

- Most rumors are internal, about personnel changes, job security or job satisfaction.
- External rumors consist of hearsay of concern to general public, such as org'n reputation & product/service quality.
- Rumors incite lowered employee morale, bad press, loss of trust between mgmt & employees, increased employee stress, loss of trust among co-workers & by customers, decreased productivity & damaged individual & corp reputations. Internal attitudes such as lowered morale were considered more severe.

Strategies used to counteract rumors range from discussing the procedures used for upcoming changes to explaining how those decisions were made, using multi-level com'ns techniques such as town meetings, memos, e-mail, etc. 3 effective strategies cited by respondents but not used frequently were: 1) establishing a rumor hotline; 2) denying rumors via trusted outside sources; 3) confirming the rumor.

Survey was conducted by Nicholas DiFonzo (Rochester Institute of Technology, NY) and Prashant Bordia (U-Queensland, Brisbane, Australia). Respondents were 74 pr pros from the Arthur W. Page Society at its '97 annual seminar. Members of the group were corp com'ns or pr officers & pr consultants. Mean years of pr experience was 26.18. (More from DiFonzo, 716/475-2907; NXDGSS@rit.edu)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **A new manual, *Writing for the Wired World: The Communicator's Guide to Effective Online Content***, by Shel Holtz, teaches the ins & outs of Internet & e-mail com'n. Examples include organizing e-mail campaigns, building web sites, representing your org'n in discussion groups & developing online newsletters & e-zines. (Call IABC, 415/544-4700)

¶ **Is the online information you read true?** Researcher Deborah Sawyer believes most is inaccurate, according to the Feb. issue of *The Futurist*. There's little copy-editing or fact checking of info on the Internet, says Sawyer, & the result is repetitious & skewed. Other problems: plagiarism, increased discourtesy, & a tendency of many companies to refer all questions to their Web sites, regardless of whether the site can supply answers. (More from prr or World Future Society, 301/656-8274)

¶ **Dare we leave design of non-financial indicator measurement to accountants?** John Budd has been on this subject for years -- in the financial press as well within pr -- and has come to some conclusions. "The difficulty, when accountants try to define these intangibles, is that they can only think in quasi-qualitative terms. Further, they & others who have recently discovered these so-called soft values, fail to realize that "discovery" is only the beginning. Next must come objective assessment of these squishy values &, if justified, how to promulgate them -- & where." This makes the case that practitioners had better be involved in these decisions, or we'll be left with unworkable systems that are, in effect, evaluating our performance. He has put his suggestions into a small book, *How to Manage Your R.O.E. -- Return on Expectations*. (\$5.95 from him @ The Omega Group, 32 E.38th st, NYC 10016)

CO. USES MAPS FOR EMPLOYEE COM'N, QC, TO PLAN ITS FUTURE

"The maps help people understand the overall complexity of the company & how their jobs relate to others," John Ogrodowczyk of Cirtronics Corp (Milford, NH) told prr. "If employees live by the mapping framework & it's successful, it's a nice way to see how people interact."

Cirtronics uses mapping to comply with quality standards & to help develop new corporate strategy that will enhance the company's mission. The company, a contract manufacturer of circuit boards, prides itself on having no hierarchy (it employs 100 people). It used its push for ISO 9002 certification, achieved in '95, to develop the maps -- in conjunction with consultants Business Enterprise Mapping (Medway, Mass.)

- **Housed in a master notebook** as well as on the company's computer network, each map was produced to answer specific ISO requirements, e.g., how do you do planning? How does your customer service dep't work?
- Rather than assigning the ISO certification task to one person or dep't, it was given to 14 "process owners" -- employees who worked in the areas being written up
- Ogrodowczyk developed a **standardized format** for the maps as well as common symbols & terminology to make the entire project more understandable

WHAT MAPPING PROGRAM DOES

Company uses the processes in the map book daily. "It's the way we live.

Mapping was born out of ISO but then took on a life of its own."

- **Maps visually illustrate all company processes** for every employee. Any change to a process affects other processes, so com'n among employees is vital. Map book is cross-referenced to show how processes affect others.
- **An internal audit team** -- consisting of employees from different levels of the company -- periodically asks employee teams how they're improving. Audits are scheduled throughout the year, so the system "can review itself," says Ogrodowczyk.

MAPS BECOME GUIDE FOR FUTURE

Mapping process is now helping Cirtronics in its corporate planning.

"We want our mission to come alive & our planning to have meaning thruout the company," Ogrodowczyk says. "It's what people do that reflects the



mission." Company's mission (short version): to serve & continuously improve.

Ogrodowczyk has developed a map to guide the strategy planning process. That map illustrates:

1. Company's guiding principle
2. Target audiences: customers, employees, community, environment, suppliers, company itself
3. Success indicators or metrics
4. The process whereby corp planning feeds the biz plan, which in turn feeds mgmt and financial reviews, leading back to corp planning
5. Company mission (longer version):
 - **To serve our customers** by providing high quality electronic & electro-mechanical assemblies, while striving to improve our methods, technology & offerings.
 - **To serve our employees** by providing a positive work environment that stimulates personal growth, trust & respect.
 - **To serve our community** by working to highest standards of ethics & quality, establishing us as a leader in excellence in contract manufacturing.

SHOWS CENTRALITY OF FRONTLINERS

The company is refining its planning. To do so effectively, strategy team created a hypothetical company using a **circular model rather than traditional hierarchical pyramid**. They discovered that employees working on lower level activities actually are the most important, because they need elements from people in the "outer circles" to do their jobs well.

"We determined that, because we work with operating teams, the people on the outer circles serve others inside the circle," Ogrodowczyk says. "In fact, the higher up you are in the company, the more you serve, which is the way the universe works naturally." The company's ultimate goal in planning is to make the structure work without the power struggles & control issues found so often in traditional, hierarchical structures. (More from Ogrodowczyk, 603/654-6125; Jogrodowczyk@cirtronics.com)

GAME TEACHES SEARS' EMPLOYEES IMPORTANCE OF BOTTOMLINE

Better than thumbing through large training manuals, watching boring videos, or listening to management speeches, games can be invaluable teaching tools (see pr 4/4/88, 3/14/94, 3/24/97). Last year, Sears (Hoffman Estates, Ill.) introduced a new board game to teach profit & loss to hourly associates (term used in retail to mean employees).

"We (in mgmt) understand the big picture of profit & loss, but getting it to the associates' level is the most difficult part," John Hither, hr mgr, told pr.

HOW GAME EVOLVED

1. District hr mgrs discovered a need to help associates better understand the basics of profit & loss. "Throwing away extra bags or misusing merchandise & equipment affects profit & loss," Hither notes. Associates' daily performance makes the difference in store profitability.
2. Four hr team members, including Hither, brainstormed the game concept & used various board games as models. After testing the prototypes on their families, a final game evolved: "*The Bottom Line & Your Impact on It.*" Key was to keep it simple.
3. Game is targeted to sales associates with 2 months on-the-job experience. Although targeted to them, game may be updated for use in sales support areas, where employees don't have customer contact.

HOW GAME IS PLAYED

1. Played by 2-5 associates and usually facilitated by a store or sales mgr, each player moves around the board with a token after rolling a die.
2. Players collect cards representing percentages of controllable profit & loss elements for a \$25 million Sears store. Cards represent payroll, sales, returns, inventory shrink, initial markup, reductions, miscellaneous income. They can be traded with other players.
3. "The hardest part of the game is the game sheet & calculations," says Hither. "Not everyone understands percentages, so this provides an opportunity to discuss the impact of net sales, income & expenses -- & bring it into focus."
4. Facilitators are encouraged to discuss their own store's profit & loss, using examples of how associates can affect the bottomline. (More from Hither, 847/286-2500)

RUMORS MORE THAN JUST HOT AIR, STUDY SHOWS

The major generator of rumors is organizational change, finds a study conducted for the Institute of Public Relations. It confirms what every practitioner knows: that organizational & external rumors are common "thorns" in the sides of pr pros.

Findings include:

- Harmful rumors (defined as "an unverified bit of info about something of importance to a group") are common. Respondents reported hearing a rumor they were concerned about nearly once a week. One participant remarked: "A recent com'ns audit revealed that the grapevine is the #1 source of credible info in the company, surpassing leadership, mgmt, or the supervisor."