

2. They've "lost faith" in typical means of expressing their views such as public meetings, letters, surveys. These are viewed as "window dressing," manipulating the idea of participation. (Why civil disobedience is so prevalent.)
3. Public officials (also organizational execs?) **seldom "level" with them.** (Gov't theme: find ways to let publics test or measure for themselves what you're telling them.)
4. The time they might be heard is not while decisions are being made by "the system," which is stacked to favor special interests, but by **angrily protesting** policies.
5. Media & pols **don't frame issues in reality -- or in terms they can understand.** Media make it worse by playing along with negative campaigns & ignoring substance. (Go around the media & direct to key publics & their opinion leaders.)

Get this: '91 is the **50th anniversary of the focus group!** Fifty years ago, sociologist Robert Merton pioneered the application of qualitative research methodology to marketing & social issues with his "focused interviews." Now there are 700 group interviewing facilities in the US alone. Qualitative Research Consultants Ass'n will celebrate with a luncheon featuring Merton & other experts on Sept. 13 in NYC. (Info from prr)

Methodology was 10 focus groups conducted by The Harwood Group in geographically diverse locations. Cross sections were obtained for sex, age, ethnicity, income & education. (Free copy from Kettering, 200 Commons Rd, Dayton, O. 45459)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

1 Alden Group Celebrates 35 Years By Donating 875 Hours To Community.

"Rather than celebrate with a party which only a few would enjoy, we decided it's time to give something back to the city where we've prospered for 35 years," explains pres & co-founder Sy Ripka. Its program works with NYC Mayor's Volunteer Action Center. Each employee (25 person shop) is volunteering 35 hours to a local organization. Alden Group gives each employee one day off per week to do this. Program will be used as a prototype for other businesses that would like to explore volunteering but for many reasons don't know where to begin. (More info 212/867-6400)

2 Direct Marketing Copy (8 Pages!) Stimulates Media Coverage for new newsletter. "In garnering media attention, our **sales letter** outpulled our conventional press release 2 to 1," explains Mae Block of Global Success Corp. "Conventional press releases often edit the life out of a project. But for your direct mail sales letter, you spend a lot of time obsessing to find words which will excite your prospects into buying your product. What we've stumbled onto is that these same high-powered words excited the media, whereas the normal press release pap didn't." Block claims length of sales letter contributed to success. It "gave reporters plenty of opportunity to think up provocative questions & seek juicy quotes."

PRACTITIONERS ARISE: BASHING OF FIELD & ITS ACTIVITIES BY OPPONENTS OF VARIOUS CAUSES & BY MEDIA IS INCREASING; WHEN WELL-KNOWN FIRMS & COMPANIES ARE INVOLVED, PR SUFFERS

In the law court, it's an axiom: if you can't prevail by trying the case, then try the law or try the judge. In the court of public opinion, the counterpart strategy is to try the pr tactics -- and with it the pr firm or dep't. Not only is this being employed by opposition groups, whose actual or professed ignorance is understandable, if culpable. But also by media, in its marketing-driven bent to find anyone affiliated with a controversy "guilty" (just because a controversy exists, since controversy "sells papers").

Current examples include Hill & Knowlton's work for Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Bain & Liechtenstein's acceptance of the Church of Scientology after H&K dropped the client under pressure from drug companies being attacked by the church, Burson Marsteller's fur industry coalition account & its British Columbia forest industry account, Epley Associates for counseling Burroughs Wellcome, accused of charging too much for an AIDS drug, also for a waste disposal siting case.

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IS BEING IGNORED ALL ROUND

Even if clients **have** done something illegal or unethical and been found guilty (by the judicial or regulatory authorities, not the self-appointed media judges), they are entitled to use pr techniques -- and pr pros -- to rehabilitate themselves with their publics. And when they are **merely accused** (in the above cases, no indictments or official reprimands are even threatened at this point), they have the obligation to defend themselves with the best possible pr, if that is their strategy (often it's smarter not to make a case of it & prolong the agony). Furthermore, the profession has an **obligation** to see that they get counsel if they want it.

Not only the professionalism -- read "civic value" -- of pr is at stake. Basic First Amendment tenets are threatened. And such accusations amount to blackmail: if you represent this client, we'll impugn your reputation & your ethics. It's the classic "chilling effect" -- like SLAPP suits filed against opposition groups to silence them by threatening costly legal defense. But who has spoken up in defense of these firms? Some other firms reportedly view it as a chance to woo away their clients -- for all practical purposes aligning themselves with those attacking the field.

A telling example comes from the LATimes. A long article 8/20 talked about "eyebrow-raising clients." Included in the list were, of course, cigarette companies. If this became the standard, democratic debate would cease -- or only those perceived to be "good" could engage in it. Practitioners have an obligation, and a self-interest, to rebut such thinking.

ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME TACTICS ARE QUESTIONABLE H&K seems to be the lightning rod. Boston Globe reported 7/12 that "the pricey New York PR gurus" advised a new client, reportedly being investigated for insider trading violations, to have an opinion piece offered to the newspaper by a prominent local economist. The economist "had the good conscience (or fear of getting caught) to mention that he would be doing the opining on the H&K payroll," wrote the paper.

The client's dpr explained an upfront cover letter would have accompanied the opinion piece. H&K convinced her, she said, that the neutrality of the economist would be a benefit. Is this just fair debate tactics -- or bordering on the unethical (quite apart from the fact it backfired)?

One result is certain: such cases allow critics of pr to employ the jaundiced language about the field that the Globe & LATimes used.

Another case: Kaufman & Co/Shandwick (DC) "masterminded" a plan for its National Dairy Board client to send "undercover operatives" to a National Farmers Union meeting at which the controversial BST (pr 1/21 & 10/23/89) was opposed. NFU became suspicious, according to media reports, when a woman rose from the audience & asked highly technical questions while identifying herself as "just a housewife." Info released under FOIA revealed the duplicity.

This is indefensible. But again, it provided the springboard for media to bash pr in general, questioning legitimate tactics like focus groups, publications & lobbying. In this case, however, even those tactics are illegal under new federal law if they promote the safety or effectiveness of a drug before formal FDA approval. H&K & 4 other firms have helped Monsanto, Animal Health Institute et al do just that. When FDA ordered a stop, Monsanto asked a key question: why is it ok for opponents to wage campaigns against BST, but we cannot counter?

One reason may be that the pr-bashing has been effective. As long as sleazy tactics are employed by some, it will continue to be -- and the profession is diminished.

IS THIS IN PART THE FALLOUT FROM GOING PUBLIC, GETTING BIG & BECOMING AN "INDUSTRY"?

Again, H&K proves the point. Media & stock analysts now cover pr as they do other sectors. Crain's Chicago Business questioned turnover among managers at the firm's local office -- 6 in 5 years. Story describes ex-manager & CEO Bob Dilenschneider as "a tireless self-promoter." It notes he "is understood to be under pressure from H&K's parent, United Kingdom-based WPP Group plc, to improve profits." Then came the announcement he is no longer in charge of H&K day-to-day operations.

SOME POSITIVE STEPS ALL PRACTITIONERS CAN TAKE

1. Revealed in the coverage of the cases is the fact Epley Associates has every employee sign the PRSA Code of Ethics as **part of their employment agreement.**
2. Also covered was that PRSA's Code is increasingly included in **contracts or letters of agreement** between firms & their clients.

ANOTHER RESEARCH DEVICE FOR IDENTIFYING OPINION LEADERS

New scholarship on their importance appears in Public Opinion Quarterly. Gabriel Weimann reviews the development of the Strength of Personality Scale (PS) & integrates it into 2-step flow, media effects & other studies. PS was developed for a German magazine, Der Spiegel, which sought to identify influentials. Weimann has now administered the test to 2 Israeli samples. Success in such different venues validates the method.

PS asks 10 questions aimed at testing ability to influence others thru strength of personality, e.g. "I usually count on being successful in everything I do," & "I often give others advice & suggestions." Researchers have argued over the years whether this characteristic was vital to influencing others. Media-effects scholars claimed the key variable was exposure to information thru media. Behavior-oriented researchers said it took certain personality traits.

"The individuals identified as 'strong' on the PS scale combined personal traits, competence & social position in their personal network, enabling them to influence others. Thus, it is not merely a unidimensional measure, but a combination of personal traits with social network positioning."

Weimann's work finds PS able **"to predict communicative & influential behavior."** Influentials here are found to be not dependent on mass media but to rely on personal sources & personality to influence others. (Copy from prr)

AMERICANS ARE NOT APATHETIC BUT ANGRY ABOUT THEIR LOSS OF POWER, FINDS STUDY; OPPORTUNITY TO OVERCOME THE MYTHS

Anger arises over a political process controlled totally, in most people's view, by 1) politicians, 2) special interests, 3) the media. The challenge, says study sponsor Kettering Foundation (Dayton), is to "reconnect citizens & the political process" -- made to order for practitioners in a number of areas. How people feel:

1. They haven't dropped out of civic concerns, but **channeled interests** to neighborhoods & communities -- where they feel they can make a difference. (Nonprofit theme: help change the world, right here.)