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THO IT IS AN ART, EFFECTIVE PERSUASION UTILIZES SCIENCE
ITS OTHER TOOLS ARE STORIES, HUMOR, EMOTION, IDEOLOGY;
PERSUADERS ARE BOTH ESSENTIAL & POWERFUL, PRSA CONFERENCE TOLD

Single focus of the 38th National Conference -- the art & ethics of persuasion -- worked to unite the speakers & magnify the topic for 1,500 attendees.

PERSUASION IS SCIENTIFIC. It's an art & craft, but also a science, says Yale prof William McGuire, prominent psychology researcher. Reductionalists argue that as mastery of persuasion matures, it will gradually be reduced from art to craft and then to science. But, says McGuire, for persuasion to advance adequately, insights must be generated by scientific theory as well as by the practitioner's craft and the artist's intuition. So it takes creativity, experience & use of research findings to be a consistent persuader.

PERSUASION IS ETHICAL. The strength of North America's "experiment" is its basis in Judeo/Christian ethics, said Michael Novak, sr fellow American Enterprise Institute. At the root of our ethics are 3 ideas:

1. Sin -- "Everyone is a sinner so when there's a mess, tell the truth; people expect it based on what they see in their own lives."

2. Creativity -- "Public relations must show people how to think in a new way, to help us understand who we are and how to look at things" because we are the profession of words, symbols, stories, ideas.

3. Community -- A new sense of community is developing. Our social vision is one of an interdependent world with people joining together to form corporations, associations. The community personality, not the rugged individual, is the norm.

STORIES PERSUADE. "Those who are in a position to explain things to others are, wittingly or not, those who most influence the world in which we live -- past, present & future. It is the stories people tell us that influence our lives. Big stories, little stories. Stories about what happened, and why, about what is going on, and why, about what causes what, about what should be done about what. In this sense, public relations practitioners are story tellers," managerial scholar & consultant Lee Thayer told attendees in the 24th annual Foundation Lecture.

"THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR" SPEAKS (ON TAPE) TO PRSA CONFEREES

For years, members have been suggesting that PRSA is worthy of a presidential appearance. Perhaps 1986 conference chair Joe Awad can pull it off since the meeting will be in Washington. However, this year's conference closed with an impressive Reagan video-tape appearance arranged by Grace Angst, Ketchum Public Relations/Washington, 1986 host committee chair.

"I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today. However, I'll have to admit making a presentation before some of our country's foremost public relations professionals -- individuals who make it their business to know communications -- is a bit of a challenge even for a president. Seriously though, public relations plays a vital role in our free society. It is rooted in our First Amendment freedoms -- freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly.

"Our forefathers, like Jefferson & Adams, placed great value on these freedoms. They sold the people of the colonies on liberty & independence. You might say they were early practitioners of what today might be called public relations. Surely their public relations effort was facilitated by the fact they were selling an idea whose time had come to proud & brave people.

"Over the years, public relations has continued to be an important part of our way of life. In Washington, public relations plays a vital role in setting the public policy agenda. On a daily basis, our nation's capitol is the site of democracy in action, much of it aided by communications professionals such as yourselves. You help others understand government and government better understands the needs & desires of the people. Through your expertise, more of our citizens are able to participate in the debate on issues that affect their lives. Whether it's government or profit-making or nonprofit-making enterprise, public relations is a necessary part of the picture.

"I hope you're having a rewarding gathering in Detroit. Back in 1980 I went to a convention there myself. I would also like to extend an early welcome to each one of you to your next year's convention in our nation's capitol. Again, many thanks for the opportunity to speak to you. Good luck and God bless you."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. Public Relations Society of America's 1986 ofcra: prez, Anthony Franco (prez, Anthony Franco, Inc, Detroit); prez-elect, John Felton (vp-corp comms, McCormick & Co, Hunt Valley, Md.); sec'y, Nancy Wolfe (prez, The Wolfe Group, Winston-Salem); treas, Dwayne Summar (dpr, Robinson & Weskel Communications, Miami). Serving 2-yr terms as dirs-at-large, E. Zoe McCathrin (vp & dpr, BancOhio Nat'l Bank, Columbus), Lloyd Newman (exec vp, Manning, Selvage & Lee, NYC), Sunshine Janda Overkamp (assoc exec dir, United Way of Texas/Gulf Coast, Houston), Dennis Wilcox (coord pr degree prgm, San Jose State U). As-

sembly delegates-at-large, Peter Klute (owner, Klute Communications, Scottsdale), Ruby Miller (assoc dpr, Martin Marietta Energy Systems, Oak Ridge, Tenn.).

AWARDS. Winners of PRSA's highest individual awards: Leone Baxter (prez, Whitaker & Baxter International, SF) receives Gold Anvil for her contributions to the profession; Norm Nager (comms prof, Calif State U, Fullerton) named Outstanding Educator; Robert Edwards (retired mgr, exec svcs, corp comms, Corning Glass Works, Corning, NY) receives Paul M. Lund Public Service Award for his contributions thru public service activities.



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His review of the idea of leadership emphasizes the influence that followers have on determining it. He believes practitioners "need to figure out how to teach people to be intelligent and moral followers, not leaders. An intelligent & conscientious follower will always be a good leader, so we can go about making good leaders by making good followers. The real danger is always stupid followership, as history has given us ample evidence; a bad leader is no leader if there are none who will follow."

Organizational leadership, he says, will be provided "by those who are equipped to sense what is going on in that organization's environment and in that organization's inner-workings, to read these goings-on as they bear upon the interests of that organization and its many categories of stakeholders. It will be provided by those who are uniquely equipped to translate the goings-on of the world for those who make the decisions of the world, and to explain those decisions and their human & social implications to everyone who has a stake in the consequences. This vital information-communication-intelligence-strategic leadership could & should be provided by today's public relations practitioner. But you must first lead others to see you in this more global, vital role."

PERSUASION MUST BE PROGRAMMED. USA Today publisher Cathleen Black listed her 5-step method: 1) aim for the decisionmakers, "they're more ready to join a new idea"; 2) listen before speaking, "listening gives clues to what will persuade"; 3) become a personality; 4) communicate enthusiasm because "enthusiasm is the most persuasive motivational tool we know"; 5) build consensus thru team work & involvement.

HUMOR CAN PERSUADE. Jody Powell's wryly humorous presentation demonstrated the value of humor as a persuasion technique. It makes portentous matters manageable. Gives perspective to problems. Keeps small issues from becoming large. Promotes civility amid crisis. "When stakes are high and both sides adamant, there's no better way to keep both sides from losing."

BALANCE EMOTION & EVIDENCE. "Our heritage praises as the best of humankind the person who can use the art of persuasion to adapt truth to the audience and the audience to truth. The persuasive challenge," asserts x-priest now consultant Michael Shadow (Seattle), "is to argue the audience into a set of feelings justified by the evidence. The rule of thumb is that the emotions be appropriate to the evidence. Grand concepts require grand feelings. What we need to guard against is a puny idea shrouded in great emotions."

RESPOND TO PUBLIC ISSUES. The public interest is a powerful persuasion tool, according to Carol Tucker Foreman, DC public issues consultant. "Today, Sears is pushing for free checking, truth-in-savings, community reinvestment and limits on the period of time banks can hold checks before crediting accounts. It was the consumers' agenda, now it's Sears' agenda, too. If the corporate agenda is more likely to be achieved by working with public interest groups...if the corporate agenda can be shaped to meet the needs of the public interest community...why not give it a shot?"

WHAT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TELLS ABOUT THE TECHNIQUES OF PERSUASION

Useful illustrations from researcher William McGuire: "The lesser-expert is more persuasive spokesperson. Research shows people "are more influenced by novices like themselves than by the expert." Thus, workers sell positions or policies better than CEOs, outsiders better than members of the organization.

Unpleasant sources are more persuasive. People are more influenced by groups that require them to undergo a traumatic initiation and by unpleasant tyrants. Because of the unpleasantness, people need a face-saving reason for complying and so convince themselves they really believe in the heavy's position. They internalize the nasty's position more than they do Mr. Nice Guy's.

Impact of eye contact. Power is communicated by a high level of eye contact while speaking, and low contact while listening.

Fast talking works. Contrary to conventional wisdom about used car salesmen, the faster the speaker, the more shoppers change their position to agree with the one advocated. Fast talk makes the speaker appear more intelligent & knowledgeable and, surprisingly, more trustworthy.

Persuasive impact of figurative speech: Newspaper article with similes was significantly more persuasive than the basic literal editorial. Version with metaphors had significantly more impact than the one with similes. Sustained metaphors carried over several sentences were even more persuasive than isolated metaphors. There is research evidence that metaphors evoke increased attention, enhance the perceived competence of the speaker, and establish an aesthetically pleasing mood.

Persuasion while alone or with others. Are people more persuaded by a given communication when they receive it while alone or in the company of others? The presence of others seems to have an anchoring effect that makes people more resistant to persuasion, even when the others are passive strangers. Peculiar incidental finding shows speakers are better liked by hearers in the company of others. This is paradoxical and deserves further study. (For a copy of McGuire's talk, write prr.)

MAKING WRITING PERSUASIVE REQUIRES SIMILAR TECHNIQUES

Here's your chance to break rules learned in Freshman English, says counselor Jim Fox. Incomplete sentences, repeating words rather than using synonyms, and weeding out extra adjectives are all effective. You should also:

A. Use triads (groups of 3). For example, "Friends, Romans, countrymen," or "He came, he saw, he conquered."

B. Use alliteration, metaphors & other stylistic devices.

C. Limit statistics, or at least round them off.

D. Reason with audience, using cause & effect as a method.

E. Use emotional appeal.

F. Make your conclusion first, then back it up with benefits & other support.

The formula for writing that sells:

1. Get attention.
2. Show a need.
3. Satisfy that need.
4. Point out benefits.
5. Request action.

"Determine the audience's attitude and identify with it," says Fox. "Once you've established a relationship, then go for what you want."

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