

"Gaming puts people in a situation where they can practice dealing with problems. Learning how to win the game helps people come to grips with actual situations." (More info & game samples from pr)

ADVICE FROM B.F. SKINNER The terminally ill behavioral psychologist, in what may be his last interview, said he wants to be remembered as a "social designer." Since the world's problems are overwhelmingly caused by failure to work together, share & admit interdependence, that could become an honored designation. It seems related to Ed Bernay's description of practitioners as "societal technicians, with the capability to bring about accommodation in the Court of Public Opinion."

On dealing with critics: "I've almost never answered my critics. Once in a while, I've done something to correct a misunderstanding, but most of the time I don't spend time arguing with critics who don't understand, because I have other things to do."

On not being understood: "I've written 20 books, and you'd expect by the end of that time, they'd know what you were saying. But I still see the most egregious errors published."

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

When Is It In Everyone's Best Interest To Tell All -- & When Is It Not?

The era of right-to-know, sunshine laws & open meetings, involvement & participation has taught us that you cannot, with any efficiency or effectiveness, do everything by consensus, or in public. There's a legitimate place for quiet negotiation -- so long as the decision, & the reasoning behind it, are publicly announced with questions allowed. But how will folks react to Vietnam War commander Wm. Westmoreland's dictum in Omni magazine? Said the general: "Vietnam was the first war ever fought without any censorship. Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind." Wisdom...or dangerous thinking?

No Wonder Public Seems More Societally Responsible -- Activism Is Now

Easy. Just as shoppers can launch a zinger at a corporation by switching brands, couch potatoes can make an impact by reaching for the phone. A new Anheuser Busch commercial urges Americans to "tell 'em to can the beer tax" by dialing an 800 number. A free message is then sent to representatives in Congress. Taxpayers for Common Sense, funded by the wine, beer & distilled spirits industries, is introducing a similar campaign to California voters.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Nominated. 1991 PRSA nat'l officers: pres, Joseph Epley, pres Epley & Associates (Charlotte); pres-elect Rosalee Roberts, vp

Bozell (Omaha); sec'y, Hal Warner, exec vp Manning Salvage & Lee (DC); treas, Joseph Vecchione, vp-pr, Prudential Insurance (Newark).

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RESEARCH FINDS ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS STRONG ENOUGH TO CAUSE COMPANY/PRODUCT BOYCOTTS; IS THIS TOPIC-SPECIFIC? OR AN UNPRECEDENTED WAVE OF BEHAVIOR ON ISSUES IN GENERAL?

Exxon, Mobil, Procter & Gamble, Star Kist, Bumblebee, GE, Dow, Mennen, Coca-Cola, Perdue, McDonald's, Kimberly Clark, Pampers are among those being blacklisted by enviromania, according to a poll of 600 NY adults by Century Research Corp (Ridgefield, Ct). A study of 1000 adults nationwide by Opinion Research Corp in April finds 27% have boycotted a product based on the manufacturer's environmental record -- and 71% say they've switched brands to gain environmental benefits, such as recyclability, not harming the ozone, biodegradability. ORC labels this "an extraordinary" number.

The environmental ethic is affecting purchasing behavior. Very likely no cause has achieved this extent of influence before -- certainly not in recent times. Century found that 25% stopped buying from companies which are perceived as polluters. "This isn't just a cuckoo fringe group," pres Al Ungar told pr. "This percentage represents a significant portion of the population."

A 1984 study by Otto Lerbinger found that in recent history there has never been an effective product boycott based on an issue -- no matter how angry some publics have become.

If latent readiness to behave in what is perceived as environmentally responsible ways is a lasting phenomenon, Exxon Valdez was the triggering event. It must be ranked with Rachel Carson's Silent Spring as a historic trigger. With deeply emotional issues rampant on education (creationism, sex ed), healthcare (costs, triage, AIDS), lifestyle (abortion, addiction), will we see similar behavior against other organizations?

WHO ACTS ON BELIEFS?

Most likely to switch brands are a) women, b) whites, c) suburbanites, d) better-educated, e) higher income, f) under 35, g) 45-54 years of age, Century study finds.

Least likely are a) males, b) inner-city or c) upstate residents, d) less educated, e) lower income, f) Blacks & Hispanics, g) those over 55.

PRODUCTS/COMPANIES IN TROUBLE ON ISSUE

Most offensive products are plastics & aerosols, boycotted by 33% (of the 25%), followed by oil & gas (16%); tuna (10%); chemicals (5%); disposable diapers (4%); detergents (4%). ORC finds overwhelming perception some industries are harmful: chemical & oil (93%); plastics (90%); metals & mining (85%); steel (80%).



Despite publicized issue struggles, forestry tips in at "only" 70%. The feeling carries over to "clean" industries like computers (49%) & telecommunications (48%) -- suggesting an irrationality that paints every industry with the same brush. Environmental strategist David Stephenson (Agnew, Carter, McCarthy) sees electric utilities as leaders in "elevating environmental decisions in their planning." But 80% in ORC's survey find them "harmful."

SWITCHING BRANDS IS EASY WAY FOR CONSUMERS TO GET INVOLVED

Purchasing power is a convenient tool for the public to wield against organizations. It's an effective yet effortless way to contribute to a cause. "Research indicates it's not a lot of trouble to stop buying one product and switch to another," says Ungar.

The findings seem discouraging for companies (Star Kist, McDonald's, Kimberly Clark) which have taken very public policy change initiatives. But apparently, the public can be forgiving. Tho study didn't ask, some respondents volunteered that they "switched back to Star Kist after they stopped killing dolphins." Yet ORC finds 76% believe fast food industry is "harmful to the environment."

In North America, an idea is fully accepted when someone can make money from it. Will Ted Turner's Captain Planet tv series -- an international anti-pollution cartoon show -- succeed against the odds to prove the point? It debuts next month, based on his belief tv can be used for social change. Each show ends with presentation of practical environmental tips.

ORGANIZATIONS MUST MONITOR GRUMBLING AT THE GRASSROOTS Unger urges business

to be aware of storms gathering at the local level. Recent restrictions have come mainly in state legislatures. Even towns are passing laws enforcing recycling, banning the use of styrofoam -- which affect all types or organizations. "In the past few years, companies have stopped worrying about Congress and started worrying about local legislatures."

Ungar says that as important as it is to make the public aware of good environmental citizenry, it's even more important not to make false claims. You'll get caught, and your reputation will be much worse. "When you don't care about the air people breathe and the water people drink, the message is that you don't care about the people themselves."

¶One harbinger. Many day-care centers, hospital nurseries, etc. are switching to cloth diapers. Regs once demanded "disposable only" for sanitary reasons, now are changing. Some day-care centers demand about \$7 more a week from parents, since diaper service costs them more.

GAMING & SIMULATION COULD BE THE PR TOOL OF THE FUTURE FOR IMPARTING INSIGHT & UNDERSTANDING

Designers worldwide are excited about this versatile methodology which incorporates many of pr's critical needs: 1) a personalized technique that 2) is participative, 3) by providing hands-on contact with an issue or situation 4) in an in-depth examination of reality. Uses:

A) To rebuild relationships between divergent parties, it can make clear the necessity for accommodation, negotiation or compromise. B) Within an organization, it quickly reveals why policy alterations or culture change is needed. C) As a training tool it can help all members of the organizational family explain an issue to their neighbors or learn their role as pr ambassadors. D) Most important, it can make complex topics understandable.

It could be called "role playing gone wild," but that wouldn't aptly describe gaming & simulation. This learning & negotiating device may radically change education and significantly impact business & gov't. Public relations practitioners will be expected not only to use these games, but to design them.

Meadows feels gaming may replace standard methods of teaching & training. "Learning thru acting out, negotiating, and group procedure is so much more effective. Gaming is learning as we learn in real life. As a teacher, I see the positive effects. Conventional methods of education are not very efficient, many don't learn from them."

"There is nothing new about this," Dennis Meadows, dir Institute for Policy & Social Science Research, UNH (Durham) told prr. "For years, airline pilots have used screens simulating crashes, various emergencies, etc." Psychologists, teachers & drama coaches use role playing as a learning device for patients & students. Simulations are a standard tool of trainers & OD consultants. Now medium has broken out into other areas -- companies are starting to use games to train managers, government to prepare for disasters & crises. Customer relations is a hot area. Already Meridian Bancorp has employees walk with seeds in their shoes to simulate senior customers' corns. Chains like Staples Office Supplies send workers on retreats to their stores to "play shopper." Aim is to gain sensitivity.

INTEREST IS GLOBAL Institute recently hosted an international conference on gaming. 150 participants from 27 countries gathered to share simulations -- including games about healthcare, OB (organizational behavior), AIDS policies, the environment, international relations. One, led by former Mideast hostage Moorehead Kennedy, taught about terrorists & crisis negotiation. Another, from British firm TJA Enterprises, trained small groups on how to negotiate with Japanese. Hans Gernert, Humboldt U (Berlin), discussed building a game-based university.

HOW IT WORKS Formats have become more orchestrated & elaborate. Materials range from free-form role playing and team problem-solving to computer simulations, interactive videos, boards with pieces. Example: TJA's game included a computer program which provided responses to the negotiating strategies entered. Meadows earlier designed "Blackberry Patch" which brought together disputants in land use issues in a way that made them understand opponents' views & move toward negotiation.

POSSIBLE PITFALL The greatest danger with Gaming is that participants may have too much fun. They will take up too much time with the game and give short shrift to the analysis & discussion of policy implementation which must follow.