with a brochure
2. **Volunteer as a couple/group/family.** Think about volunteer opportunities parents & children can do together, or life partners can do as a team

Many times offering helpful information on doing good is as rewarding for org'ns as doing good. It carries out the strategy of serving publics rather than selling them.

MORE EMPLOYERS SAYING "HUMBUG" TO HOLIDAY PARTIES

An increasing number of org'ns are foregoing the tradition in response to these trends

- A. Employees prefer other goodies – say, a day off – to a company bash
- B. Employers fear the public appetite for lawsuits

"Companies may find that employees would actually prefer time off versus an afternoon or evening of manufactured frivolity," one Chicago CEO told AP.