

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

- ¶ **Bernays Sighting?** We grabbed the latest *American Heritage* off the newsstand because one face in a cover drawing of "the 20 greatest innovators of the 20th century" appeared to be ELB. Turned out it was George Washington Carver -- who surely ought to be on anyone's list of innovators (ask any kid eating a PB&J sandwich). We should've known "innovators" would all be men & women of physical sciences, engineering & finance -- not anything as inconsequential as human relations.
- ¶ **Firm Brings Value To Overseas Clients By Conforming To Time Zones.** A reader writes that his "value-added" service includes staying open for business on Sunday & starting the workday at 6 a.m. Firm's focus is working with Israeli high tech companies -- from San Antonio! Since the Israeli workweek is Sunday thru Thursday, Alan Weinkranz & Co is open accordingly. "We know & understand how to work with what is for the most part a highly engineering-driven culture, & we keep Israeli office hours by starting at 6 a.m. -- allowing for real time com'n & resolution on strategic & tactical issues."
- ¶ **Guidelines For Measuring Relationships In Public Relations Now Available.** As described in pr 10/11, 3rd in the groundbreaking Institute for PR series on measurement & evaluation is also the first model for measuring relationships -- pr's major activity. Walt Lindenmann's exec summary kicks off Jim Grunig's & Linda Hon's detailed text. (\$15 from IPR, PO Box 118400, Gainesville, Fla 32611-8400; 352/392-0280 or ippre@grove.ufl.edu)
- ¶ **Holiday Lesson In Sign Language Is Reminder How Prevalent It's Becoming.** Practitioners could well watch as communities in & around Washington get a lesson in signing this holiday season. A delegation of signing Santas who can interpret for the deaf are being sent to area malls. "We feel it is important to communicate the joys of the Christmas season to deaf & hard of hearing children & their parents," says Daniel Swartz, exec dir, Professional Interpreter Exchange (Laurel, Md). "It's also an opportunity for the hearing community to experience sign language in a very public way." When it comes to supplying signing Santas, Washington is at an advantage because of Gallaudet U, the only university in the country dedicated to teaching the deaf. Malls are donating film & gift wrap supplies during some of the signing visits. Profits from souvenir photos go to Deaf-REACH, educational & advocacy group for the low-income deaf & deaf with multiple disabilities.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

JOB CHANGES. Bill Novelli leaves Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to direct pr & legislative afirs at AARP -- going from kids to seniors. Matthew Myers, Campaign's general counsel, replaces Novelli as president.

HONORS. Carl R. Terzian Spirit of Giving Award honors the LA counselor for "over 30 years of devotion to civic, charitable & comty org'ns." Created by *LA Business Journal* & biz leaders, award will be given annually, after Terzian gets it this year.

DISTRESSING HEALTHCARE REPORT A REMINDER HOW DIFFICULT ISSUE ANTICIPATION IS TODAY -- & HOW ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL

Perhaps as many as 100,000 people die in the US each year due to medical errors, the Institute of Medicine reported last week -- the 8th leading cause of death. Everyone has seen reports of the wrong organ removed or similar sensational mistakes. While most patients aren't facing such major surgery, such data could generate fear about more typical & mundane healthcare procedures -- something as simple, & apparently as common, as a misread test?

- How will hospital & healthcare practitioners, or those handling employee com'ns where health coverage is provided -- i.e. just about every org'n -- handle this?
- What issue anticipation techniques can they employ to get ahead of situations that might erupt into outrage?

The Institute's proposal for mandatory reporting of errors to create a "lessons learned" databank was quickly rejected by the medical establishment. A bipartisan group of senators led by Ted Kennedy have picked up the idea, but its enactment would not remove the need for effective pr. It might even make the need greater.

ANOTHER LAWYER-LIKE BARRIER GROUP TO SOUND PR = RISK MANAGERS

The reason given for not reporting errors to gov't agencies is liability. Trial lawyers would pick up on the reports to stimulate

suits -- class actions if possible. True, some trial lawyers seem to have become business entrepreneurs out for money, not attorneys seeking justice -- with a proliferation of "specialty" groups soliciting cases to gain class action status.

- This means hospital risk mgmt dep'ts can become gatekeepers, limiting candid com'n by pr dep'ts.

As is sometimes the case with lawyers' opposition to forthright messages, given the circumstances risk managers have a valid point. But the old question arises: *Will avoiding suits in the court of law cause greater damage in the court of public opinion?*

OPPORTUNITY FOR CULTURE CHANGE

Hospitals remain what some call "balkanized", with physicians often

opposing change while mgmt is forced to promote it, various specialties still resisting integrated case management, & various insider & outsider groups blaming each other for the parlous state of healthcare finance. Admitting mistakes -- which are, after all, only human -- is not typical in medicine.

- Practitioners have been attempting culture change for years. Does this offer a triggering event?



SOME BEST PRACTICES IDEAS ON SOLUTIONS TO THESE CONUNDRUMS:

1. **Transparency is essential today on issues where any element of fear is involved.** Mazur's law applies here, where anyone would be quite right to be worried. It postulates that, beyond a window of creating awareness, the more an issue is discussed or reported, the more stakeholders tend to take the negative position. Thus, fear is enlarged & reinforced -- so many patients will come to the hospital ready to sue if they perceive any mistreatment or medical error. Hostile patients also don't get well as fast, so there is a clinical element here, too

■ Despite natural, sensible opposition from risk mgrs & lawyers, pr must argue strongly for openness

2. **Issue Anticipation Teams are an effective, no-cost method for getting ahead of harmful instances.** They are simple & easy to use. Select a group encompassing various elements of the org'n, plus differing ages, experience levels, sexes, time-in-grade. Have them meet monthly (or whenever) over a brown bag lunch (or similar) -- or if geographically dispersed, on the web or intranet. Ask them to consider 2 questions:

- a) **What's going on -- out there & in here?**
- b) **Could it affect us -- particularly could it become an issue for us?**

Give them some offbeat publications to read, or books, to stimulate their thinking & realm of vision. Have them report to the CEO when they identify anticipated issues. PR facilitates the group. Have several teams if appropriate. (See [pr](#) 6/14/93)

■ The climate established by medical errors reportage will make it harder for well-meaning staffers to come forward & report screw-ups, so lurking issues will increase. IA Teams are the safest haven for conscientious employees to get to sr mgmt without fear, since the report comes anonymously from the IA Team

E-MAIL BURGEONING AS A SURVEY TOOL FOR PR; REPORT UNDERSCORES ITS MANY BENEFITS, A FEW DRAWBACKS

For decades, mail questionnaires were the workhorse for research. Then telephone surveys took over. Now new technology is pushing these mainstays aside. The Internet has developed into the world's biggest info resource -- so is becoming the medium of choice for surveys.

"The technology is still evolving, the software is getting better," Don Wright, U So Alabama (Mobile) told [pr](#). Wright's report on the topic, given to PRSA Educators Academy, is based on personal experience, & telephone interviews with 6 leading pr research suppliers & 5 pr scholars. His scholarship highlights the phenomenal advantages e-mail can bring pr research, and provides some tips on how to use the tool properly.

"PROPER USE" DEFINED

Wright says that proper use of the e-mail system can generate a 50% higher response rate than snail mail.

"Proper use" includes two key practices:

1. **Use e-mail surveys for targeted groups**, e.g., employees, consumers, identified organizations, or designated opinion leaders -- not the general public. "It's a tricky sell for general public surveys," says Wright. Recipients might see them simply as junk mail. But, he adds, general public surveys are *always* difficult. "They get a low rate of return anyway, even when they're sent by regular mail. And, most surveys pr people use don't deal with the general public."
2. **Send questionnaires in the text field** rather than as attachments. "Many companies are obsessed with appearance & insist they be delivered as attachments instead of as text messages." The problems with attachments are:
 - a) **Software compatibility problems.** Some people won't be able to read them
 - b) **Fear.** People often don't like attachments because they're afraid of viruses
 - c) **Time & space.** Downloading that questionnaire takes time -- who wants to take the extra step of checking a downloaded document, or tie up the computer while the survey is downloading?

ASIDE FROM EFFICIENCY, OTHER ADVANTAGES

1. One of the beauties of e-mail is a **fast response rate**, illustrated by Wright's recent experience with a Fortune 100 client. "From the time we sent out the (1700) questionnaires to the time they got their report, it was two weeks." He added that the company's lawyers needed 21 days to *approve the survey*.

2. **Another huge consideration is cost.** "To mail 1700 questionnaires would cost \$935 in postage alone, plus printing costs, and the time needed to stuff & label envelopes, etc. If you did a second mailing, you would have the same charges all over again." E-mail, by comparison, costs next to nothing. This cost impact will be huge, he believes. "This technology is dramatically changing not only the efficiency of surveys, but the costs of conducting them."
3. **Findings are easier to distribute.** "It provides a wonderful vehicle thru which reports on research results can be distributed to research subjects."

SOME KINKS

E-mail is not without problems & some issues are still to be resolved.

- a) **Accessibility.** It is still a **technology of privilege**. Management might have e-mail, but not the guys working in manufacturing, so its usefulness varies, depending on the group that's targeted
- b) **Privacy.** Respondents' anonymity isn't as protected in an e-mail survey
- c) **Attachments.** As cited above

But Wright says these issues are resolvable. "A lot of companies are finding it cost effective to make sure employees have an e-mail address." And, newer software will allow fancier e-mails that look as good as attachments.