

¶ **“Marketers Of Products And Services Must Understand The Complexities Of Spiritual Patriotism** to thrive in today’s marketplace,” writes Chuck Kelly, pres. of Kerker, a Mpls-based marketing communications firm. “Spiritual patriotism is about pride, loyalty, caring and believing. It signifies the shift away from the ‘dot-com era’ – away from the days when we measured our success by the number of stock options we possessed. Today’s patriotism spans family, friends and country. What knits us together is the spiritual quality of these relationships. The thrill of owning things is now passé. Sharing is what it’s all about,” Kelly writes in the 11/18 *Star Tribune*. He describes the AT&T Wireless ad as effectively “identifying unforgettable ways to emotionally connect the product with the consumer”: “The music is brilliant. Names of cities from around the world appear on screen. Each city is accompanied by the name of a street from that city. At the end, the words ‘The power to unite, stronger than the power to divide’ appear onscreen.” Communications that “meet these needs and wants will be heard and succeed as long as the product [or action] measures up to the message.” (Copy of article from www.startribune.com/stories/535/829514.html)

¶ **Media Relations Requires Building A Relationship With The Media.** When 32 journalists were asked what pr professionals do right, only 3 said “build a relationship.” 61% said pr pros don’t know the publication or the reporter. The study, conducted by Florida International University (Miami) pr students, is based on interviews with 32 South Florida broadcast and print journalists – possibly the “first study of its kind to be conducted here since 1985,” notes Professor Bill Adams. “We hope this study will provide helpful information pr practitioners can use to **improve and strengthen their relationships** with the media.” Other findings:

- 70% say releases are average to well written.
- Journalists are looking for: the facts (5 Ws), 70%; interesting subject, 23%; news value, 19%; relevance, 13%; time value, 13%; local angle, 7%.
- Only 1 said pr pros block access to the CEO.
- And only 2 said pr pros have a hidden agenda.
- Respondents commend pr pros for knowing deadlines (39%) and being straight to the point (32%).
- 68% prefer to receive their information via e-mail – corroborated by a finding in another poll by The Cherenson Group where 81% of its respondents prefer e-mail.

¶ **Physical Touch Is A Valuable Means Of Communicating Support**, say Josephine Lee and Laura Guerrero in *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (Aug 2001), but used indiscriminately in the workplace, it can raise the specter of sexual harassment. Studies show that where someone is touched (the face is a more volatile region than the forearm) and who does the touching (women are perceived as affectionate, trusting and happy; men as sexually motivated) contribute to the perception of the nonverbal message.

WHO’S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. St. Paul (MN) Area Chapter of the American Red Cross names David Therkelsen its new CEO. He was chief marketing officer

for American Red Cross-North Central Blood Services since ’93, managing business relationships with 144 hospitals & other customers in MN, IA, WI & SD.

COMPANY LEARNS BOTTOMLINE VALUE OF SOFT DISCIPLINES – CUSTOMER CARE, EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT, COMMUNICATION

Four years ago when Eddie Mayfield, pres., Electronic Maintenance Associates (EMA), commissioned a survey of his customers, results were dismal. “Only 73% said they were ‘very satisfied’ with their most recent experience with EMA,” he says. “That meant nearly 30% of our customers were in some manner unhappy with the company.” Mayfield implemented changes in communication strategies – changes he credits with lifting customer satisfaction levels to more than 98%.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO CUSTOMERS’ HEARTS

This is basic public relationship building but too often neglected. EMA provides technical services, primarily repairs and retrofits on industrial and electronic controls. The survey findings indicated that problems weren’t related to technical performance, but were almost exclusively about communication issues. Due dates were missed and customers weren’t notified. Small problems were allowed to fester into larger issues. Information that should have been relayed to customers was either nonexistent, or inaccessible to the people charged with calling them. Employee morale was deteriorating and customer frustration was increasing. EMA implemented two major changes:

1. **A tracking system to provide timely, accurate information** to employees about customer jobs and orders. “The first attempt was a disappointing failure,” says Mayfield. “After spending over \$50,000 on a system that only served to exacerbate the situation, one of the employees came up with a simple database that served as a shell for what finally became a first-rate system.”

Aftermath or Maintenance: This is where reputations are sealed, as shown by the classic TARP study that satisfied customers tell 4 or 5 others – while dissatisfied customers whose cases are not resolved tell 10 (pr 11/9/81). [And with the advent of e-mail, it’s likely complaint numbers have risen.]

Two pitfalls are 1) complaint handling – finding ways to make the situation delightfully right; 2) finding ways to identify those who are not really dissatisfied but their expectations were not met. The latter stimulates customer defections – very costly to your bottom line.

An opportunity is to stimulate third party endorsements – delighted customers, ideally opinion leaders, who take *your* case to *their* groups.

We must indelibly impress on the entire organizational family the body of powerful research supporting customer delight – starting with the study showing that 70% of customers choose you not because of your product/service (which they know they can also get elsewhere) but because of **how they are treated!**

– Pat Jackson (pr 4/14/97)

2. A new culture at EMA, moving from a purely technical one, where “soft-touch” issues like communications took a back seat to engineering and technical issues. “This was accomplished by hiring customer service managers, by publishing standards of customer service, and by constant coaching and insistence that everyone follow them.”

Mayfield began to hold employees accountable for customer service issues; in the past, he had held them accountable for technical issues. “Slowly, step-by-step, as the culture began to change, customer satisfaction levels began to rise.”

The company boasts the best customer satisfaction level within its industry. “Morale is at an all-time high, and EMA has been able to remain viable in a field where others are either going under or seeing their business deteriorate.” (For more information contact, Electronic Maintenance Associates, 5952 Peachtree Industrial Blvd, #9, Norcross, GA 30071, or <http://www.emainc.net>)

IF WOMEN DOMINATE THE PROFESSION, WHY DO GENDER DISCREPANCIES PERSIST?

“That there are gender issues is no longer news in pr,” researcher Linda Aldoory, U of Maryland, told *pr*. “Finding out *why* they exist is very exciting and helpful.” Funded by PRSA, Aldoory and fellow researcher Elizabeth Toth (Syracuse U) sought to find out: a) gender discrepancies in the public relations field and b) the factors driving them. The issue is intriguing because women have dominated pr in number since the late 80s. “The unique presence of gender discrepancies in pr, where women are currently the majority, needs to be addressed more seriously and empirically. The liberal feminist approach – which supported increasing the number of women to make women equal to men, has not worked in pr.” Existing literature indicates:

1. **Hiring.** Women made up 44% of the profession in 1980, 70% in 2000, which is a disproportionate increase compared to other professions. Theories explaining the increase include affirmative action, sex-specific demand, a surplus of women, female intensive industries, flexible hours, fewer sex barriers, and a gender ideology favoring women’s social skills.
2. **Salaries.** Men make 45% more annually, according to a ’95 salary survey of pr pros by Simmons Market Research. Researchers quote *pr*’s ’98 salary survey finding of median salary for men at \$72K, \$16,000 more than women. Aside from discrimination, interpretations include age (women in pr are younger), experience, type of organization, and pr roles.
3. **Promotion.** While women hold 70% of the jobs, percentage doesn’t hold in higher-level positions. In ’97, 36% of women were managers in marketing, advertising and pr. Of the specialists, 60% are women. Literature suggests this might be because women occupy technical (e.g., writing) roles. In 2000, 3/4s of women surveyed in PRSA membership say there’s still a glass ceiling.

THE NEW RESEARCH

Focus groups revealed a myriad of distinct factors that contribute to explaining the gender discrepancies:

- **Hiring:** a) gender discrimination in hiring seemingly no longer exists because of the large influx of women in the profession; b) men are being hired in preference to women because they are rare in the field; and c) men are hired because clients want male representatives. “Although the last two factors could be seen as political or biased, neither the men nor the women found problems with these practices.”

- **Salary:** a) skill differentials – especially negotiation tactics; b) socialization, on the part of both men and women; c) gender discrimination and sexism; d) women attempting to balance work and family limits salary levels; e) recruitment and retention efforts for men lead to higher salaries; f) historical parity that is difficult to regain; g) salary discrepancy not a problem.
- **Promotion:** a) socialization; b) gender discrimination and sexism; c) unrealistic expectations of women who balance family and work; d) biological determinism; e) skills differentials; f) favoritism toward men due to low numbers; g) type of organization influences access to promotions.

Findings show that the disparities lie mostly in the structural demands of organizations and society. For example, there is a lot of travel required in pr and women with children are less likely to want that task. There is also the stigma within organizations that if a woman has a baby, she won’t return to work, or that she will have to balance two jobs – homemaker and practitioner. Aldoory says her study is the first in-depth study to delve into factors driving the disparity. “The research gave greater breadth as well as depth to the validity of existing gender discrepancies in pr.” More importantly, however, the factors that were highlighted and refined here are the first steps in theory building, moving gender research in pr from descriptive to explanatory scholarship. “I felt we extended what was done already and it’s important to men as well as women. It’s definitely not just a woman’s issue.” (For more information, contact Aldoory @ 301/405-6528 or la74@umail.umd.edu.)

SHARING INFORMATION, RAISING TRUST LEVELS THROUGH FACE - TO - FACE CONTACTS SEEN AS PART OF SOLUTION TO 9/11

The F.B.I. is being urged to adopt a N.Y.P.D. information-sharing tool called Compstat – designed to share intelligence “on a grand scale” and has been credited with reducing major crime in the city by nearly 70% during its 8 years in place. “Compstat...is totally counter to F.B.I. culture, which too narrowly defines the ‘need to know.’ This approach has been effective in many cities precisely because all the players are compelled to meet, talk and question each other regularly,” says Daniel Oates in 11/5/2001 *NYTimes* editorial.

Face-to-face contacts can also work to increase trust levels between agents and local police. Requiring new agents to “spend time in field training with detectives in major cities to see how local officers work” is being urged along with “joint task forces merging police and federal agents.” Again, the far-reaching importance of communication, especially face-to-face, is illustrated. (Copy of editorial from www.nytimes.com/2001/11/05/opinion)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

- ¶ **Is Humor The Way For Managers To Reach Employees?** A little “benign buffoonery”? “Don’t get beaten by your own shtick,” advises corporate communications writer John Mackenzie. For example, a field sales force may see its management only once or twice a year. They want to know that those running the store have a clear vision of where the company’s going and what it will take to get it there. “Giving them Bozo the clown doesn’t do a hell of a lot to convince a sales force their future is in good hands. Confident managers are secure enough to bypass situations that often succeed in converting respect to ridicule. It’s usually the uncertain manager who clutches at these moments in an attempt to create a public charisma that personal performance has never provided,” says Mackenzie who has been creating corporate communication elements for 30 years (www.thewritingworks.com)