

Towers details advice received from respondents:

¶Communicate to employees what is happening to the company, why it is happening. If mgmt is suffering, no bonuses, salary cuts, let the employees know.

¶Plan. Devise a financial, organizational, but most of all an internal communications strategy.

¶Boost morale of surviving employees. Tell them you need them, you want them to be part of the renaissance, participants in the change.

¶Cut others as quickly & neatly as possible. Towers' Robin Schoen: "When downsizings are done, they tend to be done poorly. They cut a little at a time, and anxiety builds among the employees as they wonder where the ax will fall next. One respondent advised actually cutting more than is necessary, because it's always easier to put back than it is to cut again."

¶Provide equitable severance, outplacement for those who are cut, and communicate this to everyone early on.

3 STRATEGY PROBLEMS TO PONDER:

1. Can a Defensive Posture Call Attention to the Problem, increasing public fear rather than overcoming it? "There's been a big flap in the media lately about one of nature's most perfect foods and its relationship to some sneaky little bacteria called Salmonella Enteritidis," says New England Brown Egg Council in huge newspaper ad. Copy goes on to address the charges, instruct public how to avoid salmonella & detail all the good things there are to know about eggs. Could it backfire? "I don't think so," says Maureen Sciacca, S.F.M. Media Inc (NYC), who handles the account. "I think they just wanted to get their message out that eggs are good, & brown eggs are better than white eggs. They're responding to the fact that in today's society, eggs are always associated with cholesterol & salmonella." What do you think?

2. Has AIDS Dampened Public Perception Of Red Cross? Newsweek says it was once seen as a "guardian of public health," but now the AIDS epidemic threatens the reputation of the entire blood industry. In question is whether blood banks were reluctant to adopt AIDS screening for fear of scaring away donors -- "the blood-banking system was dependent on good pr. The notion that there was AIDS in the blood supply was horrible." prr contacted ARC to find out if it sensed antipathy from the public, how it planned to alter this perception. "It sounds like something some reporter thinks might be a story," responded Bob Riccio. "We pioneered AIDS education. We're not trying to change public perception about us, we're just trying to increase awareness about AIDS."

3. Bundy Says Media Influenced His Behavior. In an "exit interview" with religious broadcaster James Dobson (Pomona, Calif), mass murderer Ted Bundy says early exposure to violent pornographic media played a serious role in his murder rampage, & ultimately, his execution. "I don't want to infer that I was some helpless kind of victim...what we're talking about is an influence of violent types of media, violent types of pornography which had an indispensable (role) in the chain of events that led to the behavior, the assaults, the murders." The debate continues, but if Bundy's assessment is accurate, it supports theorists who argue that media can produce behavioral change (pr 10/17/88).

Vol.32 No.5
January 30, 1989

REPORT ON CONCERNS FACING SCHOOL PR APPLIES TO ALL FOR '90s:
1) PUBLIC PERCEPTION IS MAJOR PROBLEM, 2) ADVOCACY IS NEEDED,
3) PRACTITIONERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO HELP ORGANIZATIONS COPE

"Every leader knows the power of public perception," says Bill Banach, dir., Nat'l Issues Mgmt Program, (Mount Clemens, Mich). "Great leaders know how to harness it to the advantage of their cause." Report issued to educators, media, gov't offices nationwide says public education in the US is in great trouble, & the primary culprit is communication: "It has broken down. Schools & the public have become divided by a gulf of misunderstanding, weakened by a lack of common purpose."

Report says future of public schools is at stake as court of public opinion is negative. Urges a 3-step communication solution (applicable to all organizations):

1. Dialogue: between school districts & constituencies can counter negative perception, or make changes where perception is justified. When citizens are involved with their school, public understanding & support increases. There's no other way to solve this problem, yet some districts lack...
2. Philosophical Commitment: to telling the school story & building community alliances; to establishing a vision, for both educators & community to understand & support; to maintaining faith in teachers, youngsters, the future. Such commitment must lead to...
3. Financial Commitment: Public, educators must realize that comm is a sophisticated process requiring trained & competent comm professionals -- a scarce commodity in both private & public sectors. They must be seen as a necessity, not a budget luxury.

Banach sees continued conservative agenda promoting school public relations. "The Bush Admin will open up the doors of education to pr practitioners because the 'schools of choice' issue will come to play. (Minnesota has already adopted this policy.) If schools can't adequately communicate, they won't be chosen. The school of the future will be market-driven. It will listen to its clients and provide them with what they want. It will become the school of choice & be the winner of the next decade and the new century just around the corner."

When even public schools must win customers, tension arises between giving them whatever they think they want & maintaining educational integrity. Persuasive advocacy becomes a necessity, generating other educational issues for practitioners to watch:



"plastic curriculum" accommodates mandates, tech advances, special interests, whims, latest fad. But curriculum is the school's "product" so standards must be set & understood.

laws & regs which choke creativity -- so complex they've spawned a new breed of attorneys. It's a bad sign when we give up on good ideas because "we might get sued."

governance -- "who's in charge here?" Too many people rowing in too many directions. Innovation is stifled because "it's not politically smart" or "it will never fly with the commissioners."

exhilaration -- teachers & execs should not be poisoned by critics or battle-scarred vets who remember all the negatives. Students & parents, must catch the spirit, reinforce the teacher -- which requires a campaign.

"Problems are not solved by gov'ts or biz or the educational community but by people talking things over. It's been estimated that well ove 90% of all problems are solved by people working in groups of 2 or 3, sifting thru solutions, laughing off mistakes, coming to a consensus."

no-fault society -- everyone is blaming others, the buck is always passed. Gov't is the biggest "they" followed by big biz. It's time for everyone to take responsibility -- theme for another pr campaign.

clocks, calendars & tests should phase out, allowing schools to operate before & after normal hours, permit some youngsters to attend for longer periods of time, others for less. Also, tests cannot adequately assess thinking, problem-solving ability, synthesis of information -- these skills are not optically scannable & are thus never taught.

the body of knowledge will be 4 times greater in 2000 than it is now. Clients of education will change -- becoming younger, older, more ethnically diverse. The pace of life will accelerate & there will be an increased interdependence on the world's people.

Report advises educators to look to business allies for:

- * sense of community. Demographic shifting plus the Industrial Age (which taught us to break things down into the smallest of parts) causes us to treat communities with a throwaway, replace-it mentality. Management is discovering that preoccupation with parts prevents us from seeing the Big Picture. The new emphasis is cooperation, consensus, collaboration & hopefully community.
- * learning partnership between biz & ed. "Too often schools ask businesses, 'Help us financially and we'll go away.' I think it's time to lean on business to stop giving us lip service & an occasional computer but to commit early, get involved at the planning level and stay committed," Banach told prr. "The return for businesses will be a better-trained workforce & a better community."

THE COMPLIMENT: VITAL PART OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION; BUT CAN WE GIVE & TAKE THEM?

Internal behavior change (see model in prr 1/2/89) begins with positive reinforcement. Knowing how to deliver this reinforcement has become a widely debated & studied topic.

There are many ways to do it wrong and that can cause more problems.

Mark Knapp, speech comn researcher (U Texas-Austin) simplifies the dilemma by studying the skill we all learned when small -- the compliment. Studying compliments as part of interpersonal comns, he finds that only 8% of compliments are given between superiors & subordinates. This is a missed opportunity for positive reinforcement. "A compliment is a statement which makes a person believe s/he has received a positive evaluation," he says.

But "if the compliment does not coincide with what you know was your true performance, ... then both the compliment and the person who gave it are discredited."

Jerry Hawkins of Landers College (Greenwood, SC) emphasizes the importance of compliments in the business world. "There are so many opportunities to honestly compliment an individual's performance, yet I have been struck with how management and coaches, in many regards very similar, see their role relative to feedback and reinforcement as one-dimensional. They use criticism almost exclusively... anyone who would be a motivator, must use a prudent blend or combination of timely praise and criticism. It changes how people relate to each other."

Compliments may also enhance the communication process when the psychological rule of "expression before communication" is followed. The research shows that individuals who compliment each other tend to disagree less, cooperate more, and generally think that similarities exist between them.

If You Can't Fire 'em, Mortify 'em says Xian Instruments Factory (Xian, China). Wall Street Journal says China discourages the capitalistic custom of firing, so even the foul-mouthed & lazy can feel secure. But Xian found an effective recourse -- a "40 Worst Employees" list. Those selected are shamed by a plaque, featuring their name & photo, above their work station. Customers are encouraged to participate in the nomination process -- ballot boxes are featured at handy locations. "When a seller has a plaque at her counter identifying her as the worst assistant in the store, she'll improve quickly to get it taken away!" says mgr Xiao Xingcai. If humiliation fails, money talks. Employees who frequent the list lose quarterly bonuses.

EXPLAINING RESTRUCTURING PLANS TO EMPLOYEES WELL IN ADVANCE INCREASES THE CHANCES FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION, STUDY FINDS

Alan Towers Assoc (NYC) survey of 73 restructured Fortune 500 companies (service & manufacturing) reveals:

1. 62% of those with improved productivity & 66% of those with increased sales had implemented comn plan prior to restructuring.
2. 64% of those starting comn plan during restructuring did not have improved productivity; 57% did not have increased sales.

"A few years ago, most companies would not tell employees about the upcoming changes," Alan Towers told prr. "They figured remaining employees would be grateful just to have their jobs. What they found was that survivors were shell-shocked -- they saw friends leave & thought they would be next. They felt in the dark, no longer trusted management. And productivity suffered. Even when management tried to resurrect itself by finally communicating, it was no contest for the rumor mill, which took control and pre-empted all attempts at rebuttal."