

HOW TO POSITION YOURSELF IN A LEADERSHIP ROLE

by Pat Jackson

You have mastered the strategies and organizational philosophies of public relations - or at least you're an avid student of them, which in our changing world perhaps better describes the situation. But you need a seat at the decision-making table to help the district fully apply the power of public relationships.

How can you show your management team that you belong? Try these strategies, which have worked for others - and may for you, since they are derived from psychological principles of persuasion:

1. BECOME A TRAINER

Since building relationships is everyone's job, this is essential to *your* job anyway. If you do it in a way that demonstrates you have knowledge others do not have, and have mastered it sufficiently that you can train others, your boss may see you in a different light. Don't hesitate to legitimately promote your training courses - so your boss and the leadership team can't miss it.

A few low key posters around the place won't hurt; after all, you're only urging people to attend this important course.

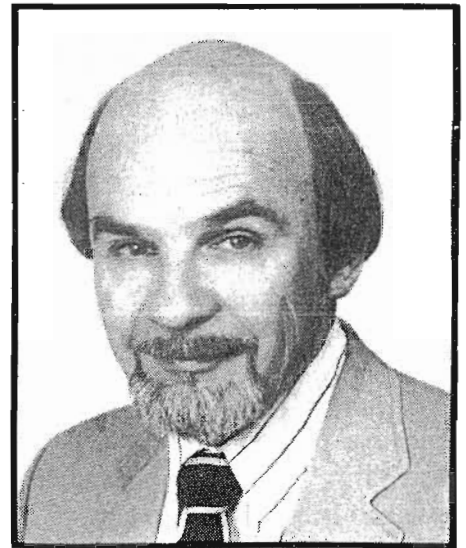
2. NEXT, TRAIN THE MANAGEMENT TEAM THROUGH PARTICIPATION.

After you've established a course or two that are working, so you and others have confidence in your training skills, suggest to your managerial colleagues that you develop a round-up course or series to help achieve some important goals of the district. Or, just do it. But get them to help shape the specific subject matter - whether it be an overview like "relationship-building in the community" or as concrete as "communicating within the school building". This participation will start them learning the finer points of public relations, through these directed discussions with you. The more folks willing to help plan your curriculum, the more who are thinking about the importance of public relationships in effective schools.

3. THEN, TRAIN THE MANAGEMENT TEAM ITSELF.

Before launching the new course or series, however, those who helped plan it should be asked to *pilot* it. You are now in a position to:

- a) expose your colleagues to public relations theories, strategies, tactics, research findings and case studies (which you would most



Pat Jackson

About the author -

Patrick Jackson is senior counsel for Jackson, Jackson and Wagner, an international public relations counseling firm specializing in behavioral public relations and reinforcement on social and organizational issues. Pat is editor of pr reporter and editor/author of numerous other public relations publications. He has delivered more than 500 lectures and major addresses in nearly every state and province. A former national president of PRSA, he has been the recipient of several national public relations awards, including PRSA's Gold Anvil and NSPRA's Learning and Liberty Award.

likely find it difficult to deliver to them in any other way); and

b) show them you belong at the decisionmaking table because you possess critical skills not represented there at present.

4. SURROUND THEM WITH TRAINING.

Whether or not top managers are willing to help plan your training courses, or pilot them, go on offering training to everyone who will attend.

Before long, public relations strategies will be so ingrained in the organization that managers who *don't* understand and utilize them will feel they are missing something. Others will be chiding them for their lack of knowledge. They'll feel left out. And you can come to their rescue.

A training strategy is fail-safe, even if for some reason it doesn't immediately gain you your spot in the leadership. Because *nothing* is more important than getting those who *are* the schools to be the relationship-building agents *for* the schools.

Its other value is focusing your efforts on long-term public relations outcomes - rather than newsletters, press releases and trinkets. The school public relations professional is a strategist and facili-

tator, not a job shop operator.

It's this level of talent that

a) deserves to sit among the leaders,

b) is needed, and

c) *can* contribute to decisionmaking.

Operatives who specialize in process tasks are necessary, but not at the top. If they were the key persons, the superintendent's cabinet would include the purchasing agent, bus supervisor and building maintenance chief.

5. A POTPOURRI OF OTHER TACTICS THAT HAVE WORKED

READ WHAT THE BOSS READS, then find an excuse to discuss it with her. Show you're on the same wavelength.

GIVE EVIDENCE FOR YOUR SUGGESTIONS,

not hunches. Quote acknowledged experts, the body of knowledge, research findings, case studies.

CIRCULATE THINK PIECES,

not clippings. Demonstrate your depth of understanding and the range of your environmental scanning.

BE VISIBLE IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS,

professional groups and public service causes outside education. Show that you are a

leader in other circles - that you have the stuff executive decisionmakers are made of (and the experience, gained from these other activities.)

LURE OTHER MANAGERS TO HELP PREPARE YOUR ANNUAL PLAN.

They'll know that what you're doing is essential at the decisionmaking table; that if goals are to be met, what you have to offer will need to be utilized.

ADAPT YOUR PERSONAL STYLE TO YOUR BOSS'.

How does he prefer to get information? What's her management approach? Is he a listener or a reader? Is she involved in routine or a delegator? Does he always like to know what's going on? How does she handle - or avoid - conflict? Fit in to these patterns, and you'll be able to really *help*.

LINK EVERYTHING YOU DO TO THE BOSS' GOALS.

You'll be a key executive when you demonstrate that you - and your valuable public relations philosophies - are helping achieve his agenda.

Good luck. For the good of the organization - and of education - public relations professionals deserve to be involved in senior management decisionmaking. But you can't wait to be asked! Earn your way there.