

IN ECONOMIC CRUNCH,  
LOCAL GOV'Ts DROP PIOs

Last week pr reported the job outlook is fairly secure, especially for top level practitioners. Not so, however, for those working in city and county public information offices. Survey by pub. affrs. ofc., Shelby County (Tenn.) found 12% of counties, 70% of cities responding have abolished their offices in recent years. Significantly, most pio's are ex-media people with little public relations background or training.

Behind budgetcutters' ax is widespread misunderstanding about public relations function. In far west, where many offices have succumbed to Proposition 13 fever, came this typical citizen response: "(Public information offices) are a waste of taxpayers' money. The best thing you could do is to abolish your office." Internal misunderstanding at management level -- to which majority report -- compounds difficulties. 16% of cities, 19% of counties cite lack of cooperation with other gov't dep'ts as most pressing problem. Some report municipal departments can choose whether to use their services. Almost half of those without pa units have other gov't workers carry out the function.

Survey found that info offices live up to name. Money goes mainly to producing communications materials. News releases, psa's top services. Tours rank third, provided by almost three-quarters; in-house newsletters are fourth. County operating budgets average \$57,000, cities \$95,000. (For copy, which includes salary & budget data, write pr.)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

¶Budgeteers: Figure 20 cents 1st class postage in '81 projections. U.S. Postal Service Bd. of Governors still couldn't agree on new rates at meeting last week, set hurry-up session for April 20. Postal expert John Jay Daly, Washington counselor, predicts a stamp will cost 19 or 20 cents effective March '81. USPS needs 10 months for public hearings, printing stamps. Last time proposed rise to 16 cents, settled at 15 cents following strong opposition at hearings. But budget for 20 cents, Daly told pr reporter. His "nostalgia of the week": 25 years ago, in '55, 1st class rate was 3 cents.

¶Canada now has reverse discrimination problem. Possible repercussions of Alberta ruling which parallels U.S. Bakke case merit attention of Canadian practitioners. Board established by Alberta Human Rights Commission ruled that outreach program at Univ. of Calgary violates rights by giving preferential treatment to Indian applicants. White woman wanted to take course taught on Indian reservation, was denied, brought suit. Decision has raised concern of both Indian and women's groups. "Human rights legislation in this province is among the weakest in Canada," says Maria Eriksen of the Alberta Status of Women.

¶Anti-smoking campaigns now focus on workplace. Surgeon General's '79 report that smoking accounts for \$12-\$18 billion in lost productivity, wages and absenteeism -- as well as \$5-\$8 billion in direct healthcare costs and 350,000 unnecessary deaths -- has provoked concern among businesses. Survey of 3000 companies by Nat'l Interagency Council on Smoking and Health reveals that a) many companies have policies prohibiting or restricting smoking, b) 15% of companies have programs to help employees quit, c) another 30% would like to initiate one, d) an additional 1/3 are unsure. 70% of respondents without programs would like assistance in developing and funding. Council feels responses "indicate a large and potentially successful area -- the workplace -- to provide assistance to adult smokers who want to quit." Results of survey will be used to assist companies in developing programs. Council membership is blue ribbon census of medical, healthcare, public service organizations. (For list of resource persons, write pr.)

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LISTENING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM BRINGING IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS,  
NEW BUSINESS TO SPERRY -- & MAY BE ENHANCING CORPORATE IMAGE

Listening is often cited as the most critical public relations skill. Yet poor listening is a chronic thorn in the heel of communications. Managers spend as estimated 70% of time listening. Yet listening efficiency levels hover around 25%. "Improving listening skills requires an ongoing effort," explains Dr. Lyman Steil, president of International Listening Assn. Among 300 organizations which have consulted Steil, Sperry Corporation has adopted the most comprehensive listening program.

Sperry backed into its listening improvement campaign. Research to find a central theme among its diverse divisions for new ad campaign revealed Sperry has reputation as "company that listens." Listening improvement has moved beyond the slogan to become a total in-house commitment. Listening training sessions are offered to all management and sales personnel. Eventually this will be extended to all employees.

Training session stresses that listening is more than just hearing, is subject to common bad habits (see chart on p.2). First, trainees take test in which they evaluate their own skills, predict how others would rate them as listeners. Then they role play -- one employee acts as boss, one as worker, one as observer. Observer critically analyzes their interactions, in process may illuminate his own listening pitfalls. One participant who felt asking questions was to "admit ignorance" recounted his observations of two co-workers: "I couldn't believe how confusing and frustrating their conversation became -- all because they neglected to ask questions."

CEO PAUL LYET ON LISTENING

"Poor listening is one of the most significant problems facing business today. Business relies on the communications system, and when it breaks down, mistakes can be very costly. Corporations pay for their mistakes in lower profits while consumers pay in higher prices."

Sessions are followed by video presentation which leaves participant with realization that "to perfect a skill requires a lifetime of work," says one trainer. Much depends upon employee initiative, but Steil feels this is balanced by "phenomenological benefits of program" -- high impact of noticeable improvement in employees' own communication effectiveness. Although too early to tell, Steil believes long term benefits may include "increase in productivity, time savings, increased profitability, credibility, and improved employee relationships."

In terms of business opportunity, benefits are already measurable, reports Dell Kennedy, ad director. Sperry has spent over \$4 million on advertising -- mainly in business & opinion leader publications. Copy is directed toward "executives of Fortune 500." Objective is to expand client base for Sperry Univac computer division. Slogan "We understand how important it is to listen" is ideally suited to counter image of rival IBM, "which is not as responsive as we are," according to sr. news specialist Cynthia

Swain. Ads have gotten wide attention and "marketing people claim interest in the listening program is opening doors," getting business which otherwise might not have been possible. Ads have also brought in 22,000 inquiries for free listening quiz. "We've been surprised by the response, and have a bit of trouble keeping up with the requests," says Kennedy.

Sperry's corporate image research this year will solicit evaluations from stockholders, analysts, customers. "If gain in image exceeds historical increments, we'll attribute success to the listening campaign," Kennedy told pr reporter. (For booklet containing self-quiz, other materials write Sperry, 1290 Ave. of Americas, NY 10019.)

#### 10 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING

<u>The 10 Keys</u>	<u>The Bad Listener</u>	<u>The Good Listener</u>
1. Find areas of interest.	Tunes out dry subjects.	Opportunizes; asks "what's in it for me?"
2. Judge content, not delivery.	Tunes out if delivery is poor.	Judges content, skips over delivery errors.
3. Hold your fire.	Tends to enter into argument.	Doesn't judge until comprehension complete.
4. Listen for ideas.	Listens for facts.	Listens for central themes.
5. Be flexible.	Takes intensive notes using only one system.	Takes fewer notes. Uses 4-5 different systems, depending on speaker.
6. Work at listening.	Shows no energy output. Attention is faked.	Works hard, exhibits active body state.
7. Resist distractions.	Distracted easily.	Fights or avoids distractions, tolerates bad habits, knows how to concentrate.
8. Exercise your mind.	Resists difficult expository material; seeks light, recreational material.	Uses heavier material as exercise for the mind.
9. Keep your mind open.	Reacts to emotional words.	Interprets color words; does not get hung up on them.
10. Capitalize on fact thought is faster than speech.	Tends to daydream with slow speakers.	Challenges, anticipates, mentally summarizes, weighs the evidence, listens between the lines to tone of voice.

-- from Sperry booklet,  
"Your Personal Listening Profile"

#### COMPANY ENCOURAGES "SELF REVITALIZATION" IN SHRINKING RURAL TOWNS

Corporate sponsored revitalization programs have traditionally been aimed at betterment of urban communities. Now

Carolina Telephone (Fayetteville, N.C.) is bringing new life to rural towns. Project Proud initiates "self-revitalization of deteriorating rural business centers," says Bobby Suggs, mgr. cmt. rels. Goals of social responsibility effort are to strengthen local economy, stem migration to cities, demonstrate utility as full partner in community.

Because each town's problems are "unique and require local brainpower," company approaches community with customized slide presentation. Success "requires involvement of entire business community," Suggs told pr reporter. Carolina Tel provides leaders with handbook of suggestions on how to start. Once underway, company continues counsel role, attends meetings with project officials every couple weeks "to make sure they don't drop the ball."

"The answer begins with repairing the old stores and making them more attractive to customers," Suggs says. Media coverage of renovation revitalizes civic pride. Impact snowballs, residential neighborhoods often join in. So far 4 towns have projects underway, another 5 or 6 will begin soon.

Steve Skinner, who heads project in Lillington, N.C., told prr that locally-owned businesses, community groups such as garden club are "very excited." Media, both tv & print, are also favorable. Main stumbling block has been securing initial funds, particularly from absentee store owners. He's "confident, however, this can be overcome." One solution has been to secure federally-funded CETA workers to carry out renovations. How program works:

1. Tactful, credible "originator" located within community to introduce project, work with Carolina Telephone to gain support of other community influentials.
2. Steering committee formed, decides such policy matters as funding, goals, membership, legislative requirements. Non-profit org'n set up to sponsor renovation.
3. Open public meeting held. Gain support of existing community groups, convince businesses to pay membership dues. Leader explains, however, that every business will benefit even if doesn't pay dues.
4. Architect & builder retained to suggest, carry out renovations. Individual businessmen bear brunt of costs.

Loans may be provided at low or no interest by community bankers.

5. Steering committee meets frequently to review accomplishments, deal with problems, alter goals as circumstances change. Carolina Tel attends, provides counsel.
6. Lobbying group formed to enact or change ordinances to stimulate progress, such as laws on trash collection, sign placement. Solicits support of assessing officials for renovation work.
7. On-going public relations effort keeps media, community informed. Enthusiasm fostered thru project-centered events.

#### CEOs & the MEDIA

"We in business often seem unduly sensitive to the needles and barbs of the media. But business must recognize that the first amendment does not guarantee a fair and accurate press. The guarantee is for a free press. Sometimes it is fair and sometimes it is inaccurate. But considering that it puts out a totally new product every twenty-four hours, could it always be absolutely fair, totally accurate, always excellent or completely objective?"

-- T. Mitchell Ford, CEO, Emhart Corporation