

- **Stops at McDonald's** while jogging or visiting an area symbolize the "average guy, concerned with typical problems" reputation Clinton is trying to project. (Whether he's wise to always choose the same venue in a bitterly competitive market is another question.)
- **Selecting an elite private school** for his daughter when improving public education is a stated goal sends another level of symbolic message. Opponents & doubters can say it shows Clinton isn't the average guy after all. Supporters will respond that a president's child shouldn't be the victim of policy questions, that the chosen school is run by down-to-earth Quakers etc.

BOTTOM LINE In fact, CEOs & other leaders today are finding that -- whether or not, like Clinton, they're strategic enough to know & utilize the power of symbols -- every act of theirs is perceived as *personifying* their organization & their position on issues.

Successfully functioning & communicating in the pressure chamber of this constant spotlight requires 2 things:

1. **Careful planning before every move** -- something many sr. execs find constraining. Scenarios, environmental scans & other techniques need to be applied to what once were routine activities, because if the wrong symbolic message is sent, real damage to major goals can be done. Stanford pres. Kennedy's resignation (see today's t&t) shows how this can also destroy the effectiveness of key managers, even tho they personally may not be the culprits.
2. **Using pr staff as constant counsel.** No one else in the organizational panoply is trained to recognize & understand the criticality of these perception issues, much less deal with them.

Many practitioners give little thought to symbolic communications but spend their time & care on words. Big mistake.

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

✓ **HEALTH & CONCERNS OF SENIOR CITIZENS ARE TOPICS MOST REQUESTED** by editors of daily & weekly newspapers, according to a survey by News USA (Alexandria, Va). Leading topics chosen by 300 editors include: health (62%); senior citizens (61%); medicine (56%); environment (51%); agriculture (51%); food (50%); education (46%); consumer issues (45%); finance (43%); recreation (43%). 32% **prefer to receive features in 1 of 3 automated formats:** Macintosh disk (25%), IBM compatible disk (4%), AP-style modem feed (3%). Camera-ready copy is preferred by 64%.

✓ **30TH ANNIVERSARY REISSUE OF 1963 BOOK IS VALUABLE READING** on the modern roots of pr. John W. Hill's *The Making of a Public Relations Man* has a few dated references, but the theme of "integrity, quality, innovation & service" cannot be restated enough. Hill & Knowlton's recent troubles may have prompted the reissue -- good pr move on their part -- but one problem shows how the field has changed. The jacket of pr's copy quickly got marked up to read, *The Making of a Public Relations (Wo)Man*.

IBM'S NEW SUGGESTION PROGRAM IS STUDY IN CHANGING CULTURE

For 64 years, IBM had the same employee suggestion plan, cut with the same cookie cutter as most other companies, generating the same lackluster employee involvement -- less than 1 idea/employee/year. "And there were a lot of things employees didn't like about it. It was restrictive, certain subjects weren't eligible, managers & high level professionals weren't eligible to participate, no one was allowed to send an idea that had anything to do with their job responsibilities," Jerry Michael, mgr, IBM Ideas Dep't, told pr.

MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

"This suggestion plan was not supporting our desire to increase employee involvement, empowerment & participation." Needed was something simpler, faster, with higher level of support from management & evaluators who decide whether or not to implement an idea.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

1. **External benchmarking** with 43 other companies -- eg. Milliken ("considered world class in the US"), Xerox, Motorola, Toyota, Mercedes-Benz. "We hired Peat Marwick. We selected the companies, they made the contacts. Some of the companies were competitors so we couldn't make a direct overture. With the companies that weren't competitors or that didn't have a problem sharing data with us, we went along with Peat Marwick on the visit." All participating companies received survey results.
2. **Internal surveying** of 3,500 employees over a 6-month period. "We met with them at 100+ locations for focus group discussions about what they did & didn't like in the old plan, what they'd like to see in a new plan." Talked with everyone who has a role in the process -- submit- ters, evaluators, managers. Written questionnaires were given out following focus group meetings.
3. **Definition of a world class plan** was developed from info gathered -- "taking the best features of other companies' plans, looking at what our people said they wanted." This was presented to senior management committee in fall '90.
4. **"Recipe" for a successful plan was delegated to company's 5 major geographic business units** -- Canada, US, Latin America, Far East, Europe -- with directions to tailor it to local culture within 1 year. Previous plan had been administered out of corporate headquarters: the same plan in 111 countries with no local differences.

NEW U.S. IDEAS PROGRAM

1) **Totally an online system.** Because all employees have access to E-mail, they can type in a word that brings up the form on the system.

2) **Cycle time has gone to less than 4 hrs, in some cases,** from an old average of 50+ days, reports Donna Eaton of Ideas Dep't.

3) **Usage:** 350 employees/day are generating ideas. Expectation by the end of the first year was 700/day. "I think we'll get there. Some of our locations were so busy in the 4th quarter they didn't give the training the priority we were hoping they would," explains Michael.

4) **Employee response:** As yet, 1 yr into the program, no formal evaluation has been done but "people seem to love it." A phone survey is beginning this week with hotline callers as the sample (about 125 people/day who call for help in using the system). They are asked how they like the new program & how they were educated about it. "We're trying to find out about the training. If it actually got to where it was supposed to go & how well it got there."

5) **Training package:** a) 15 min videotape that was mostly motivational on the art of creativity, with 4-5 minutes describing the program; b) manager training videotape of an anchor person asking Michael a series of questions that were "intended to get them ready to train employees"; c) Program Guide for all employees; d) Managers Guide with foil masters for making overhead transparencies, a script & Q&As.

"Our intention was that managers would 1) watch the training tape, 2) study the Managers Guide, 3) make the foils. Then 4) have an employee meeting to present the material, answer questions & 5) hand out the Program Guides -- and 6) show the 15 minute video. That was the ideal. I don't think more than a third did that. The pressures of the 4th quarter had managers worried about bigger problems. In many cases they just handed out the Guides without benefit of the meeting. *We have a great program but it got lost in the dust of corporate priorities.* So now we're doing some remedial work." Managers are interested "once you get their ear because now they're eligible to submit their ideas and get \$5,000."

ADVICE: DON'T DO IT IN A VACUUM

Internal & external input is needed. "There's probably at this point a consensus of what makes a modern, successful plan. *You don't have to do the benchmarking we did.* The formula is in print. But you do need to do the internal benchmarking to find out how to tailor the new paradigm to your own environment/culture. The more of that you do, the more buy-in you'll get when you kick it off."

Resources: 1) *Jerry Michael*, IBM Ideas Department, 3208 Vestal Parkway East, Vestal, NY 13851; 607/770-5024 -- "We're getting ready to offer our services as consultants on developing suggestion programs, or possibly to sell our online application, or to administrate another company's program if it has the system that can link with ours & utilize our online application." 2) *Employee Involvement Ass'n* (previously Nat'l Ass'n of Suggestion Systems), 1735 North Lynn St, Ste.950, Arlington, VA 22209; 703/524-3424 -- It collects details of its members' suggestion programs.

PR & PA ARE BECOMING MORE COORDINATED, FINDS SURVEY

55% of respondents report the functions are part of a single department; 33% say the functions are coordinated informally, according to Foundation for Public Affairs survey, "The State of Corporate Public Affairs." When asked if these areas are more or less coordinated than 3 yrs ago, 49% said "more," 46% "no change," 5% "less." 163 senior pa execs responded to the survey (32% response rate) -- the first major study of the public affairs field since '87. Some other findings:

- **PA suffers from confusing nomenclature**, like public relations. It is most popularly known as *public affairs* (43%). With its 3 closest affiliates -- *corporate affairs, corporate relations, external affairs* -- 62% of department titles are accounted for.
- **51% (57% in '87) report to the CEO**; 8% (9% in '87) report to the chairman & president; 14% (10% in '87) to the exec vp; 4% (6% in '87) to the vice chairman; 4% (4% in '87) to the chief counsel or legal officer; the remaining 19% (14% in '87) to other execs.
- **Top 3 program areas added** to pa dep'ts in the past 3 yrs: environmental affairs (17%); grassroots (16%); educational affairs (15%). None of these functions surfaced in the survey 5 yrs ago.
- **Professional staff has increased** (34%), remained the same (31%), decreased (31%) in the past 3 yrs. Similarly, budgets have increased (45%), stayed the same (28%), decreased (27%).
- **Regulatory work is a significant growth area.** 29% describe it as a "major" role; 41% "moderate." One-third report additional resources committed to it during the past 3 years. This didn't surface as a significant pa activity in the survey 5 years ago.
- **80% are measuring & evaluating their performance**, via customer surveys (67%); benchmarking (63%); quantification (59%); external attitude surveys (43%); process mapping (29%); cycle time reduction (25%).
- Altho 2/3rds identify/prioritize public issues for corporate attention, **only 1/4th have representatives serving on the planning committee.**

(Complete survey, \$25, 1019 Nineteenth St N.W., Ste.200, Wash DC 20036; 202/872-1790; fax 202/835-8343)

SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION CUTS BOTH WAYS, CLINTON FINDS

After masterfully practicing symbolic communication in the election campaign & after, pres-elect Clinton has now demonstrated the strategic pitfalls of this extremely powerful technique. Cases:

- **Bus tours** to typical, heartland cities & towns showed how *actions* do reach more people more memorably than words. His theme was change, this was a change from campaigns by media. His message was caring for the middle class, this took him where they live -- using a transport mode that is the opposite of Air Force One.