

A SCANDAL AVOIDED: ANY LESSONS FOR PRACTITIONERS ?

White House police officers, wearing rubber gloves, greeted a delegation of about 40 gay & lesbian elected officials early this summer. Officers claimed the gloves were for their protection, according to AP. Maybe, but the symbolic message is far different.

Protesters responded 5 days later during a Gay Pride Day parade. Chanting "shame, shame," a group from the parade jammed 75 rubber gloves on the iron fence around the White House. After protesters left, police removed the gloves carrying them away in garbage bags.

IF THIS HAD OCCURRED AT ANY HOSPITAL, PLANT, SCHOOL ETC.

... it would've been headlines. What was the outcome here? After White House press officer Peggy Lewis

ducked repeated calls, prr interviewed Eric Hernischfeger, spokesperson at Secret Service. Asked if the officers were reprimanded, he answered, "No they were not." What he said in full:

"Director of the Secret Service (L.J. Bowron) regretted the unfortunate actions taken when several visitors arrived at the White House. It's not the policy of the Secret Service to wear gloves based merely on known sexual preference. The uniformed division officers had discretion to wear protective gloves in the performance of their duties.

"The Secret Service takes very seriously discrimination of any sort. Officers receive training with respect to health & safety issues and this training includes developing a sensitivity to issues relating to discrimination when dealing with the public. This training is important to our agency & continues to be a high priority. I will hold a special training session directed specifically at these matters.

"That in a nut shell is the paraphrase of the director's statement."

Again prr said, "And no disciplinary action resulted?" He said, "That is correct." Arrogant power of the Secret Service is known to any who've hosted Presidential visits. Apparently they also have Clinton cowed on acting in accord with his statements about non-discrimination. And someone there knows something about ducking what could've been damning media coverage.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. PRSA's major awards for '95: (U No. Iowa); Paul Lund Public Service, John Budd (The Omega Group, NYC).
Gold Anvil, Scott Cutlip (textbook pioneer, dean emeritus, U Ga); Outstanding Educator, Dean Kruckeberg

NEWSPAPERS ARE NOT BEING REPLACED BY TV NEWS: STUDY

"There are more people who read newspapers every day than watch early evening network newscasts, early evening local newscasts or late evening local newscasts. There are in fact more people who read a daily newspaper every day than watch any of those 3 kinds of newscasts every day," find Thomas Hargrove (Scripps Howard News Service) & Guido Stempel III (E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio U) in their research, "Where Americans Really Get Their News."

Study also confirms that:

- TV news viewing, like newspaper reading, increases with age. **Growing up with tv has no affect on newspaper readership.** "At the time of Robinson's (classic) study it was widely believed the low readership of newspapers by persons under 35 simply meant they watched tv news instead. Perhaps they never would become newspaper readers. Our data indicate rather clearly that assumption was wrong. Those who were between 20 & 35 20-yrs ago are reading newspapers more than they were then."
- **The higher a person's income the more likely** he or she is to be a newspaper reader. For those with more than \$60,000 income, the gap between newspapers & tv news is enormous.

(Copy of study from prr)

WHAT RESTAURANTS, THE TOUGHEST BIZ, TEACH ABOUT SERVICE

Customer service is the behavior that differentiates. Well done, it sets your org'n apart from others, your product or service ahead of others. An example illustrates how pervasive this tool has become. Patrick O'Connell of the Inn at Little Washington (an exclusive restaurant outside DC) explains in book *Becoming A Chef*:

"We have a mood indicator. Every customer is given a mood rating when they walk in the door, from 1 to 10. The waiter needs to assess the mood of the party. This forces him...to see them as human beings.... Usually I find that as soon as the cranky guests realize that it actually matters to the staff whether or not they have a good time, the customer turns around, right away. It's a new experience for them that somebody cares."

His final sentence dramatically demonstrates why customer satisfaction is becoming the be-all & end-all. Service is so generally sloppy that it does come as a surprise when somebody cares!

THE 5 STAGES OF DINING

Tho written for chefs, O'Connell's five stages are applicable to any organization that seeks to delight its customers. "At each phase, the waiter has a counter phase that he flips into to deal with this, so we're in control."

1. **Anticipation.** This can begin years in advance or in the car on their way to the restaurant. They begin to think about what they might eat.
2. **Trepidation.** Upon entering the restaurant, their anticipation collides with a kind of primitive terror that the experience won't live up to their expectations.
3. **Inspection.** People aren't really where they are until they experience it. So they are not conscious of being there, & they don't allow themselves to experience anything until maybe the second sip of a drink. Then you see them checking out the room. At the same time, if they see a flaw -- a chipped glass, a dead flower -- then they take a little nose-dive down.
4. **Fulfillment or Ecstasy or Animal Satisfaction.** This doesn't take place until 3/4ths of the way thru the main course. They won't allow themselves to consider the experience a success until they have gotten to that place in the main course. In describing their experience, they must use a superlative such as "fantastic," "wonderful," "incredible" or "amazing." I train the staff that "fine" means "awful." Do you think that somebody's going to pay \$125 for a meal that's "okay," "very good" or "fine"? Absolutely not. If they don't use a superlative, then something's wrong. So get them something else. Do something. Move in. Don't accept "very good."
5. **Evaluation.** This begins when the check is picked up, the bottomline is examined & the wife usually whispers, "How much was it?" & the husband says, "\$236" & they smile. It was either worth it, or it wasn't. And that evaluation continues for days later at the office when people say, "How was it? How much did it cost?"

Research shows that as many as 70% of customers buy a product or service not so much for itself -- they know alternatives are available -- **as for the way they are treated** in transacting business.

Practitioners should own customer satisfaction in their organizations. Why? Nobody has an unduplicated product/service any more. Even utilities are losing monopoly status. This means the **only differentiator** is service. Particularly since underselling on price is increasingly impossible. Championing, strategizing & training in customer delight is a powerful bottomline impact for pr. (See pr 5/23/94 & 6/6/94 for cases. Or request a copy of the Customer Satisfaction Model.)

SURVEY SHOWS EMPLOYEE COUNTS WILL STAY LEAN

Companies are still tightly managing employee counts, finds a survey of 1,814 org'ns by Watson Wyatt Worldwide (Wellesley Hills, Ma). Tho the

number of firms that have laid off workers or expect to do so is the same as in '94 (28%), companies are taking other steps to keep payrolls lean:

- 34% have had or anticipate staff **reductions thru attrition** in '95
- 30% have used or expect to **use temporary employees** in place of hiring permanent workers this year
- 16% have replaced or will replace a major function with **vendor-contracted services (outsourcing)** this year
- 14% have increased or expect to **increase the number of hours worked** in lieu of hiring additional staff.

Some ameliorating steps: 47% offer flextime; 25% job-sharing; 20% work-at-home arrangements. Another 22% are considering or planning to adopt work-at-home arrangements. (More: Karen Wellerson, 617/283-9321)

ARE THE OLD TURF ISSUES BETWEEN PR & HR REAWAKENING ?

Another study by Watson Wyatt shows companies are rethinking & dramatically altering the hr function. Says Gwen Stern, who directed the study:

1. "**Line managers are increasingly human resource managers**, focusing more & more of their time on motivating, rewarding & developing their workers."
2. "**Employees are assuming responsibility for managing their own career development** -- & even their own administration."
3. At some companies, for example, **employees directly update their benefits** info thru interactive technology.

IMPETUS FOR THE CHANGE

CEOs are demanding hr give far more attention to strategic goals. "They're saying, 'Get rid of the extraneous processes -- systemize them or vendor them out -- & focus on building the skills, talent & spirit of our workforce.'" [Sounds like pr....]

Of the 34 large US companies studied, 84% list improving service to hr "customers" (line mgrs, employees) among their top-3 priorities. 69% list repositioning hr as a strategic business partner with line mgmt.

- **Combining pr & hr functions under a single vp** is again a trend, as hr becomes less paper-pushing, more strategic. Reasons: 1) Both use the same body of knowledge; 2) Employees constitute the best communications medium an organization has; 3) They're increasingly involved in community relations & other pr programs; 4) Both units work on morale & productivity.
- **One solution is to separate hr into 2 units:** an Employee Services dep't for benefits, vacation scheduling, etc. & a Human Resources Development (hrd) dep't for motivation, strategy, training.