

"It sounded nefarious, and it was," concludes the Times' writer, citing the famed Ivory Soap carving contest -- which seems about as non-nefarious as any event could be.

IS PR REALLY SEEN THIS WAY? Some professional society ought to find out, thru reliable research that goes beyond polling to see if publics' behavior truly is affected. John Stauber's book ([pr 12/11/95](#)) would support the Times' view.

The Times' conclusion: "These pr armies have forged a new world of pseudo-events, video press releases, infomercials, letter-writing campaigns, manufactured celebrities & covert actions (sic?) -- all of which has made us feel increasingly disoriented & suspicious. We want to believe there is some reality within the haze in which we are enveloped...all too often, there is only the haze."

Practitioners might respond: If the rise of pr destroyed anything, it is blind belief in the objectivity, public spiritedness & credibility of news media -- who are, after all, the willing bearers of pr's messages & reporters of pr's events, for *their own marketing purposes*. Putting the blame on pr looks like scapegoating.

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

An Entirely Different View Of E-Mail: "Since I am hearing impaired, it is manna from heaven! On my bad hearing days, some of the media e-mail me their inquiries, which facilitates communicating for me & relieves the stress caused by being unable to hear them well on the phone. For some reason, moreover, we have been experiencing clarity problems on the phone, particularly from people who have cheap phone systems... With long distance rates & time zones, e-mail has improved communications with my colleagues throughout North America as well as relationships with family & friends. For me, the positives outweigh the negatives." -- Ellen Chenux, comms coord, The York Region Board of Education (Aurora, Ontario)

Forthcoming Book Offers New Matrix For Segmenting Crises. *The Crisis Manager: Facing Risk & Responsibility* is Otto Lerbinger's new work -- out later this year. He postulates these 7 types of crises:

1. Natural Crises (hurricanes, floods, earthquakes)
2. Technological Crises (Chernobyl, Spaceship Challenger, Bhopal)
3. Crises of Confrontation (boycotts, demonstrations, labor disputes)
4. Crises of Malevolence (product tampering, extortion, terrorism)
5. Crises of Skewed Management Values (Exxon Valdez, Sears' auto case)
6. Crises of Deception (Dalkon Shield, asbestos)
7. Crises of Misconduct (defense contractor scandals, insider trading)

Criticality Of Staying Current With The Social Environment is touted by anthropologist Jennifer James: In today's complex world, we need to know what to defend and what not to bother with: "Clinton should have said he smoked...he didn't realize the myth had already been crushed & didn't need to be defended."



WHAT NEW WAVE TOPICS LIKE BIOTECH TEACH ABOUT ISSUES

"Changing the Rules for Issues Management" is what Joe Gleason, of Capitoline/MS&L (DC) called his BST (a bovine growth hormone) case study presentation to PRSA. The environment of this long-fought issue over a milk producing stimulant may be more -- **an augury of what most issues will be like**, since nearly every one now involves scientific, technical, financial, legal or other elements the average citizen (or even opinion leader) can be expected to know little or nothing about.

ENVIRONMENT OF THE BST ISSUE DEBATE

1. Scientists and the U.S. gov't felt the BST hormone was safe. But scientific evidence was not sufficient to overcome opposition from consumer groups. Research showed that women, who make food buying decisions, have had their confidence in medical/scientific statements shaken by:

- Thalidomide babies
- Dalkon shields
- Silicon breast implant controversy

Research showed these issues did not resonate with men, who had little problem in accepting BST in milk.

2. Accelerators to the growing distrust of conventional scientific pronouncements:

- a. Media shift from in-depth discussion of scientific issues to sound bites on tv "news magazine" shows
- b. Growing distrust of gov't, leading to questioning of authoritarian statements from anybody
- c. The resentment of women against the male medical model of female dependence; the publication of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* was a seminal event
- d. Abortion issues
- e. Class action suits challenging medical evidence even when no causal relationship can be proven, including the silicon breast implant
- f. Flip-flop science in areas such as:

- cancer treatments
- cholesterol
- estrogen therapy
- reintroduction of leaches
- mixed messages over butter vs. margarine & many other foods



Given these accelerators, the response of a woman to the BST controversy can be illustrated by the following logic box:

I don't know much about biotechnology	I can control the risk of what my family eats	I am responsible for the health of my family & am not going to take a chance on BST
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Key factor: Milk is the most basic food with strong emotional symbolism.

COUNSEL'S STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THIS ENVIRONMENT

- A. **Use trusted authority figures** such as C. Everett Koop and president of the American Medical Ass'n to calm & refocus the debate away from the partisan zealots.
- B. **Be proactive:** during the Washington hearings, held pro-BST consumer rallies so that media covered more than the opposition of zealots.
- C. **Do the research:** in this case showed that while *unaided* concern about food was low; *aided* concern was high and resulted in action. For example, sale of kosher foods among non-Jews increased when specific food safety issues are debated on the public agenda.

QUESTION: HOW WILL THE BIOTECH ISSUES BE FRAMED ON SUCH SUBJECTS AS:

- gene therapy
- "Jurassic Park" (Sci-fi or ...?)
- genetic testing
- food labeling
- irradiation -- a protection against salmonella or "glow in the dark"
- pesticides on food -- alar scare had no validity but issue has cropped up again about appropriate pesticide levels in baby food.

Current regulatory activity is laissez-faire on the process of biotechnology; it concentrates on testing the end product.

CONCLUSION Understanding the values that underlie stakeholder actions, and earning their trust is far more important than just providing them with the facts.

STUDY: MAKE MEETINGS BETTER OR 29%+ MAY FALL ASLEEP

Once again, 3M offers useful tips for better meetings (as a means to publicize its new Post-it Easel Roll this time). Tips come from a survey of communications pros to find out what can make, or break, a meeting's effectiveness:

- **Most prefer off-site meetings.** Top sites are "retreat centers," "agency think tank" & "corner booth in a piano bar." Not conducive to meeting creativity is gathering in your own office, according to 40% of respondents. Almost no one wants to meet in the boss' office.
- **Fellow attendees have the greatest impact** on a meeting's creativity -- more so even than the subject at hand, say nearly half the respondents. 4-6 people is considered ideal meeting size; avoid groups larger than 8.
- **Humor is the favorite tool for stimulating creativity,** say 2/3rds. Other creative catalysts: toys (e.g., Silly Putty clay, Nerf toys, Twister games) & food. Only 2% picked "Pecos River-style trust building exercises."
- **Set the environment.** Make sure you have the right stuff -- comfortable chairs, all necessary equipment. Nearly a third ranked "no easel pad for note taking" & "no pins, tape or appropriate surface to stick flip chart pages to a wall" as their biggest gripes. "Markers that don't work" was picked by 25%. Success once again is in the details.
- **Prepare for success by information mapping pre-reading.** 55% say they typically "scramble to speed-read background info" prior to meetings. But 77% report *leaving* meetings energized, inspired & empowered.
- **What to avoid:** "long, boring dissertations," "lack of focus" & lack of structure, meeting leadership, or clear objectives are among pet peeves.

29% report falling asleep in meetings, 96% have seen others fall asleep. Oh, well, Ronnie Reagan did it when meeting with the Pope.

NYTIMES' LAST LOOK AT ELB RAISES ISSUES FIELD MUST CONFRONT

Sunday Times Magazine's 12/31/95 profile -- also covering Henry Rogers -- in its now-annual review of who died during the year, wouldn't have pleased Eddie. They are termed "master image manipulators," pr is equated with publicity (largely true of Rogers' Hollywood work), he's called "the original spin doctor" & "a master huckster." To think about:

1. A cultural historian's remark that he "**orchestrated the commercialization of a culture.**" *Is this what pr has done for society?*
2. "After Bernays, **information had been commoditized,**" which the article claims destroyed faith in media's objectivity. *Did pr do this to media?*
3. **Pseudo-events** (Daniel Boorstin's phrase) are traced to Bernays' statement, "I could create events & circumstances from which favorable publicity would stem." That such events have been a part of human history as long as it has been recorded is overlooked -- including the Boston Tea Party, MLK's Lincoln Memorial rally etc etc. Of course, to NYTimes publicity means the media, whereas to event planners it also means word-of-mouth, morale building, motivational speeches & more.