

POLLING'S MANY SINS

Titled "Call Me Unresponsive," Genie Dickerson's op-ed told "Why I won't answer pollsters":

1. Polls take up my time... & then pollsters sell my answers for profit
2. How do I know it's Gallup et al or whomever? Could be anyone
3. Some questions are too personal or even dangerous to answer, like what bank I use & how often I visit, if I have a gun or dog, total income etc
4. Some pollsters are rude. When I decline to answer, they blow up at me
5. Some pollsters are salespeople in disguise
6. Many try to influence opinion by asking if you know dirt on a candidate, product or company
7. Responses often aren't private: "Once in a GOP caucus I was treated to a computer printout of my neighborhood. There were my answers."

A letter writer added #8: "Questions are often so badly constructed that to answer 'agree' or 'disagree' is impossible."

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

- ¶ No wonder financial types so often "write novels" with the numbers. Global survey of central bankers -- the Alan Greenspan of the world -- finds they rank "duty to be open & truthful with the public" as the **least** important reason for trying to build credibility.
- ¶ Did you know author Alex Haley (*Roots*) was a pr colleague? In naming a Coast Guard cutter after him, it was noted he rose from ship's steward to become the first head of the CG's pa ofc. Sadly, AP wrote that this was the "first military vessel named for a journalist".
- ¶ Do as I say, not as I do, says CBC. Canadian network may be one of the world's premier broadcasters, but like many news gathering outfits it has a double standard. Its board meets in secret & minutes are not publicly available. Tho its reporters regularly use the Access to Information Act for stories about gov't, as a Crown Corp, CBC is not subject to the Act. Reminds us how the *Boston Globe* handled the scores of reporters who sought info about the firing of columnist Mike Barnicle a few years ago: mgmt had police cordon off the entire block with yellow tape to keep journalists at bay!

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Kathleen Kelly (U Southwestern La) to receive Jackson Jackson & Wagner Behavioral Science Prize from PRSA, following selection by Body of Knowledge Bd. One finding of her research is that fundraising should report to pr, not vice versa as in many institutions.

ELECTED. Ward White (Northwestern Mutual, Milwaukee) as chmn & Frank Ovaite (Crossover Int'l, McLean, Va) as vp/treas of Institute for PR. The prestigious Economic Club of Detroit, one of the major speaking platforms, names counselor Sandra Hermanoff to its board of directors.

CD-ROM COURSE ON IDENTIFYING & DEALING WITH VIOLENT CO-WORKERS IS REQUIRED ISSUE AVOIDANCE IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE

The workplace bully who tries to sabotage others during meetings (prr 7/19) is a picnic in the park compared to the **workplace timebomb**. In the wake of recent events, national attention is again riveted on the scary issue of workplace violence.

- Over a million people are the victims of workplace assault every year, reports U.S. Dep't of Justice. Other studies put that figure at closer to 2 million. Cost to U.S. employers approaches \$40 billion annually

A new course offered by Corpedia (Mesa, Az) trains managers & employees to recognize & address the potential for violence in the workplace. "We looked at some of the recent events and researched business & sociological studies," dir of research Patrick Nichols told prr. "We looked for trends."

Course doesn't focus on alleviating problems that can lead to violence, but deals directly with situations that are already too far gone. "This course is out of the scope of stress management," Nichols says.

IT'S NOT THE PLACE, IT'S THE PERSON

It seems certain organizational settings (investment firms, post offices) are prone to employee violence, but Nichols says it's the individual, not the environment, that is the causative factor. "In trying to recognize the warning signals, it was apparent it was the individual, rather than the place, that mattered." Some people can handle stress, boredom, or feeling unappreciated without snapping, while others cannot.

Nichols offers these tips:

1. **Be on the look out for certain traits in co-workers** such as feeling singled out for unfair treatment, needing to be in control, believing they're always right, exhibiting self-destructive or even suicidal inclinations
2. **Observe how individuals interact with others.** High-risk persons may act withdrawn or exhibit jealousy, resentment of authority, paranoia; or have an abnormally high preoccupation with privacy
3. **Be aware of suspicious interests or obsessive habits,** extremist views such as conspiracy theories, publicized violent events or extreme political or religious convictions
4. **Pay attention to signs of psychological instability** -- changes in personality, withdrawal or depression, extreme stress, intense guilt or shame, excessive self-criticism or hopelessness



5. **Be familiar with late-stage indicators** such as rapid breathing, broken speech patterns, shaking & abnormal sweating. Conversely, an individual may simply seem detached and distant -- showing a blank expression or inability to concentrate

"Just because some of these signs are present doesn't mean you have a ticking timebomb," Nichols stresses. "These are just signs to watch."

IF FACED WITH AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR...

6. **Obey the demands within reason.** Stall for time until help arrives by complying with all reasonable requests the aggressor makes. *Don't threaten or ignore the aggressor at any time*
7. **Warn others.** Remain calm & compliant but look to alert others as soon as possible. At a minimum, get help from your co-workers. And never hesitate to call the police
8. **Look for any opportunity to get away.** Always look for ways to escape a possibly explosive situation. If you do escape, get help immediately & do not return
9. **Avoid actions that may set off an aggressive person.** Keep the aggressor as calm as possible by maintaining eye contact, speaking slowly & clearly, and refraining from making any sudden or startling movements
10. **Never ignore a threat.** Err on the side of safety by reporting all threats & possible indications of violence to the appropriate authorities

Since it's difficult for a large organization to keep tabs on everybody, managers & employees have to do their part in recognizing the warning signs at the very start, i.e., during the hiring process.

- **"Check references,"** he says. This can be tricky because in some states, it's illegal for a reference to disclose unstable behavior. Managers often have to "read between the lines." If someone calls you for a reference, let them know if the individual is mentally out of step.

Course is about 1½ hrs on CD-ROM. (More from Nichols at 877/629-8724)

CORPORATE CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS ARE ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF INTER-DISCIPLINARY WORK MAKING ITS WAY INTO PR/MARKETING

Also known as industrial anthros, they're the hottest new Silicon Valley trend. No longer are anthros out in rainforests studying native behaviors. They're now in our own backyards studying urban cultural behaviors.

HOW FRITO-LAY USED THEM

Company had profiled its typical convenience store purchaser as "Bubba," an uneducated, blue-collar worker. What cultural anthropology research uncovered, thru hours of observation, was that the primary convenience store

purchaser was a woman, more specifically, mothers on their way home picking up snacks as an after school treat or munchies for the kids' soccer games.

- **After learning this, Frito-Lay positioned itself** to convenience stores as not just a vendor but a partner in profit -- i.e. Frito-Lay could assist the store in attracting a certain kind of customer
- **"It's better than fighting over fees for shelf placement,"** says Rick Robinson, Chicago-based cultural anthropologist who headed up the Frito-Lay study

WHAT JANSPORT DISCOVERED

Backpack manufacturer knows 70% of its sales occur the 2 months prior to school starting. Their displays were often thrown together, with several different kinds of bags mixed in, without rhyme or reason. Cultural anthros videotaped hours of consumer purchases & conducted in-person interviews with consumers.

- **They found the style of display was confusing.** As a result of the research, new displays were designed, demonstrating the different uses of each kind of JanSport backpack.
- **Product literature was also featured,** describing the "quality and durability of the backpack."

The idea is catching on in business schools. Northwestern's Kellogg Graduate School of Mgmt is looking into integrating into their curriculum courses on how human behavior can be shaped for commercial ends. Of interest is how products relate to customer environments & the intangibles that drive purchases.

RESEARCH BASHING GOES PUBLIC, MAKING PROPER USE VITAL

A minor op-ed *NYTimes* piece 7/13 listing the ills of polling drew several letters-to-the-ed. When Dep't of Interior used a questionnaire mailed to hunters to investigate violations of wildlife regs, Cong. Joe Skeen (R-NM) attached an amendment to the Appropriations Bill barring such studies.

As if researchers didn't have enough barriers these days. But -- consider the points made in these cases:

"ACCUSATORY QUESTIONNAIRES"

Surveys went to hunters in an area where an endangered species wolf had been shot. They asked straightout whether respondents had killed the wolf or if they knew who did. Then essay answers were sought to these queries:

- "How do you feel now that you have completed this form?"
- Should we believe your answers to the questions?
- If your answer to the above question was yes, give one reason why

Interior withdrew the survey & apologized to the hunters.