

long-range planning & management training; 3) a national literacy network to stimulate awareness. People are invested by instituting a campaign to mobilize employees nationwide to become individual tutors & leaders for literacy in their communities.

ACTIVISM GOT AN E.R.A. FOR CANADIAN WOMEN;  
WHY DID SIMILAR TACTICS FAIL IN U.S.?

Differences in Canadian & US attitudes are illustrated by citizens' expectations of fundamental rights -- and

willingness to work for them politically in an effective way. While US Bill of Rights approached its bicentennial, similar proposal nearly wrecked adoption of new Canadian constitution. Many political leaders saw no need to guarantee individual citizens specific, irrevocable rights.

On the other hand, US push to add ERA to Constitution failed -- primarily because right wing women oppose the women's movement & manifestations of equality such as ERA. In Canada the opposite happened. Cabinet minister Judy Erola explained at a commencement address to Smith College how liberal & conservative women joined forces to get Section 28 adopted. Similar to ERA, it reads, "Notwithstanding anything in this charter, the rights & freedoms referred to are guaranteed equally to male & female persons."

"We got every women's organization in every town and we directed our fury at every provincial premier. There were over 100 women's organizations. It was really quite incredible. They used my office in Ottawa -- especially the phones. It was important to move very quickly. We couldn't have over six months. The reaction was overwhelming. We used everything we had. Flora MacDonald is a Conservative. I called and asked her how well she knew Premier Buchanan of Nova Scotia. 'He used to take my sister out. I'll fix him,' she said. This was typical. We used our friends across the country. The last premier was Blakeney in Saskatchewan. He was getting bad advice. The women marched on the provincial legislature, an enormous march! That was the straw that broke the camel's back. It took 10 days. Every premier capitulated."

ITEM OF CONCERN TO PROFESSIONALS

"Harm to important segments of the pr delivery system -- at least in the public view -- is predictable from early jockeying of Democratic presidential hopefuls. A year before the nominating convention, 18 months before the election, and already the media coverage is of polls purportedly telling who's ahead. "Mondale Now Trails Glenn by 16 Percentage Points" reads a typical headline. The article offers nary a word about either candidate's position on crucial issues -- only the beauty contest as measured by high-priced pollsters. This makes a mockery of media for shallow coverage. And especially of so-called professional polling firms, who do have a public responsibility not to survey irrelevant subjects. Their arguments about the "importance" of regular polls -- which they liken to taking the pulse or blood count of a patient -- sound more & more like send-me-money pitches.

DO IT NOW!

Is pr's 19th Annual Survey of the Profession questionnaire sitting in your to-do pile? Are you waiting for some quiet time when your phone stops ringing and .... Don't wait! Pull out that yellow questionnaire and share your professional insights now. If you've misplaced yours, call reader service manager Laurie Eldridge at 603/778-0514. She'll send another copy right away.

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SUDDENLY MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS, BIZ SCHOOLS & AUTHORS ARE TALKING ABOUT THE THINGS PUBLIC RELATIONS HAS STOOD FOR ALL THESE YEARS; BUT CAN PRACTITIONERS CAPITALIZE ON IT, INSTEAD OF LOSING TURF?

It's great at last to have the hot books talking about communication, customer-orientation, people skills ... isn't it? Doesn't it mean public relations has arrived? Consider:

"The No. 1 priority in every business is listening to your customer and paying attention to him," says mgmt consultant Thomas Peters, co-author of "In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies."

that organizations come to grief because 1) hierarchies are too rigid and 2) everything is on an adversarial or confrontational level.

"If you don't consult with people or show interest in them, they get to dislike you and you're in deep trouble," adds Paul Lawrence, Harvard B-School prof and co-author of "Renewing American Industry." "The first task is to make people care again." He & Boston College prof Davis Dyer say in their book

"You can't make a quality product unless you have a worker who wants to make a quality product," notes William Abernathy, also from Harvard & one of 3 authors of "Industrial Renaissance." They advise dismantling the old barriers that block communication between the top of the organization & the bottom, and between departments or people in them.

These, plus popular books like "Corporate Cultures" (current buzz words), espouse the public relations philosophy. Or what its practitioners call the public relations philosophy. Even the arrogant business schools (some of them) are recalcitrant about ignoring people factors for numbers, legalisms & manipulative techniques. "What I am most concerned about is people management skills," the vice-dean of Wharton, Everett Keech, told Christian Science Monitor. The paper reports Cornell's B-school was told by a task force of business leaders that it should strengthen offerings in human resource management.

"Employers of our graduates are telling us MBA students don't communicate as effectively as they might," says the dean of Dartmouth's Tuck School. Kerry King tells pr he is optimistic about the Foundation for PR Research & Education's project to get such skills taught by schools of management. But there are reluctant faculty.

"On those days when nothing is going right, remember three of Harper's Laws. Harper's First Law: 'You don't know if an idea is bad until it fails the second time.' Harper's Second Law: 'Good ideas take twice as long to be accepted and implemented as you thought.' And finally, Harper's Third Law: 'Who ever said managing would be easy?'"

-- Stephen Harper, UNorth Carolina-Wilmington, mgmt & mktg chrm, in Piedmont Airlines in-flight mag.



"Slowly an attitude change is coming about," says David Thomas, Cornell dean, "but you still have the finance, statistics & accounting people who feel there's no rigor whatever in doing people-oriented things." And Stanford rejected any changes in its "number-crunching" curriculum. "Reforms weren't needed; we have a very tried & true system."

The Challenge. Great as it feels to see even management professors coming around to pr's point of view, the fact is they're coining their own terms to apply it. "Corporate culture" is a new euphemism for morale, pride, and the other positive internal relationships brought about by open communication & policies attuned to people. "Stakeholders" is another word for "publics." And so on. Management gurus are an entrepreneurial lot. They are marketing their product, even if they swiped it. It is extremely doubtful they will admit public relations was right. The question is, therefore: how will practitioners capitalize on the fact their discipline has been discovered?

A NEW "SCALE" WORKS TO MANAGE INFO OVERLOAD

Information overload can victimize public relations efforts. How much information do your publics have time to, or want to, read? U-Haul's field operational manual for company-owned retail outlets grew with the addition of loose-leaf bulletins "to a point where it no longer fit the oversized binder designed to contain it. It became too cumbersome to handle and too large to read & comprehend," explains Joan Penl, info mgr (Phoenix).

"For months I tried to get people in my department to agree it was too big, too much, too inaccessible. But my colleagues are marketing managers, more concerned with generating information than with the problems of control. For them, it's publish or perish."

Penl found a way to dramatize her concern. "I put the binder out where everyone walks by it and posted a sign offering a reward for the nearest estimate of the manual's weight. When anyone stopped to pick it up and make a guess, I explained what could be done to alleviate the overload. The correct weight was 10 pounds, 6 ounces. An appalling amount of paper!"

Her "event" made the point. It created the awareness necessary to get action. "Within a week, we had a proposal for a new format, limitation of information and improved access to information. Top management is leading the task force. So far we've trimmed the manual down to fit the binder comfortably, designed an alpha-numeric filing system for the information, and are going on to develop an on-line index. After that, electronic mail."

WHERE THE ACTION IS

"It's time to demystify what's going on in medicine so people can be adequately informed and participate in decision making instead of being told to accept that the doctor always knows best."

-- Dr. Mary Ellen Avery, first woman to head a major Harvard Medical School dep't, when unexpectedly resigning last month as physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital Medical Center to work on communicating healthcare to the public.

SPECIFIC POLICY & REQUEST FORM KEEP TRADE EXHIBITS PRIVATE WHEN "60 MINUTES" SHOWS UP

If "60 Minutes" wants to come into your trade show and do some filming, should you let them? If you don't want pictures or information about certain exhibits to get out to the general public, how do you handle this? American Feed Manufacturers Ass'n (Arlington, Va.) developed a policy on filming exhibits at its trade shows.

"CBS requested they be able to film several of our exhibitors for a segment they were working on for '60 Minutes.' In response, we issued the policy that no photographs or recordings shall be taken without the permission of the exhibitor and show management," David Nelson, ass't dir of production, explained to prr. Policy protects the "privacy" of each exhibitor's area to prevent potential problems. Another motivation is "because we like to do our own publicity," says Howard Frederick.

Security personnel, already necessary for booth security & attendee registration, enforce the policy. A "photography & recording request form" is used. It gives permission to cover a specific exhibit subject to approval of the exhibitor & show management. (For copy of form, write prr.)

PEOPLE WHO CAN'T HANDLE LANGUAGE ARE IMMUNE TO PR CAMPAIGNS; ILLITERACY STATISTICS SURPRISING

In addition to apathy & information overload, there's another disease rampant which directly affects written communications. The disease is illiteracy. 1 in 5 American adults can't read, says Laubach Literacy International (Syracuse). Worldwide, it's 2 in 5.

An Adult Performance Level study, commissioned by US Office of Education, tested the ability of adults to perform functional literacy tasks, such as 1) addressing an envelope; 2) reading a want ad; 3) understanding a simple paragraph explaining why it's illegal to be held in jail without being charged with a crime. Results show 20% of Americans over 18 can barely cope with everyday reading & writing tasks. 33% are functioning with difficulty. Too many people struggle with a 5th grade or below reading level. They can't read instructions, fill out an application, read street signs or warning labels.

One organization Laubach is working with is US Consumer Product Safety Commission. "Their information is written at a higher vocabulary level than this large segment of the population can read. So we're working with them on a pilot to see if we can 'write down' and distribute it thru our network," Lynn Curtis, comms dir, told prr. There are 2 approaches. "We could 'write down' everything. Or we can be actively involved in enabling people to learn to read. It's a solvable problem."

"You think it is a pity they cannot read, but the real tragedy is that they have no voice in public affairs, they never vote, they are never represented in any conference, they are the silent victims. It is a human weakness not to become aware of suffering unless we hear a cry."  
  
-- Frank C. Laubach, founder of Laubach Literacy International

Some organizations have a lot to gain by helping to eradicate illiteracy. B. Dalton Booksellers does, so company "decided to get active not only trying to solve the problem but in trying to prevent the problem," explains William Andres, chrm of parent Dayton Hudson Corporation. The company provides money & volunteers. Dollars are spent on: 1) literacy org's in company's key markets; 2) model programs,