

TO KEEP EMPLOYEES INFORMED DURING MAJOR CHANGES,
CONTEL TELEPHONE USES CLASSIC 2-WAY FEEDBACK LOOP

Appointment of a new sector president, fall-thru of an anticipated merger, and acquisition of 2 new divisions led Contel Telephone Operations (Atlanta) to hold an open meeting to update employees on the company's new direction.

Following the meeting, employees were invited to submit additional questions via feedback forms. New sector president & other appropriate executives responded. Both questions & answers were then printed in a new employee "Q & A" bulletin. "It was an effort to close the information loop, and the response has been enthusiastic," John Clemons, mgr internal comms, told prr.

Nearly 25% of the 450 employees who attended the meeting responded to questionnaires. Majority feel meeting was worthwhile and similar meetings should be held quarterly. Many suggested other topics for future meetings as well as additional communications needs -- smaller group meetings, suggestion box, open-door policy for managers.

Increased employee interest in Contel's business has also spawned monthly lunch-time meetings. Internal & external experts will speak on new technology, the competition, deregulation -- anything related to the company.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

¶Boring people need to overcome bad habits. They are passive, slow to express their own opinions, & quick to conform to opinions of others, claims researcher Mark Leary, Wake Forest Univ. Bad habits include: a) unnecessary pauses & hesitations, b) banal remarks, c) repetition of familiar stories, d) excessive focus on self. Researchers found boring people tend to speak less overall, ask more questions (many unnecessary) and make interruptive acknowledgements ("I see," "ahem"). Engaging speakers, on the other hand, are assertive, use first-person disclosures & 3rd-person statements of information.

¶School district recruits teachers, builds pride with color poster. Featuring an inviting beach scene, it was primary tool in a national teacher recruitment campaign for Florida's Broward County Public Schools, 8th largest in the nation. Flip-side of poster features map, photos, facts and info on lifestyle of area as well as school district's programs & special features. Poster folds to make an eye-catching, easily-mailed brochure which was a "huge success," according to Jacqueline Cerra, former dir comty rels for BCPS. Many offices, schools, employees framed & displayed the poster -- in homes as well as offices.

¶Long-term impact of summary annual reports will be the return of corporate communicators to leading roles in developing the annual report" -- previously dominated by financial officers, accountants & lawyers, reports Mitchell Kozikowski, chrm, Creamer Dickson Basford (NYC). SARs will be more readable & informative because they offer an "opportunity to tell your organization's story -- its products or services, benefits, people, culture, as well as provide a 'short-pants' version of the necessary financial information. That's the kind of annual more than 90% of recipients of your annual report are most interested in & will find most useful."

pr reporter

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CONTAGIOUS SPIRIT OF COORS' QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM
CREATES LOYALTY, PRIDE, FAMILY FEELING AMONG EMPLOYEES,
HUMANIZES COMPANY THRU EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT WITH COMMUNITY

In an era when new corporate policies are choking internal & external loyalty, Coors has found a way to nourish it -- thru personal interaction among employees serving their communities. Rosa Bunn, mgr-comty afrs, explained Coors' Quality of Life program to prr:

What's Involved "We have a formal volunteer group which we call the VICE squad (Volunteers In Community Enrichment). It consists of employees & spouses who volunteer to do community work and is run by a board of employees. Only employee-suggested projects are considered." Board meets monthly to review suggestions. Monthly newsletter publishes them.

2,400 employees, out of a possible 7,000, are members of VICE. Includes vice presidents, managers, directors, janitors, drivers, employees from all areas. 120 trained project leaders help it to function smoothly. Each leader is responsible for 20 people. "Usually 150-200 people do a project. Rather than trying to communicate to the entire group, project leaders work out the logistics and then communicate to their 20 people. Afterwards, they send handwritten thank-you notes to them. It's very important to maintain communication links" and 20 is a small enough group to communicate with personally.

ADVICE (Additional Duties Volunteers In Community Enrichment) is the retirees' contingent. 250 of a possible 650 are members. They have their own office in the administration building which they staff 5 hrs/day. "They're a resource for other retirees in the company, they do their own projects and help us with VICE."

Volunteers rotate. They choose when & how often they want to work. "We've set up a framework that people can easily do. Everyone wants to do something like this but is intimidated

Bunn will share her corporate-volunteerism experience at the annual conference of Ass'n of Volunteer Administration, in Chi, Oct 9. AVA is a professional membership ass'n for individuals in volunteer mgmt. Includes practitioners, educators, researchers, students, trainers, consultants. "We have people who wear two hats. Many combine the public relations & volunteer management function," exec dir Jacqueline Callahan told prr.

International ass'n has 1,700 active members, plus 4,000 members in its affiliate program. \$75/yr membership includes bimonthly member newsletter; quarterly policy issues newsletter; Journal of Volunteer Administration distributed quarterly; and quarterly mag, Voluntary Action Leadership. (Info from P.O. Box 4584, Boulder, Colo. 80306; 303/497-0238)



by a) how do I get there, b) where do I park, c) how do I get in, d) what do I say. So we have people meet at a familiar building and provide transportation to & from the sites."

Programs 1. An employee made VICE aware of fruit growers' dilemma because of INS ruling against employing illegal aliens who have always picked their fruit. Colorado's western slopes were having a bumper crop but lacked fruit pickers. Board voted to approve this project on the contingency that real need existed. "We went to our western slopes, met with fruit growers and asked them if they perceived they had a problem. They thought they did, but weren't sure.

"We then stepped forward publicly and did a press conference with the Governor, our president Peter Coors, people from the fruit growers ass'n. We agreed to send Coors employees to help pick fruit. Working out the details so we wouldn't skew the marketplace with free labor, we set up escrow funds with 2 nonprofits (\$2,000 each). If farmers used our people, they would make a contribution back to the escrow account and we would pay for our employees' food & lodging. We then opened an office, put one of our people in it to be available daily."

Announcement created a lot of media attention. "We brought such focus to their need that the farmers were overwhelmed with people. We ended up not having to pick a single peach. 60 employees -- strictly volunteers giving their holidays, vacations, weekends -- were very disappointed they didn't get to go. The media picked up on the fact we never picked a peach, but no one was offended. We came out with the statement that if our plans should not come to pass, the escrow money would be kept, half going to a charity of choice of each of the 2 NPOs holding the money and the other half to be used as the fruit growers wished. We wanted to leave something no matter what happened." 2 weeks ago, 60 boxes of peaches from 60 different farmers arrived at Coors with the note, "To Coors With Love." The 60 employees who were among the first 2 skeleton crews each received a box.

2. "We adopted 6 nursing homes last year to bring Christmas gifts to them, sing carols, share cookies & cheer. 120 participated on Christmas day. This year one of our project leaders suggested making lap robes for the folks in the homes. It seemed a rather ambitious project. We weren't sure people would be willing to invest that much time or money into making them. But as we got started, it mushroomed."

Room on 3rd floor of Coors administration bldg is filled with nothing but lap robes & yarn. Company is paying for yarn. Employees check out yarn; when finished knitting or crocheting, return completed lap robe to check out more yarn. "In the lunchroom everyone is making them."

Benefits A. Outreach. "We have grandmas in California knitting for us, great aunts in Indiana crocheting, cousins in Texas who've heard about it and are sending them in. In all, 12 states are involved thru employees' relatives who want to participate. It changes how people feel about a company when they can see it is also very human."

B. Loyalty. Both VICE & ADVICE have t-shirts, sweatshirts, jackets, hats. "Everyone is so enthusiastic. We're like a family. On the bus to & from projects everyone sings songs, does cheers. Somehow we've touched something we weren't looking to touch."

C. Skills Training. People have uncovered skills & talents they didn't know they had, like clowning in VICE's own clown troupe, knitting & crocheting, helping others. "Peripheral things are happening we hadn't planned on."

Internal Program Initially, Quality of Life program was designed for internal use with Coors' 10,000 employees. "They are our priority" and the major emphasis of the program. Result is a spillover of goodwill into employees' communities. "It has opened up 2-way communication. Employees really feel part of us representing the company and making things happen in the community."

Because of so many requests from outside for info on its Quality of Life program, Coors has set up a profit center, selling preset packages as well as designing programs to fit needs. Coors is also planning to do regional workshops on the subject. "There is a groundswell right now to do corporate volunteerism. And I don't think people want to reinvent the wheel."

SATELLITE PRESS CONFERENCES "REDUCE HASSLE & EXPENSE OF OLD FASHIONED WHISTLE STOP MEDIA TOURS"

Don Shipley of DLS Communications (DC) further explains that they allow

newsmakers to conduct interviews with tv stations all over the country from one studio over a period of several hours. "This typically involves procuring several hours of satellite time and offering interested stations 5-10 minute windows of time to conduct the interviews...a la Ted Koppel's Nightline." Advantage over VNRs or packaged interviews is "stations can control the content and get sound bites that directly address issues of interest to their local viewers." Shipley offers this advice:

1. Arranging the interview is time consuming. Placement usually requires a minimum of 3 calls.

2. Advance planning is critical. Spokespersons must be well prepared. A meeting & dry run should be held with the studio. Know each station's needs going in, and call them several minutes before their scheduled time so technical people at both ends can coordinate & start on time.

3. Stations make last-minute decisions. They can never rule out breaking local stories and are often reluctant to commit to a specific time. They will often arrange a time only to back out at the last minute when something comes up.

4. Noon newscasts are more likely to use satellite interviews. Last night's news is old, not much has happened yet in the day, so stations are looking for ways to liven their noon shows.

5. Some stations don't like them. Some have been turned off by poorly prepared or uninteresting guests. Others don't like a) the arrangements, b) talking heads at in their stories, or c) they have their own bureaus & can cover the story locally.

6. Satellite interviews have better potential for major market place placements. Providing the story is of interest in their area, major market stations that rarely use outside material will do satellite interviews because of the greater control over content.

7. Stations need relevant raw footage to go with the interview -- e.g. if the event is a product intro, offer 2-minutes of footage at the end of their window of satellite time for use in the story they put together. Or, offer a VNR with B roll in the first & last windows of satellite time.