- **Jobs that fall off résumés**: Look for omitted brief stints at jobs that didn't work out or didn't fit well with current career goals.

- **Reasons for leaving a job**: Identify and quietly interview knowledgeable former co-workers.

- **Secret companies**: Are you told about side companies? And might they tempt self-dealing issues?

- **Scrutiny by consumer and rights groups**: Have any of them targeted your prospective business partner?

- **Controversy in local politics**: Has revealing information been exposed? Have political enemies been made?

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ *Public Relations Research For Planning And Evaluation* is available from the Institute for Public Relations. Written by Walter Lindenmann, resource booklet gives an overall review of the entire research process with suggestions on how it can be managed effectively. It covers primary and secondary research; qualitative and quantitative research; research for strategic planning and program development; research for measurement and evaluation; and whether research can be done in-house or if outside specialists must be hired. Also includes a glossary of research terms and a list of selected references on the subject. "Without research, those who administer public relations, public affairs, promotional and related communications programs, and activities for their organizations would be operating in the dark, without any guidance or clear sense of direction," writes Lindenmann. (Complete text of study is available on IPR's Website: www.instituteforpr.com)

¶ **News Biases Not Only Shape Media Coverage** of important national issues, but are consciously used by campaign strategists *to influence public discourse through the framing of news*, argues Meg Spratt, doctoral candidate at U of Washington, in her paper "Shaping Social Discourse Through Strategic Information & News Narrative: A Case Study of Two Anti-Hate Education Campaigns." She looks at 1) Southern Poverty Law Center's "Teaching Tolerance" campaign and 2) Educators for Social Responsibility's "Resolving Conflict Creatively" program. Though both programs' stated goals are similar, materials used differed. The first uses dramatic personal stories of men and women who have played significant parts in the campaign against hate. The second features education and collective action as solutions to hate and intolerance. "The strategy of offering dramatic personal stories interacts with news biases favoring cultural drama and conflict.... By embracing the personal narratives, journalists frame these large societal issues in terms of individual heroes and a battle between good and evil," writes Spratt. "We see that the ritualistic nature of news limits political discourse frames, in this case favoring individual over collective causes of, and solutions to, racism and hate crimes." (For more info: msprat@u.washington.edu)

¶ **Company Holiday Celebrations Will Be More Meaningful This Year**, predicts The Herman Group. Open houses, potluck family gatherings and similar activities will be popular. "This approach is congruent with employers' concerns about building closer relationships with their employees, to hold on to them longer. This year has been filled with motivations for people to become closer, more cohesive. Wise employers will build on those natural feelings to create more opportunities for workers to come together, be together," advises the Herman Trend Alert. Also on the rise is sensitivity to others, engendering a feeling among workers that reaching out to help people in need should be a greater part of this holiday season. "Charities will see this support, in spite of the recent outpouring of support focused on the victims of the terrorist attacks. While people are thinking globally, they will act locally." (More from alert@herman.net)

WANT A BIGGER BOTTOM LINE? PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH, BECOME A TRUSTED MANAGER, ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION

According to management theorist David Maister (see <u>t&t</u> 7/16), there are two types of organizational cultures: those made up of "farmers" and those comprised of "hunters." The farmers sow their seeds and plant their crops – they don't receive any praise – their reward is a rich harvest. "If they stop doing their jobs, the farm won't survive." The hunters go out and compete against one another to kill buffalo, and when there are no more buffalo they go after cattle, then birds. "Twenty years ago, I tried very hard to be even handed and say both types of organizations work," Maister told <u>prr</u>. "Now I have to say, the game is over, the farmers have won."

Maister bases his conclusions in part on a recent study which, he says, validates what practitioners – and companies themselves – have known for years: **a profitable company is filled with motivated employees who work as a team.** "It's great to have hard data confirming this," he notes. His research consists of surveys and interviews with 5,500 people from 139 offices in 29 global companies. Not only do results make the profitability/employee satisfaction link, they also point to the difference a raised level of satisfaction makes: **20% improvement in employee satisfaction results in a financial performance increase of 42%.** "*Management is not about systems and processes. It's about driving employee energy, excitement, enthusiasm and passion.*"

Surveys asked employees to rate how well they think their office is doing in: a) quality client service, b) quality of work, c) market reputation, d) long-term client relationships, e) profitability, f) growth, g) quality of the workplace, h) innovation and creativity, i) collaboration and teamwork, j) skill, and k) career development. Financial performance was assessed according to margin, profit per employee, two-year growth in revenues and two-year growth in findings. **Also, in-depth interviews with managers and employees show that success is more linked to character, skill and coaching capabilities of managers, rather than specific systems or strategies.**

> "The companies that make the most money are those in which employees act in an extremely collaborative way." These key attitudes emerge:
>
> - "Client satisfaction is a top priority at our firm."
> - "We have no room for those who put personal agenda ahead of the interests of clients or the office."
> - "Those who contribute the most to the overall success of the office are the most highly rewarded."
> - "Management gets the best work out of everybody in the office."
> - "Here you are required to learn and develop new skills."
> - "We invest a significant amount of time in things that will pay off in the future."
> - "People in our office always treat others with respect."
> - "The quality of supervision on client projects is uniformly high."
> - "The quality of the professionals in our office is as high as can be expected."

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES DRIVE FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Startling among the findings is the assertion that strategies and systems are not as effective in achieving profitability as is management being able to engage employees and improve their attitudes. Indeed, **employee attitudes drive financial results, not vice versa**. Also:

1. About 23% of all the variations in financial performance can be explained by the degree to which employees agree with the statement, "We have an uncompromising determination to achieve excellence in all that we do."

2. Over half of all variations in profit performance can be explained by 9 key attitudes (see box on page one), none of which have to do with technical skills or financial acuity. "The world is filled with people, whether you're dealing with clients or employees. It doesn't help to be smart or right – it's important but not sufficient."

TRUST IN MANAGEMENT FACTORS SIGNIFICANTLY

Employees at *high performing firms* **trust their manager,** believing she or he acts in the interest of the group rather than for personal superstardom. Furthermore, they believe management practices what it preaches, with no disconnect between the manager's actions and the firm's overall philosophy. Similarly, firms aren't seen as compromising their standards when bringing in new hires. Employees at successful firms also tend to feel their potential is being realized and that compensation is being managed fairly.

LESS TIME STRATEGIZING, MORE TIME HONING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

According to Maister, companies know this piece of intelligence even without the data. So why don't they work on building better employee attitudes? "Most offices have managers who don't really manage. They may spend hours on strategy, systems and processes." He says that while they may be able to explain multiple financial reports, they are not energizing their people. "All of the systems and processes and strategies do not impact employee attitudes anywhere near the extent managers do…. It's the manager's job to inspire, cajole, exhort, nag, support, critique, praise, encourage, confront and comfort as individual people struggle to live their work lives according to high standards. The primary quality is the courage to manage and enforce the standards that are preached."

Managers need to a) commit to developing people, b) be able to regularly demonstrate the courage to follow their beliefs in all situations, and c) take the long view rather than focus on short-term gratification. No fan of gentle encouragement, he believes managers should raise the bar for employees and hold them to standards of team playing. "They should be told, 'there are no individuals here.'" He applauds one firm in which no one goes home for the day until he or she walks through the offices asking those who are still at their desks whether or not they need help. "You can see why this would be a place where there is tremendous enthusiasm, where deadlines are met and where money is made." (More information from Michael Austin, 212/254-6698; michael@austinpr.com)

> A cue for PR: "The tragedy of everybody's professional education is that we tend to have overdeveloped intellects and underdeveloped emotional skills. When we receive our training, whether it is inside a university or inside companies, **no one actually teaches us how to help somebody else understand. It's an almost neglected field and yet it is key to being helpful.**"

IN WAKE OF ATTACKS, SOCIOLOGIST PREDICTS DEATH OF POST - MODERN IRONY, CHANGING MESSAGE STRATEGIES

Seinfeld stealing a loaf of rye from an old woman so George won't have to attend a dinner party empty-handed? Letterman throwing a watermelon from a skyscraper? T'ain't funny anymore, says sociologist Jonathan Pontell. Pontell told prr that the September attacks signal a change in humor, a shift in the winds, the death of post-modern irony. National Post columnist Andrew Coyne agrees that "the Age of Irony died" on September 11th. Same said by Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter. "Things that were considered fringe and frivolous are going to disappear."

"When the comedians came back on television, a week or so after September 11th, it was obvious that the cultural sands had shifted under their feet. The same things were no longer funny," notes Pontell. He says the type of humor, which was championed for years by the late boomers, was already on its way out. The attacks accelerated the process.

> "These are very complicated concepts and not easily bottom-lined," Pontell told prr. Essentially, "postmodern" can be described as "no universally applicable values by which the truth can be determined." "Post-modern irony" seems to be a celebration of chaos. "It's Seinfeld, and the type of humor typically shown by David Letterman." Laughing at convention, and at people who are earnest. Often these people don't realize they're being made fun of, and if they do, they don't understand why.

MUST MESSAGE STRATEGIES CHANGE?

Internet strategist Jim Meskauskas says that in recent years, communicators have crafted messages to be a) personally significant through well-targeted placements in niche media, or b) tongue-in-cheek, self-deprecating, ironic narratives aimed at just the right psychographic. "How is the industry going to cope with the enormity of what has happened? How can Procter & Gamble associate diapers with security and smiles, given that we're facing such uncertainty?"

But others say eulogies for irony are premature. Vancouver-based journalist Geoff Olson thinks pop culture is by nature shallow. "In a media landscape of 10-second soundbites, there's little place for anything deeper." And the irreverent Onion.com, a satirical online newspaper, managed to spoof events with impunity a week after the attack. One headline reads, "Not Knowing What Else To Do, Woman Bakes American-Flag Cake." Before putting the issue out, staff was nervous. "It was kind of a tense few days while we waited for it to come out," says writer John Krewson. "Some people on staff didn't think we should do it at all. Once we had an issue mocked up, we decided to go ahead." The site received 400,000 hits on the day it came out, double its normal volume.

HOW TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES IN RÉSUMÉS

When hiring a person or entering a business relationship, it's important to spot fibs, fabrications, and cover-ups. James Mintz, who performs investigative services, lists 19 lies and scams in an *Across the Board* article, "What Are They Hiding?"

Many of these misstatements relate to financial and legal matters, such as bankruptcy, indebtedness, tax liens and disputes, accusations and judgments in lawsuits, and past criminal trouble. But some can be used when hiring someone for your department or firm: