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The State of Public Relations 1988: Part I

PUBLIC RELATIONS IS SPOTLIGHTED ON CENTER STAGE AS NEW YEAR BEGINS;
OPPORTUNITIES SEEM UNBOUNDED -- FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO BROADEN SKILLS

"A rendezvous with reality." Pat Schroeder's campaign theme may set the agenda even tho she decided not to run for president. Among the realities that will influence public relations practice in '88:

1. Crises, in a wide variety, are impacting every type of organization -- thus becoming the key skill factor. An impressive 41% of respondents to prr's 23rd Annual Survey of the Profession report they "engaged in crisis communication in the past year." Even those who didn't made such comments as:
 - "We didn't, but we do have a plan."
 - "No, but that's not to say we didn't have a crisis!"
 - "No, but we had 3 crisis plan exercises."
 - "Everything is a crisis around here."
2. CEO involvement in pr activities continues to rise.
3. Economic adjustment, not only stock prices & competitiveness measures but public attitudes toward the laissez faire policies of Reaganomics. While the rich get richer & the old get richer, total US savings fell from 19.8% under pre-supply side policies to an estimated 4% this year. Congressional Budget Ofc says avg. income for top 5% of population went up 20% after inflation in past decade, bottom 10% went down by 15%. Conference Board report finds folks over 65, 20% of US households, own 40% of personal assets.
4. Move toward professionalism & new skills to take advantage of opportunities in the new realities. A new ethic -- & renewed sense of ethics -- are needed.

Table 1: HOW CEOs SPEND THEIR TIME ON PR, Hours Per Month

	0	1-10	11-39	Over 40
Meeting with Outside Groups	8.1	<u>37.8</u>	30.8	23.5
Speechmaking	15.1	<u>61.5</u>	19.8	3.5
Media Contacts/Press Conferences	24.5	<u>65.5</u>	7.5	2.6
Lobbying	<u>45.4</u>	36.0	11.5	7.8
Radio/TV Appearances	<u>51.4</u>	45.9	2.0	1.0

-- prr's Annual Survey, 916 responses from a sample of PRSA, CPRS & subscribers (to represent those not members of these societies)



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Table 2: HOW PRACTITIONERS SPEND THEIR TIME, Hours Per Month

	<u>0</u>	<u>1-10</u>	<u>11-39</u>	<u>Over 40</u>
Media Contacts/Press Conferences	7.4	<u>47.2</u>	24.8	19.1
Meeting with Outside Groups	12.8	<u>50.5</u>	25.3	12.6
Speechmaking	38.5	<u>56.6</u>	5.6	1.3
Radio/TV Appearances	<u>53.2</u>	41.6	3.7	1.4
Lobbying	<u>68.4</u>	26.3	4.5	3.0

WITH CEOs SPENDING SO MUCH TIME ON PR PRACTITIONERS CAN BE PRIMARY AIDES

Table 1 shows two areas where CEOs are less active: broadcast media usage & lobbying. Only half get involved; but these areas

hold promise & should be beefed up. In the former, most pr pros can be significant helpers. How about the latter? Far fewer hours are spent by practitioners in lobbying than by CEOs. With issues & crises abounding and a new federal administration coming up, this is an opportunity area. 34% of practitioners now lobby, according to Table 2.

In other functions, CEOs are committed:

¶Over 91% spend time meeting with outside groups. Time spent is substantial: 24% spend 40+ hrs/month, 31% spent between 11-39 hrs. 7% report devoting 70-100+ hrs.

¶Speechmaking receives 2nd most CEO attention. 85% of respondents report their CEOs engage in this activity. Less time is consumed -- it's quicker than meetings -- but at the extreme 3% spend 40+ hrs/month.

¶75% engage in media relations.

All categories are up from our '81 survey -- except lobbying, which dropped by 1%.

CRISES PROLIFERATE IN AN ERA OF UNCERTAINTY

Risk & uncertainty are the constants in the wide variety of crises respondents report they were faced with. The assignment is to avoid harmful consequences of:

¶Natural & technological accidents & disasters: reported by 30.5%
 plane crashes, chemical spills, radiation from Chernobyl, explosions, fires, hurricanes, environmental damage such as groundwater pollution & toxic waste disposal

¶Confrontation: reported by 19.5%
 pressure from activists, lawsuits, conflicts from AIDS, South Africa, labor disputes, employee drug testing

¶Takeovers & other restructuring: reported by 15.1%
 mergers, acquisitions, divestitures, plant/office closings, layoffs, changes in top mgmt, other personnel shifts

Management failures: reported by 8.1%
unethical behavior, fraud, insider trading,
product recalls, poor quality products

Revenue loss: reported by 5.4%
legislative budget cuts, gov't contract losses,
LDC debts

Malevolence: reported by 5.1%
robberies & other crimes, product tampering
or hoaxes, bomb threats, other terrorism

Miscellaneous: reported by 16.3%
AIDS, taxes, insurance loss, healthcare issues

IT'S HARDER TO DEFINE THE ISSUES;
SEMANTICS & POSITIONING ARE CRITICAL

To illustrate, an obvious example: During
the recent summit, much was said about
USSR's human rights situation. Has this

become a cliché -- that is, how do you define "human rights" now ... today?

It's clearly wrong in American eyes for Russia to hold political prisoners in Gulags or not allow people to emigrate. When US-funded Central American "freedom fighters" raid rural villages & kill bystanding civilians, including children, is that a "human rights" violation? Many think it is; others believe it must be done to forestall the "Communist threat".

When West Bank Palestinians protest gov't policies, is it an assault on "human rights" for Israeli soldiers to fire on the crowd? US, UK & many other gov'ts think so, for they have protested to Israeli authorities.

Another opportunity: Senior execs "love a good crisis", says Gerald Meyers, ex-CEO, American Motors. It provides an exciting contrast to routine management; opens unusual opportunities for organizational change; tests leadership abilities. The author of When It Hits The Fan: Managing the Nine Crises of Business told Kal Druck's senior pr exec seminar at Fairfield U. most CEOs are not picked for their ability at handling crisis -- so they need help.

To the confusion add this: "Loss of habitat is the most universal factor leading towards extinction of a species," say ecological studies. Is the rising problem of homelessness, right here on North American city streets, therefore a "human rights" problem? How about joblessness? To what can we claim a "right" in today's world?

Semantically defining the issue, then positioning it in sync with current public opinion, is an opportunity like never before.

ADVOCACY ADVERTISING, AN ISSUES TOOL,
SQUARELY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PORTFOLIO;
SOCIAL, POLITICAL TOPICS PREDOMINATED IN '87

Advocacy advertising (74.4%) tops list of tasks survey respondents say are handled in "my dep't" -- rather than, in this case, advertising,

marketing or the executive office. But last year fewer than 1 in 5 (17.5%) ran such ads. Some say they "should have", others plan to do so this year.

These are the topics the '87 ads covered (compare with list of issues on pp. 2 & 3):

TABLE 3: THEMES IN ADVOCACY ADVERTISING 1987

<u>¶Governmental/Political/Legal</u>	<u>run by 20.5%</u>
gov't interference, banking deregulation, defense, local gov't involvement in transportation, selective contracting bill in Ohio, tax reform, taxation of not-for-profit health insurance plans, need for long-range planning, strategic modernization, unfairness of local court system, reform of tort system, real estate laws & other legal issues	
<u>¶Social Issues</u>	<u>run by 20.5%</u>
anti-litter "Don't Mess with Texas", safe driving/drunk driving, housing inequity conversion for older people, stigma re mental health treatment, visually impaired people do have abilities, anti-drug, homeless, responsible pet ownership, spouse abuse, child abuse, animal rights, unemployment, poverty, human development, servicing of disadvantaged youths, lost children, saving the unborn from abortionists	
<u>¶Healthcare</u>	<u>run by 17.9%</u>
alcohol, drugs, tobacco, medical malpractice, health-care access, healthcare of poor, rationing of health-care by gov't, AIDS in the dental office, organ donation, physician insurance costs	
<u>¶Education</u>	<u>run by 12.8%</u>
Expand K-12 classes, funding for public schools, benefits of public education, school bond issues, crisis in school funding, teacher shortage, adult literacy	
<u>¶Economics</u>	<u>run by 6.8%</u>
trade retaliation, free trade, foreign policy, food prices, state economic development, airport funding	
<u>¶Environment/Energy</u>	<u>run by 6.8%</u>
solid waste disposal, beach renourishment, hydro-electric station, newspaper recycling, acid rain, growth vs. no growth, energy	
<u>¶Labor</u>	<u>run by 4.3%</u>
<u>¶Consumerism</u>	<u>run by 3.4%</u>
restrictive product labeling, utility rates	
<u>¶Miscellaneous</u>	<u>run by 6.8%</u>
space station, mining safety, advertising, credit unions giving business loans	

TEST FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITY NOW
IS AFFECT ON ACTUAL BEHAVIOR:
WHAT IS CHANGED BECAUSE OF PR?

"So what?!" is the wise exec's question when evaluating whether pr (or any) activities have paid off -- "added value", in the current parlance. Showing a pile

of clippings won't suffice. The only sure response is to show that helpful behavior is reinforced, desired behavior is motivated or negative behavior modified.

But the techniques for doing this go far beyond conventional communications. They begin with a basic pr tenet, however -- taking account of the psychological state of the persons or public involved. Influencing behavior most often starts with building people's confidence (see box).

B.F. Skinner's guidelines on positive reinforcement, as opposed to criticism & threats, suggest the way it is given is more important than the amount. Effective positive reinforcement should be:

1. Specific -- say exactly what behaviors you are complimenting.
2. Immediate -- on-the-spot praise, a bonus now.
3. Achievable -- acknowledge small wins along the way to perfection.
4. Varied -- attention can be as valuable as \$\$, things, time off.
5. Unpredictable -- regular or expected reinforcement loses impact.

The practitioner's first task in effecting behavior change inside organizations is to train managers at all levels in a) understanding why positive reinforcement works, carping & griping at employees is counterproductive; 2) how to give reinforcement. In sum: behavior change begins with managerial behavior.

————— A MODEL FOR MOTIVATING INTERNAL BEHAVIOR THRU PR TECHNIQUES —————

Assimilating several scholars' work, in several disciplines, a practical how-to emerges for motivating, reinforcing or modifying behavior:

1. Positive reinforcement starts it -- by building self-confidence. This is necessary to prepare people for behavior change, since those who lack self-confidence are likely to resist, at least wait for others to show the way.
2. Foot-in-door technique gets them practicing the behavior. As a trial, even in a small way, get people doing what is desired. Example: In mergers, employees of new entity receive paychecks, answer phone with new company name. The loyalty is not yet built, actual use of new name begins to break down old habits & create new ones.
3. Motivation techniques are now required to retain the behavior. Herzberg's classic studies differentiate true motivators (achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement) from mere hygiene factors (salary, work conditions, supervision, company policy) but the latter are often mistaken for motivators by the uninitiated. (Write pr for copy of his study.)
4. Role models now assume the task of reinforcing & hardening the behavior. These key players become the focal point of meetings, internal media, presentations.
5. Culture takes over when rituals, heroes & recited stories solidify the behavior with the force of social acceptance. Desired behavior becomes the norm -- and now it is failure to perform the behavior that is oddball -- & socially punished.

As the expected results of pr become behavioral, counseling & training skills -- used with management as well as the work force -- become primary. Table 2 shows where the emphasis is now.

(For a model on influencing mass behavior change, see pr 1/31/83 -- or write for a copy.)

NEVER MIND HOW FIELD DEFINES ITSELF;
POWER BROKERS, PUBLIC THINK "PR" PANDEMIC

As Phil Lesly argues in PRSA's Report on Terminology (pr 4/13/87) the term "public relations" is in such wide-

spread use now, to cover such universal human activities, that it is senseless for practitioners to impose euphemisms. While much reporting & cocktail hour discussion may not be precisely accurate, the gist is correct: that public relationships are essential to societal functioning. Recent evidence:

¶About the NRA, an LATimes piece (by a law prof) says, "The Great American Gun Control Debate has entered a new phase, an era of public relations." True, the author decries "the sophisticated simplicity of approach" which he feels is "the mark of a true (pr) professional." But he, and his readers, understand his underlying theme: that gun control issues have moved into the Court of Public Opinion ... which is the arena of public relations.

¶Jack Anderson terms the recent summit "a PR shootout on 16th St. Photo-ops at 50 paces. Indeed, we think a videotape of the week's events could be marketed as an audiovisual aid for PR courses."

¶Adds political guru Bob Strauss about Gorbachev, as quoted in Maclean's: "He's working this country like it hasn't been worked before. It's a hell of a PR show."

¶Knight-Ridder papers carried this lead last month: "Japanese farmers have discovered public relations -- American style." They're worried tariff removal might force them to compete with imports. So what tactic do they use? Public relations, of course -- and no reader will misunderstand.

As Lesly wrote: "Whether the references are favorable, unfavorable or neutral, the significant fact is that the field has been growing rapidly in public awareness. The term is becoming a part of the common language. People in all walks of life refer to it; they seldom refer to the alternate terms. That raises a serious question about whether any effort within the field to divert the course of terminology can be effective."

MILESTONES. Two pioneers who passed from the scene in '87 didn't get the farewells they deserved, in pr's opinion. Ed Pendray was the designer of accreditation. He overcame strong resistance + considerable confusion in the plans offered to get PRSA's first-of-its-kind program up & working. Dorothy Ducas, the genius behind the March of Dimes, led the way in pr professionalism in voluntary org'ns.