Chapter 4:

BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Behavioral public relations differs from traditional public relations, said Pat, by focusing beyond communication with stakeholders to **what a person will actually do, or choose not to do, as a result of our public relations efforts**. Behavioral public relations relates directly to achieving bottomline results for our organizations.

While accepting an award at Rowan College (NJ), Pat spotted the seed for one of his favorite stories for illustrating behavior:

> "There on the machine, you know, the one that blows hot air at you . . . were three steps for operation:
>
> 1. Shake hands of excess water
> 2. Press button for a steady stream of warm air
> 3. Gently rub your hands together under the stream of air
>
> Obviously someone who truly understands behavior had been there before. Scratched deftly on the machine was
>
> 4. Wipe hands on pants."

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THE 4 STEPS TO BEHAVIOR CHANGE INVOLVE PUBLIC RELATIONS TECHNIQUES

The work of Jim Grunig, Harold Mendelsohn, Brenda Dervin, Maxwell McCombs & many others suggests this sequence:

1.	Education	=	public communication campaign	Creates problem recognition, works toward sense of involvement, keeps issue on agenda long enough to stimulate action.
2.	Enforcement	=	rules or laws	Illustrates problem, creates reality of involvement.
3.	Engineering	=	social or structural change, e.g. raising drinking age or redesigning campsites to make accidental fires less likely.	Reinforces problem recognition & involvement.
4.	Interpersonal Support	=	social interaction & support groups	Reduces constraint recognition, shows people they can do something about the issue.

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BEHAVIOR, NOT COMMUNICATION OR EVEN ATTITUDES, IS THE BOTTOM LINE; SCHOLARS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AT LAST START TO WORK IN THIS AREA SEPARATING COGNITION (KNOWING) FROM ACTUAL BEHAVIOR (DOING)

After all is said & done, motivating or reinforcing or modifying behavior is & must be the goal of public relations activity. Anything less is "soft," as our critics complain. Merely communicating with a public or checking whether messages are received, or reporting feedback -- these are only steps along the road.

The journey is not successfully completed until desired behaviors occur. Yet nearly all the basic research on which the field is based -- especially communication theory -- deals not with resultant behaviors but with cognitions, i.e. what went on in people's heads & hearts as a result of a public relations program.

Now that the behaviorist psychologists have shown that behavior doesn't necessarily follow heads & hearts, the old body of knowledge is thrown into question. (Practitioners must look to those portions of the public relations BOK derived from psychotherapy, managerial studies, organizational behavior, which track behavioral outcomes.)

A new book by well-known researcher Richard Winett attempts to link communication with behavior. Information & Behavior: Systems of Influence (Erlbaum, $29.95) only partially succeeds -- because, as the author notes, "behavioral systems is an emerging, rather than fully developed, approach." But he makes some points practitioners must take into account:

> 3 behavioral goals may be sought by public relations:
>
> 1. Immediate or short-term behavior, most possible when the idea is already accepted or there is a time-certain for action, like voting; reinforcement or awareness is what's required.
>
> 2. Creating positive latent readiness for anticipated future behavior, then preparing for (or creating) a triggering event to unleash the behavior.
>
> 3. Preparing for or defending against unexpected or externally-directed triggering events (issue anticipation).

1. Until now research has been concerned with cognitions -- what goes on in people's heads when they receive information or communications. Such studies "leave us with a consumer lost in thought; rarely do we see the flow thru from stimuli, to cognitive processes, to actual purchases."

2. The real question is, "What was the immediate & longer term behavioral effect? For instance, a) Do violent tv shows affect children's behavior? b) Does information from a doctor change our health behaviors? c) Does a multimedia campaign spur the purchase of low sodium products?

3. In promoting food products, as one example, evaluating a) shopping behaviors & b) settings in which the product may be used are more helpful for practitioners than looking at information processing.

4. "Social learning theory," which Winett uses, combines with diffusion process (prr 1/6/86) to sharpen the focus of what we can learn about motivating behavior. Each recognizes that influences are both external or cultural (institutions, politics, economics, organizations, rules, norms, media, settings, contingencies, interpersonal, group) and internal (cognitions, affect, memory, knowledge, attitudes, behavior).

5. This postulates a non-linear approach, as opposed to the simplistic, linear, stimulus-response approach of much communication theory.

The book is murkily written, for other scholars. The examples of application are primarily in healthcare or social marketing. But the direction set by this volume is critically important for public relations.

One cautionary note: Winett feels behavioral scientists may see marketing as "an appropriate umbrella for their work," rather than public relations.

One practitioner who has begun preaching the gospel of not relying on conventional communications is Bob Dillenschneider, H&K CEO. In talks to the Counselors Academy, NSPRA & other groups, he warns against "lots of communicating which doesn't work." Too much tactics (process), not enough strategy (outcomes, i.e. behavior). He defines 5 targets for pr activity;

1) protection & enhancement of assets,

2) a social/economic/political climate that permits an organization to exercise its franchise,

3) protection from embarrassment,

4) damage control,

5) ways to bedevil the competition & divert their attention.

While some may cavil at #5, at least it is a behavioral outcome!

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WHY ANYTHING LESS THAN MOTIVATING BEHAVIOR BACKFIRES

When we tell managerial colleagues we've made a great publicity placement, for instance, or had a tremendous turnout for the event, what we are describing is the **process** of public relations – the things we are **expected** to be able to do. The **outcome** is whether anything changed because of our application of process. Consider this comparison. If a doctor were to brag, "I **performed** the operation," as if that were the goal, who would have confidence in him? We **assume** he knows how to do the procedure. Our concern is with the **effect** – did it solve the medical problem? Only those physicians whose procedures heal stay in business.

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PREACHING TO THE CHOIR MAY BE THE BEST WAY TO MOTIVATE CHANGE; TRYING TO PERSUADE RESISTERS DOESN'T CREATE A CRITICAL MASS

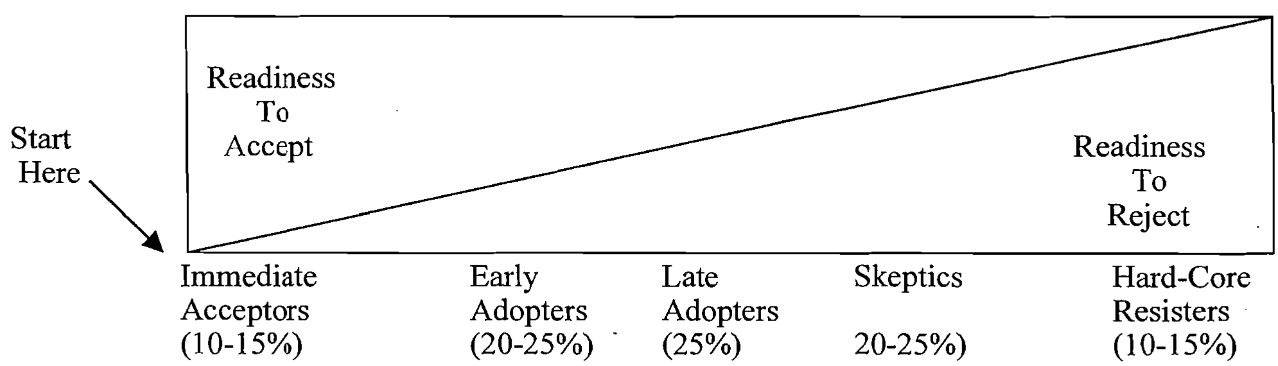
Far from the waste of time it's often assumed to be, focusing attention on those who are already believers is the first step in getting new ideas, programs or products adopted. Instead of going after the hard-core resisters and attempting to win them over – very unlikely in any case – OD consultant John Adams proposes creating a network of those already sold on the idea – the "choir."

Getting them together for "choir practice" generates ideas for reaching others and making them new choir members. Meanwhile, just urge the resisters to stay turned, trying to avoid confrontations that will stiffen resistance. Eventually this tactic will attract a critical mass of supporters – often as small as 20% of the total public you're working with. The change then becomes self sustaining.

Application of this approach to internal change is obvious. Through user groups, advisory panels or events, it can also be applied to external audiences – for example, consumers. Some programmatic guidelines:

1. Do all you can to enhance choir members' **ownership** of the change or new idea.
2. Be crystal clear about the **outcomes** from the change. State them in very specific terms. Articulate this thoroughly to the choir.
3. Does the choir represent a **diversity** of levels, locations, personalities and styles? If they're all from one group, critical mass is not attained.

NETWORKING TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE



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4. Help those most affected by the change to feel sufficiently **dissatisfied** with the status quo that they will welcome the change.

5. With **communication**, including singing by the choir, anticipate and manage resistance that can arise from surprise, uncertainty, unfamiliarity with the new idea.

6. Devise some **small steps** that can be taken toward the goal. This helps people practice the new behavior or make trial use of the product.

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IN 1989 MORE THAN BEFORE, PUBLIC RELATIONS WILL BE EXPECTED TO AFFECT BEHAVIOR: A REVIEW OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE

The "value added" by public relations is understanding people and how they are likely to act or react, as individuals and in groups, given the stimuli of varying situations. Call it **human nature**.

Since it doesn't matter what people think or feel unless they act on their thoughts or feelings, the only reliable test is their **behavior**. And that's the challenge – primarily because most practitioners are trained in communications.

But communication theory deals with cognitions, not behaviors – i.e. what goes on in people's minds as a result of communicating. As Richard Winett put it in *Information and Behavior*, such studies "leave us with a consumer lost in thought; rarely do we see the flow through from stimuli, to cognitive processes, to actual purchases."

The simplistic, linear, stimulus-response model of communication theory needs to be contrasted with a non-linear behaviorist model. Several public relations techniques, based on a combination of these models, are now proving themselves.

SEEKING BEHAVIORAL RESULTS MEANS ALTERING WORK HABITS

The first thing most practitioners do when attacking an assignment is to arch their fingers over a keyboard. We are word and writing oriented. But they are the process, not the outcomes. Instead, push away from the keyboard and ask the basic question: **What behaviors am I trying to elicit – from whom?**

That is the start of behavioral public relations: a list of very specific behaviors needed. . .from a tightly targeted group of publics. . .in order to attain the objective. For example, if the objective is a 5% increase in sales, the necessary specific behaviors might be:

- From new customers: 15% increase in inquiries, responses to mailings, etc.
- From present customers: $10 higher purchase per order
- From employees: better customer satisfaction, fewer complaints generated
- From management: sufficient budget to support these activities

In an actual plan, both publics and behaviors could be much more finite. The point is that breaking the objective into concrete actions that must occur makes it possible to plan programs that directly elicit these actions. The alternative is the naive belief that some "powerful message" or "smashing placement" will somehow get people to do these things. If pr is seen as soft and fuzzy, this is the reason.

TYPES OF BEHAVIOR Publics can be asked to a) **do** something, b) **not** do something, c) **let** your organization do something. Phrased differently, public relations can 1) motivate new behaviors, 2) reinforce existing behaviors, 3) modify negative behaviors. Obvious as this sounds, it's an essential framework for planning.

BEHAVIORAL TIME FRAMES Desired behaviors may occur a) immediately; b) eventually; c) on a fixed date, such as voting. Because people as a rule do not act without some preparation – even response to fear follows psychological preparation – the research requirement is to determine **latent readiness** to act. (Since conventional polling and surveys rarely probe latent readiness, they are less useful here.

A recurring fallacy in current practice is automatically assuming publics are ready to act if only we can be persuasive. Discovering whether in fact they are or not quickly tells which time frame applies. A model for eventual behavior – to motivate publics that aren't ready yet:

Phase 1: create positive latent readiness
Phase 2: spring a triggering event that calls forth behavior

Since the fear is that someone else may spring a triggering event, bulletproof programs need to include:

Phase 3: risk management, full-blown issue anticipation to be sure nothing destroys the positive latent readiness being built

FOUR BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RULES Major behavioral influences need to be checked in each public as a practical guide. Most useful are these:

- Rule of **Abuse**, from sociology: Any significant change in a relationship is the result of an abuse (real or imagined) by one of the parties. Until abuses are removed or at least surfaced, publics won't even hear your appeals for behavior.

- Rule of **Participation**, from psychology: People will only get behind those decisions they've had a voice in making – or feel they had a voice. To get them to act, give them ownership.

- Rule of **Rewards**, from psychology: People will do that for which they are rewarded.

- Rule of the **Cheerleader**, from anthropology: There has never been a successful society or organization without cheerleaders. Build them into plans because even the most willing audience falters sometime.

OVERWHELMING SOCIAL ROLE Research from several sources makes it clear that very few decisions today are made by individuals acting alone. Despite the myth of the totally independent cowboy and the lone wolf, in reality we take cues from our peers even on small matters. Considering that contemporary life is lived inside organizations, it is no surprise that this would shape our decisionmaking style.

To be successful in organizations, one learns to make accommodations to others' views. In addition, few of us are arrogant enough to think we know it all – so we seek the advice of others. Therefore, a key in behavioral public relations is reaching these "others" so they can help stimulate behavior among those they influence. A program that omits active stimulation of the influencer role is bound to falter. Five types of influencers have been identified:

1. Role Models – gain admiration and emulation
2. Opinion Leaders – provide peer pressure, desire to go along
3. Power Leaders – strength is fear due to ability to reward or punish
4. Cheerleaders – boost morale and action, even in difficult situations
5. Celebrities – attract attention and provide awareness

They have clout in this order, as a rule. Occasionally one person will occupy more than one of these positions in a group – but rarely. Power leaders, for instance, have formal leadership positions. This generally reduces their credibility with the "gang" to the point it is difficult for them to be opinion leaders. Instead, one or more informal leaders – not in positions of legitimate authority – become the opinion leaders.

A MODEL FOR MOTIVATING INTERNAL BEHAVIOR THROUGH PR TECHNIQUES

Assimilating several scholars' work, in several disciplines, a practical how-to emerges for motivating, reinforcing or modifying behavior in organizations:

1. **Positive reinforcement** starts it – by building **self-confidence**. This is necessary to prepare people for behavior change, since those who lack self-confidence are likely to resist, at least wait for others to show the way.

2. **Foot-in-door** technique gets them **practicing the behavior**. As a trial, even in a small way, get people doing what is desired. Example: In mergers, employees of new entity receive paychecks, answer phone with the new company name. Though loyalty is not yet built, actual use of new name begins to break down old habits and create new ones.

3. **Motivation** techniques are now required to **retain** the behavior. Herzberg's classic studies differentiate true motivators (achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement) from mere hygiene factors (salary, work conditions, supervision, company policy) but the latter are often mistaken for motivators by the uninitiated.

4. **Role models** now assume the task of **reinforcing and hardening** the behavior. These key players become the focal point of meetings, internal media, presentations.

5. **Culture** takes over when rituals, heroes and recited stories **solidify** the behavior with the force of social acceptance. Desired behavior becomes the norm – and now it is **failure** to perform the behavior that is oddball – and socially punished.

The practitioner's first task in affecting behavior change inside organizations is to train managers at all levels in a) understanding why positive reinforcement works, carping and griping at employees is counterproductive; 2) how to give reinforcement. In sum: behavior change begins with **managerial** behavior.

FOUR STEPS TO PUBLIC BEHAVIOR CHANGE THROUGH PR CAMPAIGNS

The work of Jim Grunig, Harold Mendelsohn, Brenda Darvin, Maxwell McCombs and many others suggests this approach:

1. **Coalition Campaign**, so target audience gets the feeling everyone who counts is trying to persuade them, that it is obviously the thing to do socially. Appeals in such a campaign must follow three phases:

    A. **Problem (or opportunity) recognition**: gaining widespread understanding the issue is an opportunity or problem.

    B. **Problem/opportunity personalization**: making target audience realize it involves them, they could be affected.

    C. **Constraint removal**: letting them know they can do something about it.

2. **Enforcement**, establishing rules/laws mandating/outlawing the behavior.

3. **Engineering**, enact a structural change to work around the situation, e.g., raising drinking age to reduce drunk driving accidents by young drivers.

4. **Social Reinforcement**, when the behavior becomes the societally accepted norm and social rewards and punishments take over the job of enforcing it.

THREE EMERGING TOOLS **Training** is in the forefront. PR staff today is most valuable as strategizer and coordinator – with as much responsibility for building trusting relationships pushed down to employees and off to operations managers as possible. They're the ones who interact with key publics – where behavior occurs on both sides – so the fate of the relationship is in their hands regardless. But this means continual managerial and employee training. PR alone cannot build relationships that motivate behavior.

Customer satisfaction models can elicit their behavior by conditioning employee behavior. Departments or other relevant units hold brainstorming sessions to build a model of a satisfied customer. They answer such queries as: What would he or she be feeling or thinking after the transaction? What is their likely next action? How can we stimulate that next action?

Then a panel of customers is called in to evaluate the model. Resulting finished model is used to establish norms of customer service – from not letting the phone ring more than three times to positive handling of complaints. The priority question becomes: will this satisfy my customer? Works for internal as well as external customers. Gets ownership of employees for proper behavior toward customers – because they designed and tested the model.

Constituency relations programs also use employees, at all levels, to personally carry out direct outreach to key opinion leaders in publics most important to the organization. Twice a year the contacts sit down with these assigned influencers to listen to what's on their minds, what they're hearing, their positions on issues or marketing topics. Just one-on-one dialogue. After the visit, the findings are put into a database. Potential for sending forth these opinion leaders to trumpet the organization's cause is unparalleled. And the database may well be the best research available.

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APPLYING THE FOURTH STEP OF THE BEHAVIOR CHANGE MODEL: INFLUENCING SECONDARY PUBLICS IS KEY TO SOLVING PROBLEMS

Practitioners today are expected to tackle societal problems – for public agencies or for their employers. They may want to consider targeting parties that are **indirectly related to the condition**. Anti-drunk-driving efforts are proving this works. Rather than aim messages exclusively at offenders – which clearly doesn't work – they're targeting: 1) **bartenders**, penalized for serving someone who winds up driving drunk; 2) **friends**, who are told, "friends don't let friends drive drunk"; 3) **peer groups**, who are encouraged to choose a designated driver prior to partying (prr 10/17/88).

Results have been a shift in public awareness, leading to social pressure against the behavior. This is reducing alcohol-related road fatalities (prr 1/15) – just as the 4-Step Behavior Change Model postulates (prr 1/2/89).

ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MOVEMENT STANDS TO GAIN

Anne Menard, Conn. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, thinks the cause against spouse/partner abuse should employ similar tactics. "We're getting to the point where we have public policy in place, we've set up shelters and hotlines, but **we're still responding, band-aiding the problem,**" she told prr. "We need to shift public awareness."

Crusades have thus far appealed to 1) **women**, often the victims of violence at the hands of 2) **husbands** or **boyfriends**. But Menard says that's not enough. "There are still too many myths and prejudices":

- "It's not that bad a problem"
- "It's overwhelming. Nothing can be done about it."
- "It basically happens within certain neighborhoods, ethnic groups."
- "It's a private, family matter, no one's business."
- "What's wrong with her – why doesn't she just leave the crumb?"

In researching thus-far successful campaigns, e.g. anti-drunk driving, anti-smoking, Menard notes: 1) simplicity of messages; 2) commitment to a long period of time; 3) consistency of messages; 4) provision of concrete tactics which people can easily employ.

This shows the **relevance of Jim Grunig's 3-Step Message Strategy** in causing awareness of the need for behavior change: 1) problem identification; 2) problem personalization; 3) constraint removal.

Note the October murder in Boston of Carol Stuart. "The public's reaction provided an interesting gauge of how people view this topic. Everyone wanted to believe her husband and was later shocked when it became apparent that he had killed her. This reveals that deep-seated misconceptions remain."

GOOD OLD BOY NETWORK MUST BE CRACKED

Societal pressure on Charles Stuart might have prevented the tragedy. He'd told at least three people of his intention to murder his wife. "Did anyone warn her? Did anyone tell him that he was crazy, or try to stop him?" Further evidence that these secondary publics must be targeted:

- **Clergy** who advise women to "pray" rather than to get help;
- **Doctors and nurses** who treat the wounds yet never ask questions;
- **Bartenders, brothers, bosses** who know a guy is beating his partner, look the other way, never take a stand – instead of saying, "Why do you treat her that way? That's not cool!"
- **Barroom buddies and cronies at the workplace** who laugh when a batterer brags about "teaching his wife a lesson";
- **People who criticize the wife's intelligence** for being in the situation. "We often ask these people, 'When have you ever had a job or relationship in which, when things became unpleasant, you just left?' Leaving anything is difficult. Many women are forced to consider that perhaps an occasional beating is better than no roof over your head, no food for your kids." And leaving can be the most dangerous act of all. "Often, the real threat to life is not staying but leaving. People who say 'Just leave' are ignoring the realities of the situation."

MISSION AT HAND

. . .is to challenge the way the way people distance themselves from the situation, to change the public's relationship to it, perhaps by defining the problem differently. "We have to get the public to cut the batterer short, to let him know that what he's doing is unacceptable and not to be tolerated. People say 'you'll never change basic attitudes,' but I'll bet anti-drunk driving efforts heard the same thing 10 or 15 years ago."

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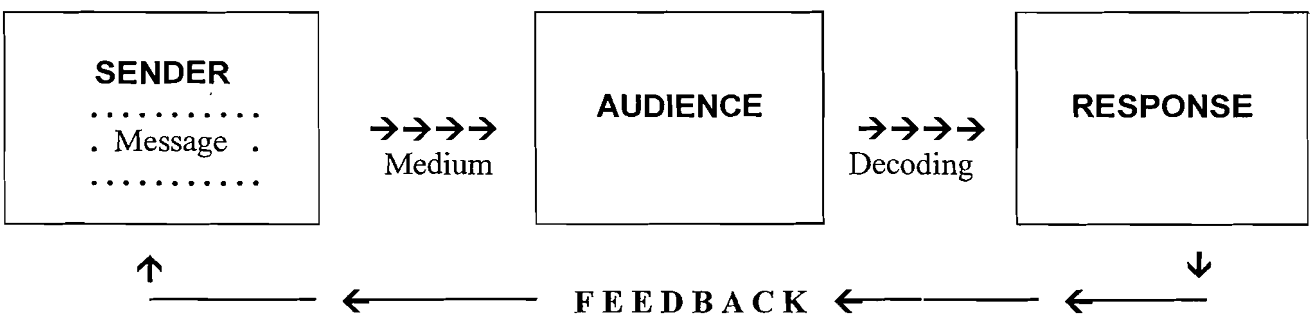
BEHAVIORAL MODEL REPLACING COMMUNICATION MODEL AS BASIC THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF PR PRACTICE: KEY IS STIMULATING LATENT READINESS AND CREATING TRIGGERING EVENTS

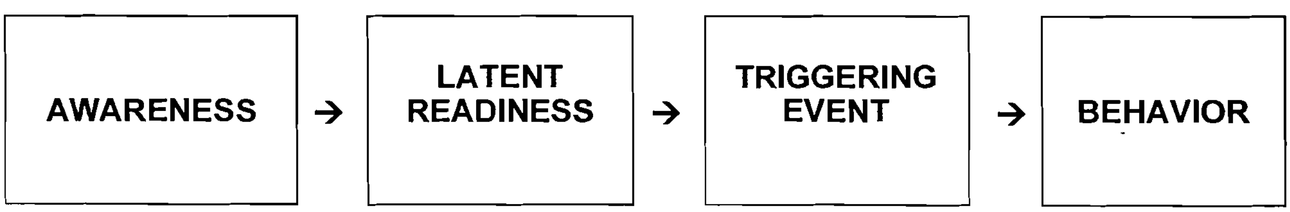
In public relations, "behavior is the only evaluation that counts," (prr 2/17/86). Larry Newman defines this as motivating people to 1) do something, 2) not do something, 3) let you do something. John Hill, now in the voice of his successor Bob Dilenschneider, says pr pros are problem solvers – which usually means getting somebody to take action.

Yet many (most?) of us practitioners think of ourselves as "communicators." Our degrees are in journalism or mass communication. A large part of our daily effort is one-way information transfer or, at best, two-way communication – but for its own sake. Moving information, facts, data or feelings is the apparent objective. Clips, attendance, "reach" and similar measures evaluate success. To all of which knowledgeable employers or clients ask: So what? What has changed because of this? Never mind what our publics are thinking; **the question is what are they doing?**

THE COMMUNICATIONS MODEL



BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS MODEL



THE OLD MODEL Publicity, publications, advertising and similar communications are essentially awareness devices. Or reminders, which is re-awareness. They move people to action only when they have a strong pre-disposition (positive latent readiness) to act. Put another way, when there is no resistance to acting.

Even then there are barriers, e.g. brand preference. Coke's communications may remind me I am thirsty, but if I'm a Pepsi drinker the competition benefits, not the sender of the communication. In transactions more sophisticated than merely buying a drink, reminder communications decline rapidly in power. Even at this simple level, communications must deal with brand or provider preference – and though we can try "positioning" and similar strategizing, factors like the product or service itself, price, availability and whether one's peer group considers the brand/provider acceptable weigh heavily.

> Our forebears knew. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions," they said – meaning thoughts, opinions, attitudes, even deeply held beliefs don't matter... unless carried through into behavior. Every dieter facing the dessert tray understands the **difference between attitude and behavior**.

Therefore, what communications may be able to provide is **building latent readiness**. They must be tightly targeted at susceptible publics, and even at those members of the public who have a viable interest. And they must be carefully strategized to deal with feelings about product, price, etc. Which means they must be based on sophisticated research. **Mass communication, to get or keep the name before the general public, with a one-size-fits-all message, in most cases is an inefficient and often wasteful effort**.

THE NEW MODEL Basically shifts the objective, and with it the focus of thinking, strategizing and planning. Practitioners ask what behaviors am I trying to motivate, rather than what information am I trying to communicate? "Messages" are thus replaced by "appeals" to act. This may seem minor – but in fact is revolutionary. Interpreting the model:

1. **Awareness**: Here salience or relevance is key. There are three levels: 1) **initial** awareness, 2) awareness of **changes** in subjects already in one's consciousness, 3) reinforcement or **renewing** awareness. Communication is at its strongest here, at the start of the behavioral process. But getting more difficult all the time. Practitioners must apply all the nuances of the old model just to break through the unbelievable clutter and make publics aware.

2. **Latent Readiness**: Either **positive** or **negative** readiness to behave in a certain way starts to form – often largely subconsciously, if the topic isn't top-of-head at the moment – as soon as people become aware. Indeed, it begins immediately by referring the new topic to existing perceptions, attitudes, etc. We get ready to act by accumulating: experience, information, attitudes, word-of-mouth, values, beliefs, opinion, moods, emotion, intuition – the whole realm of psyche and human nature. The practical influence of the communications model is here, helping publics form positive/ negative latent readiness (depending on whether we want them to do something or not do it).

3. **Triggering Event** (TE): An opportunity, or an appeal, to act triggers our latent readiness – or at least offers us a chance to act if we're so inclined. For instance, voting day is the TE in election

campaigns. A sale may be it for retailers. Quarterly reports may trigger stockholders to buy or sell. An attack on an organization or its services/products bay be a TE to unite critics or to start legislative/regulatory action.

Some TEs are **accidental**, they just happen (though issue anticipation efforts can guard against many of them). Others are **launched by competitors, opponents, critics, disgruntled publics, unsatisfied customers or stakeholders**. By using this new model, practitioners can build the **launching of their own TEs** into pr plans. This moves pr practice beyond communication into behavior motivation.

4. **Behavior**: The main point here is to remember that people rarely go from ground zero to the final behavior. Therefore, we often have to lead them through several **intermediate behaviors** before they can give the **ultimately desired behavior**. For instance, purchasing your product may be what you want people to do. To get there, you may first need to motivate such behavior as a) requesting literature or a demonstration, b) visiting a showroom, c) trying the product and similar.

   The key is that each of these behaviors is finite and measurable. You know precisely what you are asking people to do. The vagueness, the softness is out of the equation. PR efforts can target definite publics or individuals, appealing to them to provide specific behaviors. This immediately shapes pr activities including events, one-on-ones, communications, whatever.

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MORE ON BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS: IT GIVES NEW FOCUS TO RESEARCH; ADVERTISING LEADERS PREDICT THEIR WORK WILL MOVE IN SAME DIRECTION

The behavioral model of public relations (prr 7/30/90) inevitable supports Derrick deKerckhove's dictum: PR no longer means ***public*** relations – dealing with mass publics. It now means ***personal*** relations – or at least personalized (prr 6/29/87).

1. Diffusion process, or two-step flow, shows that communication primarily serves the **awareness** function. It contributes to negative or positive **latent readiness** – but has little or no power to drive behavior, except in cases where there is no resistance and people are waiting to learn how, where or when to carry out a certain behavior.

2. The more typical decision to act in one way or another is primarily influenced by peer interaction or opinion leaders. These are **personal** activities, whether one-on-one or in a group. They involve actual face-to-face relationships, or the closest possible substitute.

3. Even when the decision to act is made – i.e. very high latent readiness to behave in a certain way – a triggering event is necessary to allow the behavior. You may decide that your next car is going to be a Zippy, but until your present car needs replacement that remains a tentative or probably behavior. If you have engine trouble tomorrow, or someone offers to buy your car – that may trigger action.

BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS MODEL

AWARENESS → LATENT READINESS → TRIGGERING EVENT → BEHAVIOR

GOAL OF RESEARCH SHIFTS

Mere polling or vague probing of attitudes or opinion is even less useful now. Statistical samples of mass publics have long been unreliable – since 80-90% of respondents won't act on their opinions, either 1) because the subject isn't on their agenda or 2) they will experience no triggering event.

A. **New research goals** are more definitive: 1) Exactly who and how many have become aware, so tactics may switch from creating awareness to building latent readiness. 2) How strong is latent readiness, and what is influencing it positively or negatively. 3) What triggering events are likely to provoke behavior. Practitioners with this data can move publics to action.

B. **Subsidiary research objectives include**: 4) determining how a public became aware, 5) which opinion leaders are most influential, 6) which triggering events in the past have in fact motivated behavior. Behavioral questions – "have you ever actually done this?" – become primary, replacing "how do you feel about this?"

AD AGENCIES ARE THINKING THE SAME WAY

"The 90s will be a decade of one-on-one advertising," the CEO of Ogilvy & Mather told an *LATimes* columnist in December. "Advertising will become much more personal as industries try to zero in on their targets."

For instance: Cable tv commercials beamed to individual households and specially selected for them. Magazines with ads containing the name of the subscriber, written especially for them based on research data about them.

Adds Leo Burnett's president: "The Holy Grail will no longer be an ad recall score. The question won't be, 'Did you remember the ad?' The question will be, '**Did it persuade you to act?**'"

Bozell's chief notes "in-depth psychology" will be key. "We will all need a deeper understanding of **what makes people tick**."

STEPS TOWARD DESIRED BEHAVIOR MUST BE CAREFULLY CALCULATED

Sociological research – actually observing people's behavior rather than asking them about it – moves to the fore. Researchers have long wrestled with respondents' inability to objectively describe – or remember – their real lifestyles, behavior, even attitudes. Key now is to discover the step-by-step process that leads someone to buy a product, switch brands, vote for a ballot issue, decide to shed a habit, etc.

For instance: in most cases, especially if there is a large financial stake or risk of ridicule by one's peer group, people don't move from awareness directly to the ultimate behavior, such as making the purchase or starting a diet. The objective is to find out the steps along the way – and appeal to publics to **move through those steps**. This is different than continually badgering them to give the ultimate behavior, which is what pr and advertising mostly have been doing.

Since various people will be at different stages of readiness, targeting personalized messages is essential – in order to urge them to take the next step in **their** progression. Again, the declining power of one-size-fits-all mass communication is evident. Say research shows dieters most typically a) suffer an embarrassment for being overweight, b) start searching for a diet they find comfortable, c) ask a friend for advice or reinforcement, d) go to their doctor – and then plunge in, but only e) to falter and start over. Appeals and activities can now focus on moving target publics through each of these steps sequentially.

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TREND TOWARD BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFERS A CHANCE TO ADOPT A SYSTEM FOR MANAGING THE PR PROCESS

pr reporter has often commented on the need for a **standardized process management system** for the field – the type of accepted method of practice used by lawyers, accountants, doctors, engineers and scientists (prr 4/19/90, 2/12/90, 1/22/90, 7/10/89 and more). In those disciplines, all practitioners work by the accepted method so that one professional can evaluate, continue or replicate work by another.

This, in turn, **makes quality control possible** – lets a practitioner audit his or her own output, lets a firm evaluate its work or a client critique its counsel. In large measure it is this accepted standard of practice that **gains** a discipline recognition as a profession.

Because behavioral pr admits the limits to communication and makes behavior its goal, a new, communication-plus system can now be devised. For instance:

> The process begins with a deceptively simple question: **What are the desired behaviors I am trying to motivate?** Answering it often takes professionals a long way from news clips and publications, however.

Step 1, Environmental Scan:

In the current or near-term environments of both the organization and its key publics, what mutually desirable behaviors are both necessary and possible that will enable the organization to achieve its goals. These are **ultimate behaviors**, such as purchase, vote, join, etc.

Step 2, Planning:

What step-by-step cycle of **intermediate behaviors** may be required to bring key publics to the ultimate behavior? Becoming aware...building positive latent readiness to behave...a triggering event? Trying the product...hearing it praised by a friend (Diffusion Process)...attending a meeting? In other words, list the way stations people pass through en route to the desired behavior, recognizing they rarely jump straight from awareness to action.

Step 3, Targeting:

Exactly whose behavior do we need? Supertarget a list of publics, discover their opinion leaders on the topic at hand, then determine which among them are likely to be open to giving the desired behaviors. Like target marketing, this requires effort – but pays off big in the results and cost-effectiveness. It is the antithesis of mass communication.

Step 4, Research:

Where are the target publics and opinion leaders on the **latent readiness scale** – that is, have we got a chance of getting their behavior in the needed timeframe? Solid pr research, most likely studying

segments of publics, can supply this data. This is a far cry from market research, and certainly from polling, but the techniques are available (see prr 8/13/90 for a description of this research).

Step 5, Strategy:

Which **type of campaign** is required to motivate the desired behaviors? The deciding factor will usually be the target publics' position on a resistance scale (see following chart).

Step 6, Tactics:

What **activities and techniques** will move the campaign forward to success – i.e., move the target publics through the steps of intermediate behavior to the ultimate behavior? (Or, rarely, directly to the ultimate behavior.) Devising **triggering events** is key.

6 TYPES OF CAMPAIGNS, BASED ON RESISTANCE TO THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

Resistance Scale	Campaign	Description
Basically, none or minor	**Awareness**	Publics are ready to act, need to be told how, when, where. One way mass communication works well.
Not opposed, but doubt relevance	**Information**	Basically one-way but feedback devices useful to answer questions; message strategy is "this affects you for these reasons."
Not opposed, but not convinced to act	**Education**	Uses opinion leaders and two-step flow to motivate acceptance and action.
Some are with you but debate rages; social pressure is great	**Reinforcement**	Targets those known to agree via two-way communication; role models and opinion leaders stir their resolve not to be held back by opposition.
Opposition because idea seems to counter prevailing sentiments	**Attitude Change**	Major use of two-step flow, using communications to raise questions and peer groups to offer social rewards or punishments; primary message strategy is not to stiffen resistance, secondary is offering validation for changing attitudes.
Publics are behaving the opposite way	**Behavior Modification**	Use all available tools to ask for a willing suspension of disbelief toward suggested new behavior; use behavioral technologies by Lewin, Grunig et al, others; message strategy is repetition of benefits.

Another approach might be to consider ultimate behavior the goal, intermediate behaviors the objectives. Or, ultimate behavior the strategy, intermediate behaviors the tactics.

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MORE EXAMPLES OF WHY BEHAVIORAL PR MUST BE DEVELOPED IF THE FIELD IS TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUES

1) US Food & Drug Administration surveys between 1983 and 1988 found a whopping 50% increase in understanding the role of fat and dietary cholesterol in heart disease. The communication and information system worked. BUT – the studies also found there has been no significant decline in consumption of fat, i.e. **no behavioral results**.

   Even attitudes weren't changed (and they're a long way from behavior). American Dietetic Association last fall released a survey showing 36% of respondents don't consider nutrition very important! Good nutrition takes too much time and requires sacrifices, they said. Again, no behavior.

2) Despite the unprecedented communication bombardment about AIDS, 29% of high school seniors have had 4+ sexual partners, reports Centers for Disease Control based on its '90 study. For 9th grade boys, even, the number reporting such behavior is 19%. Only 41% of these use condoms – despite programs that give them away free, and massive attention generated by controversy over such programs.

   When pr evaluates its capabilities in terms of motivating, reinforcing or modifying behavior – not just passing out information – the field will be viewed as a hard, bottom-line contributor.

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Good Try By Outdoor Advertisers to sell their wares is this Florida billboard by Naegele Outdoor: "*If this sign doesn't work, howcum you're reading it?*" Undefined is the word "work." True, if awareness is the goal, outdoor today is more potent than many other ad media. What's causing the ad decline is that awareness only works for ***new*** products/services/info. The trick is motivating behavior from those already aware. Then ads work only if people have already made up their minds to do or buy a certain thing and all they need to know is how, when or where.

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UNDERSTANDING AND USING *COGNITIVE DISSONANCE* IS A SCIENTIFIC WAY OF AFFECTING BEHAVIOR & ATTITUDE CHANGE: A PROPOSED SYSTEM FOR PUTTING IT TO USE IN DAILY PRACTICE

Since Leon Festinger put forward the theory of ***cognitive dissonance*** in 1957, it has been hailed, denigrated and debated. All the texts mention it, but it has been little used by practitioners in an overt way – probably because it can be very confusing and there has been no system or method for applying it.

Yet for modifying behavior or changing attitudes, it's one of the few psychological constructs available. How can practitioners purposefully employ it – use it as their tool? Or defend against it, for it can also be used against you.

HOW COGNITIVE DISSONANCE WORKS TO ALTER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

Cognitions are what a person *knows* – about himself, his behavior, his surroundings, as Festinger put it. They are *beliefs* – and thus direct requisites of behavior. An obvious example: if a person knows a product works for her, that's the start of her *belief proposition* about it – which might be charted like this:

I know I like the product; I know it works for me; Therefore I buy it.

This is consonant (or consistent) reasoning. To get this consumer to switch brands, dissonance (or inconsistency) must be injected into her reasoning. Two opportunities appear: in "like" (is there a product attribute that can be called into question?) and in "works for me" (can she be made to question whether the product really does?). Remember: these beliefs are perceptions and may not be factually accurate.

Taking the trouble to chart the "I know" sequence is the key, instead of just "creatively" deciding what might persuade her to change. That is a shotgun approach; this is target shooting.

A PRACTICAL METHOD FOR APPLYING COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

1. Identify precisely the *behaviors occurring* that you'd like to modify; those *not occurring* you want to motivate; or those you want to *reinforce*.

2. Discover the *belief proposition* that drives those behaviors. Why are they behaving this way? What *cognitions* make it acceptable behavior to them? Research (most likely qualitative and behavioral methods) may be able to provide this data. Or you may have to postulate it.

3. To modify negative or motivate new behavior, design an appeal/message/action that will create *dissonance* in the belief proposition [not possible in all cases]; or that will reinforce *consonance* in the belief proposition of those now behaving in a desirable way.

4. If effective, *suggest new behaviors* that will be *consonant with the altered belief proposition.*

Most practitioners apply dissonance theory without knowing it. Systematizing to purposefully utilize it will help overcome humankind's marvelous ability to avoid facing up to inconsistency in belief propositions.

> The "Don't Mess With Texas" campaign (prr 9/26/88) is a **brilliant use of dissonance**. The belief proposition is: I know I love Texas; I know Texans are rough and tough; I know they can't be bothered putting trash in the barrel. The slogan usurped the love belief to show it was right to put trash in the barrel – and refocused the rough/tough belief as a threat against litterers.

BARRIERS TO BE OVERCOME: HOW PEOPLE RATIONALIZE

Even when we are able to inject dissonance, a number of defenses will be used to avoid admitting it is dissonant. Anything to duck the discomfiture of changing our mind or behavior. Festinger's theory has two parts:

A. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.

B. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.

Besides avoidance, ego defense and selective perception are other ducking tactics. How then to break through and implant the irritant of dissonance that may cause change?

METHODS OF MAKING DISSONANCE STICK

1) Making target publics or persons aware that **circumstances have changed**. In other words, they needn't rationalize any longer; it's safe and ok to change because the situation has changed.

2) **New developments or discoveries** are an unthreatening way to break through, since the person need not save face about hearing dissonant data that has just been born. (Keeping up appearances, avoiding embarrassment, not giving in is strong here, as always.)

3) **Precisely the right, or perhaps an unexpected, spokesperson** may sneak through the ego defenses. Similarly, a message unexpected in a usually predictable medium.

Most persuasive devices rely on the force of logic (rarely effective among humans) or of emotion applied in a general way. Cognitive dissonance urges practitioners to substitute the force of applied science by charting people's **perceived reality** – then interacting with them on that plane.

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LABEL LAW: STUDY IN "ENGINEERING" PHASE OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Standard model for mass behavior change has four steps (prr 1/31/83):

1. coalition campaign to create awareness of desired behavior;
2. threat of punishment
3. engineering around the problem;
4. social rewards and punishments system to motivate the actual change in behavior, and reinforce it thereafter.

New rules mandating full disclosure of nutritional info on food packages (prr 12/17/90) – especially total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol content – shows how open communication with external publics can end up bringing about product and policy change. What's happening: once manufacturers were forced to put true ingredients lists on products, to tell consumers what's in them, the products themselves started to change.

No fat, low fat, light, extra light, no cholesterol – the words are everywhere, in all product lines. Dieters can have almost everything now that products have been reformulated: no fat frozen yogurt replaces ice cream, no fat chocolate cake tastes exactly like the harmful original, even no fat cheeses are available – and cookies like fig newtons boast no fat, no cholesterol.

ENGINEERING CAN LEAD TO ELIMINATION OF THE PROBLEM

Other examples of successful engineering: 1) Air bags to reduce effect of accidents drunk driving campaigns fail to eliminate. 2) Building asphalt pads around cooking pits in national forest campsites to stop accidental forest fires. However, this case poses some other considerations:

1. **Would issue anticipation have turned situation into a positive for manufacturers?** The question for practitioners and their clients is: why did they wait; why not take this lead on their own? Did market studies suggest consumers weren't ready – despite the barrage of medical information (including official US government anti-cholesterol campaigns)?

While case shows power of pr, it **raises an ethical conundrum**: since people's right to know is a pr tenet, can practitioners argue against it (as some in food industry did when label change was under consideration)? Being attorneys in the Court of Public Opinion arguably permits helping clients and employers to take any position in public debate. But does this still apply when what's at issue, as here, is a basic tenet of pr philosophy?

2. **The way it happened is customer participation in reverse**, where consumers have to push their way into impacting decisions that affect their lives – in this case by lobbying for the label law. Does this affect the reputation of industries and companies in any behavioral way?

3. **The power of honest information in the hands of consumers**. No reg or law is telling manufacturers what to produce, but once consumers have the data they can shape the market. This is the power of the public relations philosophy.

For health educators, consumers and their pressure groups, engineering proved to be a potent part of the four-step effort to change food purchase behavior. For practitioners in the food industry, the case appears to be a great opportunity lost – though undoubtedly some tried but were unable to persuade managements that mistrust marketplace democracy.

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A PROCESS FOR PRACTICING BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Motivating stakeholder behavior is increasingly accepted by organizations and practitioners as the value-adding role of public relations – as opposed to just communicating messages. The question of precisely how to accomplish this becomes a critical issue. Then, the follow-on question is how to evaluate and measure it. A brief review:

YOU HAVE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT BEHAVIOR TO MOTIVATE

1. **The process begins with a concrete list of desired behaviors.** This is the antithesis of "messages" or "communications" or "reaching publics" – though they may play a tactical role, of course.

   - Exactly what do key stakeholders have to **do, not do, or let you do** in order for your organization's vision or strategy to succeed?

2. Beginning every project by making a desired behaviors list **gives you a specific guide for what you are trying to accomplish.** This is the most important step toward engendering those behaviors – instead of thinking right away about messages, media or activities.

A BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIC PLANNING MODEL CAN BE USEFUL

Here's one that includes the major elements:

1. What *behaviors* must be motivated, reinforced or modified to achieve the goals?
2. Precisely *which stakeholder group or segments* must give these behaviors; or could keep you from achieving the goals by withholding the behaviors or by overt opposition?
3. Since people don't often go straight to the ultimate desired behaviors, what *intermediate behaviors* might you have to lead them through as way stations?
4. Since groups/publics don't usually act spontaneously, who are the *opinion leaders* in these groups and what special behaviors must be sought from them to stimulate group behavior?

UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERING EVENTS IS THE LINCHPIN

People are available to do, even ready to do, a lot more than they actually do. Lack of time or funds, other priorities, lassitude and a thousand other barriers inhibit them from enacting the behaviors your organization needs to motivate. Overcoming the barriers means:

1. **Constructing a triggering event** that pushes the behavior into priority position.

   - *Example*: Retailers hold sales to lure shoppers who would like to buy the goods but are reluctant to spend or are otherwise engaged.

2. **Usurping naturally occurring triggering events** in the lives of your stakeholders.

   - *Example*: 40th birthdays start us thinking about our health future.

3. **Capitalizing on those triggering events that randomly come along** in the social environment.

   - *Example*: The Thomas Supreme Court hearings unleashed intense latent readiness against sexual harassment.

4. It also means, defensively, **being able to fend off triggering events launched by competitors and opponents**, or occurring in the environment.

THE BEHAVIORAL PUBLIC RELATIONS MODEL EXPLAINS THE PROCESS

AWARENESS leads to...	→	ongoing investigation of **LATENT READINESS** to or not to act.	→	Occurrence of a **TRIGGERING EVENT** pushes toward acting.
				↓
ULTIMATE DESIRED BEHAVIOR occurs.	←	There is a **POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP OPPORTUNITY** at this stage.	←	**INTERMEDIATE BEHAVIORS** are the most likely result.

INTERMEDIATE BEHAVIORS ARE THE TACTICAL FOCUS

Appealing to people to go straight to the ultimate behavior is usually futile. There are intermediate behaviors most of us work through, on most decisions, before proceeding to the ultimate behavior.

1. **This provides a focus for pr efforts**: leading people to the intermediate behavior by concentrating our appeals there. Asking right off for the ultimate behavior is usually resisted anyway.

2. If the intermediate activity puts the organization in direct contact with people – say a celebration, meeting or event is held – this is **prime time to build relationships** with stakeholders face-to-face.

3. The combination of attracting them to an intermediate event, then building a relationship, provides entree for them to **act the ultimate behavior**.

    - *Example*: Hospitals hold educational seminars and affinity groups, building relationships between staff and attenders during the events, as a means of stimulating attenders to make the hospital their healthcare center.

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CAUTION: BIZ RELATIONSHIPS ARE DIFFERENT FROM PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, SO REQUIRE A DIFFERENT APPROACH

In one way, they operate almost backwards. Even in an incipient personal relationship, concern for the other person's interests ("mutuality") is there from the start – even if there's nothing in it for you. But there *is* something: you care about your friend and don't expect any real, honest relationship to "pay off." Except in your enjoyment of each other's company.

Business relationships at the beginning, and often for some time or even forever, harbor latent *mistrust*. The other person is trying to sell us something, get our support or vote or donation. We remain at arm's length and move through a series of growth stages – *provided* the mistrust proves unfounded (prr 10/16/00):

1. **Access** 2. **Exchange** 3. **Mutuality** 4. **Supportive behaviors**

Getting to stage 4 asap is the goal of the relationship-building programs now in use by nearly all organizations. But the definition of asap is likely to be rather long term – certainly several months or a year at minimum. Much longer if 1-on-1 contact isn't part of the equation, or if contact is infrequent.

WHY THEY'RE DIFFERENT

1. **People who know each other under business auspices usually have no desire to be friends.** And in those cases when friendship develops, a 2-tier relationship comes into being. How often when they're together as pals they agree "not to talk business tonight"

2. Customers want friendly relationships and service that delivers delight. But they're leery of organizations that go over the line and **intrude in their lives**

   - *They* decide when to invoke the relationship. The waiter who's too talkative and chummy irritates. The bellman who obsequiously asks if this is your first visit or where you're from makes most folks cringe

3. There's a reason tony shops and top dining establishments keep their help dressed to the 9s – and *silently* observant. **"Always dress one step above your audience"** is the rule. And never appear intrusive

4. Employees, community neighbors, public officials and other stakeholders – for the most part – feel the same way. Serve me exquisitely, but on my terms – and **until summoned, keep your distance**

STRATEGIES FOR THE STANDOFFISH

Organizations wanting to build relationships with opinion leaders in key stakeholder groups are advised to treat these programs much like Websites. Remember they're pull, not push, media. You need to keep *offering* opportunities to interact while knowing you won't get individual targets to take you up on them very often.

THIS SUGGESTS A SET OF OBVIOUS, ALMOST SHOPWORN, STRATEGIES:

1. **The invitations must be heartfelt.** Show you really want to see them, symbolically if possible

2. **Events or opportunities must have great appeal to *them*** – not something that benefits you. If a stage 4 relationship occurs thanks to your patience, the payoff will be ample. WIIFM rules (What's In It For Me). Research to know absolutely what will appeal is vital ... but must also be done subtly and with taste

3. **Let them *know* they're in charge.** You want to please them without intruding. This puts them at ease as the relationship ripens

4. **Do communicate useful or fun info** when they miss a chance to be together. Adopt the value-added marketing philosophy: valuable info of this kind is one thing they can get only from you

Friends like to hear from one another often. Business "friends" have limits. The success factor for organizations today – when every company, NPO, government agency and other organization is competing with every other one for "share of mind" and "share of heart" – is devising the correct method to build vital relationships with folks who didn't know you were interested, and never thought they would be.