

TIPS FOR REDUCING JOB STRESS -- & FACE-TO-FACE SKILLS

- A. **If someone displays dominant body language** -- hands on hips or arms folded -- hand that person something, or shake hands, to get him or her out of the dominant posture. If you allow someone to act dominant, that person will feel dominant.
- B. **Know the communication differences between extroverts & introverts.** To motivate extroverts, demonstrate what you want done & stress the benefits of your message. To motivate introverts, put instructions in writing & keep them short. Introverts feel overwhelmed by too much spoken information. Give them time to think about your message. Extroverts like the "hands-on" approach & need praise when they do the job right.

These & other stress tips are available in a new 13-minute video, "Communicating to Reduce Stress on the Job." (\$59 from Communications Briefings, 1101 King St, Suite 110, Alexandria, Va 22314; 800/888-2086)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

"READER IS "BEMUSED" BY JOHN BUDD'S VIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS (pr 10/3). "What a whining article," George Miraben, vp-pa of Tucson Electric Power, told prr. "Many of us haven't missed the opportunity. We are reinvented. We're at the heart of the organization. We see communication for what it's supposed to be."

"STEPS TO LAUNCH AN ISSUE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM" lists 20 objectives that take about 4 yrs to complete...if you focus your full time attention to it. "So add 1 or 2 years, according to your responsibilities," notes Teresa Yancey Crane, editor of Corporate Public Issues & Their Management, who compiled the list. Some of the initial steps: a) review existing programs at other organizations, b) conduct stakeholder assessment surveys among primary audiences (customers, employees, shareholders) as an initial internal benchmark & for "hard data" in building credibility & support for issue initiatives; c) identify the top 10 issues affecting your org'n. Later actions include: d) assess the impact of key issues, e) set priorities on the top 3 to 5 issues, f) assist in the creation of issue action plans. (Complete copy from Issue Action Publications, 207 Loudoun St, SE, Leesburg, Va 22075-3115; 703/777-8450)

"TO INCREASE SPONTANEOUS CONTACT AMONG EMPLOYEES & accomplish organizational goals, companies are tearing down walls, getting rid of executive suites. CEO & 9 top execs at Aluminum Co. of America will work in a cluster of cubicles, reports the WSJ. Instead of waiting for formal meetings or writing memos, they can lean over a makeshift wall to confer. Others reportedly doing it are IBM, Chiat/Day, cable channel Nickelodeon. At IBM, 800 marketing & sales employees from several locations across NJ now work in one warehouse. 400 desks, set in long rows, are numbered & assigned by a computer to anyone needing to use one. Message: spend time with the customer, not at your desk. What's important, say workplace experts, is the involvement of top mgmt in linking facilities & management philosophies.

A SYLLABUS FOR TRAINING EXECS IN RISK COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Risk communications of any type (pr 1/6/92) means "cutting thru all the high level concern & emotion by **empathizing, showing care & concern for the individual,**" finds Terry Flynn of Frontline Corporate Communications (Kitchener, Ont). His firm trains clients in this "growing field." Here is how he presents the case to execs being trained in *environmental risk*:

3-LEVEL IMPETUS FOR RISK COMMUNICATIONS

Execs know "it doesn't make sense anymore to have practices that affect the environment. They know it makes good business sense to be

more environmentally conscious & active -- and to be seen that way. Most industries are at different levels: (a) just now putting in place environmental management systems; (b) involved in public meetings on issues; or (c) anticipating that if they don't develop a new level of trust & credibility they're not going to be in business much longer."

2 CHOICES FOR EXECS

An organization has 2 choices with environmental regs, according to Flynn: 1) Fight in a court of law or 2) defend yourself in the court of public opinion. "It's better & easier to do the latter. People's interests & concerns have to be first & foremost."

BECOMING A CREDIBLE PARTICIPANT IN RISK COMMUNICATION MEANS:

- **Getting your publics involved** in the process. They are a legitimate part of the solution.
- **Planning & evaluating your effort beforehand.** Get out there & inform your publics about what you do, what you're all about.
- **Listening to your publics.** Hear what their *stated* concerns are. Try to understand their *underlying* concerns as well: some may ask "Am I safe?" What they're really asking is, "Because I live beside your plant, is my real estate investment going to be affected by what you're doing?"
- **Being honest, candid & open** to establish trust & credibility.
- **Working with other credible sources** in the community to help tell your story -- universities, doctors, community advisory panels.
- **Meeting the needs of the media,** because when the community is at that emotional level, the media have an important role to play & you can't ignore them. Work with them to help inform the community.



- **Empathizing & understanding where your publics sit.** The typical style of "we're the experts & we've got all the knowledge so listen to us" doesn't carry weight anymore. Instead, the public is saying, "I've got the answers. I want you to ask me questions." It's a changing trend especially in this high concern/low trust area of communication. Get in front of it. Don't wait for it to hit the fan. Be proactive.
- **Knowing how to communicate tough stuff.** EPA's Community Right To Know legislation has a worst case scenario aspect. Chemical/petrochemical facilities have to design a worst case scenario risk management program that tells how many people will be affected if everything went wrong at the wrong time. Act says you have to tell the public about emissions & discharges -- a lot of technical information. How do you communicate that in the best light? Most of us are innumerate (like illiterate: we don't understand numbers). What does 65,000 tons of something mean?

USE 1-ON-1 COMMUNICATION

"In a dialogue, rather than from a podium down to the masses." Flynn's firm uses:

1. As an alternative to the formal meeting, **public information & poster sessions.** "Like a trade show. Rent a school gymnasium or church basement. Invite the public. Give them an overview of what will happen, introduce the people they'll meet, then let them go & see the information as it's displayed on poster stations." Environmental engineers, scientists, human health & safety experts, organizational reps are present to explain & answer questions & address concerns face-to-face.

"We've found this enables communications to get thru because people are asking questions. It enables personal dialogue which you don't get at formal public meetings. Many people have a need to ask questions but are afraid to get in front of a microphone. This trade show approach fulfills that information exchange."
2. Going **door to door.** "Employees become environmental ambassadors who seek to establish relationships with the neighbors." They tell what the organization is doing, ask for questions or comments, hand out information. "If they meet angry neighbors, we instruct them to learn the source of the anger, not engage in debate -- because that's not the issue. We have to appreciate that a concern from anybody is a legitimate concern because they have it. So we have to deal with it."
3. **Community newsletters.** 4. **Toll free info lines.**

LARGE OPPORTUNITY: Training managers & others in the background, strategy & techniques of risk management -- for enviro issues or as an approach to all communications now (pr last week).

"There's a great deal of willingness to do risk com'ns from organizations on the front line. Others on the edge of the envelope are saying 'Show me what the benefit is & then we can get into it.' Like anything else. How many companies have a crisis communication plan until something happens to them or some company close to them. Then they say, 'Gee, we better do it.'"

SURVEY: REACH SKEPTICAL EMPLOYEES VIA MANAGERS, NOT MEDIA

"Since communicators are on the front lines of organizational change, they face the challenge of explaining what it means when companies downsize, restructure or merge. This is becoming more & more difficult -- employees are so shell-shocked from change they have become skeptical about what their companies are trying to tell them," explains Kathryn Yates, pres of Council of Communication Mgmt (Oakbrook Terrace, Ill).

CCM recently surveyed 75 pr mgrs at companies like AT&T, IBM, Merck, Motorola, to choose **the 3 top communications challenges** for their organizations in the coming decade:

1. Helping mgrs change from a hierarchical style of supervising people to a facilitation role focused on successful project completion. (60%)
2. Delivering the organization's key messages to an increasingly skeptical workforce. (51%)
3. Dealing with intense operating issues such as restructuring, downsizing or integrating mergers/acquisitions. (44%)

Solution, according to respondents, is

- a) Concentrate less on traditional ways of sending messages to employees (newsletters, videos).
- b) Take a more active role in helping managers at all levels communicate.

HIGH TIME TO LEARN WHETHER MEDIA INFLUENCE STOCK VALUES

Long held to be one area of indisputable journalists' power, a NYTimes article again raises the question. Reporting on Dan Dorfman's switch from USA Today to Money magazine, the story said he

"is one of a handful (emphasis added) of financial columnists whose reports regularly affect stock prices -- even, sometimes, when they have been denied by the companies involved."

Of course, this is the writer's assumption, since no research data exists to support the claim one way or the other.

- Does this apply only to columnists?
- Or to media reports in general?

Time for some definitive, longterm studies to replace the anecdotal data now prevalent.

- That the supposedly "rational" market is fickle, reacting to the psychology of rumor & speculation far more than the statistics of economists, is well known.
- Does this mean media reports are powerful here? Or that "only a handful" of journalists have suasion?