

HAS "NO COMMENT" BEEN REHABILITATED, AT LEAST SOME TIMES ?

Biggest change in media relations is probably the new look being taken at the formerly-infamous "no comment."

- Once this response was felt to imply guilt. In extreme cases of scandalous behavior, it still might.
- But on balance today, in this era of small or irrelevant topics being touted by media & pols as major issues, not talking is less damaging than getting into details -- & thus opening your org'n to more potential areas of nitpicking or criticism.
- New Englanders have a saying: *Short hair cannot snarl* -- i.e. the less said, the less someone can make something of it.
- Additional rationale: Trust in media & journalists is very low because of their in-your-face & gotcha tactics, so the reasonable audience -- usually the great majority -- sees you're being wise not to engage in a struggle with a skunk.

Those who are with you will applaud. Those who aren't wouldn't be persuaded anyway no matter how telling your comment -- due to good old Selective Perception.

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ *Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations & Com'ns* is available on tape (pr 9/6/93, 7/13/92 & 6/17/91). First comprehensive research to ferret out what pr excellence is, how it can be achieved, and how much it depends on overall org'l excellence was also the first real stretch by a pr foundation. IABC Foundation raised over \$400,000 to fund Jim & Lauri Grunig, Dave Dozier & an all-star team. (\$15 from 800/776-4222 or service.centre@iabc.com)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Dave Drobis (CEO, Ketchum PR, NYC) receives John W. Hill Award from PRSA/NY for leadership in the practice of pr & service to PRSA & the general public.

Dick Dyer (Winthrop, Maine) receives '97 Edward L. Bernays Award from the Maine PR Council for

outstanding contributions to the field.

PEOPLE. Fred Lash named dpr of Nat'l Defense Industrial Ass'n (Arlington), product of a merger between Nat'l Security Ind'l Ass'n & Amer Defense Preparedness Ass'n.

HELP IN MAKING MEETINGS PRODUCTIVE: A PR OPPORTUNITY

Research shows business professionals on average spend 40-50% of their working hours in meetings. As much as 50% of that meeting time is unproductive & up to 25% is spent discussing irrelevant issues, say surveyed professionals. 3M is declaring war on ineffective & unproductive meetings via some of its newest resources & products (available early '98):

1. Meeting Network on the Web at www.3M.com/meetings offers:

- tips on meeting management
- info about the latest meeting tools & technologies
- research about new meeting practices
- a forum to share experiences
- a meeting advisor who will answer your questions
- online directory of meeting professionals
- and publications & research about meetings.

2. Videoconferencing System facilitates face-to-face meetings for team members in remote locations.

- **Automatic voice tracking** allows the camera to focus on the speaker while ignoring distracting background noise. Video & audio controlled by a simple, intuitive interface & hand-held infrared remote.

3. Dataconferencing System enables team members to work on the same page -- from anywhere. Displays paper, transparencies, electronic documents or 3-D objects. Similar in design to an overhead projector.

4. Ideaboard, the next-generation whiteboard, allows meeting participants to focus on creating ideas rather than taking notes.

- Digitally captures ideas on its porcelain writing surface with regular dry erase markers, then automatically saves them on a PC.
- When used with an electronic projection system, an enlarged interactive PC screen effect is created in the meeting room, enabling users to toggle backwards & forwards & annotate "pages" in real time.
- New pages can be created, printed or even closed instantly from magnetic Ideakeys located directly on the Ideaboard, enabling the meeting leader to control the info flow.
- Info generated in the meeting can be distributed to participants in hard copy, sent via electronic mail or fax, or saved to a network.



FACTS ABOUT MEETING SUCCESS

From in-depth research, focus groups & customer feedback, 3M's Visual

Systems Division (where communication & productivity solutions are designed for meetings, training & the classroom) has determined what makes or breaks meeting effectiveness:

Ineffective Meetings

- Professionals tend to **dislike meetings** because they monopolize their time & increase work responsibilities.
- Staff meetings are more disliked than any other type of meeting because they usually **do not have specific objectives, resolve issues or reach decisions**. [A heads up for Team Leader As Key Communicator programs]
- In most meetings, 30% of attendees are not satisfied with their meeting role, the **amount of participation, or the decisions reached**.
- Typical meetings cover the entire agenda **only 50% of the time**.
- Meeting participants spend 5% of their time discussing **irrelevant issues**.
- Meetings generally last **25% longer than scheduled**.
- Participants are given little or no **prior notification**.
- More than 50% of meeting leaders do not use **presentation aids**.
- Most participants believe they have **little or no influence** in meeting outcomes.

Effective Meetings

- Use **advanced preparation**.
- Last 1 1/2 hrs & cover the entire agenda -- leads to a **sense of accomplishment**.
- One day notification is given & a **written agenda** is distributed in advance.
- All attendees **actively participate**.
- Info is shared, action steps are defined & **decisions are made**.
- **Handouts** increase retention & generate excitement.
- **Brainstorming meetings are fun** & give everyone a chance to participate & be creative.
- **"Task Force" meetings** are usually well-liked because they often have tangible outcomes.
- Presentations that **use visual aids** are 43% more persuasive than those that don't.
- Flip charts, whiteboards, overhead projectors, slide projectors & video support are used 50% of the time.

(More: 800-952-4059; see also pr 6/6/94, 7/11/94, 9/12/94, 10/24/94, 8/7/95, 5/13/96, 7/15/96)

3M not only supplies products that "enhance the meeting room, training room & classroom," but also "delights" customers with value-added info & expert resources. This is a prime example of how value-added marketing (pr 2/8/93) assures customer satisfaction.

CELOTEX BANKRUPTCY CASE REAFFIRMS "RULES" FOR SUCH CRISES

Bankruptcy & reorganization were the challenges for building materials mfr. Celotex -- and the program developed by its pr firm reaffirms the classic strategies in crisis situations of this kind. Company filed for protection under the US Bankruptcy Code in '90 due to asbestos litigation. Six months before emerging from protection, it consolidated its divisional structure into a single unit for enhanced customer service & staff productivity.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Led by Public Communications Inc, included:

1. **COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE**. Recognize the ongoing info needs of all stakeholders -- employees, owners, customers, vendors, trade & consumer media -- & **proactively communicate** with them.
2. **CONTROL THE INFORMATION FLOW**. Never let stakeholders learn initially of good or bad news from **any source other than the company**.
3. **INTERNAL COM'NS IS FIRST PRIORITY**. In addition to personalized vehicles like letters, voice mail to all employees from dir corp com'ns & the pres/CEO, plus an employee newsletter for reinforcement, an activity was used that adds both priority & urgency:
 - Pres & sr mgrs held a **"press" conference** for hq internal audience at a hotel. 3-hr meeting included breakfast, announcement of the settlement & how it would affect employees, and questions from the audience (about 300 employees).
 - Managers at plants around the country held similar sessions for their employees.
4. **PROVIDE EASY FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES**. Employees at all plants could ask questions anytime by using an **800# or fax #**. Questions could be anonymous tho plant location was revealed. Answers were then promptly given to **all** employees in that plant. This helps control the grapevine.
5. **DON'T LET RUMORS & ERRONEOUS INFO GO BY**. Be sensitive to rumors & the dissemination of incorrect info. **Swiftly counter rumors** & correct misinformation.

RESULTS

Celotex successfully reorganized & emerged from bankruptcy in mid '97 after posting record sales & profits -- & no significant increases in employee turnover. (More from PCI, 707 Franklin St. Mall, Tampa 33602; 813/226-2772)

Happy Holidays to everyone! This is the last issue of 1997, giving staff & printer a much needed rest. Look for our in-depth, special topic, First-of-the-Year issue on January 5, 1998.