

Testimonials have been published as a book & distributed to employees, given to new hires at orientation, made available at functions. "One quote from an employee sums up Mercy Workout perfectly -- 'it's all about working together.'"

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

NEXT DIVERSITY ISSUE: HOLIDAY NAMES? Cambridge, Mass. School Committee has before it a recommendation to change Columbus Day to Peoples of the Americas Day; Christmas Holidays to Winter Vacation; and St. Patrick's Day to Evacuation Day (also March 17, commemorating the day in 1777 Revolutionary artillery moved onto Dorchester Heights & forced the British to evacuate Boston). This is not political correctness, says the Multicultural Education Committee, just ethnic sensitivity. "All we're trying to do is be inclusive," says one member -- noting the city has students representing 64 different nations. Good Friday was left as is, showing "the move is not anti-Christian." Thanksgiving was also untouched -- tho First Americans may want to be heard on that. **Looks like another no-win issue for organizations & their relationships.** Someone's going to be angry...

LONG AWAITED NEW EDITION OF CAREER PATH PUBLISHED AFTER SEVERAL YEARS' WORK. "PR Professional Career Guide" outlines job descriptions, required knowledge, professional development opportunities and relevant body of knowledge for 7 levels of practice: Entry-level Technician, Technician 2, Supervisor 1 & 2, Manager, Director & Executive. Valuable for planning your career, hiring & evaluating staff. Jim Haynes (Austin) led compilation by Professional Progression Curriculum Task Force. 60-pg volume updates Kal Druck's first edition in the 70s. (\$10 mbrs, \$25 non-mbrs from PRSA Foundation, 212/460-1474)

NYC STILL PR CAPITAL, CLAIMS STUDY BY PRSA CHAPTER THERE; EVERYONE AGREE? Columbia prof Rob't Bailey helped gather these stats: a) 20% of US pr expenditures go to NYC firms, \$500 million; b) pr employs 6000 there (at avg. salary of \$35,000); c) pr job growth 1972-87 was 89%. Purpose is to fend off tax & other measures. Now, who wants to debate whether this data, as opposed to, say, cutting edge practices, makes a city the PR Capital? Only firms were studied. (Copy from Jay Sears, 212/887-8014)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

CHANGES. Ron Rhody (exec vp & dir, corp comms & external afrs, Bank of America, San Francisco) will leave the Bank at the end of June. He will open his own firm by early fall specializing in crisis mgmt & damage control, helping org'ns manage their way thru periods of significant change.

APPOINTED. Kerry Tucker (Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, San Diego) to Calif State Board of Food & Agriculture by Gov. Pete Wilson.

HONORS. Carolyn Glynn (assoc vp & dir, pub policy & comms, Hoffmann-La Roche (Nutley, NJ) named Woman of the Year by Healthcare Business-women's Ass'n.

YES, FOCUS GROUPS ARE RELIABLE AS STAND-ALONE RESEARCH

Focus groups are particularly appropriate when you want to understand behavior, believes Lauri Grunig, U of Maryland at College Park. She offers 2 examples from her own research using focus groups:

- "In a study of community acceptance of group homes for the chronically mentally ill, I learned the **sources of information** that people use to develop their attitudes & knowledge about mental illness:
 - Talk shows figured prominently (see prr 6/22/92 re rising power of access/entertainment media)
 - Standard news media were not credible for this kind of information
 - Celebrity spokespeople were considered irrelevant unless they had a direct & obvious link to mental illness."
- "In a study of internal communication at a defense subcontractor, I learned that senior management seriously misunderstood **employees' concerns** about the company, their attitude toward it & their typical communication behavior at work:
 - When the CEO viewed the videotaped focus group sessions, **he was convinced to begin changing his own communication style** -- managing more informally & meeting with small groups of employees selected at random from thruout the organization.
 - Thus focus groups themselves can communicate in a 2-way fashion -- **rather than serving merely as research** that will lead to effective communication programs."

ACTIONABLE DATA: "THE ESSENCE OF WHAT DIFFERENTIATES PR RESEARCH"

- Focus groups provide this by answering questions essential to planning projects, programs, campaigns: "The series on group housing for the mentally ill resulted in an action plan that de-emphasized media's role & concentrated on community meetings & open houses."
- By testing &, if possible, deflating assumptions: "The focus groups of employees at the aerospace company taught the CEO that problems he thought employees would be concerned about were not the problems they perceived. Instead, what he considered the company's greatest strength -- the fact that it is owned by employees -- turned out to be the biggest problem. (Employees resented having to buy the company to fight a hostile takeover & thus lose their secure pensions.)"

"Focus groups also disconfirmed the assumption that employees would value a program of ownership reinforcements -- including company slogans on posters, t-shirts, pins & bumper stickers. Unless such a program were accompanied by substantive communication, the research suggested these materials actually would have a negative impact."

3. **By supplying baselines to permit accurate information:** "Thru a couple of focus groups on the feminization of public relations, we began to develop a snapshot of attitudes & behaviors of both men & women as of '91. When this PRSA-sponsored study is replicated in '94, we'll have a basis for comparison. We hope to determine whether PRSA's interventions -- suggested by analysis of the initial results as means of overcoming gender discrimination in the field -- are having any impact. (This kind of **longitudinal** study is all too infrequent, in my view.)"

FOR UPDATED INFO ON FOCUS GROUPS

Grunig suggests: a) "Focus Groups as Qualitative Research"

by David Morgan (Sage, '88); b) John M. Blamphin's MA thesis, done at U Md in '90 (copy from prr). "He conducted a Delphi study that corralled the experiences & opinions of public relations research professionals toward focus groups. Like Morgan, he concluded:

there is no reason why focus groups always must be accompanied by other research methods."

CQI WORKS IN A FUN, NON-JARGON PACKAGE, HOSPITAL FINDS

Sound familiar? Mercy Hospital (Sacramento) needed to improve relationships with patients, physicians & employees, while cutting costs & improving services. From a series of mgmt team meetings, led by hospital's administrator, came "Mercy Workout" -- a program which empowers employees...to help improve systems...in order to meet & exceed customers' expectations. Program won a MacEachern Award from PRSA's Health Academy.

"Our goal is to be an organization where employees at all levels are empowered to make decisions about everyday work that result in continuous quality improvement for all our customers," explains Laurie Davis, community rels.

At an **empowerment celebration** "we did this puzzle that had Workout & CQI words all over it. Each dep't got a piece & they brought it in on Friday to complete the puzzle. Rather than lecturing, these are fun ways to help employees learn the vocabulary & be able to look at these words as tools -- using them to affect how they do their jobs."

Since comparable facilities provide similar services, *quality of service* has become a major differentiator of healthcare providers -- as of most organizations today. "It's the first step to distinguishing a healthcare facility; the next step is to make sure that quality is perceived & understood [felt] by the customer." Also driving the program is the need to meet accreditation requirements for continuous quality improvement (CQI).

HOW PROGRAM ADDS FUN, SIMPLY: 1) Departments submit project ideas for review. 2) Each submission (not just winners) earns a filled candy jar & personalized thank-you note indicating the date the project will be reviewed. 3) Each subsequent idea is rewarded with a bag of candy to re-fill the jar. 4) A Tracking Form is used to follow the project to completion. 5) Upon completion, project is evaluated for what did or didn't work, any modification needed.

When project is completed, department gets to choose from a list of rewards -- e.g., dep't-wide pizza party, or individual products such as pens, travel alarm clocks, aprons. "The pizza party is the most popular choice. And not because of the pizza. It's **the social aspect** where everybody's having a good time together" -- further building empowerment.

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT, BUDGET = COMMITMENT

\$500,000 has been allocated for a) mgmt/employee education, b) program implementation, c) rewards & recognition. Dep't mgrs -- "who play a key role in developing commitment to & participation in the program" -- are responsible for encouraging & facilitating support.

MAINTAINING HIGH LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT:

a) Periodic written surveys to ferret out problem areas for submission; b) brainstorming during staff meetings; c) posting photo of Workout parties/rewards; d) conveniently-placed suggestion box; e) maintaining constant awareness thru communication.

To help managers, program provides: f) educational binder; g) revised Workout form that's easier to fill out; h) dedicated display near the elevators to promote the program; i) hospital-wide poster displayed in all dep'ts; j) education via focused seminars.

RESULTS IMPRESSIVE

107 projects have been completed or are being implemented. "We reached our initial goal of 100. Now we're shooting for 200." **All are documented cost-savers or time-savers.**

Employee morale. Employees were asked to write a couple sentences describing a personal empowerment experience as a result of the project -- testifying to where they have seen an impact. "They almost get euphoric about the improvements they're seeing. Their motivation is personal -- they enjoy their work more when they see things running more efficiently. It's making them happier about the work they do," Davis told prr.

Some patient testimonials about what empowerment means to them:

- It's having the ability & authority to take charge in a situation, to do what is best for the patient.
- It helps the quality of our work when our patients are at ease.
- A patient at the Medical Plaza was lost & confused. I took her down to Central Reception, X-ray & Nuclear Medicine -- on my coffee break.
- I like the idea of being treated as if I **can** make responsible decisions -- because I **can!**