

FOR ORG'NS SUPPORTING SCOUTS, THEY'VE BECOME AN EVEN THORNIER ISSUE AS JEWISH LEADERS DENOUNCE GAY STANCE

The first religious group to speak out, they join several others upset by a supposedly nonsectarian org'n adopting a stance that is basically religious. US & most states' laws promote freedom of sexual orientation among many inclusivity areas. Here an org'n that receives substantial public support, in both dollars & other ways, is defying the move toward total diversity. Important to many practitioners in its own right, this may be a bellwether for issues of the 21st Century.

Is it best to just duck this one? Corporations that have long worked with Boy Scouts of America (BSA) – which is supported by fund drives such as United Way – are bound to be flummoxed by the escalating controversy. Many org'ns have employee support groups for gays & lesbians, among others. Now, Reform Jewish leaders are recommending that members withdraw their kids from Boy Scout chapters & that synagogues end their sponsorship.

■ BSA's stance on gays is "incompatible with our consistent belief that every individual – regardless of his or her sexual orientation – is created in the image of God and is deserving of equal treatment," the Joint Commission on Social Action stated in a January 5th letter to Reform congregations. It recommends congregations publicize their reasons for cutting ties with Scouts.

In June, US Supreme Court ruled BSA could exclude gay leaders & members. Scouts argued that homosexuality contradicts the group's core values. Jewish organizations sponsor only 277 of 123,935 troops nationwide, a Boy Scouts spokesman says – but move is symbolic. Reform Judaism comprises about 1,000 congregations & 40% of US' 6 million Jews, ordains openly gay men & women as rabbis.

MANY SUPPORT SCOUTS ANYWAY

"The overwhelming majority of corporations continue to give strong support to scouting at the local council level," BSA says. Understandable, since many execs are ex-Scouts. Fact sheet titled "In Support of Values" says "relatively few corporations have decided to end their support of scouting ... in fact, the recent court decision has energized fund-raising efforts." Also, since the decision, enrollment is up 7% to 6.2 million members, a record. Scouts boast of an inclusion policy that encompasses all races & religions, contend BSA is private – with a right to set its own standards for membership & leadership.

■ **Tightrope for BSA to walk is obvious.** Southern Baptist pres. predicted big issue of '90s would be homophobia. Perhaps he was a decade early

[2 lines (here in italics) were omitted from the following when it appeared in the 12/18/00 issue]

¶ **Ups & Downs of New Tech Spawn Useful New Description: "Anticipointment."** Since everything in cyberspace accelerates, including time, perpetually optimistic Americans quickly find themselves disappointed when software, Websites or whatever are not as touted. Writing a chapter titled "Cyberspace, USA" in the new book *American Places*, historian Edward Ayers defines his word as "a sensation of possibility undermined by the feeling reality never quite lives up to the idealized image. It is pr, of course – the vaunted buzzzz – & lonely as well as hopeful, energetic & sociable." It is a democracy without a constitution – & agreeing on one, or at least a set of rules, will dominate the next decade or longer. "Cyberspace seems a distillation of America. Both are quick, shallow, and lonely as well as hopeful, energetic, and sociable."

IS CULTURE OF "PERSONAL DESTRUCTION" ONLY A POLITICAL & MEDIA PHENOM, OR AT ALL LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING?

As 2 highly visible political figures exit, critical considerations for pr strategy come into focus – along with the current environment in which it must be practiced. The theme seems to be that while issue debates can be harmful, they are also an opportunity. Personal attacks, in contrast, are almost always harmful.

LESSON FROM LINDA CHAVEZ

Withdrawing from the nomination as Sec'y of Labor, she cited "the politics of personal destruction" for her fall.

Tho there was strong opposition to her *positions* on issues Labor deals with, it wasn't until an act from her *personal* life surfaced that the Bush team abandoned her – under expected media & opposition fire

- The incident involved her relations with an undocumented immigrant. She described it as an act of compassion. Probably true, or at least understandable. But she gave the transition team conflicting dates & explanations – & that prompted them to back away
- **Disingenuousness (some call it lying or dishonesty)** is poison now. It wasn't Clinton's acts with his intern but being dishonest about it that caused impeachment. Studies reveal that while some are still puritanical on sexual mores, the majority isn't overly concerned. Lying, however, is unacceptable. Only mental illness (sadly) is as disliked, even more than embezzlement or stealing
- **Hypocrisy** is not accepted, being unfair – but it's such typical behavior now reporters hardly mentioned it in Chavez' case. When Clinton nominated Zoe Baird to be his Attorney General, Chavez in her syndicated column positively ranted at Baird's employment of an illegal immigrant
- **Guideline: Walking the talk matters nonetheless.** Be careful when your CEO or org'n speaks out on a topic that it is one they or the org'n will probably never be entwined with. Org'ns are terrible at this – especially with employees, where saying one thing, doing another is frequent

LESSON FROM GEN. MCCAFFREY

His hard-nosed reputation in the military colored, even distorted, his true views – if an exit interview with *NYTimes* is accurate. There Barry McCaffrey comes across – for the first time – as very concerned about helping addicts & supporting treatment programs. Indeed, the article is headlined "A Drug Warrior Who Would Rather Treat Than Fight."

- **Personal failings laid at his feet** were difficulty working with staff, & thus keeping even high level aides; micromanaging or at best not delegating well; & demanding things be done his way – criticisms rife from his military days & liberally heaped onto the Washington grapevine by officers who had served under him



■ **It was assumed therefore he was totally a tough guy** in the so-called war on drugs. But he told the *Times* solving the drug problem means “engaging in a more coherent, rational way the chronically addicted. If you want to save taxpayer dollars, & reduce violence in your communities, you have to draw them into effective drug treatment.” He also criticized mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses & other issues of nonviolent offenders – while believing drugs shouldn’t be legalized

■ **Today, personal issues become symbols & set the tone for perception of substantive positions**

BEYOND POLITICS

CEOs in the current wave of closings & bankruptcies get similar treatment. The *substantive* issue is often their healthy severance packages, while everyone else gets little but unemployment. But *personal* attacks accompany this – often some failure early in their career, or some imperfection in work style or personality. Even an offhand comment years ago. It is made to look as if they alone caused the failure.

It isn’t only journalists who perpetuate this but grapevine commentators as well. As Chavez claims, it is the culture of these times. What can practitioners do to prevent their org’s being harmed by it? Here’s a starter list:

1. **Underpromise & overdeliver.** Modesty is an ever larger virtue in an environment of negativity. Help CEOs & other big shots get their egos & feeling of importance under control
2. **Say less & keep it strictly focused.** Don’t try to cover all details. As a famous senator advised Larry Speakes, “You don’t have to explain what you don’t say”
3. **Make psychological models of every proposed word & action.** Q&As yes, but beyond that to modeling responses by key players – then your response to that. But don’t try to please everyone or fend off all questions or criticisms. Make your strongest play, then repeat, repeat, repeat without amplifying
4. **Use symbolic com’n – actions** that illustrate the policy, the position, the belief, the message. Usually they require no, or few, words
5. **Respond to gotchas with candor ... but put them in context.** So often it’s only the media who give a rap! Say “Yup, as a student I smoked grass. I was a young experimenter then. I’ve learned better as I grew older & more mature. Next question?”
6. **Go under the radar.** Face the fact that too much media exposure in some quarters, at some times, is asking reporters to find the feet of clay. E-companies’ last year buzz is a prime example

The article following is an apt case study of how such tactics can work.

ROOT OF THE “SEARCH & DESTROY” CULTURE

Chavez’ apt description illuminates an emphasis on punishment. Psychological investigation of the reasons would not reflect well on us for our eagerness to lash out at others. A telling quote from a child psychiatrist describes the issue. Commenting on abuse & other traumatic problems besetting many kids, compared with the trend of jailing them for crimes, she notes, “We pay attention when children *do* the hurting as delinquents, but do little when they’re *being* hurt.”

LESSONS FOR PRES-ELECT FROM PREDECESSOR WITH GREAT PR

Ronald Reagan himself was “the great communicator” because of his delivery style – understandable in a professional actor & public speaker. But behind him was one of the great pr teams – including Mike Deaver, Larry Speakes, Lyn Nofziger, Peter Hannaford, David Gergen et al. The program they created would serve George W. Bush well – or *any CEO coming into leadership (or wanting to reassert it)*. Four critical elements:

1. **Pre-inaugural planning research:** “The Imperial Media” study, done for him by a think tank, established media policy – with some elements practitioners might dislike, but which worked brilliantly for the Reagan administration:
 - **Ration the number of media events.** They reinforce public & journalistic cynicism
 - **Use honeymoon period to dampen, not raise, expectations.** Underpromise, overdeliver
 - **Negotiate in private,** to nip media’s tendency to play up conflict. Then announce the deal when it’s final. Watching *The West Wing* tv drama reaffirms presentday danger of letting the media run the White House
 - **Concentrate on “why”** something is happening, not on “what.” Media will emphasize data & detail unless led away from it
 - **Quit the press club.** Mingling doesn’t do what some pr pros think it does: “advantages of personal friendship dissolve when the news gets juicy”
 - **Keep spokespersons, not pr strategists, in the dark about details** – so they can honestly fend off reporters’ inquiries, especially the gossipy personal stuff
2. **100-day plan:** included delivering on 2 key campaign promises, a tax cut & increased defense spending. No one was allowed an oval office meeting, no trips were taken or speeches given, nothing was done that didn’t contribute to winning these issues. Both were attained within the year – even tho the other party controlled Congress
3. **Briefing book:** all administration officials were handed a briefing book & monitored to see that they used it. *prr* discovered this when Isobel Parke attended a PRSA “meet the new Washington crew” seminar, at which several cabinet members amazingly all emphasized the same points. She cornered Gergen & asked, “Are you using a briefing book to assure one clear voice – instead of the usual situation where the new secretaries are all jockeying for the spotlight?” “You bet,” he said
4. **Good guys/bad guys studies:** researcher Dick Wirthlin conducted regular studies to see who was seen by key audiences as good at any given time, & who bad. Both individuals in the public eye & org’s were tracked. In Reagan’s or other official’s speeches & various communication vehicles, the good (read popular at that moment) would be praised, the bad criticized – thus keeping the administration continually in tune with momentary public consent

More detail is provided by Speakes’ book, *Speaking Out: the Reagan Presidency from Inside the White House*. A fun read for pr pros in any case. (Copies of original *prr* articles describing each of the 4 steps available; contact Laurie Eldridge at *prr*)