

SOCIAL PROGRAMS CAN'T BE TESTED LIKE A NEW DRUG

They have "multiple components requiring constant mid-course corrections, the involvement of committed human beings, & flexible adaptation to local circumstances" –

i.e. too many variables to give one group a pill & another a placebo. As the authors make the case:

- "Insistence on irrefutable scientific proof of causal connections has become an obstacle to finding what works
- "Ironically, the methods considered most 'scientific' can actually defeat thoughtful assessments of promising (programs)
- "While the gurus insist on using only the most orthodox methods, we miss learning from bold & effective initiatives to restore neighborhood life, educate children & strengthen families"

Anyone who's ever applied for a program grant will appreciate the sentiments. This isn't a call for sloppy evaluation. Just the realization that proving causation isn't always possible – or necessary. Remember, there's precious little irrefutable, causal evidence that advertising or publicity works. But the correlative circumstantial evidence can be overwhelming. (Full text from [pr](#))

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

- ¶ **First conference devoted to pr measurement & evaluation** will be held in DC April 3 & 4. Speakers include Kathryn Collins (GM) on measurement of employee com'ns; Donna Coletti (Texas Instruments) on measuring pr contributions to org'l objectives; Dick Hyde (H&K) on measuring how issues change reputations, using the Olympics as a case; report from Commission on Measurement & Evaluation. (Info from IPR, 352/392-0280 or ipre@grove.ufl.edu.)
- ¶ **HR pros earn an average of \$80,000 – but top pay is \$550,000+**, finds survey by Abbott, Langer & Assoc (Crete, Ill). Median total cash compensation of training & OD directors is \$91,750; of corporate training directors \$103,212; OD specialists \$70,611. Big bucks go to compensation directors, \$130,450 – but after all they decide what everyone else gets paid. (More from www.abbott-langer.com)
- ¶ **Patch Adams gives powerful analogy for essentiality of teamwork** (did you see the movie, with Robin Williams?). Geese fly in their famed V formation because they attain 71% more distance that way. Here's how: 1) Flapping wings of the leaders provide aeronautic lift to the followers. 2) This is why they change leaders regularly, so the tired former leaders can move to the back & benefit from lift provided by others. 3) Followers honk continually to give positive reinforcement to the leaders who are making their flight easier by supplying them with lift.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. Harry Wilson, 82, chmn Fleishman-Hillard (St.Louis) from '74-'89. Among his career achievements is one that may help explain why the firm has been dominant in its hq city. As an F-H employee, Wilson was first

sec'y to Civic Progress – an org'n of CEOs of St.Louis' major companies. He worked with these CEOs many years on civic improvement projects. Joined firm in '53 when it had 20 employees.

COVERAGE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE PITS MEDIA RIGHTS AGAINST SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY; ISSUE APPLIES TO MANY TOPICS, SO ALL PRACTITIONERS CAN LEARN FROM OBSERVING THIS PROBLEM

School violence & media coverage of school violence – which is the chicken & which the egg? All across the US copycat threats – or real incidents & even tragedies – are occurring in apparent response to almost voyeuristic media interest in school violence. In the wake of another school shooting, this one of a 1st grader by her classmate, and in anticipation of some dark anniversaries, the question of how to mitigate press coverage of these incidents is more critical than ever. *To what other issues does this apply? Workplace violence, surely, & class action suits – but how much more?*

- Hiding behind the First Amendment, rather than acknowledging some social responsibility, many journalists refuse to admit any role in stimulating copycats ... but overwhelming evidence shows reportage is a cause, or the stimulus – especially graphic tv coverage

Judi Willis, comty rels dir, Mesa Public School District (Arizona), is one of many reporting that incidents in her area were directly linked to media coverage, according to no less a source than the children involved. "In two instances in my district, the kids said they got the idea from the media & just wanted to see what would happen," she told [pr](#). "At first the media covered each & every threat like flies on honey, even tho we were telling them they were exacerbating the problems."

- In response, reporters said they knew their coverage could have a negative role, but editors were making them cover the incidents. And editors were probably being pushed by publishers looking to raise circulation – journalism is a business with a bottom line

IS IT POSSIBLE TO PARTNER WITH THE PRESS?

Does media influence behavior? Perhaps not

directly, but it can have an impact. "When kids are exposed to these kinds of stories, it does enter into their consciousness on some level," NSPRA assoc dir Karen Kleinz told [pr](#). "As these stories are run, it puts the issues front & center in the public consciousness. How children internalize them has to do with development issues, how they perceive death, at what point they consider it final." She says the issue is difficult for school practitioners because you can't police the press. "It's a tough one."

- "You're trying to always look at things in terms of what is good for kids [or employees, customers or whomever], but you have to balance that against the First Amendment, how media put things out, & what their responsibility is to the community."
- Dialog with the local press is key.** "There has to be conversation between the community & the school district. It has to *be from the grass roots up to a national level*, rather than the other way around." Instead of regarding local media as adversaries, they should be considered partners in solving the problem. "Appeal to them as members of the community." But will that work?



- C. **The next few months are critical because of anniversaries** of Columbine, Oklahoma City bombing & Waco. She feels practitioners should find out if & how media plan to commemorate the anniversaries. "Find out what kinds of stories they're planning to do. You know there will be big stories attached to these anniversaries." Trick is doing this without stimulating stories.
- D. **This goes hand in hand with other anti-violence, issues anticipation programs** by school pr: working with police, monitoring students, determining who's at risk, paying attention to odd behaviors, making sure staff is up to speed on initiatives. "It's important for everyone in the schools & district to come to a meeting of the minds in a way that helps prevent copycat violence."

Kleinz considers the ides of April. "Spring is always a difficult time – kids are antsy anyway. Unfortunately, we also have a lot of these anniversaries." Therefore, she says, it's time to focus on prevention/intervention efforts. "We're encouraging NSPRA members to sit down with the media & decide how to deal with what probably will happen."

ISSUES ANTICIPATION IN PLACE

One area moving forward with issue management in anticipation of the Columbine anniversary is

River View Gardens School District (St. Louis County, Mo). David Clohessy, dir comty svcs, says his district is already working with reporters & police on managing it. "We fear some news outlet could run a 15-part series on 'Columbine: Could It Happen Here?'" He believes key pieces to getting responsible media coverage include:

1. **Making reporters responsible.** *St. Louis Dispatch* has a "public safety" team as well as an education team that has met with Clohessy's group about how to strategize coverage of the anniversary. He notes that while the role of newspapers is big, **tv coverage is more apt to influence kids' behavior.** "A couple of tv stations here have a policy of not reporting bomb threats unless there are extenuating circumstances." But is this a journalistic norm – or the exception?
2. **Safety message.** "We would like media to acknowledge the fact that, despite the spate of school shootings, they are the safest places for kids to be." Is that message sexy enough to get covered?
3. **Downplay coverage.** "We hope they delay coverage of the Columbine anniversary as late as possible so individuals (prone to violence) have less time to think about & prepare similar crimes"
4. **Interview real experts.** "Rather than whoever happens to be in your Rolodex. Make sure whoever you talk to understands how children feel, operate, & respond to these crimes"

"The Columbine anniversary is a real story, and it won't go away, but we are trying to think of ways it can be covered without inciting copycat crimes." His district is one of several developing a strategy.

A CASE WHERE YANKING THE FEEDBAG HELPED

Willis' district decided to discourage stories by refusing interviews. "Several of us in the larger district agreed to issue generic statements about copycat incidents that end with, 'This statement serves as the district's response. No interviews will be granted.'" Tho stonewalling is hard for many in pr who automatically fall back on old media myths (or their own years as journalists or degrees from j-schools), **the need is for strategy, not convention.** Willis says since the strategy has been in place, coverage has quieted.

PR OPPORTUNITY: FEDS STRIVE TO WEED OUT "CULTURE OF SECRECY" ABROAD & EMBRACE PR STRATEGIES; ROLE OF NGOs

The State Department needs to apply new marketing techniques & become media savvy to inform people abroad about the US & its policies, Evelyn Lieberman, undersec'y for public diplomacy & pa told a symposium. Recently, US Information Agency was merged into State. Lieberman was one of several officials who called for pr improvements in the way State handles itself. Key points:

1. **Engage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) & advocacy groups.** These groups are exerting increasing influence on attitudes everywhere via the internet & other info tech tools
2. **Think less of controlling information,** more of how best to deliver it
3. **Practice boldness, creativity.** Use programs to gain greater access to overseas media, opinion leaders, markets & a greater array of audiences than traditional diplomacy reaches
4. **People care less about what "official" spokespeople say.** And, they obtain info in their own ways, not in the way officials deliver it. "This means we must think about and develop better delivery mechanisms for public diplomacy messages & use ones appropriate for the audiences we are trying to reach," says Jamie Metz, sr coord for International Public Info, State Dep't
5. **Government info is small, shrinking part of the total global info environment.** "Practitioners need to think constantly about its relevance to their goals & to their audience," says Metz
6. **The info world is open & truthful,** without place for covert delivery of public information
7. **Credibility is everything.** Lose it & you lose your audience, generally for good
8. **Target appeals by polling audiences**
9. **"Enlist others to help us get the message out"**
10. **Support indigenous media.** "People on the ground have greater credibility with local audiences than we do"

Further proof big, secrecy-obsessed gov't agencies are changing: symposium also advocated risk taking, issues anticipation & long-range forecasting! Actually, any org'n anywhere can benefit from the list, with perhaps a few word changes here & there for relevance.

YANKELOVICH CALLS FOR SENSIBLE PROGRAM EVALUATION

Practitioners involved professionally or pro bono in social programs will be cheered by an op-ed written by Dan Yankelovich & a Harvard official. It makes the case for realistic evaluation of such efforts – instead of the mindless number crunching usually demanded by foundations, other funders, some academics & gov't.

- **Since behavioral pr is also a social intervention, their words apply as the field strives to create realistic evaluations**