

- **Media doesn't effectively tell people how to think about issues.** Early coverage of the S&L debacle never sustained attention. Even after Lincoln Savings & Loan was declared insolvent, costing the taxpayers \$2.6 billion, its chairman was still not a major news story. But once a) "the Keating Five" was turned into shorthand for Washington influence peddling, b) the drama of looking into Lincoln's collapse began, c) Pres. Bush's son's involvement became a symbol, and d) the public was facing a \$500 billion bailout, media couldn't get enough of the story. Dramatic symbols were needed to capture & hold readers' attention. Serving the public good wasn't enough.
- **The makeup of newsrooms seriously affects what makes it into print.** "A big-city newspaper is actually a collection of medieval fiefdoms. They compete for space, money & bragging rights. They fight over juicy stories rather than teaming up, sometimes producing different versions for the sake of ego."
- **A pecking order exists in many newsrooms.** On top is usually the metro staff, with sports, features & business in secondary roles. On larger papers, national & foreign staffs are preeminent. Top editors tend to be drawn from the national & foreign staffs and their interests lean toward politics & diplomacy. Explains Jerry Knight, who covers banking for The Post: "One of the great failings of this newspaper is that people at the top don't care about business & economic issues. The track to the top here is politics & government. None of the political reporters understood the S&L story. Political reporters specialize in process, not substance. They would go out & write these mood-of-America pieces. Banks & S&Ls never hit the charts."
- **"We were trapped by the conventions of objective journalism,** the insistence on quoting experts, when what was needed was some old-fashioned crusading. Conditioned by decades of restraint not to cause panic among depositors, we were afraid to shout fire in a crowded theater. The problem was, the theater was burning down while we quibbled about the intricacies of the fire code." (For copy, write pr)

DISSATISFACTION GROWING "Attack journalism" is what Larry Sabato, prof of gov't at U of Va, calls '92 campaign coverage which had a "very substantial bias in the Democratic direction." And this liberal bias is growing. 35.5% of reporters were Democrats in '71; 44% in '92. Republicans went from 25.7% in '71 to 16.3% in '92. In a Freedom Forum survey, journalists gave themselves a B for their collective performance in '92; but a C- for fairness.

"The media always cite the studies showing that a substantial majority (of readers or viewers) are pleased with their performance. What they ignore is the substantial minority, the growing minority, that is displeased. Who are in that minority? They tend to be a **highly educated portion of the population.** They are disproportionately Republicans & Independents, and their dissatisfaction with the media is becoming much more intense," claims Sabato.

What is amazing is that organizational executives -- & even practitioners -- still expect fair or balanced treatment from the media.

MODEL FOR EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION & OUTREACH PROGRAMS

| WHO'S INVOLVED? | Hand-picked 5% | Self-selecting 5-10% | Remaining 85% |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| WHO DO THEY CONTACT? | Targeted opinion leaders | Members of civic, community & professional org'ns | Friends, family, neighbors |
| PROGRAM ELEMENTS | Opinion leader contact (Ambassador or Constituency Relations programs); Speakers Bureau (key audiences) | Sponsored memberships, volunteer projects; Speakers Bureau (local); Issue anticipation teams; Letters to editor | Self & family education |
| INTERNAL OUTCOMES | Build 1-on-1 relationships; Gather rich data direct from movers & shakers | Employees more <u>visible</u> ; Help monitor environment | Employees become educated; Develop confidence in responding to casual comments & questions |
| EXTERNAL OUTCOMES | Opinion leaders use contacts as knowledgeable sources of info; See org'n as willing to listen | Employees seen as willing, active, involved; Publics become more willing to trust & support org'n | Employees seen as informed & participating; Aware of realities; Team players |
| TOOLS | Training; Briefing books; Database to take contact results; Program coordinator | Continuing educational courses; Meetings; Project leaders | Newsletter articles; Wallet-card messages; Videos; Phone stickers |
| SPECIFIC INCENTIVES | Performance appraisals; Self-esteem | Letters in personnel file; Annual recognition event | Awards (t-shirts, hat, mug) |



WHY NO OTHER PROGRAMMING CAN EQUAL THESE IN IMPACT:

1. **You could also call this a model for One Clear Voice communications.** It enforces *organization & prioritizing* of both outbound messages & key internal messages. No other factor has been identified as doing more damage than mixed messages.
2. **It encourages lateral communication** -- the missing ingredient in most programs, according to research. Most organizations still think in terms of top-down & bottom-up communication. But in an era of decentralization, decisions pushed ever downward & empowerment, the most vital channel is lateral.
3. **It embodies the principles of empowerment, team tasking & other emerging values.**
4. **Most powerfully, it shows publics the organization's behavior, not more words.** Employees -- who, after all, are the organization -- are caught in the act of *doing things* that demonstrate they are valued & in the mainstream of activities; and that they are active players in the community or industry.
5. **It lets employees at all levels work as teams** -- the most important ingredient in building successful organizations today.
6. **It offers true motivational rewards,** not hygiene (as defined by Herzberg), of learning, stretching, being in the spotlight, job enrichment, being where the action is. It also helps select & prepare a new cadre of emerging managers & executives -- by *training them in the public policy & relationship side of organizational effort.*
7. **It reinforces that the real bottom line is relationship building.**
8. **It builds relationships with both internal & external publics strategically & simultaneously** -- to achieve efficiency & synergy. Hand pick the 5% of employees most suited for the direct contact role. Another 5-10% will self select. The remaining 85% become the 3rd group. Each group will have its own program (see chart, pg. 1).

In organizations of some size & complexity, these percentage breakdowns are proving quite accurate, in addition to being practical targets -- i.e. about the numbers employee outreach programs can handle.

Result is a relationship-oriented organization of actively involved employees who can speak knowledgeably about the organization -- internally with other employees, externally with opinion leaders, key publics, families, neighbors, etc.

SUGGESTION SYSTEMS & COLLATERAL PIECES CAN BE SIMPLE, FUN

A suggestion system that has proven effective at St. Paul Red Cross (Minn) is called Eureka! "It was named for Archimedes' exclamation when, 2200 years ago, he conceptualized the displacement principle while in the bathtub," David Therkelsen, dpr, told prr. Collateral pieces reflect program's "creative, good-humored spirit."

- Simple brochure (2-fold, 8 1/2x11", b&w with a splash of red) explains the process, includes line drawing of Archimedes in his tub.
- Employees submit idea 1) on a *Eureka Form* -- a short 1-page outline that asks employee to describe the way things are done now, his/her idea, its advantages, disadvantages, and drop it in the **Eureka tub**, or 2) employees call in their ideas on the *Eureka Line* where someone transcribes it for them onto a Eureka Form.
- Every suggestion receives a written response from the appropriate director or supervisor within 30 days or submitter gets a free lunch at a local restaurant -- appropriately-named Acropolis Inn.
- If the idea is adopted, employee receives "recognition from the executive director, applause from your peers, the satisfaction that comes from making a difference and, possibly, a cash award."

"Eureka -- from a Greek word meaning 'I have found it.' Some 2200 years ago, the king of Syracuse asked the mathematician Archimedes to find a method for determining whether a gold crown had been adulterated with silver. Stepping into a bath, Archimedes realized that a given weight of gold would displace less water than an equal weight of silver. Thrilled at his discovery, it is said he ran naked thru the streets shouting, 'Eureka! Eureka!'"

"Program drew about 20 suggestions per month. That's about 19 or 20 more than the previous system received. In spite of its success, Archimedes went on sabbatical due to some major reorganization within American Red Cross. When things settle down (do they ever in organizations these days?) he, his tub and the Eureka! program will return to go on collecting and acting on employee ideas."

A MEDIA REALITY CHECK -- BY A JOURNALIST

Media's mission is to be society's watchdog on the one hand, unbiased chronicler of events on the other. But journalists, editors, publishers are people with biases -- liberal ones, studies show. Throw in the economic fact that news organizations need to stay financially solvent. If a story isn't sexy enough or is too litigiously risky, it won't get coverage.

Those are observations of Howard Kurtz, Washington Post staff writer, in "Asleep at the Switch," adapted from his upcoming book, "Media Circus: The Trouble With America's Newspapers." Like an archaeologist, he delves into archives & newsrooms to see how the media "bungled the story & contributed to the S&L crisis" -- food for evaluating media's perceived power, a must read for practitioners.