

as big as life, has congressman member. Doesn't mean only communications, either, because another is called Information Center. Sessions will interest practitioners, include right to privacy vs freedom of information, future of info retrieval. Attendance by invitation only. pr will cover.

COMPLAINT HANDLING GETS SHORT SHRIFT;
BUSINESS MISSES MARKETING OPPORTUNITY

Complaint handling can be marketing asset for business. For starters, "It may be less expensive to resolve problems with old consumers than to solicit new business," according to John Goodman, co-director of TARP. His group recently completed 4 yr. study for U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs.

Majority of business community does not handle complaints cost-effectively, TARP found. Gripes are viewed as nuisance, cases handled individually. At leading companies, however, top management gives complaint-handling high priority. Special technology -- word processing, computers, hotlines -- is set up to handle gripes, then identify root of consumer problems. Approach provides these benefits:

- maintenance of market share
- low cost market research data base
- lower warranty, service costs
- improved employee productivity
- decreased gov't involvement in corp affrs

Some companies actually go as far as soliciting consumer complaints. Gulf Oil, for example, sent customers insert with credit card bill on "The Art of Complaining," (see pr 5/15/78). Non-complainers go away dissatisfied, Goodman says. Company actually loses marketing opportunity.

Esther Peterson, dir., ofc of Consumer Affrs, released TARP's results in special White House briefing for annual conference of Action Line Reporters. Conference was sponsored by American Express, is itself example of emphasis business now places on handling consumer complaints. Enlightened view recognizes Action Line Reporters as playing role in helping business keep customers informed & satisfied.

Using consumer action panels to arbitrate is expensive and should be avoided. Study recommends establishing only for "big ticket items where potential loss to consumers is substantial." Instead, educating CEOs is key to better business performance. Here, assns -- business, industry, trade & prof'l groups -- should take lead.

TARP's research examines complaint-handling of business, gov't & private voluntary groups. For copy, write U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, TARP Study, HEW-Reporters Bldg., Wash., D.C. 20201. Study has not been endorsed by White House; Peterson is inviting review & critique.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

FIRMS. Kenneth D. Makovsky opens Makovsky & Co., Inc., PR, 370 Lexington Ave., NYC 10017; 212/686-9640...Jeanne G. Paluzzi re-establishes JGP Public Relations, Inc., 17315 Rougeway, Livonia, Mich. 48152; 313/421-8693...Paul Lehman opens Paul Lehman Associates, 80 Washington Post Dr., Wilton, Conn. 06897;

203/762-0710...Hanley-Hogan Public Relations, formed as independent div of Hanley Partnership, Inc., headed by Timothy J. Hogan at Raeder Place, 727 N. First St., Laclede's Landing, St. Louis, Mo. 63102; 314/621-1400...Rose Sexton/Public Relations moves to Room 700, 477 Madison Ave., NYC 10022; 212/355-2613.

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BASIC, "SIMPLE" TASKS STILL KEY;
IN DAY OF TELECONFERENCING, 2-WAY TV, ELECTRONIC MIRACLES,
MANY ORGANIZATIONS STILL MISHANDLE TELEPHONE

Are practitioners so busy with issue anticipation and training execs to face cameras that they're overlooking the most common interpersonal relations & communications medium -- the telephone? Communications audits begin with an organization's use -- or misuse -- of Mr. Bell's invention. Every professional knows million dollar public relations campaigns can be riddled by as "minor" an infraction as insensitive phone manners. Yet blatant examples, and missed opportunities, are everywhere:

1. Letterheads & literature don't give phone numbers. Some of the biggest outfits are guilty. Corporate executive officers & banks are prime offenders. Centrex systems may make it "inefficient" to print personal numbers -- if you view stimulating interpersonal communications as less important than ease of printing. There's always the main number at the switchboard. Or adopt the policy of routinely typing in the number in body of letter or in space provided. Basic rule: don't force people to look up your number or call information (unless you're purposely discouraging contact).
2. "Have a good day," other inane comments become habitual. Are insincere, often grating. Sometimes out of place or dangerous -- e.g. when used by hospitals where caller may have gotten news of death or serious illness. "Bye-bye" terrible but no worse. Some organizations making concerted switch to "good-bye" or "good-bye, (name)." One of worst offenders is phone company. At private club using old type system, member placed toll call. Person on switchboard handled, requested time & charges from operator. Operator's non-stop reply to switchboard: "Please stay on line to get time & charges have a good day."
3. Transferring caller from switchboard to extension can be infuriating...when operator does not check in to see whether connection has been made. Isn't there a device to alert switchboard that extension phone is not being answered? Often operator could try another station or suggest another person to speak with. As it is, caller has no option when extension is not answered except to hang up and re-dial switchboard. (Expensive on long distance calls.)
4. Getting call switched from one extension to another is a hassle. Common monologue in such cases: "Let me try to transfer you. However, just in case the system breaks down, let me give you the number so you can call direct." This open lack of confidence suggests a) electronic system is inadequate, or b) the troops don't know how to use it. Does this reflect on the organization? telephone company? or both?

OPPORTUNITY: HIRE SWITCHBOARD OPERATORS
AS YOU WOULD RADIO TALENT

Make a "radio voice" part of job specs -- clear, understandable, strong, pleasant, in mid-tone range. Demand personality

that realizes what it means to be "on stage." Folks with difficult accents, harsh voices, uneven temperament have no place here -- even as temporary replacements. Yet one hears them all the time. You would not hire a radio announcer without definite vocal skills & training. Why demand less from phone answerers? The parallel is exact.

Readers are invited to send in letterheads or other materials which omit phone numbers. prr will publish review. If you know cases where numbers are sometimes left off for good reason, please share them, also.

CASE STUDY: TEXACO REINFORCES PHONE MANNERS
IN MOST LOGICAL PLACE, INTERNAL PHONE DIRECTORY;
ALSO PRINTS EMERGENCY PLAN THERE

Following is verbatim text from page facing start of listings:

GOOD TELEPHONE MANNERS AND PRACTICES

When talking over the telephone you are TEXACO...what you say...how you say it... can help or hurt our reputation.

Keep Texaco's "best voice forward."

Answer your own telephone promptly. Avoid answering with indefinite words such as "hello" or "yes."

Your own telephone..."Miss Reed"

Department or Section telephone..."Accounting -- Miss Brown."

Another's telephone..."Mr. Jones' office -- Miss Scott."

Keep a message pad or Form G-207 and pencil within easy reach of your telephone.

When taking calls and messages for others, volunteer information and offer to take a message. If information is not readily available, avoid undesirable holding -- offer to call back. Be certain messages are complete and accurate, including name, the company or department, the telephone number, date and time. Do not hesitate to ask the caller for the correct spelling of his or her name. The most commonplace names are often misunderstood over the telephone.

Be tactful -- "May I tell him who called" is so much more pleasing than an abrupt "who's calling."

End your call with an appropriate closing expression. "Goodbye, Mr. Jones" is hard to beat. Both of you then know the conversation has been terminated.

Wrong numbers are a waste of time, temper and expense -- if in doubt consult directories before making or transferring calls.

Leave word when away from your desk where you can be reached, when you plan to return. If you have placed or are expecting long distance calls, please stay at your desk until you receive your call or get a report.

The making and receiving of personal telephone calls should be restricted to emergencies such as illness, anticipated delay in arriving home due to working overtime, etc.

Whether business or personal, avoid lengthy calls. Don't "visit" via the telephone.

Remember -- There is Always Time for Courtesy.

HOUSE VOTES TO CURB PACs,
LIMIT SUPPLIER CREDIT

Long Congressional debate over

limiting amounts Political Action Committees can contribute ended with adoption of three key stipulations. 1) Candidate can accept a total of \$70,000 from all PACs combined. 2) Single PACs can contribute \$6,000 to a candidate, down from \$10,000 in current law. 3) PR firms, campaign consultants, ad agencies, other suppliers can not extend credit to candidates for more than 60 days.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce, labor, special interest groups opposed bill. Common Cause, environmental groups and others strongly supported. House Majority Leader Jim Wright (D., Tex.) expressed sentiment: "It is threatening to the democratic process if more and more of the money we receive must come from special interest groups. A seat in the House of Representatives shouldn't be like a seat on the New York Stock Exchange -- up for sale to the highest bidder."

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

Nuclear debate remains case study all practitioners can learn from. Evidence issue has risen above technological discussion is report in Oct. newsletter of Amer. Nuclear Society. It quotes chmn of pro-nuke group battling referendum to prohibit nukes in state: "If Maine Yankee is closed, it will be the first time that an in-place operational nuclear power plant will be shut down solely on the basis of public opinion. That would immediately set the stage for the closing of nuclear plants nationwide." On a lighter note, Americans for More Power Sources (AMPS), pro-nuke group composed largely of middle-aged women, offers a bumper sticker that shows ability to overcome their personal styles in order to reach out to the masses for support. It reads, "A Little Nukie Never Hurt Anyone."

White House Conferences use term "public relations" even if gov't agencies don't. WH Conference on Library & Information Services, to be held in Nov., is culmination of 3 yrs of regional pre-conferences. Key subcommittee is labeled Public Relations,

SELF-PORTRAIT OF A GATEKEEPER

Linda Thompson, staff ass't to Boise Cascade CEO John B. Fery, told United Airlines' In-Flight magazine, "In general, I handle the organizational and communications aspects of Mr. Fery's job. I screen all his calls, answer questions, handle mail, make sure that the flow of information is easy and constant in both directions -- without its ever becoming an overload or interfering with regular executive operations. A lot of the time, I am Mr. Fery's voice. I see my major function as that of a communications expert."

Current buzzword in the changing semantics buffeting public relations is "communication." Quotation above illustrates how widespread adoption of the word dilutes its usefulness as a demarcation for public relations professionals.