

IT'S NOT ABOUT SPIN

Organizations must actually *perform* properly to regain the public's trust," says Adams. Government threats of severe penalties won't bring about regulatory compliance because "proper performance comes down to personal ethics and the building of two-way communication and mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. **Self regulation and the establishment of meaningful internal codes of ethics** will be a crucial part of regaining public confidence." (More from Adams at prprof@aol.com)

"The corporation, as we have known it, will survive and prevail in its mission only with a **new dedication to, and interpretation of, business ethics, corporate social responsibility and public trust,**" writes John Paluszek, sr counsel at Ketchum, in an article in the July/Aug *Impact* from the Public Affairs Council. In his article, Paluszek demonstrates how the scandals provide a strong business case for corporate social responsibility.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE PR PROFESSIONAL TO BECOME THE CHIEF REPUTATION OFFICER

"Today's crisis of confidence in business is akin to an uncontrolled wildfire, but calling in public relations help now to put out the blaze has little effect. Prevention is the key," believes Aaron Boles, who practices corporate & legal communication with National Public Relations (Toronto). He offers these thoughts on the public relations professional becoming the **Chief Reputation Officer (CRO)**:

- "PR professionals have been important agents of change as the antenna and conscience for their organizations, driving much of what we now call corporate social responsibility. It's now time to go a step further. Just as companies employ lawyers and legal compliance officers to ensure their standards and practices fall within the law, so they should **bring public relations professionals to the boardroom table and hold them accountable as guardians of the public trust.**
- The CRO would **fulfill the promise of corporate self-regulation**, which is to vet the ideas of management and to steer clear of doing things that are wrong and that the public will not tolerate. Fundamentally, the CRO acts as a bridge between a corporation's natural self-interest and the greater, seemingly forgotten, public interest.
- The CRO must be someone with **autonomy, authority, business experience and communications expertise.**
- The aggregate effect, over time, of doing the right thing and letting it be known, will be a **growing reserve of goodwill capital** – a stockpile of public confidence. The public will grant the benefit of the doubt to a company with a track record of ethical behavior.

The remaining question, he says, is whether business leaders will take up the challenge. "**If they don't, the government and regulators certainly will.**" (More from Boles at 416/848-1450; www.national.ca)

¶ **Of related interest:** John Budd, in this week's [plain talk](#), addresses pr's role in today's business climate: "Let's not be intimidated by the precarious times we're in. It's disturbing to have our budgets slashed while we watch clients, or bosses, parade before the public, figuratively in handcuffs. But this is our venue, if ever pr is to be problem-solver. We should be responding aggressively and positively to the circumstances beleaguering our companies."

STATE OF MARYLAND USES MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO AFFECT BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

The State of Maryland has declared war against smoking, tying the campaign in with its cancer prevention and screening efforts. As part of a settlement agreement by attorneys general in 46 states against the tobacco industry, Maryland was awarded \$1 billion over 10 years for smoking prevention programs. The state created the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF) in 2000 to make sure the money is used to fund anti-smoking projects.

Governor Parris Glendening, who is championing the initiative, was diagnosed with melanoma last year and treated. His experience, which involved early detection, points to the goals of the \$14 million, 17-month social marketing program: 1) to prevent tobacco use, especially among teens, and 2) to prevent cancer and provide screening and treatment. "The reason the governor has put these two things together is that most of the cancer is caused by smoking," Caressia Hussein, dir, CRF (Baltimore) told [pr](#). "Nicotine gets into the cells; we don't know how it works, but we know there's a connection."

CAMPAIGN'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Every aspect of the campaign embraces one or more of the following principles:

- **Support the person, hate the act:** Campaign encourages people to take action, while recognizing that smokers and tobacco users are not villains, but victims of an industry that markets an addiction.
- **Make it personal:** This is a movement of, for and by the people of Maryland. Campaign focuses on actual Maryland residents and locations. Many aspects of the campaign will spread from the grassroots level out for maximum impact.
- **Hits close to home:** Research revealed that Marylanders feel a strong sense of respect and responsibility for their communities, where groups often band together to fight a problem or help others in need. This attitude is key to personalizing the risk of tobacco use and using community responsibility as the cornerstone of the message.

PREVENTION INVOLVES COALITION BUILDING, MESSAGES

Hussein says studies show most people start smoking between the ages of 11 and 13. Therefore, target publics include adolescents, pre-adolescents, and those around them (teachers, daycare providers, college administrators, cigarette vendors). "Much of it is coalition building. We provide the funds to the 23 counties and Baltimore City, which in turn build coalitions with community groups." For example, counties decide how to work with schools and they talk to vendors about moving cigarettes to the back of the counter. "We're also working with Univ of Maryland law schools so counties can decide for themselves how they want to clamp down on abuses such as selling to minors, etc."

Message campaign "Smoking Stops Here" involves a website (www.SmokingStopsHere.com), ads, billboards, and education activities. The "Here" in the slogan encourages individuals to **take a stand against tobacco use in a way that is personally meaningful to them**, such as a parent choosing not to smoke with kids in the car, a teenager turning down a cigarette at a party, or a business owner supporting a smoke-free workplace, says Georges Benjamin, Secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "The examples of 'Here' are virtually limitless, as is our potential to make a difference."

Tobacco companies are well known for distributing "cool" promotional items to youth and adults alike. Since this is a **counter-marketing campaign, it is essential that it, too, include promotional items, referred to as Here Gear**. These items include: messenger bags, baseball caps, mousepads, car license plate frames, lapel pins, desktop organizers, t-shirts, buttons, clear static window decals. *Here Gear* is just one tactic used to support the grassroots community outreach and education activities.

SMOKERS UNHAPPY

Maryland has one of the nation's strongest bans on smoking in the workplace and has raised the cigarette tax. Montgomery County has even banned it from public places. Critics include restaurants, especially those near the DC line, which have lost business to patrons who flock to establishments over the border. The Village of Friendship Heights, where DC and Maryland meet, put forth an initiative to ban smoking outside – on public streets – an idea that was quickly squelched amid a flood of talk show call ins, letters to the editor, etc. "Even non-smokers are uncomfortable with how far this is going," said one talk show host.

But Maryland brags that **its efforts are bearing fruit, with teenage smoking rates declining** dramatically faster than the national average: a 28% decline among 8th graders and a 31% decline among 10th graders, according to a recent Maryland Adolescent Survey administered by the Maryland State Department of Education. This compares to a national average decline of 2.5% and 2% respectively. (For more info, contact the Governor's press office, 410/974-2316)

EMPLOYEES WANT STRONGER SECURITY MEASURES

In the aftermath of September 11th, workers want employers to build tighter security at the office. According to Harris Interactive, more than half of all employees believe their employers should have made identification procedures for entering their workplace more strict, but only a third report this has happened. Over 50% believe tighter procedures should have been adopted for accessing their employers' computer systems, but only a quarter report this has taken place. Half of all employees want to have more detailed background checks on new job applicants, but only 1 in 9 says this has occurred.

The survey, conducted by Harris for Privacy & American Business (PAB), consisted of interviews online with a nationwide sample of 1,258 employed adults. The surveys took place about six months after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

PRIVACY ISSUE SECONDARY

Though privacy issues remain priority, safety comes first. "While employees at both private and government workplaces want to see due process followed and privacy boundaries respected, large majorities want wider background checks and stronger access-security measures carried out at their

workplaces," says PAB pres Alan Westin. "Three fourths of **employees express high confidence that their employers can be trusted to increase security in a proper way.**" Key findings:

- 81% of employees say they would be **willing to have ID cards issued by their employers**, with photos, a fingerprint (or other biometric identifier); 44% say they would be *very* willing; only 7% are "not at all willing" to have this;
- 36% of employees say their employers have made **identification procedures more strict** for people entering their workplaces;
- 26% say **tighter procedures for accessing employers' computer systems** have been adopted;
- 11% report **more detailed checks on new job applicants** are being done;
- 7% say **more detailed checks on current employees** are being done.

SECURITY – EVERYONE WANTS IT

The proportion of employees who think their employers should be doing more security checks is far higher than the numbers who report that their employers are doing them. Three out of four measures are supported by just over 50% of all employees. This support is strong among both managers and non-managers, and even stronger among union than non-union workers, perhaps because they tend to work for large employers where more of these practices are being implemented, and where support for them is stronger. (For more information, contact Nancy Wong at 585/214-7316.)

PR ROLE IS TO HELP ORGANIZATIONS PERFORM ETHICALLY AND BE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

During these turbulent times, pr pros are called to be "ethical catalysts for change" within their organizations, according to Bill Adams, assoc prof of adv'g & pr, Florida International Univ (North Miami). It's more important than ever, he notes, for public relations managers to take the ethical high road to establish and maintain organizational reputation during the current "crisis of confidence" in institutions – ranging from business to politics to religion and sports.

PR'S "CRUCIAL" ROLE

"We must be true 'issues managers' and ask how the current environment impacts our organizations' relationships with employees, shareholders, the media and communities in which we operate." PR must be vigilant in these areas and *counsel management* to:

- Establish early warning systems & use management to communicate these signals;
- See that the organization is transparent in all its relationships and is willing to change and admit shortcomings;
- Encourage a pro-active (not defensive) stance;
- Show what the org'n is doing in the public interest to build mutual understanding.

Questions that could signal problems ahead:

1. Is the organization attentive to the public interest?
2. Does the organization value communications as a management function?
3. Are there clear mission and/or value statements?
4. Does management follow through on stated goals and objectives?