

6. Give unions elbow room -- room to blow off steam. "They mounted a very powerful & effective pr campaign to counter us. It was very emotional -- things you'd want to react to right away. But our strategy was to ignore those things. The only time our spokesperson would comment was to correct factual errors."
7. Keep execs & sr mgrs in the loop & involved, at all times.

ITEMS FOR PROFESSIONALS TO PONDER

Reconsidering the phrases "meeting cascades" or "cascading information" because they sound top down (pr 8/18), Mark McCain (Florida Municipal Power Agency) suggests this one: *information trees*. "Akin to a telephone tree, the phraseology of information tree is associated with a concept that has some built-in understanding among people. In addition, the tree analogy is alive with positive associations. For example, whether you associate the front-line workers with leaves or roots, either comparison is positive." Or here's another idea: *info waves*. Waves coming into shore & the undertow as they go back out are both powerful forces. Other thoughts?

"This is a 3rd generation Web site" means it's interactive. Ogilvy Adams & Rinehart's Web site redesign & upgrade (www.oarpr.com) reveals: 1st generation was info rich, mostly text & links. 2nd generation added visuals & animation. 3rd generation "focuses on interaction -- sharing information & promoting relationships," explains CEO Bob Seltzer. Each section within the site offers instant e-mail access to senior staff. "If you've got a question, you'll get an answer."

Big time CEOs take lead at 3rd Annual International Conference on Spirituality in Business, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, Nov 8-15. Michael Stephen (Aetna), Ray Anderson (Interface) & Horst Rechelbacher (Aveda) are among them. Conference literature makes clear that, in the business context, "spirituality" is not a belief system. It's a "corporate culture that fosters honesty, respect, openness, compassion, commitment to quality & equality, commitment to the environment, & connectedness among the employee group. It fosters inspiration. It breeds creativity. It harnesses the best of people at all levels of the corporate ladder. And it translates into productivity & profitability." (More: 505/474-0998; e-mail, inlakesh@sisna.com; Web page, www.spiritinbiz.com)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONCRS. Dean Kruckeberg (pr prof & prog coord, U Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls) wins 1997 Pathfinder Award, given for a significant contribution to the BOK & practice of pr, from The Institute for PR Research & Educ. His research includes studies of the realities of pr, transnational corporate ethical responsibilities, educational outcomes assessment & European pr. "His work has helped establish a new world code of professional conduct," notes Institute pres Jack Felton.

"SUCCESSFUL NEW COM'NS IS SPARE, UNVARNISHED, UNADORNED"

Again: Face-to-face is the most valuable technique for communicating during organizational change, finds 3rd annual survey by MacDonald & Co. & The Cairns Group (both Toronto) (see pr 9/23/96). 53 of Canada's leading organizations (public, private & nonprofit) participated in the survey. Undoubtedly applies to US as well. Some findings:

WHAT DOES NOT WORK From an open-ended question: a) various printed vehicles (25%); b) top-down, 1-way com'ns (21%). Specific examples of what didn't work:

- "Speeches from on-high, trying to change direction & philosophy."
- "Training managers to communicate. They simply do not respond. What they need is information, & what prompts them to act is to incorporate their communications skills into their bonus assessment."
- "Public meetings at only one location. You need to bring the message to the stakeholders instead of the stakeholders to the message."
- "Mistaking information for communication (i.e. reliance on e-mail)."
- "The ones in which management didn't permit honesty."

WHAT DOES WORK By 2-to-1, respondents say speed is more important than detail. 40% say face-to-face is the vehicle of choice for communicating with employees. Distant 2nd place choice: electronic com'ns (9%). For communicating with stakeholders: 1st place, face-to-face com'ns (26%); 2nd place, print/written com'ns (11%).

"The recommendation that com'ns is more effective when the message is delivered promptly than when it is detailed is likely to provoke considerable discussion in many organizations. HR & legal dep'ts, e.g., often favor having the last detail in place before disclosing major programs, particularly when it comes to staff reductions.

"Experience counsels otherwise, & our survey respondents agree. Really big news finds a way to leak thru the best intentions, & management that begins a change exercise playing catch-up with the rumor mill starts a long race with a big handicap."

- 3 most common change initiatives: mgmt & org'n restructuring (98%); downsizing/staff reductions (87%); expense reduction (75%).



- 62% say communications was an important part of the strategic planning process for these changes; 32% say communications was reactive.
- 83% of employees expect more from com'ns since the changes have been implemented. Expectations include more direct com'ns from leaders (85%), more info on direction & strategies (75%), more frequent (68%), more timely (68%), more opportunity for feedback (68%), more variety in delivery (17%).
- Advice from communicators (open-ended question) for others about to face a major change or adaptive challenge in their org'n:

1) develop a strategy/plan for the entire process (32%); 2) be upfront, honest, straightforward (23%); 3) create 2-way flow of info, listen & learn (22%); 4) be part of strategic change planning (18%); 5) communicate often, can't overcommunicate (16%); 6) involve employees & stakeholders (16%).

KEY COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

- "Do not assume employees reject change."
- "Learn to be personal, to go by your gut; technology isn't everything."
- "Get out of your office, walk about & listen. Get to know where the rumor mill is located."
- "Insist on a seat at the management table."
- "Communicate even if there is no news. This is when rumors happen."
- "Senior management must be visible -- not in newsletters or memos, but in person."

CONCLUSION: OLD STYLE & OLD TOOLS JUST DON'T DO THE JOB TODAY

"The most successful new communications is spare, unvarnished, unadorned. Like the new, flattened corporate structures, this aspect of change communications has lost the trappings of a previous era. It tolerates no slick video treatments, no glossy publications, no ambiguous language.

"In fact, it has taken away some of the tools that communicators leaned comfortably on to see them through earlier awkward times. Instead, it relies on the relationship the communicators have -- or must develop -- with the most senior level of management. It challenges them to be brave, & be quick about it. And it argues passionately for the unalloyed truth, served directly to an audience that appears eager for the process, even if it doesn't relish the message.

"A lot of communicators won't like this message. But then, there is nothing about the process of change that makes organizations comfortable, & communicators are not exempt." (More from Doug Mephram at MacDonald & Co, 131 Avenue rd, Toronto, Ont. M5R 2H7; 416/975-1572)

CASE STUDY: BC TEL'S VERY DIFFICULT CHANGE PROCESS

When the phone environment became competitive, BC Tel decided to lower costs by \$100 million between July '95 & Dec '96 -- which meant downsizing.

At BC Tel (Vancouver) pr has a seat at the mgmt table & is involved in decisionmaking. **Key decision:** "get out early & announce this to employees first; put a stake in the ground & say this is where we're going. It shocked people. But it wasn't as shocking as it would have been had not our CEO been saying for many years that a change was coming. But people are in amazing denial when it involves them personally. So it was still a shocker," explains Gayle Stewart, vp corp com'ns.

USED VOICE MAIL TO GET MESSAGE TO EMPLOYEES

"We have a system where we can hit 8000 mailboxes at the same time." CEO, who voiced the bulletin, "is a fabulous communicator. He doesn't read a script; he talks from the heart. You could feel that in his voice mail." Also went out publicly with a news release & talked with the gov't so info was released in one 24-hr period. "Most of our stakeholders knew where we were going by the end of that day."

SOME SUCCESS FACTORS

1. **Have a plan. Put it on paper & stick to it.** "When we hit choppy waters, people began to ask 'why are we doing this?' Plan became a security blanket. I could say 'remember back in July we agreed as a group to do this.' It calms people down. It doesn't have to be a beautiful 20-page document but does have to be something you can physically get your arms around."
2. **Do a lot of scenario planning -- what if this or that happens.** "We had copy written, ready to go in the worst case scenario. It was empowering for us as a group to have that material at our fingertips."
3. **Hire a strategist.** BC Tel used one who "knew us but wasn't part of us." Kept him private. Employees, even sr mgmt, didn't know his name. "He carried on a low key, supportive & extremely strategic role with us."
4. **Develop strategy in a cross-functional team format.** Corp com'ns didn't go off & develop a plan in isolation. Industrial rels head was on the team. She became key spokesperson -- not the CEO or HR vp. "We needed to be hand-in-hand with our industrial relations colleagues & with senior operations managers who are responsible for front line managers -- who run the company. If we didn't have them on board, engaged, involved in what we were doing, we couldn't be successful." Also appointed a corp com'ns person to be part of the industrial rels team "developing the rapport we needed for them to understand why we wanted to communicate & the way we were communicating; why sometimes we didn't want to communicate." The biggest plus of all this -- "our strategy was very linked to the industrial relations initiatives that were going on not just at the bargaining table (with the union) but thruout the co."
5. **Empower managers to communicate face-to-face.** "It's the only way to communicate when you're talking about someone's livelihood, their future, their family." Gave them the needed tools & support to deliver a "very, very difficult message."