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ISSUE ANTICIPATION & PERCEPTION
MANAGEMENT**

- I. My thesis is that 90% of the issues that beset our organization occur because:
 1. We create them ... by not monitoring carefully enough our operations & policies vis-à-vis opinion;
 2. we over-respond to those not self-created ... giving them credibility they often do not merit.

- II. There are four types of issues:
 1. latent
 2. emerging
 3. hot
 4. fallout

- III. What is an issue?
 - Something which affects large numbers of people;
 - has at least two opposing sides;
 - emotionally charged
 1. A “crisis” is an issue that got out of hand:
 - turning point
 - potentially damaging
 - life or death struggle/conflict
 - sense of anxiety, dread
 - adversarial atmosphere

Issue Anticipation (con't)

2. Remember that a crisis, like any process of change, seeks a resolution; tension seeks to be released.

3. Resolution involves mediation. There are 5 questions which need to be answered:
 - Can I persuade you to change your mind?
 - Are there points on which I am willing to change my mind?
 - Are there points which can be dismissed?
 - Are there points which we can all agree?
 - Are there points on which we are in total and apparently unalterable disagreement?

4. Don't wait for these 3 key questions to be asked by someone else, usually a journalist, politician or activist:
 - What really happened?
 - Why didn't you tell me about it sooner?
 - Why didn't this get solved before it became an issue?

Issue Anticipation (con't)

- IV. Four guidelines for communication planning;
1. Public relationships must be recognized as part of management team activities.
 2. Agreement on a communications plan by the team is crucial.
 3. Avoid “state of siege” mentality.
 4. Develop third party advocates, your natural allies but also (better still) unnatural allies.
- V. Four behavioral sciences criteria you can use for your screening:
1. from sociology; the rule of abuse
 2. from psychology; the rule of participation
 3. from psychology; the rule of rewards
 4. from anthropology; the rule of cheerleading, to remind & remotivate
- VI. Strategies for handling controversy:

Douse the fire – avoid confrontation when

- issues are complex
- issue will divert organization from primary objectives
- the opposition group is weak or underfunded
- you're prepared, but want them seen as aggressors

Issue Anticipation (con't)

Fan the flames – seek or allow confrontation when it will

- place important issues on the agenda;
- attract attention to subjects the public has ignored;
- divert attention from other problems or provide a scapegoat;
- reveal opponents' true colors (self-seeking, shallow, etc.)

- So:**
1. Blanket the debate by developing positive actions;
 2. develop slogans, terminology & other semantic tools that let you take charge of the issues;
 3. always inform internal audiences;
 4. never indulge in name-calling.

Other “to do’s”:

1. Stick to the issue at hand;
2. be able to admit you are wrong;
3. don't be afraid to alter position;
4. find good things to say about the other side;
5. present your views in a non-defensive matter;
6. never ridicule;
7. rise above the opposition;
8. don't just oppose.

Issue Anticipation (con't)

VII. Can information campaigns change public opinion?

- Opinions tend to be based more on perceptions than facts.
- Recent studies show no correlation between knowledge and direction of attitude.
- Studies also show impact of knowledge appears to be strongest on intensity of attitudes.

Summary: The more media covers an issue, the more negative opinion becomes, even if reporting is accurate and positive; perception rules, NOT facts.

The media cannot solve the issue(s), so don't fight it out in the media.