

## WHAT "PRODUCT" DO COUNSELORS OFFER? IT'S INTANGIBLE, SO...

As consulting, rather than producing communications products, becomes the role of senior practitioners in organizations, they face the situation outside counselors have been dealing with for years: What do they **produce** for their organizations?

That "product" is even more intangible than one might think:

- First & foremost, counselors provide **confidence** to clients -- can-do feelings that encourage them to move in a direction & things will be all right.
- **Strategy** is next most important. Too many organizations have strong tactics & little or no real strategy -- which often means going 100 mph but *in the wrong direction*. "Why are you doing this?"
- **Coaching, training, cheerleading, mentoring** -- "building muscle, steering relationship-building & communications activities."
- **Bringing people together** -- a matchmaker inside the organization & with outside movers & shakers, activists, thinkers, leaders.

Many pr execs get ulcers because the transition to counselor leaves them nothing **on paper** to show for their efforts, after years of pointing to it as proof of accomplishment (which remains as unstable now as it was then, in terms of true value added -- since a lot of the "paper" merely contributes to debilitating overcommunication). One standard solution is to be sure tangible but useful "products" are provided clients, such as:

1. **Evaluation research** showing progress, or at least strong interest in meeting goals. And pointing future direction.
2. **Reports** -- not recounting "what I've done" but more forward-looking. This is what we need to do next. Here's what we've found that you may want to act upon. Here are cogent comments by customers & others. This makes pr efforts part of forward motion, CQI, customer delight.
3. **Updating phone calls** -- but again to deal with actionable matters.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**HONORS.** PRSA names 3 Individual Awards winners: Gold Anvil to John Paluszek (Ketchum Public Affairs, NYC); Outstanding Educator to Elizabeth Toth (S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse Univ); Paul M. Lund Public Service Award to Frank Long (Anne Klein & Assocs, Mt.Laurel, NJ).

**PEOPLE.** Patricia Howlett appointed dir, M.S. degree prgm in pr at Golden Gate U, San Fran. Program caters to working adults, has campuses thruout Calif. Offers M.S., or certificate for shorter program. Courses are taught by practitioners; experience is emphasized in internships & independent studies.

## "PUBLIC JOURNALISM" AIMS AT NEW MEDIA/PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP

Journalism is threatened on one side by declining audiences & economic pressures; on the other by

*"the fraying of community ties, the rising disgust with politics, & a spreading sense of impotence & hopelessness among Americans frustrated by the failures of their democratic system. If this second threat isn't noticed & taken seriously, American journalism may lose control of its future [understatement: it's already happening], which is bound up with the strength of public life in all of its forms [probable overstatement],"*

writes Jay Rosen (NYU), dir of Project on Public Life & the Press. Any effort to re-engineer journalism is welcome. 2-yr project, begun Sept '93, is operated by Kettering Fdn (its 2 recent studies also discuss public discontent, pr 9/2/91 & 10/25/93) in collaboration with American Press Institute, the Knight Fdn & NYU.

**PR practitioners & their organizations are invited to join the Project's discussion** on the shaping of "public journalism." It proposes "a new compact between journalists & the publics they serve, in which both parties recognize the duty of the press occasionally to *intervene* in public life in the interest of strengthening civic culture."

Public journalism is an attempt to assist the political process "so that it actually produces something valuable for the people to whom it belongs. If it does, we can trust that journalism will remain valuable. If it doesn't, what we know as 'journalism' may well fade into that amorphous but ever-expanding thing called 'the media.'" -- Rosen

## JOURNALISTS NOW ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM

"In the last 2 decades, public life has eroded to the point that the nation seems unable to solve fundamental problems.

The national will to make things right is stifled by lack of cohesion & purpose, paralyzed by cynicism & **frustrated by barrages of contextless information -- supplied by journalists** -- to which there seems no useful response. So Americans have ceased responding. They have dropped out. And public life has been confiscated by politicians & special interests who rushed into the vacuum," explains journalist Davis Merrit, Jr.

Journalists are again questioning their role as mere observers -- as they did with a rash of interjective reporting post-Watergate.



## WHAT PUBLIC JOURNALISM HOPES TO ACCOMPLISH

Help re-engage citizens in public affairs & the life of the community, enabling them to reach what Dan Yankelovich calls

"public judgment" -- "the state of highly developed public opinion that exists once people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, understood the choices it leads to, & accepted the full consequences of the choices they make."

## HOW? BY GOING BEYOND REPORTING TO INCITE ACTION

By going beyond awareness or "agenda setting." Merritt suggests these changes in newsrooms:

1. "Fully understand, & appreciate, the dynamic of democratic communities" [which means eliminating the traditional cynicism].
2. "Actively provide the place where shared information is discussed & translated into action. This goes beyond passively providing a space in which discussion is reflected." [Needs how-to suggestions]
3. "Face the reality that real solutions can be found only if there is resolution of competing core values -- the beliefs & priorities that rest beneath people's opinions. To avoid active discussion of what people value -- & that different people value things differently -- out of misplaced notions about 'objectivity,' is to deny the reality of how the public decides important issues." [Stop worrying about "balance" and tell what's really happening]

To public journalists, a civic problem is more than an opportunity to report what's happening. It's "an obligation to promote the discourse that leads to solution; to act as a conscientious citizen would act."

## LET'S DISCUSS IT... BUT FACE ITS DANGERS

- A. While current "gotcha," tabloid journalism is destructive, does this particular re-engineering approach lead back to we-know-best media arrogance? To the days when reporters were dishonest partisans twisting the news? Read a history of the LATimes for a blatant example.
- B. Which begs the question, can journalists or anyone be objective -- especially when they're trying to achieve a goal, even if it's community decisionmaking?
- C. Is journalistic activism better or worse than flawed objectivity?
- D. Project still assumes the mass of a public somehow makes decisions & does things. Sociology tells us this is true short-term only when we vote on something. The rest of the time opinion leaders make things happen. Is the study looking at their response to journalism?

(To join the discussion or get more info: Dep't of Journalism, NYU, 10 Washington Place, NYC 10003; 212/998-3793; fax 212/995-4148)

## SURVEY SUGGESTS PR COULD BENEFIT FROM MORE FEMALE CEOs

If the ratio of men to women CEOs of the top 1,000 US public companies were reversed (it's currently 997 to 3), how would business change? A lot, say senior female execs; not much, say their male counterparts. Hmm...

Findings from a Brouillard Communications survey:

- 71% of female & 36% of male respondents believe **employee relations would improve** under female leadership.
- 37% of women, 27% of men think **general communications would improve**.
- 41% of women, but only 18% of men say **marketing would become more innovative**.
- 38% of women, 24% of men believe the **overall reputation of US business would become better**. 10% of men believe it would decline.
- "The one realm that female business leaders are still believed to be lacking in is **the competitive arena**. Apparently, some stereotypes persist," notes James Foster, Brouillard's chrm. 26% of men, 13% of women say it would make the US **less** competitive internationally. On the flip side, 7% of men & 18% of women believe US business would be **more** competitive. (Info: 420 Lexington av, NYC 10170; 212/210-8985)

## IS A MINUTE TOO LONG TO KEEP CALLERS ON HOLD?

Try this test, recommends *Telephone Terrific!* (Dartnell, \$8.95): Keep your eyes closed until you think a minute has elapsed. Odds are you'll open them before the minute is up. Moral: A minute is a long time when you're waiting. **Poor telephone manners remains one of the major pr goofs & missed opportunities -- at 9 out of 10 organizations.** Other how-to tips on phone success:

- **Don't assume even serious customers will call back if they get a busy signal.** Their business may be lost for good. Research indicates that 34% of all callers won't call back when they get a busy signal.
- **Stand up & pace while you think,** next time you're tackling a tough problem with a customer or associate on the phone. Researchers at U Calif have discovered we can process information 5-20% faster standing than sitting. Besides, we all need to exercise!
- **If their complaint has been resolved successfully,** 75% of dissatisfied customers will do business with your company again. But the company's service reps must express concern & do what they can to correct the problem. Recent surveys show customers are loyal & tolerant of mishaps.
- **When an angry caller speaks loudly to you,** if you speak more softly the caller is likely to follow suit. Try it. You'll be amazed at how well this technique works.