

departments reflects management's perception that 'corporate communications' is a stratified function and not a vital management element."

2. Even those who abjure public relations in their titles belong to professional associations with the term in their names. A worldwide survey found overwhelming unanimity around the term public relations. Only the Norwegians dropped it (for "Information & Public Affairs").

3. Most practitioners now receive training in colleges where almost every basic text has public relations in its title. Thousands of students continue to flock to those courses, undeterred by the term.

4. Studies by prr's Annual Survey & O'Dwyer's directories both show public relations the term of majority usage despite the rise of euphemisms.

5. Counseling firms almost entirely describe themselves as offering public relations services. Even if they add other terms to keep up with the euphemisms, public relations is the dominant one.

6. Media has now accepted the term, and describes nearly everything these days as a public relations situation.

7. "Whether the references are favorable, unfavorable, or neutral, the significant fact is that the term has become part of the common language."

The report proposes semantic differentiations between 15 widely used terms. It also urges adoption of a definition that concentrates on the perception of those not in the field. Such a definition "must be graspable by the public and be retained clearly in its mind. It must be crisp, concise & memorable. It cannot be more than perhaps fifteen words long, with no more than two abstractions." One possibility is that proposed by PRSA's 1980 Task Force on The Stature & Role of Public Relations:

"Public Relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. Texas PR Ass'n 1987 ofc's: pres, Helen Varner (Stephen F. Austin StateU, Nacogdoches); 1st vp, G. Irvin Lipp (Conoco, Houston); 2nd vp, Sue

Collier (St. Mary's Hospital, Galveston); sec'y-treas, Jim Goodwin (Southwestern Bell, Austin).

Opening paragraph of the IABC-PRSA announcement (pg.1) illustrates how semantics gets in the profession's way at every turn. It states that "the two largest public relations & business communications organizations" will investigate merging.

If public relations is the de facto umbrella term, will senior professionals (or generalists at any level) want to be part of an organization which includes a lesser term such as business communications? And how does one define "business"? Will PRSA's substantial membership in educational, social service, government & other non-commercial sectors be comfortable? IABC has members from those sectors. But will other IABC members feel public relations is imprecise for them, especially the original core group of editors & employee communications specialists?

PRSA AND IABC AGREE TO SET UP TASK FORCE TO STUDY MERGER

PRSA pres. Jack Felton & IABC chrm. Bob Berzok announced in a letter to their members last week: "We believe our organizations share sufficient common interests to explore the formation of a new international (sic) public relations/communications organization."

A task force is being formed to study the proposal. Each org'n will appoint 5 leaders to the task force which will be headed by Chet Burger -- a member of both. A report will be developed by the end of the year addressing 1) organizational issues such as dues, chapters, professional development, pub'ns, accreditation, ethics; 2) make recommendations regarding professional offices & staffs; and 3) develop a process to handle all unresolved issues.

"During the past few years IABC & PRSA have been discussing areas of mutual interest, such as joint accreditation, ethics policies and professional development programs. Our members and chapters are expressing much interest in a united profession, and we are responding to that as well. We believe that a new organization could provide improved professional services across the board, more cost-efficiently."

The announcement caps 7 years of activity, kicked off when the 1980 PRSA administration proposed uniting all public relations organizations. Tho that initiative sparked cooperative efforts between most of the professional societies -- including organizing North American Public Relations Council for the purpose -- IABC has not participated until recently.

Unresolved is the status of CPRS. IABC has 1,300 Canadian members. The early discussions proposed either merging PRSA, CPRS & IABC (& perhaps others) into a continental society; or merging IABC members in the 2 countries with PRSA & CPRS respectively.

The surprise announcement came as PRSA leadership from across the nation assembled in New Orleans for Symposium II on Demonstrating Professionalism. Many proposals on accreditation, professional development, fellow status, educating CEOs, promoting the ethics code & related topics were expected to be approved at the meeting.

FRANCO SPEAKS PUBLICLY FOR FIRST TIME ABOUT HIS CASE AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM IT BY PRACTITIONERS AND PR SOCIETIES

Tony Franco talked about the lessons of his SEC debacle at UTenn-Knoxville's annual PR Day last Tuesday. In a phone interview prior to the speech, he told prr he chose this platform because it involved professional development & students -- 2



areas of high interest to him. "I want to share my experience to help others." His pre-speech reflections included these key points:

1. "I had legal advice but no outside public relations counsel, which I should have gotten." The difficulties turned out to be far more public relations than legal ones.

2. "When I signed the consent decree, I thought it was more of a benign document than it is. I was naive. Signing it means you neither admit nor deny any of the allegations of the complaint. But that's not understood by most people, including the media."

3. "Often people understand what's perceived over what's real. Once I signed the consent decree, I was perceived guilty. And by signing the SEC agreement, I am prohibited from commenting on the merits of the settlement. As public relations practitioners know, silence is often perceived as guilt."

4. After the decree was signed, "certain members of the profession yelled 'guilty, guilty' and victimized a fellow professional. By doing so, they tore the profession down. They succumbed to what we counsel our clients not to do -- publicity doesn't make a case. But they reacted; they believed the publicity over one of their own."

5. "PRSA paid dearly for not putting out the reason for my resignation. But it was an oversight. They clamored to save themselves -- but didn't realize they were frying one of their fellow board members at the same time. It set the profession back by miles." Tell the full story, even if you think people may already know.

6. "Public relations people yelling 'guilty,' gave media a chance to show what they think about pr people. Who prompted the 9/26 WSJ story about PRSA's handling of its communications? Did it warrant the front page? Was it a combination of the press willingness

to do something anti-pr & accusations by PRSA members of the Society's alleged communications mistake that gave the WSJ a story? Professionals, feeding right into it, were quoted in the media."

7. When asked why he accepted the position of PRSA president, he responded: "I did so because I was advised by counsel that the likelihood of a case being brought was slim. On hindsight however, publicity brought on by my title and the attention fed by some PRSA members blew it out of proportion."

8. "My reason for resigning was to get out of the spotlight and to save the Society embarrassment." It worked, he believes, but then PRSA publicized that he volunteered to go before the ethics board. And the publicity began again. Why did PRSA do this? Was it using external media to reach an internal audience?

"The ethics process didn't work in this situation because they allowed the process to become politicized by the delays & the amount of media attention it got. No one could make a fair judgment. They should never have allowed people to give their opinions to the press without being severely reprimanded, because that's a violation of the code -- to do damage to a fellow member." Several chapter officers & others did make public statements, for instance to the WSJ, yet the case hadn't been heard before the ethics board.

9. Franco feels ethics board's rules limit what it can do. It has only 4 choices: a) close case because of insufficient importance, b) hold for further investigation, c) hold for further development, d) file charges with judicial panel. First 3 were

inappropriate. To speed up the process because of pressure, ethics board with Franco's agreement eliminated the judicial panel and went straight to the board of directors. He now sees need for a 5th option: "Dismiss case as submitted for lack of evidence" -- because a consent decree does not establish guilt -- "but recommend to board a warning or reprimand," or some middle ground of this nature.

MANAGEMENT MUST BE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS, NOT SPECTATORS

This ensures research validity, believes Robert Duboff of Temple, Barker & Sloane (Lexington, Mass). They must weigh what they know against what the research says to make sure results reflect real phenomena in the marketplace and are not just a function of poorly worded questions asked of the wrong people. He also warns against using research to "merely confirm what is already believed."

Instead, he recommends a research process based on steady interchange between decisionmakers & researchers. This includes planning, secondary research, qualitative research, a review of preliminary findings, quantitative research, and a final review of results & recommendations. "Because managers are the decision-makers who will actually use the findings, they should oversee the entire effort from conception to conclusion."

Without this kind of involvement, managers run the risk of accepting flawed or questionable research -- particularly if that research tells them what they want to hear, warns Duboff.

TERMINOLOGY REPORT FINDS LITTLE PRACTICAL CHOICE TO STICKING WITH, PROMOTING "PUBLIC RELATIONS"

"The babel of terms applied to what is generally referred to as 'public relations' is a threat to advancement of the field & to the stature of the people in it -- whatever title they may use," concludes Phil Lesly, chrm., PRSA cmtc on terminology (part of the Demonstrating Professionalism effort -- see pg. 1).

Moreover, employers & management are confused because the field itself is -- and hasn't acted to resolve the problem. As it turns out, history & general practice have probably already made the decision. The report cites this evidence:

1. Most substitute terms apply to segments of the field only, e.g., communication is a service function, public affairs has become equated with government relations. "It seems likely that the downsizing of corporate

10. "In the future, PRSA ought to hold a Society member responsible for his or her actions and not allow resignation to stop the process. They should still issue findings, which they can't do under present by-laws. That needs to be looked at." He feels the whole code enforcement side of the Society needs to be made tougher and fairer. [As this was being written, PRSA Assembly was preparing to act on such proposals last Saturday in New Orleans.]

"Research, in & of itself, does not produce answers or strategies. It produces data that must be questioned, interpreted & converted by management into answers & action plans."