

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION  
ORIGINATE AT THE PHYSICAL LEVEL,  
SAYS GENDER EXPERT**

"Women & men still cling to the myth that the difference between them is cultural, that if only society treated them the same, it would become apparent they are the same, only with different bodies," Jayne Tear (NYC) told **prr**. Tear counsels organizations on male/female dynamics in the workplace, says differences between the sexes starts in the physiology of the brain.

Tear says misunderstanding of style & linguistic differences creates problems for organizations and hampers performance & career advancement for women. Awareness of gender differences in communications is the first step to overcoming them:

- Listening Behavior:** Women actively listen. They smile, nod, hum, their eyes rarely wander. Men often feel women are agreeing with them when in fact they are simply being polite. Men maintain a neutral expression & let their gaze wander, which women misread as disinterest or displeasure.
- Speaker Behavior:** Men interrupt most often. Women misread this as rudeness. Women wait for pauses before jumping in, which men see as timidity.
- Humor & Banter:** Men trade one-liners, while women find such banter silly or offensive. Men find these women awkward.
- Small Talk:** Women use personal info such as family as small talk. Men misread deeper meanings into such self-disclosure.
- Negotiation.** Women come into a negotiation with a collaborative attitude, believing that a better solution may be worked out than the one she wants. Men enter the room with a goal to win. Having to back down makes them feel challenged or fearful of failure. "And women often accommodate if the collaboration doesn't work. If men don't get their way, they avoid, or put off action."

Tear says press is reluctant to publish medical industry's findings. For example, NYTimes ran an article on it but referred to "subtle differences." "There is nothing 'subtle.' These are big differences. People are afraid of the facts, believing one side will appear stronger. There is no inferior/superior. There are many instances in which you would only want to apply logic without the interference of emotion & vice versa."

**Book available:** Making many of the same points from a sociological angle is Deborah Tannen in her recently-published You Just Don't Understand: Women & Men in Conversation (Morrow, 330 pp, \$18.95).

"One major difference is in the connective tissue between the left (linear, logical) & right (creative, visionary) parts of the brain. The tissue in the female brain is larger, develops earlier. Signals travel thru it faster & more easily. Women think in a synthesized way, blending logic & emotion. Men remain focused on one or the other." Tear says the difference has been noted time & time again by physicians, only recently has it been analyzed in terms of resulting behavior.

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**LOCALIZED PROGRAM + PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS = BEHAVIOR CHANGE;  
GRASSROOTS EFFORT SUCCEEDS AT ELIMINATING DROPOUT SCOURGE,  
REAFFIRMS TRIED & TRUE PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY ABOUT BEHAVIOR**

According to National Education Ass'n, the school dropout rate is 29% nationwide, 44% in major cities. Everyone suffers, thru a) increased crime; b) more people on welfare; c) higher taxes; d) decreased tax revenue; e) higher unemployment; f) lack of educated workforce, portending disaster in the competitive global economy. The following case study illustrates how a grassroots campaign that anticipates problems by targeting affected publics achieves behavior change.

**NON-PRO USES  
BASIC PR TENETS** Interestingly, program was spearheaded by a former teacher who left the classroom to work for the NEA as a field rep. "St. Louis had a dropout rate consistent with other large cities," Ted Tunison told **prr**. "I reflected on my own childhood and remembered 1 or 2 teachers whose personal involvement really turned my life around."

So Tunison implemented "Adopt-A-Student," which calls upon school employees to offer support to potential dropouts: 1) coordinator comprises list of at-risk freshmen -- those with poor attendance, low grades; 2) full staff meets, divvies up names; 3) these substitute "parents" initiate contact with student & 4) proceed to guide, help with homework, listen to problems, etc. for duration of student's high school career. Meetings occur during school, immediately before or after. Some relationships become more involved, with volunteers taking students to hockey games, out for pizza, to church, etc.

**CONVINCING KEY PUBLICS** Idea needed support of several groups:

- All personnel**, not just faculty. "Cafeteria workers, janitors, administrators with master's degrees can volunteer. These kids don't care about titles."

NEA feels program works due to "Hawthorne Effect," Elton Mayo's 20s discovery when working with employees to improve productivity. He experimented with workplace comfort, e.g. decreased/increased lighting, shorter/longer breaks, etc. -- and all raised productivity. After experiments ended & consultants left, productivity dipped back to the pre-experimental level. Conclusion was that the attention, not the experiments, had raised productivity -- a good case for ongoing practitioner involvement.



2. **Parents.** "There was confusion at first because we made the mistake of not alerting them. A few called, miffed because their kids had come home saying 'I was adopted at school today.' But when they understood what was happening, they became very cooperative." Most have extensive phone contact with "adoptive parents," attend yearly awards banquets.

3. **Students.** "My biggest fear was these kids would look at being 'adopted' as a stigma, something to be ashamed of. Just the opposite happened." Program is so popular that other students complain, "Why wasn't I adopted? What's wrong with me?" They are encouraged to seek out an adoptive parent themselves. "And they do, in droves."

4. **Administration.** "The schools are enthusiastic, but central administration was difficult." Dilemma is nationwide -- board members, superintendents (senior management!) are out of touch. "We quickly learned to go directly to the schools, to the principals (line managers). When we had their support, we were in."

5. **Business Community.** Initially supported by NEA, program is now funded by local businesses which readily responded to solicitations. "But we need ongoing support, we'd rather not have to keep begging."

**PRELIMINARY RESULTS** Since its inception in '88, program has expanded to include 6 high schools. This year, middle schools will also participate. Complete cost is \$3000 per school, with a third going to building coordinator of the program, the balance to students & "parents" for field trips, award programs, other enrichment activities. "So far, we're cutting the drop out rate by 50% -- a pattern holding true in all participating schools. I'm nervous about making a big deal about it -- things could change -- but it looks like we may truly have a winner."

#### **PR MUST EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY, FIRM SAYS, INCLUDING RESULTS BASED ON BEHAVIOR OF PUBLICS**

can confront the need for pr accountability with a fast-growing arsenal of research & evaluation techniques: a) research at the outset of a program to analyze situations, establish goals; b) evaluation, during & after, to document that our efforts have made a difference, that we have generated change." Ketchum's hierarchy of accountability:

Campaign strives to **change a mindset** (latent readiness), in this case created by poverty. "If you're worried about electricity & heat & how to pay for groceries, your child's academic performance isn't all that important to you. Their role models are dropouts, drug addicts & dealers -- it's their culture and they don't know anything different."

Apply situation to workers who're worried about jobs, customers who feel alienated, communities who perceive your organization is bullying them, stockholders caught in an uncertain economy, etc.

#### **Level A: Behavioral Change**

It's possible to measure how a target audience's behavior has changed because of pr programs. A purchase, an investment, a vote, or a decline in a negative behavior, e.g. drunk driving.

#### **Level B: Attitudinal Change**

Such changes are measurable via surveys before & after pr activities. [However, Ketchum's material claims "Behavioral change is based on attitudes" -- a statement most psychologists would not agree with since the work of Skinner & the Behaviorists. They have shown that attitudes often follow behavior change, not vice versa.]

#### **Level C: Change in Awareness**

Some pr programs have more modest goals. One is increased awareness, usually as a preliminary for additional communications or behavioral activity. Again, the proof is in pre- & post-program surveys.

#### **Level D: Message Delivery**

A traditional measurement, being improved by reporting "reach" or "frequency." [But question remains: has anything happened because they got the message?]

#### **Level E: No Empirical Evaluation of Change**

Occasionally, a program's results need not get documented beyond subjective criteria. Tho not scientifically projectable, information transfer can support an important element in decisionmaking -- the "gut" feeling. [Tho this is hardly pr "accountability."]

[A useful hierarchy...despite our editorial comments.]

#### **DO 800 NUMBERS WORK? STUDY SCOPES USAGE LIKES & DISLIKES**

A survey of 150 nationally representative households provides some insight about the popularity of 800 numbers. According to co-authors Lyman Johnson, mgr comm & market research, Monsanto Agricultural Company and Richard Rennecamp, pres Westgate Research (St. Louis), 75% of American adults called an 800 number during the past year; and made an average of 13 such calls within the year. Also:

1. Tho many marketers use word-number combinations like 1-800-452-CARS, people express a 2 to 1 preference for all numbers;
2. 2/3rds say they would look up a number from a written source rather than try to remember the word-number combo. "The implication is that when special 800 numbers assist memory, it's mostly for the short term."

Most dislike voice mail & audiotext. By a 2 to 1 margin, they prefer to go thru a human operator, saying they'd rather deal with a person than a machine.