

have been affected by job loss, pay cut or lay-offs in the past year.

- **Not willing to sacrifice further.** "Reaction to the shorter work/less pay solution indicates that the public is not prepared to make any personal sacrifice on this score. Rightly or wrongly, they appear to feel they are so squeezed at present, fearful of their jobs & scratching to make ends meet, that they will keep foreigners out & ask for more government spending to increase jobs for fellow Americans."
- **All issues are local** still, & while nationally things are awful, personal experience is better. For instance: Just 24% are satisfied with the country's course, but 68% are satisfied with the way things are going in their communities; 83% are content with their personal lives. Also: Healthcare & morality/family values, top concerns nationally, hardly register at the community level (2% each). While this disparity isn't unusual, it is greater than usual. It's the old "Congress is bad but my congressperson is good" irrationality.
- **Unresolvable, religiously-held positions** may be losing some ground. Compared to 1990, slightly more Americans say they are supporters of the gay rights movement (15%, up from 9%). Survey also found more people *totally rejecting* the labels NRA supporter or "pro-life/anti-abortion" movement supporter.

(Full report, with detail on many issues, from Andrew Kohut, dir, Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, 1875 Eye St NW, Wash DC 20006; 202/293-3126)

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

BIMBOGATE SEES LAWYER OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED AS PR STRATEGIST. Reports that lawyer Robert Bennett will represent Pres. Clinton as he faces a suit over alleged sexual affairs said Bennett will "help coordinate legal & public relations strategy," in the words of LATimes. He "is seen as one of Washington's savviest political & public relations players" -- whatever that means, probably twisting the media. Clinton's other lawyer on the case is described as "a superb technical lawyer" -- implying ultimate attorneys now also have pr skills.

FREE PUBLICATIONS CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING SENSITIVITY TO DIVERSITY available from B&C Assocs. "While we are not PC hounds, we know special interest groups can make minor offenses into major crises," reads the checklist. Asks you to assess the frequency of 1) various groups that appear in text & visuals (e.g., physically challenged people, blue collar employees, white collar employees, female mgrs/execs, etc) & 2) overall editorial (e.g., strives toward gender neutral language, spotlights older workers outside the retirement page, etc). (Copy from Box 2636, High Point, NC 27261-2636; 910/884-0744)

GENERAL MOTORS GOES FACE-TO-FACE, SHEDS MOST PRINT

Taking dramatic strides to turn around record losses, GM is building a new culture using *face-to-face communications* as a critical building block. To support this change, it eliminated all major internal print mechanisms at the corporate & group level...tho "still using newsletters at our manufacturing plants & farther out in the org'n, & to our retirees," Sharon Morton, mgr North American Operations employee comms, told *pr*.

"All the surveys we do show employees rate their supervisor or boss as their preferred source of information."

RESEARCH Annual phone surveys with employees since '88 emphasized the need to change an internally competitive, disempowered culture. Data highlighted 4 major employee issues: 1) confidence in GM mgmt team to run the business, 2) doubts that GM cares about them, 3) understanding of GM's business goals, 4) perceptions that GM listens to them. In all 4 areas, GM had been experiencing either a statistically significant decline or a leveling out. Employees perceived GM as uncaring, out-of-touch & unresponsive.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY To move thru 3 phases over 5 years. *Phase 1:* establish credibility with internal & external constituents. *Phase 2:* earn their confidence. *Phase 3:* GM is perceived as a world-class company to work for & buy products & services from. Phase 1 began in '93.

First step: tie communications strategy to the business plan. NAO mgmt team asked the org'n to focus on 5 objectives. First 4 centered around profitability, quality, marketplace momentum & product development. The 5th, called "Build the NAO Focus/NAO Team," addressed a key cultural issue -- internal competition. Old structure fostered competition among units. New culture encourages them to share resources & work toward beating the outside competition. Communications team felt its initiatives would have greatest impact here.

Plan, targeting salaried & hourly employees & senior leadership, had 3 major strategies: 1) help employees understand & achieve business objectives; 2) empower employees as credible spokespersons; 3) advise senior leadership.

GM began restructuring in '92 -- creating North American Operations (NAO) business unit, installing a new mgmt team, empowering it to take immediate action on all aspects of the business. **As in countless similar cases, one of the first things that had to change was internal relations.**

TACTICS Face-to-face communications included:

- **NAO Leadership Conference Communication Packages.** Presentation-ready summaries of major issues covered at quarterly sr mgmt meetings. Supervisors use them in face-to-face meetings with salaried & hourly employees.
- **Electronic Town Hall Meetings.** Monthly events feature a member of sr mgmt team discussing key business issues with a live audience -- designed to improve 2-way communication between mgmt & org'n-at-large. Include Q&As, focus on particular themes (ie, identifying successes & roadblocks). Broadcast via satellite to all NAO locations.
- **GM This Week.** 15-minute satellite program broadcast to all GM locations. Designed as a brief update that can open regular local communication meetings. Content reinforces NAO objectives & messages from NAO Leadership Conference.
- **GM NewsWire.** Computer system links all NAO locations to a data bank that holds press releases, speeches, facility profiles, biographies & major announcements.
- **Salaried Compensation Broadcast.** Special satellite broadcast (Nov '93) featured CEO outlining the new salaried compensation program.
- **GM Ambassadors.** An expansion of GM's product referral program. Intent is to sell products thru employee & retiree word-of-mouth. Provides participants with an unprecedented amount of info on GM products & business. Goal is "ambassadors" will be so well informed they can act as spokespersons to influence sales & public policy.

Major challenge with these face-to-face mechanisms is that many supervisors & employees remained resistant. During first Town Hall, people were reluctant to ask questions. With the Leadership Packages, supervisors were reluctant to assume a key communication role, either because of a lack of confidence or skill level. With GM NewsWire, pr reluctantly incorporated it into their local communication practices only after counseling by the NAO Comms team on how to best use the mechanism & adapt to the change.

EVALUATION "One of our overall objectives is to enhance corporate reputation. Evidence suggests our efforts are paying off," Kathy Collins, mgr of corp/NAO comms research, told prr. Employee research, previously done annually, is now quarterly "to get a better read on employee reactions to the company, changes in the business, the communication environment."

Research conducted in Jan shows significant progress on all 4 target issues. Sharp increases for both salaried & hourly employees in their belief that GM is a well run & managed company, & that GM cares for its employees. A significant increase in those who say they understand company goals -- 58% of hourly & 82% salaried say they do, up from 48% & 70%, respectively, in '92. And, for the first time since '90, an increase in the belief that the company is listening to what they have to say.

PRSA CMTE CHAIR ASKS, "IS PUBLIC RELATIONS 'MEDIA SOFT'?"

Are we sidestepping the media? Jim Roop raised this issue announcing the Silver Anvil winners: "Central to almost all the programs was extensive media coverage & support, belying the criticism that public relations is media soft." Queried by prr about this statement, he responded:

"There has been some criticism that the industry is moving away from its traditional roots in publicity & going with more controlled media. The fact that so many of the Silver Anvil programs were based on publicity campaigns suggests it's not a correct assessment."

Roop feels the value of the media depends on the situation & what you're trying to do. But he sees a link between publicity & behavior -- pr's bottomline value. "The whole idea is to increase awareness of an issue or point of view & then have people act on it." He notes these Silver Anvil examples:

- a) Pepsi's syringe crisis -- "Thru mass media Pepsi alleviated fears bringing people back to buy its product.
- b) CARE's Somalia effort -- "People contributed as a result of CARE's effort to raise awareness about the problems in that country & the need for food & clothing there."

But, as Roop agreed when prr asked, awareness is just the first step in the behavioral process.

LONGEST RUNNING DEBATE IN PR

As pr's knowledge/science base expands, its relationship with the media constricts. Decline of media in balanced coverage, reach & credibility add fuel. Many practitioners are rethinking media's role in pr strategy. Are we writing media relations into our pr plans because of what media can legitimately do (create awareness or reinforce existing attitudes/behaviors) or because it's what has always been done...& you (your boss, your clients) are not convinced yet that it should be otherwise? (See prr 3/21)

PEOPLE DISSATISFIED, FEEL WORLD OUT OF CONTROL: NEW STUDY

"Americans feel the national economy is on the mend & sense it in their own lives" -- but this does not overcome massive fears & dissatisfactions, finds Times Mirror's survey, "Economic Recovery Has Little Impact On American Mood." Highlights:

- **Practitioners beware nationally hyped, media- or politician-created issues.** Only 14% name reforming healthcare as a top problem nationally. It came in fourth (16%) after jobs (26%), reducing crime (23%) & the budget deficit (20%). Welfare barely registers as a priority.
- **Jobs/Unemployment** is the only issue that registers as a problem on all 3 levels -- nat'l, community & personal. 52% say they or their family