

TURNING LEMONS INTO LEMONADE

Some industries, like insurance, can capitalize on the fear to tout their philosophy if not indeed their products. Northwestern Mutual Life's notice reads:

"After 142 years in business, NML knows the value of preparing for uncertainty. After all, we help secure the futures of millions of policyholders like you."

Then it advises customers they can take any worries about the company's Y2K readiness "off your list."

The larger fear factor -- that some cataclysm will occur (see [pr](#) 6/14) is one example of not thinking globally, since only Eurocentric cultures consider next year to be 2000. In China, it's the year of the Rabbit. For Jews it's 5759. (Interesting info on www.y2kdisclose.com)

SEMANTIC ISSUE: WHAT ARE CORRECT TERMS FOR PR'S TARGETS?

PR has more words used to denote multiple things, or multiple words to denote the same or similar thing, as any field. Ironic, since we're supposed to be the clear voice communicators. Here are some basic terms, used many times daily by every practitioner, in need of revision:

Audience This clearly means a passive group, usually a disparate & unorganized group, sitting there waiting to hear messages. Well, perhaps not sitting there, probably not wanting our messages at all -- but passive & hopefully reachable or at least targetable, but for messages, communication. And that's not enough in an interactive, face-to-face, involvement era

Public Used to be the term describing the big-g-g entity out there, which could be subdivided into target publics. "General public" was in our lingo -- until demographic research found there is no such thing on almost every topic. So that phrase is rarely heard now from professionals. And public now means something else

Stakeholder Grunig's paradigm ([pr](#) 5/24) shows this is the term to use for the big entity. It respects a known fact: anyone who doesn't have a stake in the topic today is not interested & of little, if any, concern to pr strategies

Publics Stakeholder groups subdivide when some *decision* (policy or action) strikes them as a *problem*; *publics* organize around this problem & create *issues*

So we're back to chasing publics. But they're defined much more sharply. Grunig puts them in 4 classes: Inactive; and 3 active publics -- long haul, special interest, hot button ([pr](#) 10/5/98).

BROAD-BASED, GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE INSPIRES BEHAVIOR CHANGE

The Safe Kids Campaign, a public-private partnership focused on preventing accidental injury & death of children, has something to brag about: proven effectiveness in changing behavior.

Ten years after the program's inception, research indicates behavioral change regarding risk factors -- and a 26% drop in serious injuries among kids 14 & under. "On paper, it's just a percentage," David Swearinger, dir corp com'n, Johnson & Johnson (New Brunswick, NJ), told [pr](#). "In real life, however, it means that one quarter of accidental deaths of kids has been eliminated."

CHALLENGE: COULD A PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN CHANGE BEHAVIOR?

Twelve years ago, J&J was approached by a doctor who was shocked that the same hazards kept killing & injuring kids. "He kept seeing the same key risk areas," said Swearinger. "He said if there was a way we could educate parents and children, we'd reduce the numbers."

- Hazards included falls, scalds, poisonings, lack of bike helmets, improper use of seat belts & car seats, pedestrian dangers & home fires.
- Until that point, child safety was a discussion saved for the experts at conferences -- no behavior change ever resulted. "Everyone was frustrated," says Swearinger.
- Meanwhile, stats showed unintentional injury was the #1 killer of children ages 15 & under in the US, Canada & Puerto Rico.

J&J became Founding Sponsor of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign (SKC), the first childhood injury prevention org'n in North America. Other sponsors include Children's National Medical Center (DC) and General Motors. Campaign spawned sister-programs in Canada & Puerto Rico.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS: ONE CLEAR VOICE ACROSS THE CONTINENT

"To develop this program, the same message had to be told in a variety of ways," says Swearinger. "Put babies in car seats," "wait for the walk signal," "check fire alarms," "belt up," "keep poisons out of reach of kids" -- these were directives SKC leaders wanted to send to a **target audience** comprised of **children, parents, caregivers & teachers**. "We had to have the same theme overlay events across the country." Program includes:

1. **Grassroots, Hands-On Initiatives.** Fire depts, hospitals, police depts & civic groups hold fairs, bicycle rodeos, local Olympics & other special



events. Car seats & bike helmets are offered free or sold at these events, literature is distributed, etc

2. **Mass Mediated Messages** such as PSAs, print ads, dialogue inserted into tv programming ("Touched by an Angel"), kiosks at supermarkets, free pamphlets, etc. reinforce the appeals. News conferences were held in major cities, and special programming shown in over 300 cities
3. **Beyond Media.** A vital element: J&J works closely with more than 60,000 retail partners to set up information distribution in stores & malls
4. **Legislative Efforts:** "We went to Capitol Hill and got the interest of four key senators." The senators co-sponsored a hearing that provided the base for a lot of the '98 events. A special week in May has been designated for SKC. States across the country have also had special hearings encouraging participation in the campaign & in the nationally recognized "week"

For the 10th anniversary of SKC, J&J conducted research and noted the 26% drop in deaths. "The fact that Centers for Disease Control & Prevention evidenced the report, and that the data was endorsed & reviewed by John Hopkins, provides a special blue ribbon for us," says Swearinger.

TRUE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

"We don't sell the products (bike helmets, fire alarms, etc.) so we don't make money from it," says Swearinger. "We just felt it was important corporate citizenry, reflecting our credo of 50 years." That same credo, which calls for putting customers first, was applied when J&J went through the Tylenol crises in 1982 and 1986 (see pr 2/14/83). SKC campaign has won 3 Silver Anvils from PRSA.

STUDY: ORGANIZATIONAL BULLIES DRAIN PRODUCTIVITY, LOYALTY

The movement to put civility back into society has a strong pr responsibility in the workplace: People who are bullies at work cause lack of productivity & erode organizational loyalty, finds a study from UNC-Chapel Hill.

HUGE PR NEED

Results indicate that after an unpleasant encounter (being yelled at, talked over, talked down to, expected to make up for the instigator's procrastination, left out of a meeting, etc.) 12% of targets **actually changed jobs to get away** from the instigator! Other findings:

- 28% lost work time avoiding the instigator
- 53% lost work time worrying about the incident or future interactions
- 37% reduced their commitment to the organization
- 22% decreased their effort at work
- 10% decreased the amount of time they spent at work
- 46% contemplated changing jobs to avoid the instigator

MGMT DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THIS

Of the targets who reported incidents to management, only 1/4 were satisfied with the way the organization handled things.

- Some said they never reported the event because they thought their careers would be jeopardized or the report would have no impact
- Many respondents indicated that leaders were reluctant to take follow-up action, either because of the instigator's personal clout or because the leaders wanted to avoid a sticky problem

ADVICE FOR CO-WORKERS OF ORGANIZATIONAL BULLIES

- Clarify expectations re: interpersonal interactions; establish explicit code of conduct
- Watch closely for patterns vs. one unique occurrence
- Document incidents, reflect inappropriate behavior in evaluations
- Deny the instigator further influence over people
- Mandate (rather than "recommend") counseling, if needed

ADVICE FOR LEADERS OF ORGANIZATIONS & WORK GROUPS

- Heed warning signals of incivility
- Recognize that such behaviors can affect not only the target, but also bystanders & those who hear from the target & the bystanders
- Don't punish the messenger who reports the incident
- Don't make excuses for powerful people
- Don't make excuses to evade a "sticky" problem
- Don't look the other way re a bully's actions
- Don't transfer, promote, recommend employees who should be fired

Study, "Incivility & Aggression at Work" sampled 775 respondents nationally with a 240-item questionnaire about unpleasant interactions (rudeness, insensitivity, disrespect) inflicted by a coworker ("instigator") on the respondent ("target") at work. Respondents, half female & half male, were from a variety of industries ranging from 2 to 100,000 employees. (More from Peggy Pickard, UNC: phone 919-962-0285; fax 919-962-4425; e-mail Peggy_Pickard@unc.edu)

WHEN DOES TOUTING Y2K READINESS ADD TO THE FEAR?

"This is a Year 2000 Readiness Disclosure as defined in the Year 2000 Information & Readiness Disclosure Act." To many practitioners this mouthful is a familiar phrase as org'ns try to deal with customers' expectations -- & oftentimes wild perceptions -- about Y2K computer problems.

But are we overdoing the needed job -- and adding fuel to fear?

Just about every industry that could cause social disruption reports they are at or near compliance. Latest to report is one of the most worrisome, healthcare. Amer Hosp Ass'n says 99% of hospitals will be ready by yearend.