

3. **Familiarity.** Don't pave over the family farm or the village square – a community will fight tooth and nail to save it. In other words, customs, cultures and routines are to be respected and preserved.

Caplan says that the recent implantation of an artificial heart “demonstrates how a company can successfully maneuver among ethical rocks of justice, truthfulness, choice.” AbioCor didn't brag about the device but promoted it with honesty and reserve. Also, the heart wasn't given to a wealthy person who needed it but to a low income individual who also happened to be a minority.

**HOW SOUND ARE YOUR CLIENT'S / COMPANY'S PRIVACY POLICIES? GET THEM IN ORDER TO EARN PUBLIC TRUST**

People are concerned about companies snooping into their personal affairs and think only the government can ensure their privacy, according to a report by Wirthlin Worldwide (McLean, VA). Report draws from three public opinion studies conducted by Wirthlin. One study samples 1,201 U.S. adults, another surveys 150 senior level execs, and the third involves a national quorum of 1,000 adults. Analysis of the combined information indicates *the general public is nervous about sharing information with companies and especially balks at sending it out online.* Overall, the “worry rating,” when providing personal info to business, is 6.9 on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being extremely worried, 1 being unconcerned). When giving information via the Web, the worry rating jumps to 7.4.

When asked to describe their feelings in words, 92% say they're “cautious,” 81% are “hesitant,” 72% “suspicious,” 68% “uncertain,” and 64% “uneasy.” Many Americans feel that a lot of the personal details companies seek are “never necessary to give out.” What types of information requests make people skittish? Top on the charts are: 1) bank information (71% say they're never comfortable giving it out); 2) credit card number (63%); 3) information requested about their kids (62%); 4) political affiliation (61%); 5) medical history (60%); 6) income/salary (56%).

**GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT NEXT?**

Until now, the approach has been for companies to regulate themselves. But a recent Federal Trade Commission report claims these programs no longer provide adequate safeguards. This report dovetails with the research findings concerning public opinion, as 59% of the individuals polled believe only legislation and legal enforcement will make sure businesses observe a good privacy policy. Meanwhile, business execs believe they can police themselves, with 60% saying they can adopt good standards on their own. Wirthlin sr. vp Jean Statler says the survey should be viewed as a skyscape with storm clouds representing more government on the near horizon. “Business needs to be seen as part of the solution rather than part of the problem.”

“Lawmakers, faced with mounting pressure, will act with more regulation,” she notes. “We've already seen a flood of legislation in the 106th Congress that mentions privacy. **Businesses must initiate bolder policies to allay consumers' fears.**” Allowing consumers to opt out of having information used for marketing purposes, for example, is a relief to the person filling out the form. Another method is informing the consumer exactly what the information will be used for.

“The issue has huge implications. According to our survey, 67% have made long-distance purchases using a catalog, brochure, telephone 800 number or Internet over the past year; with an average among that group of eleven purchases during the year.” Trust must be a component in the new economy.

(For more information, contact Wirthlin at 703/556-0001.)

**CAN VOUCHER INITIATIVE CLAIM WIDESPREAD SUPPORT? LOCAL PUBLIC OPINION DOESN'T REFLECT POLITICAL & MEDIA HYPE**

Most parents would rather see more funding go into public education than have the choice of sending their children to a private school via a voucher program, a recent survey indicates. “I think one of the things surprising us is that virtually every demographic [group] was opposed to it,” Ray Palermo, Teachers' Insurance Plan (White Plains, NY) told prr. “It was unpopular across the board.”

The survey, which questioned by telephone 1,046 adults across the U.S., focused on the debate of “failing schools.” According to Palermo, results show that some of the solutions that have been brought to the table conflict with what school parents want. “And parents are prepared to put their money where their mouths are to pay for their priorities.” That's because 65% of public school parents would rather see more money go into public education than toward a tax cut.

When asked whether they would rather see more money go toward public schools than toward a voucher program, 58% of parents surveyed agreed, 65% of public school parents agreed. “Most public school parents believe it would just siphon money away,” says Palermo: 56% said it would reduce money available to public schools.

Two school pr practitioners offer **their views from the field.** They told prr:

- “Our suburban Mpls school district does not hear a loud demand for vouchers.” However, regarding federal funding, “there is a growing awareness of the under funding of special education among our parents. Our Legislative Action Committee e-lobbyists received an update last year and were urged to contact our senators and congressman to urge full funding.” – Nancy Kracke, comty rels coord, School District 112 (Chaska, MN)
- “Vouchers and federal funding of public schools are not hot topics for parents here.” – Joan Graff, pub info specialist, Manitowoc Public School District (WI)

**What The Media Can Do**

- “The media has no power to tell us *what to think*
- “but they do have the power to tell us *what to think about*”

– Maxwell McCombs' seminal research on the role and power of the media

**CLASS SIZE, TEACHER WAGES TOP THE PRIORITY LIST**

The research surveyed parents' opinions on a host of other related issues, including:

1. **Class size.** Most ranked it at the top of the list. 29% say reducing class size is priority #1.
2. **Wages.** Paying teachers a “fair wage” came in 2nd, with 26% ranking it #1.
3. **Other issues** trailed: “providing tutors for failing students” (16% naming it #1); classroom computers (11%); school building repair (7%); voucher programs (5%); additional pre-K classes (3%).



### PARENTS SKEPTICAL ABOUT STANDARDIZED TESTING

The tempest surrounding standardized tests – “whether they are doing more harm than good” (pr 6/18) – was revealed in the survey. Most

respondents (53%) believe using the tests as a measure of school success forces teachers to “focus too much attention on subjects to be tested” to the detriment of a broader education. When faced with a school that is failing on standardized testing, 54% believe education funding should be increased to “bring up the quality of the education” being provided. (Survey was conducted in May by Opinion Research Corporation. For more information, contact Palermo at 914/640-6588 or visit the Press Room at www.Teachers.com.)

### OF RELATED INTEREST – PLETHORA OF STUDIES SHOW PARENTS SEEK PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

A theme emerging from various studies conducted by the Kettering Foundation is that Americans want to be partners in the education of their children, not just consumers of “an educational experience.” The Kettering Foundation, an Ohio-based interest group focused on advancing inventive research to improve democracy, has conducted several studies over the past four years which, it says, forms a picture of what parents perceive as the “ideal” public school: a) neighborhood-based school; b) school that consults parents and other community members on how to best reflect the goals and values of people in the community; c) school as the hub of community during the day and evening by providing a public space for educational activities and community building.

“While most people like the idea of choice, few see it as the solution to our educational woes in the long run. There is considerable support for choice among public schools, but far less for vouchers and private schools. Some people are philosophically opposed to using public money to fund private, usually religious, schools.” – Kettering Foundation

### STUDENT/PARENT-AS-CONSUMER METAPHOR IS THE WRONG WAY TO THINK

A study for Kettering Foundation conducted by John Doble Research (Englewood Cliffs, NJ) indicates an

array of dysfunctional ways parents and schools relate. One popular model is consumer/provider. It allows schools to be decision makers, unimpeded by the public, and parents feeling comfortable with it. But more rewarding, says Kettering Fdn, would be to convert consumers to partners who have a hand in shaping the broad direction of the school system; also in promoting dialogue and community efforts.

Parents in the Manitowoc Public School District (WI) are “**more vocal now than ever before,**” Joan Graff, pub info specialist, told pr. “Parents are more likely than ever to question administrative and school board decisions and issue demands. Parents in our neighborhood schools are becoming strong advocates for **their** kids and **their** school staff. When they can’t get the attention of school officials, they take their issues to the local newspaper, which is only too happy to give them a voice.”

Once opportunities for relationship building are in place, “these **efforts must be evaluated** to see if what is available aligns with what our parents expect. That is probably the next important step for us,” Nancy Kracke, comty rels coord for Chaska, MN, School Dist 112, told pr.

Another study questioned 400 West Virginia parents through a series of 19 forums. Many talked about feeling shut out of their schools. Many of their opinions dovetailed with those in other studies:

1. **Vouchers seen as impractical.** Most people are more worried about losing their community’s only school than they are about having a choice. One parent says, “I like the idea of taking my money elsewhere if I’m not satisfied, but where?” Another suggested choice of approaches within schools themselves.
2. **Parents don’t want to run schools,** at least not their day-to-day operations. “They value the expertise that teachers and administrators bring. Consensus is an overwhelming thing to achieve; it can paralyze a system.”
3. Don’t leave it all to the pros. **People want a relationship** that’s more of a “huddle” where everyone works together rather than a “hijacking” where one stakeholder group takes over.

(For more information, contact Kettering Foundation at 1/800-600-4060.)

### AGRIBUSINESS, HEALTHCARE, CERTAIN TECHNOLOGIES MUST UNDERSTAND VALUES PLATFORM, SAYS BIOETHICIST

The United States should be attentive to the bioethics “engine” that drives the nation’s economy, says Arthur Caplan, dir. of Center for Bioethics at the U of Pennsylvania. But promoters need to understand the country’s values platform and how to maneuver around certain “ethical rocks.” Caplan, who made his remarks to the PRSA Health Academy, notes that if promoters of certain technologies don’t pay attention to what consumers value and their framework for value-based decision making, they could “blow the technology.”

### CUES FOR AGRIBUSINESS: LEARN THE CONCEPT OF INFORMED CONSENT

The controversy over genetically engineered foods points to the need to allow

the public informed consent: don’t manipulate the genes of a tomato plant and tell me it’s safe, or not tell me at all. “If you just put them out there without labeling, it’s not going to wash.” Conversely, if all genetically engineered foods were suddenly banned from the marketplace, the rub wouldn’t be as bad. “People don’t mind risks, but they don’t want risks imposed upon them.”

Informed consent is just one of several “ethical rocks” practitioners need to maneuver around. Others include:

1. **Privacy.** Americans don’t want theirs threatened. “For example, if managed care needs to look at all of the data to make healthcare cheaper, it will get into trouble if it goes up against the privacy rock and starts looking into the personal lives of its patients.” This is also an example of how all too often business concerns itself with cost benefits and risk benefits without bringing core values into the equation. “Companies constantly blunder with their talk about risk benefits.”
2. **Virtue.** Clinton, Condit (think adultery, not suspicion of murder), and Newt Gingrich all violated this value. No matter the politics or their public life, the fact that they may have been unfaithful in their marriages and/or lied to the American public caused them to crash against the virtue rock.

“The core value for Americans is the right to choose,” Caplan told pr. “Autonomy, self determination and the right to choose are dominant values for our culture more than for any other (other than, possibly, Australia).” Caplan points to frontier stock, or a capitalist mentality. Whatever it is, it exalts the freedom of choice and seems to drive how people accept a product or an idea. “If you ignore this core value or try to battle it, you will pay the price.” Just look at “managed care,” he says.