

**CASE: INSIDE MESSAGES PLACED IN OUTSIDE MEDIA STILL WORK WELL**

Olive Garden restaurants ran full page ads to congratulate employees on a "truly outstanding year." This provided a more-than-usually credible platform to cover a multitude of topics the public wouldn't otherwise be interested in. Much like leaking inside data -- where bragging is ok:

1. **Financial results:** 15 consecutive quarters of same-restaurant sales increases
2. **Employee relations:** "We look forward to exploring new & exciting opportunities like trips for some of our servers to Trentino, Italy, this fall for the harvest where our vintage wines are produced"
3. **Sr mgr MBWA policy:** "Whirlwind Tours" by CEO & evp-ops, done for 4 yrs & "will continue to do so indefinitely." "It is invaluable for us to meet with you, visit with you in your restaurants & listen to your feedback."
4. **Mission statement:** Focus on being "brilliant with basics" [great statement for an iterative process like running a restaurant]
5. **Vision:** "Hospitaliano, our passion for 100% Guest Delight" & to "be THE choice for Italian, now & for generations."

Letter is signed by CEO & evp-ops, in a typeface that looks like typewriter. (Full text from [pr](#))

**ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS**

- ¶ **The pronoun test.** "For 6 months now, I've been visiting the workplaces of America, administering a simple test. I ask frontline workers a few general questions about the company. If the answers I get back describe the company in terms like 'they' & 'them,' then I know it's one kind of company. If the answers are put in terms like 'we' or 'us,' I know it's a different kind of company," writes former sec'y of labor Robert Reich in Bits & Pieces (Fairfield, NJ; [www.epinc.com](#))
- ¶ **If you want to read the most balanced and funniest Monicagate piece,** tribune Media Services' Kathleen Parker wrote it in USA Today 9/15. She uses the land of Oz as an allegory, with Monica as Dorothy, Starr as Tin Man, Paula Jones as The Wicked Witch of the West etc. Sample: "Hi, I'm Monica. Wanna see my thong?" Right answer: "No, Monica, I want you to go home & wash out your mouth with Lysol." (Copy from [pr](#))
- ¶ **Short course in effective pr counseling.** Ed Block suggests always ending sessions with CEOs, other execs, or group meetings, with a standard question: "Anything else I should know about?"
- ¶ **One more piece of research about how to get volunteers** comes from a Seventeen poll of teenagers. They get involved because peers ask them to or role model the behavior. 85% say they are more likely to volunteer if friends do. The reason they volunteer is because it makes them feel good about themselves.

**IN A WORLD WHERE RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE BOTTOMLINE, NEW EXECS MUST SPEND FIRST 100 DAYS MEETING EVERYONE IMPORTANT**

This applies to CEOs, other sr mgrs, plant or regional office leaders, unit heads. Delgado Community College (New Orleans) established its new CEO with a 100-day plan for face-to-face sessions with key opinion leaders. J. Terrance Kelly began Jan 1. Last Nov "I spent 2 days with him to create our 100-day plan," dpr Joe Brennan told [pr](#). Goal was identifying:

- **Key needs** & then refining them into sound bites "so we would have the **core messages** in a format he could *deliver consistently & easily*"
- **Key stakeholders:** 1) employees, 2) potential students & those who influence them, 3) current students, 4) business leaders, 5) gov't leaders, 6) media, 7) other college presidents, 8) community at large
- **Specific points** to emphasize with each audience

"Face-to-face was the starting point of everything we did, with either a single individual or small groups." Then **meetings were always reinforced by some form of written communication.** For example, after meeting with a CEO of a corporation, a letter was sent; after speaking to the Chamber of Commerce's board of directors, an article was placed in the Chamber's newsletter outlining the key points discussed.

**CREATED MECHANISMS FOR 2-WAY COMMUNICATION**

"This was not at all a one-way process. It was as much about listening as it was getting our points across."

- **Published CEO's personal e-mail address & home phone number** with his blessing. "He wants to talk with people. He answers his own phone in the office. Anyone can talk with him." He gets 30-40 e-mail messages daily -- feels it's worth his time spent on answering them, that it's better to do that than to let the problems fester.
- **CEO gets out & walks the campus, eats in the student cafeteria.** He enjoys meeting & speaking with people. "He's a pr person's dream boss."

"Bottomline is people don't read. We can't achieve what we want to achieve by sending somebody a letter, fax or memo. We try to do everything face-to-face which is a huge demand on our CEO's time. By far the majority of what he does is face-to-face meetings, building relationships with people either addressing their problems or getting them to accept his vision. My advice to practitioners: **counsel your CEO that's where 3/4ths of his/her time must go -- to be the frontline communicator.**"



- **Created 2-way systems for communicating on a long-term basis.** E.g., CEO's regular attendance at monthly Chamber board meetings; developing an organization for staff that facilitates 2-way communication.

"In the first 100 days, we wanted to get face-to-face, deliver the message & back it up. In the first year, we want to have systems in place for every audience so we can build relationships & maintain 2-way com'n."

#### WHAT WORKED

Most success came from meetings with business community & media.

1. **"We're much closer to the business community than we've ever been.** He's being invited to participate in major regional planning issues. We're beginning to be seen as a major player. Kelly attributes that to the plan -- that got him in to meet with 25 of the top business leaders."
  - Key messages used with them: "We're creating your educated workforce. We invite you to develop partnerships with us. We can't do it alone. We're willing to change to be more responsive to what you need."
  - Just opened a \$125,000 adult literacy center funded by a local bank.
2. **CEO was named one of 30 people to watch by New Orleans Magazine.** "It's a pretty big deal in this town. The plan we laid to get him to the influentials helped because a secret panel of influentials vote on that list."
3. **Tour of all regional media "where we said we don't have any agenda"** other than to introduce new CEO, leave his office/mobile/home phone numbers, & pledge proactive, open & ethical public relations.
  - Media tour generated a couple stories -- but tv station called to get an academic source to comment on an event. "For a 4-yr research university, that may be no big deal. But for a community college it's a very pleasant change."
  - Where it really paid off: later a hatchet job of a story was done about the school. Reporter called Brennan at 7:30pm, prior to airing it at 10pm. "I said the facts didn't sound right, give me a chance to check them out." They didn't, & led with the story. "Next morning it got worse. They said a college official was being arrested. They were inventing stuff." Brennan took the CEO to the station to meet with the news director, who apologized & offered a followup to correct the inaccuracies. "The point is, we didn't wait till we had a problem to go see the news director. We already had a relationship in place."
4. **Efforts with state legislators were least successful** -- "because we didn't follow thru with plan to have face-to-face visits. We've visited some, others we haven't because of the crush of time -- & that seems to be noticed. Legislators come up to Kelly at functions & say, 'Hey, when are you going to come & visit me?'"

(More from Brennan at Delgado Community College, 501 City Park av, New Orleans, LA 70119-4399; 504/483-4400)

#### STRATEGY: FIRST GET CEO OUT THERE, THEN EMPLOYEES

Employee ambassador campaign is in the hopper. "We know that the most credible spokespeople for any org'n are the frontline employees & their immediate supervisors. And for colleges, students. I want to mobilize those folks to speak on our behalf, to go out & tell our story. To make that happen, we're pulling together a steering committee of people from different sectors of our college & turning it over to them. It will help us in recruitment of new students, legislative relations & improve our own morale because it will spill over internally," Brennan told prr.

#### LEWINSKY CASE (PLEASE, NO MORE!) VERIFIES LONG-HELD PR DICTUM

1. **The modern public is willing to overlook sexual affairs,** maybe forget & certainly forgive them (excepting always the self-righteous & the afraid-of-sexuality groups). Evidence so far: Clinton's favorability ratings remain high, unchanged by the Starr "sex novel"
2. **What they have a hard time countenancing is lies.** Evidence so far: Those who have defected, especially Congressional Democrats, principally cite the untruths
3. **Roper studies find that many feel there's nothing wrong with lying** if it is done to protect another person or keep secrets that are nobody's business (pr 1/6/97)
  - Whether this finding proves accurate in practice is perhaps the most educative element for pr from this whole sorry case -- with implications for employee & investor relations & issue response strategies

#### CONTRASTING CASE SUGGESTS CONGRESS & PUBLIC RESPOND TO LIES UNEVENLY

The same Sunday papers that reprinted the Starr report carried a long AP story on tobacco companies' efforts to increase the potency of nicotine & thereby make cigarettes more addictive.

- Hard evidence was found in company records, surrendered to the court in the Minnesota case, that they did "manipulate & modify" nicotine content
- When the CEOs of 6 companies were asked about it -- for the record, under oath -- by a House cmte in '94, each denied the allegations. "We do not manipulate the nicotine levels of our cigarettes. No, sir," said the CEO of the company doing the major research on "increased nicotine delivery."
- Nicotine is a highly toxic, addictive chemical. Millions have *died* from their chemocide -- while the President only had a foolish dalliance with a young woman who initiated the sexual relations.
- Telling the truth could have enabled gov't action that might have saved other victims. Was any punishment given the CEOs for lying about their killer product...?