

Chapter 11:

ISSUE ANTICIPATION / MANAGEMENT

“Issues can be anticipated, but once they explode, managing them is very difficult if not impossible,” wrote Pat. He recommended having a historical perspective and constantly scanning the horizon for latent issues that could emerge into major headaches. “Employ as many people in your organization as possible using formal issue anticipation systems to spot and report potential issues that could impact your organization sooner or later,” he advised.

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FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS, ORWELL'S YEAR MAY BE TENSE CONSIDERING THE MASSIVE, OFTEN HIDDEN ISSUES TO BE NEGOTIATED

Edward L. Bernays has been saying for a decade that to do their jobs, public relations practitioners must be "**societal technicians . . . with the skills to bring about accommodation . . . in the court of public opinion.**" Whether your job is anticipating issues, helping to manage their impact or communicating about them, 1984 looks like a year with plenty of hot topics to practice on.

EMERGING ISSUES THAT AFFECT EVERYONE: EQUAL PAY IS THE BIG SURPRISE

With gigantic public relations and other ramifications, equal pay was rammed to the head of the list by a federal court that has ordered Washington state to end wage discrimination against women employees immediately. External publics may be upset at the \$70 million annual cost plus \$1 billion back pay and benefits – to be borne by taxpayers. For practitioners, dealing with internal disruptions in morale and productivity may be the bigger headache. Especially if the practitioner is female and may have, or be perceived to have, a vested interest.

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees believes the ruling may affect 83,000 government units across the US. Aside from male (and female) chauvinists who may feel their position is under attack, sheer effort of communicating the change in philosophy – and gaining acceptance of it – appears huge. Ruling goes beyond equal pay for the same job. It eliminates so-called women's jobs. Under that classification, women at the top of the secretarial pay scale got less than men performing less-skilled jobs washing walls or driving trucks. The new standard is "comparable worth."

Even if the ruling is overturned on appeal, this long-smouldering issue will not recede – especially in an election year when other women's issues are in the spotlight. One likely target is the field of public relations itself. Every salary study shows discrepancies between male and female wages. As *pr*'s Annual Survey of the Profession points out, "With the 1983 median salary for men at \$45,000 and women's at \$30,000, there's a lot of explaining to do. Our sample of 1,060 comprises 70% men and 30% women. The women are younger than the men, have spent fewer years in pr and hold fewer top level positions. These factors provide **some** answers to the salary differential."

But 1980 census found a woman with a college degree earns only 62% as much as a male college graduate, on average.

A job for futurists: If women's pay catches up, will that stimulate or repress the daycare movement? Will employers still find it valuable to sponsor or otherwise be involved in childcare for employees? Or will higher wages make it more attractive to use other facilities or different means of caring for children of working parents, especially single mothers?

(more....)

HOW A TOP MANAGER VIEWS THE TASK

"We now live in the most powerful, most complex system ever known. It is made up of countless interacting institutions and organizations. Will this conglomeration of elements drift ever faster without guidance, or will some sort of new consensus evolve?"

"This depends on how managers of our organizations **see the patterns** evolving, how they **shape their policies** to serve these patterns, and how well they **communicate** to achieve understanding and support.

"These three factors are the elements of public relations. Recognition of their importance is behind the rapid growth of public relations and public affairs in the consideration of managers." – Gaylord Freeman, honorary chairman, First National Bank of Chicago, in the foreword to *Lesly's Public Relations Handbook*.

ANOTHER SLEEPER: CORPORATE TAXES

"Unitary" tax systems are one way beleaguered state governments can increase their income without asking voters to ante up. California started it years ago. Unitary rates make it difficult for multinationals or conglomerates to use bookkeeping entries for inter-subsidiary dealings as a way to avoid taxation. Corporations are taxed on their worldwide profits, not just the portion accountants might allocate to a particular state. On December 5, US Supreme Court refused to consider the matter, leaving unitary taxation intact.

About two-dozen states use the method. With federal taxes on corporations reduced under the Reagan administration, the tax fight shifts to the states. This development could stir a confrontation between dollar-starved states, booming companies and human service providers staggering under growing caseloads and dwindling budgets.

Some far-sighted companies favor the unitary tax. Caterpillar Corporation says, "Regardless of the revenue impact, the most important consideration is this: The combined method is the fairest, most accurate method."

"FRONTS": AN ISSUE AGAIN?

Same day Supreme Court passed over unitary tax case, it decided another California matter which impinges on public relations ethics. It is okay, ruled the justices, for broadcasters to air public issue commercials that do **not** identify the true sponsor.

Tobacco industry had run ads in the 1980 battle over separate smoking areas in public places. Proponents protested the ads urged defeat of the initiative without revealing the industry paid for them.

This appears to be another extension of "corporate free speech" – but questionable. PRSA's Code of Professional Standards is clearly against such practice. **Article 8** mandates "identify(ing) publicly the name of the client or employer on whose behalf any public communication is made."

And **Article 9** bans "(making) use of any individual or organization purporting to serve or represent an announced cause, or purporting to be independent or unbiased, but actually serving an undisclosed special or private interest of a member, client or employer."

Another difference between law and pr: it may be legal but that doesn't make it **ethical**.

SPILOVER: SOMEONE ELSE'S ISSUES WITH MEANING FOR US ALL

Who has the toughest public relations job these days: 1) **Manville Corporation and Continental Airlines**, who are attempting to use Chapter 11 bankruptcies for purposes far different than normal (Manville to escape huge damage claims from victims of asbestos poisoning, Continental to get rid of its unions)?

2) **Electric utilities** with nukes now coming on line, that spent years touting nuclear power as the inexpensive alternative and now must ask for gigantic rate increases when the opposite turns out to be the case (e.g. Long Island Lighting requested 56% ... then settled for 12% ... which in itself must be a nightmare for pr staff to explain)?

3) **Telephone companies**, any telephone company, trying to make us understand the effects of deregulation?

It's a tough call, but Ma Bell's practitioners may win the prize. Not one of their publics is really prepared for the outcome: not shareholders, not employees, certainly not customers. Since even the companies can't be sure, what do you communicate? Because consumers and stockholders will be deluged by competing phone services and brokers seeking their business, the internal audience is predictably the hard one. How do you change behavior patterns from monopolistic to competitive?

Mountain Bell chartered a task force of longtime managers who really know the company to look at the problem. Their response was the Easy To Do Business With program. Research found high dissatisfaction with the company's services, primarily due to **lack of teamwork and too much departmentalization**. Top management took the giant step of deciding that the answer is not persuading customers to view the company

differently, but altering attitudes internally. The official statement is far-sighted for any organization, revolutionary for a utility:

"Stakeholder perceptions can only be changed by the mechanisms that create them – internal management activities and the resulting effect on stakeholders. Accordingly, a commitment must be made to use the Stakeholder Process as a means to **revise and improve internal management**, not as a means to change stakeholder attitudes."

At Manville and Continental (both Denver), how can their dpr's square Chapter 11 with social responsibility? In the airline's case, employee relations problems of morale and productivity must be fierce. Teamwork may seem a hollow term meaning **you** team up to work for **us**.

For electric utilities, recent studies find that as much as 60% of the decline in residential energy consumption is linked to behavioral changes and therefore "largely permanent."

After all the nuke plant battles, at least two companies may go broke because they "won" and got permission to build. Cincinnati Gas & Electric's \$1.6 billion Zimmer plant and Public Service of NH's \$6 billion Seabrook plant are the killers. And Cambridge energy Research Associates reports many nukes will produce power at rates equivalent to double or triple the price of OPEC oil.

¶What public relations strategies do you call on at times like these? The asbestos and utility cases are new versions of the Love Canal syndrome whereby organizations lose public support because they failed to see into the future. Projects begun with public approval under one set of standards become nightmares years later when new standards reign.

HOW TO DEAL WITH "REINVENTED HISTORY," WHEN GOOD SUDDENLY BECOMES BAD?

Medicine and healthcare have been doing what they received public consent for: saving mankind from once fatal or crippling ills. Now, what was good yesterday has become bad because of the cost. Practitioners dealing with asbestos problem, nuclear power, phone deregulation are in the same bind. Public withdraws its consent, reinvents history of the subject, gives consent somewhere else. If 1984 has an Orwellian tinge, for public relations this may be it. But we were warned:

- "The issue of the 80s is going to be how we as a society, as a government, as corporations and industries deal with hazards that existed when no one knew they were hazards – and are just coming to light." – Curt Linke, vp-corp relations, Manville Corporation (Denver) to pr in 1980.
- "Whenever the public has an idea that they would like to change a large business (or any organization: ed.) and make it perform in a certain way, the public convicts the business of not having performed that way before it was told. The only safeguard for those of us in a large business, therefore, is to keep a pretty careful watch on the way people's minds are running, figure out the coming public attitudes, what the public decisions are likely to be – and then be ready for them. We must try not to be in the position of being convicted of treason. We must obey the rules even before they are passed. – Public relations pioneer Arthur Page of AT&T, in 1938

Though the opposite of futures research, **reviewing your organization's history is therefore a form of issues anticipation.**

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AS RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY BECOMES EVER MORE NECESSARY,
SIMPLER MODELS FOR ANTICIPATING ISSUES & CRISES ARE NEEDED

A crisis is an issue that got out of hand. What constitutes a crisis is being redefined by overweening political & media prying & muckraking -- and by intense competition that stimulates grasping at any tactic which may seem to gain an advantage.

While strategic thinkers say one solution is to redefine approaches to media, even they realize some form of risk management is needed to ward off unwanted intrusions. You can't practice today's goal-oriented, proactive public relations if you're constantly swatting hornets.

Issue anticipation teams are working well for many organizations as the structure (pr 4/27). What's increasingly sought is a paradigm or outline for analyzing issues that could sting. Here's one that combines elements many report have worked for them:

A. Categorize topics by state of development, which suggests the response required:

Latent can still be handled by issue anticipation & accommodation.

Emerging require more active preventive measures.

Hot. demand crisis management.

Fallout. these leftover remnants of hot issue settlements need damage control or they will go right back to "hot" status.

B. Diagnose issues by what causes them:

<u>Crisis By</u>	<u>Action Strategy</u>
1. <u>Accident</u>	Show concern for victims first, then detail plans to prevent reoccurrence.
2. <u>Scandal</u>	Distance the organization, note is act of individuals but without scapegoating.
3. <u>Bedfellow</u>	Distance yourself from the bad actor ally involved, with or without making judgments as the case demands.
4. <u>Disagreement</u>	Agree opponents have right to their views, but....

5. Organizational Failure Acknowledge, express regret, term it an accident if consistent with facts, detail plans to resolve.

Numbers 1-4 are inevitable from time to time in a democratic society. Number 5 can be managed -- and it is where the great majority of issues arise, right in the daily operations of the organization Since practitioners will be asked to put out fires that arise here, they have a valid claim to be involved in monitoring operations as a key part of issue anticipation.

C. Design a new-era Emergency Action Plan, which realizes the "lone gladiator" approach won't work amid today's complications, so employs broad division of labor:

1. Decisionmaking Team. . . .remove from CEO/sr mgrs as they are often targets or embarrassed.
2. Feedback Networkto monitor exactly what's getting across, internally & externally.
3. Designated Responders. . .to handle all inquiries & respond with One Clear Voice.
4. Designated Proactive Communicators. . . .to generate blanketing messages if required, get across your side, target opinion leaders etc. -- not to respond.
5. Designated Cheerleadersto inform & positivize internal & supportive external publics.
6. May need an Investigative Team. . . .to objectively get at cause of problem, dimensions, impact, implications -- and suggest to decisionmaking team what steps can be taken, and announced, to avoid repetition.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the more people involved, the better -- short term. After that, it destroys ongoing work assignments. And the teamwork & training involved are like a military operation. But if sergeants can pull it off with a bunch of buck privates...

Special Issue on Our Vote for The PR Issue of the 90s

MANAGING RISK PERCEPTION: HEALTH HYPE AND OTHER DIRE WARNINGS START TO BE QUESTIONED AND COUNTERATTACKED BY SCIENCE AND MEDIA; HOW WILL PUBLIC RESPOND? COULD CHEMOPHOBIA ET AL GO AWAY?

In an era where we're warned that just about everything is dangerous, how long before commonsensical humans say to hell with it – and ignore even the real dangers? After years of bullying by researchers and medical prophets, there's evidence the tide is turning. Debunking has begun in earnest. Could a "balanced" view of risk – or the search for it – be emerging? Items:

- **Sugar fights back.** One of the first victims of "health hype" is campaigning on the small caloric difference between sugar and substitutes. Reports of diners spitting out food when they discover it has sugar in it, as if it were a deadly poison, illustrate the irrationality that may be moving people toward a more balanced approach.
- **Eggs**, painted as deadly, were found last year to contain 22% less cholesterol than thought earlier.
- **Cholesterol** itself has come under attack, from a book prominently excerpted in *The Atlantic* plus medical experts calling the scare overemphasized in relation to other causes of heart attacks.
- **Removing asbestos** from schools and other buildings causes more danger than leaving it firmly in place, lung cancer experts reported in *Science* magazine last week. This theme emerged in August from a blue ribbon scientific meeting at Harvard, which found indoor tobacco smoke and radon exposure to be 200-400 times as risky as asbestos.
- **Oat bran** debunking as a cholesterol-reducer also began last week, with a report in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. But critics of this study noted it could be reverse health hype, since the sample consisted of just 20 persons – all with average to low cholesterol counts.
- *USA Today* frontpaged a plea for **changing one's toothbrush every two weeks**, since germs thrive in warm, moist bathrooms. American Dental Association said that may be overkill.

Washington Post has called the situation "an epidemic of fear."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PR PRACTITIONERS

This could be the public information, right-to-know, Court of Public Opinion ideal gone wrong. The practice of scientists and researchers fighting for publicity in order to keep their grants coming – and media using it to create controversies that "sell papers" – stimulates the "epidemic" and ignores the public interest. It drags the profession back a century to Edison vs. Westinghouse, when press agents for one side supposedly claimed electric current could come out of the socket to strike people.

PR ethics codes (and commonsense) mandate fairness, honesty, truthfulness – pick your word – even if media show no ethics. Fenton Communications' recounting of how it hyped the Alar scare – aired by “great Hollywood scientific toxicologists like Meryl Streep,” as one scientist puts it – is a case study for practitioners on any side of a fear issue.

“The huge public relations campaigns designed to replace science and technology with emotion, innuendo and public opinion polls are not suitable means of communication for those who understand the scientific issues.”

National Resources Defense Council abdicated claims to fairness or balance in instigating the Alar move. Its assertions have been demolished by scientists, while others – even other activists – say the affair was pushed by need for members and contributions. Still, many came down harder on “the pr approach to such issues” than on NRDC. Even the man who labeled Streep does (see box).

EVERY PRACTITIONER AFFECTED, REGARDLESS OF ORGANIZATION

Every organization creates risk of some type through operations, products, services or impacts. While energy, agriculture, food and defense

industries once got the attention, hospitals and schools and every office that generates solid waste is now indicted. Financial institutions have long had to deal with risk as an everyday matter. Ask airline and travel people about irrational fears.

A sample from the breadth of perceived-risk situations practitioners may face, where people react unreasonably or without waiting to hear the “facts”:

- AIDS in the classroom or workplace (or another disease);
- Rumored bank or S&L failure or a run on the bank;
- Healthcare costs perceived so high that seeing a doctor is put off lest it lead to treatment, which could cause financial ruin;
- Chemical residues on food or clothes, releases or spills, etc.;
- Landfills, incinerators, wastes, cleaning up Superfund sites;
- Refusal to buy or drive a vehicle because of reports the brakes or some other subsystem don't work (or similar with any appliance or machinery);
- Air pollution from auto/industrial emissions, wood stoves, etc.;
- Reputed carcinogens or toxics in food, textiles or materials;
- Anything nuclear from weapons to power to food irradiation;
- Reputed fire hazard or contamination of buildings;
- Workplaces or assignments considered dangerous.

Newsweek for January 22, 1990, shows balance. It contrasts an editorial by a family doctor “on the damage done by alarmist health appeals” with a 4-page environmental photo essay titled “We Fouled Our Nest.” Says the doctor: “The population is so used to the oversell it has become skeptical” – grassroots evidence of an emerging change?

Then there are the many truly dangerous situations which people fail to recognize, like not wearing seat belts or jaywalking. Tops on the current list enunciated by risk managers are 1) smoking, 2) alcohol, 3) improper diet, 4) auto crashes. Public relations will be called upon to give them proper attention.

In our instant-solution mindset, which seeks totally risk-free living, will communicating the fact-of-nature that this is an impossibility cause acceptance – or outrage?

FOUR SCENARIO OPTIONS SEEM LIKELY

1. Hyping of fear goes on and mass **confusion continues**.
2. Public is so overwhelmed it says **forget the whole thing** and ignores most all warnings.
3. Public is overwhelmed, but to find **psychological balance** it first turns on one or two products or cases and destroys them – then ignores the rest of the warnings.
4. Public finds balance by categorizing one or a few items as absolute no-nos, then **forgets warnings on most everything else**. (What are your candidates for these scapegoats?)

Each raises that major question of present-day pr practice: **How to deal with misperceptions, especially when they're raging?**

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Despite the "epidemic," average life span continues to attain record lengths. But could this lead many to believe all warnings must be erroneous – and add to the very serious health case conundrum?
2. Elaine Auld of International Food Information Center: "Many people get a lot of their food information from the media, but do not realize newsworthiness – not health promotion – determines how a topic is handled." Will a turn away from the "epidemic" help or harm media relations?
3. As the situation evolves, will clients and employers remember that the customer/consumer is always right...because they have the votes and the pocketbooks? Or will it be back to "We know what's best for you"?
4. Now that it is to have cabinet status, how will EPA act?

Tiers Of Risk Communication Characteristics: How Many Are In Practitioners' Tool Kit?

1. Honesty
2. Openness
3. Ability to listen
Responsiveness
Cooperativeness
Consistency
4. Accessibility
Community relations
5. Long-term relationships
Ability to explain technicalities
Ability to speak well
Negotiation skills
Authority
Independence
Technical qualifications
Political power

Adapted from *Risk Communication Effectiveness: A Study of Industry and Community Perceptions* by Arthur D. Little, 1989.

GROUPS ACTIVE IN SEEKING BALANCE

This newsletter carried an early health hype story on how salt fear had been pushed to the entire population when research showed it dangerous for only a small group of susceptibles (pr 5/20/85).

But we received few subsequent offerings – although **American Council on Science and Health** has been combating overkill or misapplied science since 1978. (Its publication, *Priorities*, is \$25/year from 1995 Broadway, NYC 10023-5860; www.acsh.org)

National Council for Environmental Balance, like ACSH, is made up of scientists seeking “balanced analysis of environmental issues.” Organized in 1972, group includes one Nobel laureate. (Publications from P.O. Box 7732, Louisville, KY 40207)

The Center for Risk Management carries out research, policy analysis, education and outreach related to the management of risks to health and the environment. Research includes studies of uncertainty in risk assessment, trends in industrial accidents, the safety of waste incineration, and the valuation of life0-saving programs, according to brochure. (Materials from CFRM, Resources for the Future, 1616 P Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036)

Books available: *Health Risks and The Press*, by American Medical Association and The Media Institute (\$11.45, International Food Information Council, 1100 Conn. Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036)

Improving Risk Communication, by National Science Council (\$29.95, 364 pp., National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20418)

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GLARING EXAMPLES OF HOW MAJOR ISSUES ARISE WHEN PR THINKING IS IGNORED

Senate testimony on compensation for uranium miners never told of the dangers inherent in their work, offers one case. The mining industry and government both rejected a plan to ventilate mines. "It would cost too much," said the industry. In fact, it would have added a nickel per pound of uranium, an ex-government scientist testified.

Watchers of current environmental issues will find the **reasons offered by both federal and state governments familiar:**

1. Not our agency's responsibility;
2. We have insufficient expertise and no money to hire any;
3. Hazard hasn't been proven yet to our satisfaction in spite of what studies done elsewhere may show.

Arthur Page's 1920s warning rings true: **Organizations must conduct themselves today as if they are to be held accountable under the standards of decades hence**, or they will pay for the neglect. Anti-nuclear, anti-chemical, sometimes anti-everything public attitudes were generated by cases like these – which is why they are not easy to reverse.

Ultimate "public-be-damned" example comes from court hearing on related issue of compensation for workers injured by above-ground nuclear tests. Minutes of an Atomic Energy Commission meeting (succeeded now by Nuclear Regulatory Commission) explained why it did not want to warn citizens of the perils: "because they'll raise a protest. . .they must be sacrificed."

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Hill & Knowlton's retention by the National Council of Catholic Bishops to communicate the Council's anti-abortion stance reminds your editor how ticklish it can be to have boat-rocking clients. In the New American Revolution of the 60s and early 70s, my colleagues and I practiced what we called "public interest public relations." Activists questioning established employee, environmental, consumer, civil rights and other policies were our clients. **We believed society's license of pr mandated use of its technology for all voices in the Court of Public Opinion.**

Many disagreed. Corporate, government and other practitioners felt we were wrong to take up causes that called into doubt leadership of accepted institutions or their policies. Some said it was communistic. Certain industries campaigned against our view, such as electric utilities when one of our clients organized the anti-nuclear power movement.

At that time, a practitioner employed by a labor union was denied membership in PRSA. Clearly, public relations belonged to established interests, not to society.

How much the field has matured. Professional societies welcome members regardless of their employers. Practitioners subdue ideology and realize their obligation is to objectively advise about opposing ideas and groups. They speak out when client actions or policies could prove counterproductive – understanding not to do so is both impractical and unethical.

¶ **Public relations is the profession that makes democracy a reality.** When all contenders in the Court of Public Opinion have counsel, the democratic system will be at full strength. After all, **the people decide.** And society insists everyone has counsel in the law courts and pays for it through public defenders. But tolerance for opposing views is also a tenet of pr.

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POST-EARTH DAY REALITIES: WILL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GET TEETH? DID MASSIVE CELEBRATION PROVIDE CATHARSIS – AND COOL-OFF? OR WILL SOME ISSUES BECOME SYMBOLIC? (IS YOURS A CANDIDATE?)

Whether your organization is seen as a “promoter” or a “polluter” on these topics, now is the window of opportunity – for reassessing your situation at this high water mark of public sensitivity. Some guidelines:

1. **Symbolism is a useful tactic**, whether defending or attacking. If accused of some anti-ecological activity, can you **honestly** claim to have been picked as a symbol – rather than getting to the real solution? If pushing for some action or policy, are **honest** symbols available to speed understanding of your cause? Opponents may criticize you, saying it’s “only symbolism,” but symbols create memorability like nothing else.
2. **Data to show you are stating the case honestly** has never been more readily available. Key source is federal Council on Environmental Quality’s 152-page compilation, *Environmental Trends*. Mandated by law as CEO’s mission, it updates their 1981 report. While it states the problems, book also notes that great gains have been made.
3. **Expect messages and appeals to be scrutinized with great skepticism** – because so much data has been communicated, some less than truthful. Prime example: sudden appearance of “biodegradable” on packages of products that in reality aren’t – e.g., plastic bags which degrade in sunlight but end up buried in landfills. One grocer tries to earn customers’ trust with this sign:

Building relationships that earn trust over the long run has to be the goal. Tricky, creative or less-than-full-disclosure communications may help get over a bump in the road. But longhaul, they are backfiring until most people believe very little – except some claimed threat. However, activists who stretch the truth here (Alar is an example) can expect to lose trust also. Claims and counterclaims, government action on minor issues and inaction on major ones, scientists all over the spectrum, too much data. . .the ultimate effect is to degrade trust in all public debate on all subjects. Public relations, its practitioners and their clients will be the real loser if this accelerates.

“Given the uncertainty about the performance of ‘biodegradable’ plastics under normal landfill conditions, we hesitate to endorse them as environmentally superior to regular plastic for use in garbage bags. We think the decision should be yours.” But how is a consumer to make the decision responsibly without accurate data?

4. The difficulty of getting – or sorting out – accurate information makes **completely irrational responses likely**. Do not proceed as if this were a rational arena. Fear of words like “toxic,” “radiation,” “nuclear” and similar is demonstrated by NASA’s space seeds project. Conceived as a

way to let schoolchildren participate in space-related research, tomato seeds from a 6-year earth orbit were distributed to schools along with normal seeds for comparison of their growth and other characteristics.

Out of left field came a memo from a professor at a university overseeing NASA's school activities claiming "a remote possibility that radiation caused mutations could cause plants to produce toxic fruits." NASA and Department of Agriculture quickly countered that the seeds are safe – but many schools stopped the project. Headlines read, "Are NASA-Sent Seeds Safe?" Mere communication is unable to undo the damage.

DISPOSABLE DIAPERS ARE CASE IN POINT

Huggies maker
Kimberly-Clark
complained in

its quarterly report that "an increasing amount of misinformation has been presented to the public concerning the effect of disposable diapers on the environment." But fact sheet for parents notes: "In modern landfills, most materials, including food and yard waste, degrade very slowly, if at all, due to absence of air, moisture and sunlight." Then it states that Huggies are 80% degradable "when conditions allow decomposition to occur." Do such messages strengthen resistance to all plastics and disposables?

In its materials, Procter & Gamble (Luvs and Pampers) uses three tactics for credibility: 1) footnotes citing source of all data, 2) description of its recycling project and composting initiative for diapers, 3) the pamphlet is printed on recycled paper.

A new manufacturer whose product (Bunnies) claims to use biodegradable plastic finds the controversy – especially attacks on this claim by competitors and environmentalists – helpful in making consumers aware of the product. Hotchkiss Associates (LA) therefore uses a strategy of always responding by refuting attacks. Even bad news builds brand recognition – when you're not well known.

"Popular epidemiology" is emerging as a technique for obtaining reliable data when alleged polluters won't supply it or scientists won't make a pronouncement. It is "the process by which laypersons gather statistics and other information, and also marshal the knowledge and resources of experts," to understand health risks, explains Brown University professor Phil Brown in a joint Harvard MIT publication. Since value-neutral science is impossible, "the degree of risk to human health **does not need to be at statistically significant levels to require political action.**" The question is whether "a reasonable person" would take the risk.

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MULTI-CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS A TWO-HEADED MONSTER FOR PR: 1) AT LAST, TOLERANT ORGANIZATIONS THAT VALUE INDIVIDUALS, OR 2) PAROCHIALISM & TRIBALISM THAT DESTROY COOPERATION

Asked the major problem facing the field, one respondent to prr's 1991 Annual Survey wrote: "Diversity – the world is changing." The key word is change – and how organizations handle, fear or reject it. Multi-cultural diversity is as much a culture change problem as one of communication.

THE FEAR FACTOR IS BREEDING INTOLERANCE

(even of prominent people) simply because someone belongs to a specific group or category. Other intolerances run from **barring fraternities** from colleges because they invite only some persons to join (reverse racism?); to **outlawing x-rated videos** because they aren't part of a city's majority lifestyle.

Politically Correct speech and thinking illustrates fear of diversity – by eliminating it. **Economic racism** denies loans or credit, has resulted in several erroneous arrests

UNPREDICTABILITY IS TO BE EXPECTED – AND PLANNED FOR

Jerry Lewis raised \$45 million in his Labor Day telethon, but drew protests and was picketed by former Muscular Dystrophy poster children. They said "this telethon still emphasizes our helplessness, our pitifulness and, by application, our uselessness to society." Their aim, to change the tone of the show but not discourage donations.

What's under siege, on one hand, is the ideal of democracy, with its Constitutional protection for minority groups, viewpoints and life-styles; and on the other, intense use of this ideal by often tiny or unrepresentative interest groups. How to reconcile? How to **convince organizations to retain vital advocacy positions when attack from some quarter is certain?**

IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS, BUT DO RESEARCH FIRST

Lakewood, Ohio, officials dropped a planned anti-pornography campaign when research found 78% feel they should be able to legally obtain sex films. But that's the problem: officials and activists **act on their perceptions** of what prevailing beliefs are; i.e., they pre-judge (ergo prejudice). Diversity is shown again in this case as being lifestyle difference – which mandates not trying to legislate others into **your** lifestyle.

ATTAINING DIVERSITY IN THE RANKS OF PR PRACTITIONERS

Though there are Black and Hispanic PR Societies, and PRSA has a Minorities group, and NSPRA Holds a seat on its board for a minority member – etc. etc. – the profession is far from representative of the population, **if** that is a goal. It's often stated as one, though the rationale deserves inquiry. Must every job category reflect the population's diversity?

Should public relations, as a special case? If a yes answer implies that only Lower Slobovians can relate to Lower Slobovians, doesn't that destroy the concepts of both diversity and building relationships? However that is resolved, it is surely in the **profession's interest** to have some representation from all groups – so they can communicate subjectively the meaning and benefits of the pr philosophy and profession.

Evidence from other fields suggests recruitment must begin early – probably in junior high school. When the Detroit Symphony was attacked for lack of black musicians, one who was hired pointed out that, in three years of auditions, he had “never seen another black clarinetist among hundreds of applicants. The real solution starts with the kids, and that's going to take years.” Does any society or company *have* a program to expose kids to pr vocations – not high schoolers or undecided college freshmen, but **kids**?

CAN QUALITY CO-EXIST WITH DIVERSITY?

These are two of the hottest topics today. But IABC's Multiculturalism Committee wonders whether they're compatible. Says Ron Martin, vp corporate employee communications, American Express, and past IABC chair:

Practitioners “are being called upon to play key roles in supporting TQM *and* programs that teach managers and employees to value workforce diversity. But many quality programs are rooted in process and conformity (see pr 6/24) and therefore find it difficult to accommodate the diversity that organizations seek and prize. In fact, many quality programs were developed in Japan where the workforce is largely homogeneous and where conformity is often the norm.”

He urges 1) challenging managers to face this conundrum; 2) helping TQM programs to accommodate diversity. Rationale: **diversity breeds innovation.**

GREAT OPPORTUNITY: PR AS A PROFESSION CAN BECOME THE VOICE FOR TOLERANCE

“Diversity which has no significance except ethnicity” is fragmenting our nation, writes prominent lawyer and judge Simon Rifkind in *USA Today*. Adds scholar Thomas

Sowell in *The American Enterprise*: “Those who use the term ‘multicultural diversity’ to promote a multiplicity of segregated ethnic [or other] enclaves are doing an enormous harm to the people in those enclaves.” Yet prejudice and lack of equal opportunity do exist. Can public relations, as a start, work for tolerance between those who feel affirmative action is needed and those who believe it is itself a form of unfairness? Then, can practitioners speak out and ask their publics to make efforts to be tolerant?

If reflecting society's composition is a goal, **pr's biggest challenge may be to recruit males.** Over half the active practitioners are now women, and college majors are ¾ female. Is this because enforced socialization of women has made them better listeners, strategists, relationship-builders? Are career-choosing men too macho, so avoid a field where win/win must be the basic rule? If this *is* an advantage for women, think what great practitioners Native Americans will be, given their value system of group decisionmaking, patience and respect for every person.

First Of The Year Issue:

IN THIS “UNFORGIVING DECADE,” RISK MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION MAY BE PR’S HIGHEST SKILL. . .OR IS ALL PR NOW RISK MANAGEMENT? WILL THE SOFT ECONOMY FORCE THE PUBLIC TO BE LESS FEARFUL ABOUT RISK?

Even if your organization or client doesn’t run nuclear plants, operate landfills or make chemicals, it nevertheless creates risks in the minds of its publics. The concept of risk embraces both what people fear will occur **and** what they’re afraid will not happen. Even the schoolhouse on the corner, for instance, poses perceived risk to parents that Jane may be harmed by violence or drugs; and that Johnny may not do well in his studies.

Real world, **these cause more headaches** than worry about carcinogens or greenhouse effect. But most organization don’t apply what we’re learning about risk management to these situations. That may be a mistake.

**SITUATION RAISES AN INTRIGUING QUERY:
IS ALL PR BASICALLY “RISK MANAGEMENT” NOW?**

Specifically, “risk management” denotes explaining the risks inherent in a

product, service or action – especially to publics whose perceptions (or misperceptions) are crucial (pr 12/2/91). Practitioners evolved its tenets in a “fear” arena, involving chemicals, nuclear materials, pollution and contamination. Does this body of knowledge now provide the opportunity for a broader application?

Sooner or later, everything carries a “risk.” What poses perceived risk for publics is also risky for organizations that create the risk. Today, there are three guidelines for strategizing risk management:

1. ***How real is the risk?*** For toxics, this divides into two categories: 1) ***toxicity*** and b) ***proximity***. The most poisonous substances pose little real risk if people can’t get close to them. Everyday, often overlooked “risks” are more dangerous because they can affect so many people.
2. ***Can people be reasonably expected to manage*** their lives to avoid the danger level? Again, there are two categories:
 - a) What are they likely to be willing to do personally (balanced by their probable motivations to do so, e.g., employees can be expected to do things that residents of the neighboring community have no motivation to do).
 - b) What can the organization do to reduce danger to the minimum affordable level; here the theory of “conservative engineering” comes into play – requiring the balancing act of planning for “worst case” scenarios versus “realistic” probabilities.
3. ***Can the risk be separated from fear***, however irrational? Is ***theoretical*** risk felt so strongly that ***real*** risk is not taken into account? For instance: ask most people if they’re afraid of sharks or

tigers and the answer is yes. Ask them if they are often exposed to sharks or tigers and they're likely to answer, "I live in Kansas which has neither."

Can we develop methods for "seeing around the corner" in order to determine – at least to estimate – what effect impending actions or decisions will have on key publics, not only *immediately* – but *over time*? If so, over how long a period of time?

If we can, will they be useful for *all types* of "risks"?

TECHNIQUES THAT HELP APPLY RISK MANAGEMENT THINKING INCLUDE PROJECTIVE SCENARIOS, ISSUE ANTICIPATION, RESEARCH

- **Projective Scenarios:** Nothing makes cases real like writing them as if they've already happened. And nothing makes the situation as clear to others. This variation takes a completed near-time scenario and asks: Over time, what could realistically occur to change the equation? Altering the scenario to account for the changes provides insight into possible future risks – things that seem alright today but could boomerang or become negative later on.

It can get complicated when trying to account for multiple alterations over several time periods. (Seeing into the future isn't supposed to be easy.) One solution is to look for three benchmarks:

- 1) **risk now**
- 2) **risk short term** (1-3 years)
- 3) **longterm risk**

Some strategists have argued, including your editor, that trying to plan beyond three years is fruitless when things change so fast. **Classic risk management is stretching this timeframe.** Pollutants with long half lives, policies whose impact won't be felt for five years, an economy that may take years to fully recover – such circumstances now argue for longer range thinking.

- **Issues Anticipation:** The 4-step model dovetails nicely here, simply viewing possible trends in light of the risks they will pose for publics – and thus for the organization. The steps are, in order from most distant to here-&-now (see pr 8/3/87):

Latent Issues

Emerging Issues

Hot Issues

Fallout Issues

IA studies supply more accurate data for building Projective Scenarios.

[When pr's Annual Survey asked respondents to define risk management, most confused it with issues/crises. Maybe misunderstanding of the term (pr 12/2/91) wasn't so far wrong after all!]

- **Behavioral Research:** Determining what will drive publics and opinion leaders to *do something* often has no timeline. Whenever the triggering event occurs, they are motivated to act. Of course, circumstances may facilitate or restrain them from actually taking action, but the trigger must be known in order to manage risk.

Several methodologies work here:

- 1) **Close-the-Gap Studies**, which seek to discover where a public is now in relation to taking action, and how much patience they have left – which constitutes the “gap.”
- 2) **Reaction to Scenarios**, which simply asks respondents to verify or challenge your projective scenarios. One benefit is that they can provide a critique of the scenario at each time period – thus revealing a) their sense of the likelihood of various changes in circumstance, b) potential response to the changes and c) to your proposed corrective actions.

Practitioners applying techniques like these ... to the very real problems of risk faced by every organization ... will be part of the senior management council.
Managing risk means structuring the future of the enterprise – and only at that level can such a vital task be undertaken.

- **Understanding Perceptions Before Communicating:** Perception management means respecting others’ perceptions – however “wrong” they may be in relation to your “facts.” The way to show this respect is also the most efficient way to improve communication:
 - 1) **Listen** first, bite your tongue and listen hard, in order to learn what their perceptions are. Find out, also, how deeply held they may be.
 - 2) **Demonstrate in your response** that you have heard, that you understand their perceptions – right or wrong. That will usually win at least a willing suspension of disbelief, so they can hear *you*.
 - 3) **Begin a dialogue**, exchanging viewpoints and jointly examining them.

Though this is easier face-to-face, it is essential in written and other impersonal media as well. Throwing your fact bombs at their perceptions merely closes their minds and ears.

Risk management begins with a clear understanding of what key publics and opinion leaders feel the risks are, and how much fear is being engendered. **Both “risk” and “fear” are perceptions.**

SOME FEEL RISK CONSIDERATION IS UNIMPORTANT NOW BECAUSE A DOWN ECONOMY PUSHES THESE FEARS OUT OF MIND. DOES IT?

Question: When worried about putting bread on the table, do people:

- **Let perceived threats slip by** that otherwise they would object to?
- Or **use them as a pressure valve** for venting economic frustrations?

Second Question: If activists and critics are distracted by the economy:

- Can organizations **safely push through plans** that under other conditions would be challenged?
- Will public interest organizations **fall off publics’ – and donors’ – agendas?**

Answers offered by three practitioners noted for strategy:

1. *The '90s are "the unforgiving decade,"* warns Ann Barkelew (vp-corp pr, Dayton Hudson). *"Someone* will blame you for nearly everything you do." This strongly implies that if something is done now because opposition is immobilized, backlash will be sure and potent.
2. Way back in 1924, Arthur Page noted that organizations must somehow find the means to conduct their affairs today with one eye to how they will be judged 10, 15, 20 years hence. *Publics will "reinvent history"* then – as Love Canal and other cases show. At Love Canal the company had exceeded the chemical disposal standards of the day. When standards rose in subsequent decades, it was savagely attacked – even though it no longer owned the property and others had caused the chemical leaks that led to the outcry.
3. In managing the human climate No. 132 (pr supplement), Phil Lesly says *anticipating trends is essential, "inoculating" publics in advance rather than reacting when attacked.* This and other items on his "1992 mosaic" are "adapted and augmented" from advice he offered in 1971 – so perhaps their time has come at last!

The real meaning of ethics – acting in the best interests of others as well as yourself – is more important when others can't pay attention to what you're doing. Getting away with things could be suicidal longterm.

Many questions remain to be answered. Risk management is an evolving body of knowledge. But, it may be able to pull together and clarify much of pr's disparate techniques in a manner that a) unifies the practice, or at least the process and b) crystallizes its importance to our managerial colleagues.

SELECTIVE PERCEPTION AS A STRATEGY SCREENING DEVICE

The major strategy question (and thus research requirement) for public communication campaigns, far more important than any other, is this:

Based on their current perceptions and existing attitudinal base, how many people's selective perception will allow them to be turned on by the messages, versus how many will be turned off.

Unless the positive number is many times higher than the negative, a **public** campaign is counterproductive. A quiet, direct campaign is required. This is why most mass media campaigns have the **real** effect of creating a debate, even making an issue where there was none. Now, if you are in the minority position, or unable to garner attention for your issue, the public strategy is ideal for exactly this reason. Even then, *only* until you put the item on the agenda. If research at that point shows prevailing selective perception is against you, go underground.

A CAVEAT ILLUSTRATED BY THE ANIMAL RIGHTS ISSUE

1. **As strategized above, it made sense for the animal rightsers to go public** a few years back because nobody was paying attention to them. This put their issue on a lot of agendas. By the same token, the animal welfare folks had selective perception on their side – so both sides could make a case for public campaigns.
2. **What happens in such circumstances:** Do they merely cancel each other out? Does this put the media in their beloved “mediator” position, and therefore turn real control over the debate to journalists? Can one side prevail under these circumstances?
3. **As for prevailing,** the animal welfare people were already hugely prevalent. So they had nothing to gain by letting the issue emerge. The animal rightsers could only become stronger through a public campaign. That movement's decision to go public alters the basic principles: it forced the animal welfare side into *direct* contact with their strongest opinion leader supporters, and ruled out any response to or acknowledgment of the animal rights viewpoint – since that could only strengthen the animal rightsers.
4. **For a long time, this is the strategy Animal Welfare followed – and it worked.** Animal Rights remained a small, zealotist, fringe movement. Then someone ignored sophisticated strategy, or misunderstood the true effects of mass media, and decided (in this case, on the fur issue) that a noisy *public* defense and attack on animal rights was necessary. Almost from that date you can plot the swelling success of animal rights.

ROLE OF FUTURES RESEARCH

Another helpful tool is projecting the support an issue will be able to garner in a certain time frame. Could the animal welfare people, for instance, have calculated or estimated how many people had a value system, attitude base or lifestyle that would make them *susceptible* to support of animal rights? The evidence seems to be that very little of this kind of research is done – or done with any seriousness or accuracy (granting there's an unavoidable guess factor built in).

Vol.36 No.27
July 12, 1993

ARE PRODUCT TAMPERING INCIDENTS TOTALLY LOSE-LOSE?

Lose *now*, since even the most loyal group of customers will have its cautious segment that figures “why risk it.” Lose *later*, whenever the incident is brought up – because among those who missed or have forgotten it will be some of these cautious folk who take no chances.

Pepsi’s recent needles and syringes cases exemplify again the lose-now aspect. And in reporting that story, media and the grapevine will recount unappetizing historical cases – as evidence this in the Pepsi coverage:

“Over the past decade, for example, McDonald’s had to combat baseless rumors that worms had turned up in its hamburgers.”

Thanks a lot, McDonald’s is probably saying, for resurrecting this stomach-turner. It may be untrue, but it will stick in squeamish minds. Corona beer’s urine rumor is another with sticking power. The perpetrator admitted it was false, but the **mental image created** is damaging, per se.

- **Deterrent?** Could it be so many arrests have been made in the Pepsi case, and publicized, that the troubled persons who seek catharsis by tampering will be deterred? Unlikely, say psychologists.
- **Media Fix?** No amount of ameliorating media coverage reaches more than a minority of the public. Not everyone sees the bad coverage, either, research shows – but larger numbers do, because media users pay more attention to exciting, scary or scandalous events.
- **Different Behaviors?** Could it deter media from frenzied feeding next time? Could it make consumers bolder in resisting the urge to stop buying a product caught in a tampering case?

The answers – or lack of them – illustrate why this may be the ultimate risk management issue.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A DAMAGE CONTROL STRATEGY

1. **Get it behind you ASAP** because each iteration reaches more people. Shakespeare’s “he doth protest too much” applies. Mazur’s Rule also fits: The more media cover (or people discuss) a topic involving a threat, the more they accept the threat as real. Pepsi’s July 4th ads merely said “Thank You,” followed by holiday clichés – with no mention of what one assumes readers were being thanked *for*. That was left for each reader to infer, depending on their awareness.
2. **Deciding factor: How threatening or ugly is it?** This determines memorability – unless it’s so bad ego defense drives it out of people’s thoughts. If it’s forgettable, help people do it – fast.

3. **Memorability damages, long term.** Ok, so NBC rigged the pickup truck coverage. Unfair, wrong, etc. But would you buy one with saddle tanks? If you remember the incident – and being “right” by exposing NBC’s fraud may not be “effective” because it massively added to memorability – most likely you’ll be a cautious purchaser.
 4. **Service tampering is also possible** – e.g., a hospital hit by disconnected intravenouses, mixed up medicines, etc.
 5. **Lesson learned** is one positive. There seems no excuse for the bolts and parts that were found in soft drink cans because they fell off the machinery. Admittedly, this would have gone unreported except that the needle event made it relevant – but here’s a chance to fix the system. Credibility begins in daily operational quality.
 6. **Compared to other potentially damaging incidents** – e.g., accidents, scandals, etc. - is tampering worse? Probably, because of Grunig’s 2nd rule of effective communication: When people can *personalize* a problem, they’re more likely to act. The question is, then, whether it’s easy to see oneself getting the particular tampered product.
 7. **Like boycotts**, could a tampering incident actually raise awareness of a product or organization – thus at least temporarily increasing purchases? For a lesser known product, why not?
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DUBIOUS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS, ISSUES ANTICIPATION?

If you need to be persuaded of the importance of investing in these activities – or persuade someone else, like a budget officer – use this dramatic example from Maryland's tourist promotion materials:

- “On the 4th of July, 1828, in Georgetown, amid much hoopla and rhetoric, President John Quincy Adams lifted the first shovelful of earth for the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, intended to link Baltimore, Washington and Pittsburgh by water.
- “On the same 4th of July, 40 miles away in Baltimore, amid no less hoopla and rhetoric, 91-year old Charles Carroll, the last living signer of the Declaration of Independence, officiated at celebrations to initiate construction of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Baltimore would be linked by rail to the rest of the rapidly expanding nation.
- “When the 380-mile railroad was completed it was one of the longest in the world, an engineering triumph. When the 185-mile canal, with 74 locks, was completed it was already obsolete.”

Now as then, organizations that don't pay intense attention to what is happening technically, financially, socially and politically will suffer.

Vol.37 No.1
January 3, 1994

First of the Year Issue

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: ANTITHESIS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS?

Holiday card from pr/advertising firm Duval Woglom Brueckner Partners (Boston) humorously attempts to find a politically correct greeting:

Merry Christmas
No! Too Denominational!

Season's Greetings
It's not for a whole season, just a couple of days.

Happy Hanukkah
Same problem as Merry Christmas.

Noel
*Is this the right spelling?
Anyway, too ethnic.*

A Yuletide Greeting
Reference too obscure; too ethnic.

Happy Holidays
*What about the homeless? They never have a nice day.
There are serious problems in the world
and this just makes light of them.*

A big HI from Santa
*Sounds too pompous
Too male-oriented & the ASPCA will have a
problem with the way Santa treats the reindeer.*

Hi.

That's a light poke at a growing phenomenon. One whose ramifications can negatively affect how organizations operate and build relationships. **How can any organization participate fully in the court of public opinion while tiptoeing over land mines?**

To protect itself, *LATimes* has issued "Guidelines on Ethnic & Racial Identification. But as Jim Spencer, Newport News Daily Press writes, "Without a philosophical context, words don't produce heresy any more than they produce racism, homophobia, misogyny or any of the other societal ills that the *LATimes* thinks it can help eliminate by refusing to print certain terms."

WILL A PROBLEM GO AWAY IF GIVEN AN ACCEPTABLE NAME?

PC movement seems to be a symptom of an underlying issue – people’s sense of powerlessness.

If I can’t affect change, I feel powerless.	Powerlessness affects my internal identity; loss of control brings discomfort, anger.	To assuage anger and discomfort, I may gain <i>seeming</i> power by controlling words.
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If, instead, people felt *empowered* (as consumers, in their workplaces, by local and federal government) would there be less concern for PC terminology? Would our fragmented society be more inclined to “hash out ideas” using whatever words describe their thinking/feeling at the time, secure in their own worth and ability to attain their needs or affect change?

STUDY SHOWS PEOPLE AREN’T APATHETIC

They care, Kettering Foundation found, but they don’t know how to

affect policy (pr 9/2/91). A recent Kettering study shows that people get involved with public concerns through discussions and interactions with friends, relatives, neighbors – classic participation psychology (pr 10/25/93).

- **Can greater public participation by organizations** help arrest the insidious infiltration of political correctness – a placebo that feeds anger and disempowerment?
- **Is public relations’ role** to fight against the natural inclination to appease publics at the expense of a less appealing reality – i.e. candor and honesty – even if it means taking hits from some?

IS THE PUBLIC TIRED OF BEING TOLD WHAT TO DO? GROUPTHINK AND THE NEW McCARTHYISM POSE PR CONUNDRUMS

Don’t say that! You can’t eat this! Better not do that! Watch out for this! Don’t think like that!

Then, the next irrational step: People who *do* do these things are clearly out to get you, trying to harm you – they’re not treating you fairly and their motives are obviously nefarious.

Ann Barkelew’s prediction the 90s would be The Unforgiving Decade (pr 11/11/91) has proven true. What does this imply for organizational policies and operations? For public relations strategies?

- Does it mean **pandering** to political correctness?
 - Since media and politicians are the main drivers of this groupthink, is going around them **directly to key publics** now more vital than ever – if you want to be taken at face value and let people make up their own minds about you?
-

- Does it become the responsibility of public relations professionals to **speak out** against this totalitarianism in order to preserve a functioning court of public opinion?

CROSSTREND: EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The workplace – that all-encompassing master – may be a liberating factor now. Its trend toward empowering individuals, making them responsible and accountable, puts people in charge of their own destinies. That means thinking for oneself and taking risks – the antithesis of PC. But there are complications:

- **Downsizing can be a cruel survival of the fittest**, often a test of a different kind of political correctness: slavish commitment to the current organizational philosophy.
- **Employers are increasingly the designated enforcers** of our legislated groupthink, from no-smoking policies to relations between the sexes to (maybe) healthcare.

Thus, two massive ironies are in play:

1. **A society trying to remove barriers between its members and give everyone an equal chance ... appears to many to be impinging on the personal freedoms and privacy that have been its hallmarks.**
2. **The workplace, that “enslaver of us all” ... offers a glimmer of hope for restoring a balance between Rights & Responsibilities -- which has been lost in society at large, where only Rights seem to matter.**

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION + PARTICIPATION + POLICY = ANSWER?

Reams are being written now about this topic. This pr issue could easily be filled with recitation of various PC and “don’t” activities. But the question is: what can practitioners do about it beside wring their hands? Suggestions:

1. **Get serious about adopting truly participative dialogue and downplaying one-way communication**

Most give this lip service. But when you look at actual programs, publications and other communications “products” and media relations form the bulk. Consider the multiplicity of opportunities:

Checklist of One-on-One Participative Activities

- Face-to-face employee programs involving supervisors/managers
- Meeting networks inside the organization
- Skip level meetings to overcome gatekeeping, Town Hall sessions
- Targeted speakers bureaus

- House meetings in supporters' homes
- Formal constituency relations programs
- Ambassador programs
- Hotlines, 800 numbers and similar
- Opinion leader advisory boards
- Membership networks where employees formally join organizations
- Open houses and tours
- Allowing use of facilities for meetings and events
- Customer satisfaction matrixes

2. **Make all communications *transparent***

Open is no longer enough, as Bruce Harrison notes (pr 9/21/92). Better is to be transparent – i.e. showing the reasoning behind statements and decisions, so people can participate in the thought patterns.

To gain trust, this sometimes means letting stakeholders in on the options *before* decisions are made.

3. **Establish a policy on what is politically correct for *your* organization**

Do it participatively, of course. Then continually communicate it, transparently. Questions to be addressed include:

- When does necessary advocacy cross the line into McCarthyism?
- If you have a smoking policy, explain that the old rule applies: one person's rights end at the tip of the next person's nose. Since the smoke and smell from tobacco cannot be stopped from going beyond those limits, banning them is not Big Brotherism or taking away freedom. (Perfume is next for such a policy.)
- If you believe PC is a good intention gone wrong, say so to let activists know it isn't their goals you deny, just their methods.
- State strongly your support of inclusion, respect for individuals and anti-discrimination, but define what diversity means *in your organization*

Example of the last point. Obesity is the latest condition to have its loud advocates. But if you're a healthcare provider, or have a wellness policy, doesn't having obese people in the organization amount to not walking the talk? Isn't it like the doctor who urges patients to quit smoking while puffing away? Doesn't this mean *diversity is situational*: a university offers inclusion to an administrator or teacher who is overweight (non-medically); but a hospital doesn't?

Or is this another example of enforced behavior – like laws about wearing seatbelts or bikers' helmets.

Another diversity problem: enlightened employers often encourage support groups among special interests – black caucuses, gay rights forums etc. Now “Christian” support groups battle the gay support groups – publicly. The Latino support group demands to make statements about municipal policy they don't like and march in parades – using the organization's name and authority.

The battle between the sexes. Experience suggests stating emphatically that while sexual harassment is taboo and will be punished, using harassment policies to get even or advance one's cause will also be punished. [Then, having wordsmithed that one, go the next step and settle the problem of juvenile oversqueamishness on sexual matters: "We're adults here, right? Sex is a natural part of life, right?"]

OTHER STEPS TO TAKE, WAYS TO STAY INFORMED

BOOK ADDRESSES POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

People are angry at being shut out of the political system. They have a low opinion of politics-as-usual. Yet many look for ways to

"take back the system" and work with others to solve problems. *Politics for People*, by Kettering Foundation president David Mathews, is about creating a politics that is relevant to citizens' everyday concerns, where they do more than vote: e.g., reviving town meetings in their neighborhoods (not on tv) where political debate is turned into public dialogue – "an open, exploratory, civil deliberation that can help the public define the public's interest. Who else should do that?"

Book also responds to critics who either doubt that the public exists or believe citizens have neither the intellectual nor moral capacity for self-government. It's not a call for direct democracy or what used to be called "citizen participation." Rather, it resurrects the missing link in democracy – the politics that lies between direct citizen control and representative government. A politics that is public in character and deliberative in practice. (\$9.95 paperback, \$24.95 cloth; U of Illinois Press, P.O. Box 4856, Hampden Post Office, Baltimore 21211)

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FINANCIAL DECISIONS

Individuals can affect change by where they invest or spend their money. In 1993, "investors with a conscience" invested over \$650 billion in socially-

screened portfolios or utilized their leverage as investors to advocate social responsibility, according to Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. Its newsletter, *The Corporate Examiner* (Vol.22, No.5, 1993) lists socially responsible mutual and money market funds and investment services. And their returns are as good if not better as unscreened investments.

Customers can choose where they buy based on their convictions. Look at all the green marketing, attempting to woo environmentally concerned customers – which illustrates the potential power of convinced customers. According to research by Green Seal (a nonprofit environmental labeling and consumer education organization), four of five consumers are more likely to purchase a product with the Green Seal logo when choosing between competing brands of equal quality and price.

Boycotts are back. Want to stamp out smoking? Supposing the powerful anti-smoking coalition (led by Heart Association, Lung Association, Cancer Society) mounted a full-press boycott against cigarette companies' food units, e.g. RJR's Nabisco and Phillip Morris' Kraft and General Foods? Coop America feels this is the pr weapon of choice now.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION HAS ITS OWN ASSOCIATION

Established in 1990, **International Association of Public Participation Practitioners (IAP3)**

offers networking opportunities and practical info on designing and conducting public involvement programs. “We realized there wasn’t much of a place for those of us committed to participation. Public relations organizations didn’t fit the bill. Neither did groups of business communicators. We weren’t necessarily mediators or negotiators.

“It was time to develop a **professional organization devoted solely to the participation of the public in decisions being made by government and industry all over the world**. We are practitioners. While we may learn from theory, we’re most interested in talking about actual experiences, designing and conducting public participation programs. We have stopped talking about whether opportunities for participation should be offered, and now focus our time on how to do it best.”

SUMMARY: TIME FOR PROFESSION TO STEP UP TO THE PLATE

- A. Perception is powerful but...** in a democratic society, its views are enforceable only when an *overwhelming majority* have *overtly* agreed to enact them as *public policy*.
 - B. It is true that *whatever* an organization does today, someone will attack the action.** In prr’s First of the Year issue 1992, we suggested that all pr activities and messages today be formulated according to the rules of risk management: hazard + perception = risk. There seems every reason to repeat that counsel.
 - C. The problem with PC and all the “don’ts” is its McCarthyism aspect:** many, often most, people don’t agree either with the goal or the method of attaining it – but are afraid to speak up for fear of being attacked. This doesn’t mean everyone is a coward. Many just don’t have the time or energy to invest in fighting off zealots, or don’t want to clutter other issues they are involved in.
 - D. Thus, we have turned over policy to the loudest zealots.** Often tiny minorities in an organization or community run things – the antithesis of democracy.
 - E. Is this largely the fault of pr practitioners,** who either advise capitulating for fear of “bad press”; or don’t train fellow managers in how to push zealots aside in order to let others be heard? When the court of public opinion and communications channels are polluted, the group most at risk is practitioners....
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ELECTION LESSON: PERCEPTION AND SYMBOLISM BANISH FACTS (AGAIN)

Practitioners who believe "getting the facts out" is a workable strategy will have to explain the U.S. election results:

1. Polls and pundits say voters swung to GOP because they want balanced budgets and smaller government

FACTS: During Reagan-Bush years of GOP governance, deficit quadrupled from \$74B to \$290B and federal jobs rose from 2.9 million to 3 million. During Clinton's two years, federal employment declined back to 2.9 million and deficit was reduced to \$203B

IRONY: Voters throw out those who were doing what they say they want, turn Congress over to the party whose record is the opposite of what they say they want.

2. Voters say they're tired of the way Congress works (illustrated by move for term limits). They want to change the influence of special interests and give the people a voice. Experts of all persuasions say that can only happen when the influence of money is removed through fiscal reform.

FACT: Democrats put selves on line in final weeks of last session to enact fiscal reforms for Congresspersons. GOP leader Newt Gingrich proposed a compromise to make it bipartisan. Then when bill came to floor, he and GOP attacked it on exactly the items he asked to have added.

IRONY: Voters turn out those who were trying to do what voters say they want, turn to party that shot down legislation that would have done most to achieve it. And, new Speaker will probably be the trickster, Rep. Gingrich.

Supporters of the facts strategy have one good rebuttal. Democrats did a lousy job of getting these facts known.

A WOW CASE STUDY

Practitioners can profitably probe **what symbolic elements the Republicans employed, creating exactly which perceptions**, to cause such a seemingly irrational result. Perhaps it "just happened." **If it was a conscious strategy, it bears emulation as a master stroke.**

THE FACTS THAT DIDN'T MATTER

	1980	1992	Oct. 1994
Federal Employment	2,866,000	2,969,000	2,859,000
Federal Deficit	\$73.835 Billion	\$290.403 Billion	\$203.4 Billion

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor; Office of Management & Budget.

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COUNTERINTUITIVE TRENDS TO BUILD INTO '98 PLANNING

Life, literature and pr practice all teach that things aren't necessarily as they seem. At this unusual time in history – a single superpower, an economy that is truly global, a new millennium about to start, the move from industrialism to informationism well underway – many widely believed sociopolitical factors are counterintuitive.

For starters, there's the media/politician belief Americans aren't internationalists, when the most comprehensive study shows they indeed are (pr 12/15/97). Some others (among many) to watch for:

NEIGHBORHOODS ARE REAL – AND SAFE

43% told Yankelovich their neighborhood is as friendly as the

one they grew up in ... and 17% feel it's even friendlier. Concludes study sponsor Lutheran Brotherhood, "Americans feel comfortable with the people they live around."

- Compare this with last night's tv news or show, today's front page, the subjects of new bills from legislators at all levels
- This is another reality check against the distortion that occurs when 75% of all *reported* news originates in NYC, DC or LA ... but 75% of all *real news events* originate elsewhere
- Further evidence from the study: 69% have offered to give, or have received, help from neighbors in the past year
- 61% know their neighbors very/fairly well; and 47% chat with them five or more times each month, with another 37% doing so 1 to 4 times

WALL STREET'S SELF-IMPORTANCE AND GREED COULD OVERREACH – EVEN WITH A BULL MARKET

Many winced – since most shareholders and mutual fund holders are working folks – when the Street cheered RIFs and massive layoffs. Only holiday distraction may have saved it from scorn for another egregious act – pushing the market **down** 147 points on 12/18 when, at last, a truly democratic election toppled a scandal-ridden military dictatorship in South Korea.

New president Kim Dae-Jung was persecuted for years by the military dictators and once sentenced to death for instigating a pro-democracy uprising – in which troops killed thousands. But because he was elected by the people, whom he will assumedly serve, Wall Street in effect said it preferred dictators who serve the big companies.

Wall Street's tunnel vision is ironic. Acts like these suggest it thinks stocks exist in a vacuum from society as a whole. But next day some minor rumor will throw the market into a tizzy – like a single phrase in a speech by Federal Reserve chairman Greenspan did last year. No wonder *USAToday's* dartboard test (darts are thrown at a board containing company names to invest in) usually beats the million-dollar fund managers at picking winners.

- Is *nothing* of more value to big investors and fund managers than making another few bucks?
- The latter bunch is especially culpable: most haven't the managerial skill to run a newsstand, yet they tell management of the most sophisticated corporations how to handle their affairs. Though they add nothing to the economy or the well being of the citizenry, their bonuses alone are figured in millions. Undercontributing and vastly overpaid – and someday soon someone able to do something about it may notice.
- Hi tech stock specialist Michael Murphy reacted to the punishment given all hi tech stocks when *one* company was a few points off its earnings estimate for a *single* quarter: **“Wall Street’s got it backwards. It’s all psychology at this point.”** Another voice for the premise that economics is overruled by pr.

HEALTHCARE REALITY: DOCTORS AVOID HAVING SURGERY AND CURATIVE PROCEDURES DEPEND ON WHERE YOU LIVE

- A. **The gang that airily proposes you and I go under the knife is far less likely to choose this option themselves.** And who is better informed about healthcare choices than physicians? This seems symbolic of the whole chaotic healthcare scene today.
- Non-physicians are 80% more likely to have hemorrhoids or gall bladders removed
 - For tonsillectomy, hernia repair and hysterectomy the figure is 50%
 - Conclusion of the Swiss researchers: The more informed you are, the less likely you are to agree to elective surgery
 - Lawyers are close behind docs in surgery avoidance. Reason: docs don't push them too hard since they may sue if there are complications
- B. **Evidence that treatment options like surgery are more a matter of salesmanship than science** comes from the *Dartmouth Atlas of Healthcare 1998* (<http://www.aha.org>). It reports “striking patterns of variability” in treatment across the US “which simply can't be explained by differences in disease rates.”
- Residents of Fort Collins, Colorado, are 3 to 4 times more likely to have risky surgery for chronic back pain than those in Chicago or Miami
 - People in Bloomington, Ill, are 2 to 3 times more likely to undergo by-pass heart surgery as those in Grand Junction, Colorado, or Albuquerque

Reason: “The more surgeons and hospital surgery rooms, the more surgery that was performed.” **What does this imply for the ever-more-bitter cost and triage debate over healthcare? Even nations with national health programs don't escape this argument – since dollars are being held tight everywhere.**

GOVERNMENT GRIDLOCK IS GOOD, NOT BAD

Said George Will to a Richmond (Va.) Better Business Bureau banquet: “Gridlock is not an American problem, it is an American achievement.” The Founding Fathers feared government because of their experience with England, so they designed a political system not for efficiency but for safety.

- The problems citizens seem to be most exercised about, such as decline of the family, crime, coarsening of popular culture, deterioration of cities, don't submit easily, if at all, to cure by government, Will feels.
- Furthermore, though the president can't have a cold without it making headlines, in fact power is switching back to Congress as the Constitution intended. And the 3rd partner in balancing power, the courts, remain a strong force.

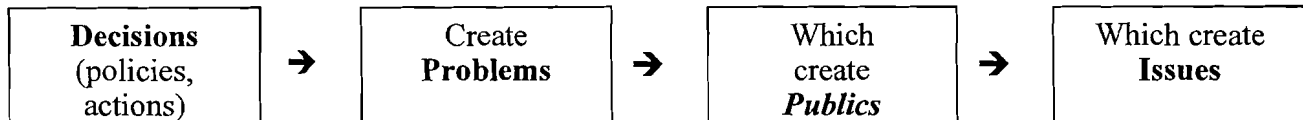
Implication: Don't expect power brokers, opinion leaders of the people to rise to your aid because your cause is just. Overcoming possible gridlock takes too much energy. Now more than ever, grassroots pr campaigns are necessary to move both governmental and social action.

- One powerful case in point: 35,000 children die *every day* from hunger and malnutrition ... yet more than enough food is produced now to adequately feed the entire world population, reports Oxfam America.

If there's no outcry over that, don't expect them to scream for action on your issue.

GRUNIG'S PARADIGM: SUPERB ISSUE ANTICIPATION AND PLANNING TOOL

This, says the longtime researcher, is where pr fits into organizational operations and adds most value:



The most noticeable element of this guide to clear pr thinking is that publics are subsidiaries of stakeholder groups – not vice versa.

- Stakeholder groups are people who *should* care and be involved because the subject could or will affect them
- Nevertheless they contain large contingents who don't get the message, can't be bothered, just plain don't care or have such barriers that they won't do anything about the issue
- These segments together can be as high as 90% of the stakeholder group

The viable term for those who do get excited about the issue is therefore publics. He postulates three types:

1. Long haul – those interested in the full ramifications of the topic
2. Special interest – concerned only about certain elements of the topic
3. Hot button – aroused only by emotionally debated elements

The three together are often limited to that 10%+ who will engage.

- **As a counseling tool**, this is a way to explain why decisions that override the desires or perceptions of stakeholders cause issues to arise – usually a costly and unnecessary occurrence. *Issues start with management, not outside (or internal) agitators.*
 - **It is also a way to manage issue anticipation**, by focusing on which stakeholders are known to be skittish about which potential decisions – then modeling how the three types of publics will fall out and what their response will likely be.
-

IN A DISASTER, ARE YOU PREPARED TO RESIST A MEDIA CIRCUS?

The Littleton school tragedy is a wakeup call for practitioners. *Any* school, business, hospital, post office, university et al could be the site of deranged persons with lethal weaponry. And the final straw is the media frenzy that follows – and fixes your organization in stakeholders' minds in possibly a very negative, or embarrassing, or pitiable way.

- Count the pages your newspaper devoted, and time given by your tv station
- Multiply that across the continent. Then ask:
- What would you do with *hundreds* of journalists all over the place *for several days*?

ELEMENTS OF A DISASTER PLAN

Today this goes beyond conventional emergency planning. Beyond issue

anticipation – though it will have elements of both. And organizations also need discreet versions of both as well. Some suggestions:

1. **Keep media at bay, you set the rules.** Some will say it can't be done, but recent cases suggest it can (e.g. pr 9/14/98). Your disaster is a legitimate news story. But feasting on it for a week is no one's right
 - Remember, they'll be back on the anniversary(ies) and whenever there's a similar tragedy somewhere else, so set the tone for them at the start
 - There may also be trials and/or lawsuits to drag the story out
2. **It's your property, even if you're a public entity.** Set the rules for where reporters and cameras can be, and maybe even when – then get tough with the first trespassers
3. **Plan with your police and fire departments in advance.** Request their help when the onslaught of voyeur reporters comes. They'll agree local folk deserve protection from this. Yes, include the fire department – since the incident may well involve them, or they may have to reinforce the police. Don't forget other reinforcement possibilities: sheriffs and state police
4. **Prepare in advance a packet for affected families** telling them how to avoid the media, and why they have every right to do so. Note the posture of the parents of the alleged Littleton perpetrators; they refused to talk at all. Include facts about their property and privacy rights, also
5. **Prepare a similar letter or packet for employees, maybe neighbors, too**
6. **Prepare your CEO.** If he or she were shown on tv decrying the media prying, depicting microphones shoved in the faces of grieving relatives, the people en masse would cheer: "At last, someone told it straight"
7. **Prepare yourself by identifying helpers to be dragooned** – to deliver the packets, deal with infractions etc, while you handle what you consider to be the right amount of media coverage and determine how to disseminate it

8. **Have a set media strategy on the shelf.** Think about pool coverage. Regularly timed briefings or media conferences. And decide what type, and what level, of coverage will be *useful to your organization* (and possibly the victims' families, in a commemorative way) – then work toward it:

- **Mourning** – in the proper amount, but not every funeral so it becomes maudlin and counterproductive; local media are most important here
- **Clear understanding the organization wasn't at fault**, if true; if not, then the most sincere regret and concern for the victims et al

How to destroy First Amendment rights. 88% believe media sensationalize too often (pr 4/5). Trust in media is at 17%. Put that together with cases like Littleton et al. Then factor in large majorities who tell survey after survey they believe limits ought to be put on the First Amendment. Media are shooting themselves in the foot.

- **Your plan to get on with life** – and better yet, to use the tragedy as a lesson learned for devising preventatives against recurrences

9. **Check your plan out with community leaders and elected officials.** Remember the downside when W.R. Grace didn't (pr 2/22/99)

IS ANYONE HELPED BY THE MEDIA CIRCUS?

Certainly not survivors or victims' kin. Not the community, nor the organization involved. Not even media, since research shows audiences are getting angry about this behavior. Voyeurism has its limits – especially with opinion leaders, the ones who matter. Can't media elsewhere use pix and feed from media where the event occurred?

Journalists rationalize by saying "they want to talk to us." Some egoists or spotlight seekers may. But for those who need catharsis, there are far better places to get it than from a reporter – and these are the distraught folks journalists seek out and exploit.

- **An extraordinary number of local and national columnists and ed page writers have attacked the Littleton over-coverage** and the intrusive aspects of much of it. As one said, all this trampling on people's lives and rights to appease advertisers' demand for numbers and Wall Street's demand for a better next quarter. Ironically, most pointed out that reporters on the assignment hate it, too – but editors today report to business managers
- **Would it matter if papers around the country used the same wire service photos**, instead of flying in photographers? Or if the networks all used pool footage? Viewers can only watch one newscast at a time so wouldn't even know – or care. And who reads the *Seattle Times* and *Miami Herald* on the same day, so readers wouldn't know or care either
- **Media developed a Tragedy Industry**, says one writer – thus the need for practitioners to prepare disaster plans

ISSUE ANTICIPATION: TWO EMERGING ORGANIZATIONAL TRENDS, AND HOW THEY MAY IMPACT PRACTITIONERS AND PR STRATEGY

1. **THE CEO PROBLEM.** Just as there's a shortage of qualified CPRO candidates, there's a similar paucity of CEO material. Prime reason: *inability or unwillingness to handle task #1, being the chief pr person for the organization* – the out front relationship builder, the personification of the organization. To do this today, CEOs must be the strategic driver – the person with the often revolutionary ideas and the tough-mindedness to bring them into being. Which demands a persuasive leader.

- **This is perhaps most visible in schools**, where not only superintendents but also principals are in short supply. The latter are CEOs of their schools, as the former are of their systems. One aspect of the problem is that not many want the jobs – with their agenda of meetings night after night, virtually every stakeholder group angry about something and the frontline troops – teachers – also in a supply crisis
- **For the first time, non-educators are being named superintendents.** Seattle and Arlington, Va., hired ex-military officers a few years back, Minneapolis hired a pa pro, now San Diego has a former prosecutor, NYC a businessman and L.A. an ex-governor
- **This is starting to happen in other tradition-prone segments**, for the same lack-of-pr-skills reason. University presidents must do spectacular relationship-building – because from this comes major fund raising. Ex-deans and philosophy profs are rarely gifted in this venue, so businessmen, ex-officeholders and other non-academics are moving into these positions

IMPACT ON PR: Since pr writ large is the CEO's task, practitioners are the top counselors to the successful ones. When organizations stick with tradition and hire conventional CEOs up from the ranks – in business they usually come from finance, engineering or law these days – the pr pro's role is even more vital, since these old-school types must be sensitized to the CEO's pr role, and trained (if possible).

- **Too often they revert to being "the boss" instead of a leader** and concern themselves with operations (making the COO and unit execs obsolete as micromanagement reigns). And it is this that makes experienced practitioners unwilling to be their CPRO – creating a cycle of failure for both positions, and often for the organization

2. **WORKER REVOLT IN THE MAKING.** Average wage of frontline workers – the folks who *are* the organization, because they provide its operations and control its relationships with customers and other stakeholders – has *not increased in true purchasing power since 1979*. Contrast that with the huge increase in executive pay. Non-college educated whites actually suffered a pay *decline* of 9%. White high school dropouts' pay lost 24%! For minorities, the figures are even worse.

- **Will employees go 21 years with no pay increase ...** which is the reason two-worker households are the norm ... which begets a litany of social problems e.g. latchkey kids ...

without revolting? Especially with years of layoffs, downsizings, program-of-the-month workplaces and other “solutions” to organizational problems that any dolt ought to know won’t work? When near-retirement-age workers are pushed out into McDonald’s jobs, how long will they remain quiet?

- **Could this be the reason morale and loyalty are low** among experienced workers, and “the work ethic” among generation.com has eroded? Society mostly has blamed the workers, parents, schools – everyone but the wage structure. Looks like another case of blaming the victims, and a situation employers brought on themselves
- **There is a handy target for the frustrated:** Wall Street greed, symbolized by brokers’ cheering when large layoffs occur
- **As usual, a cartoonist sums it up.** Morin of the *Miami Herald* offers four caricatures under the heading “Who’s responsible for the robust economy?” First is Bill Clinton, then Al Gore, then Alan Greenspan, and finally “Joe Worker, whose employer downsized and ordered him to do the work of three employees to ensure acceptable corporate profits”

IMPACT ON PR: Any practitioner who hasn’t already decided employees are the #1 public had better do so. Most have. Skills learned on culture change and reorienting internal communication could soon become secondary to cajoling the workforce – especially if the hot economy continues and workers at all levels get harder to find.

- **Now is the time for pr to get candid about the failings of our hr brethren** and take over the morale-building, productivity and training portfolios to complement pr’s work in culture, internal reputation and employee engagement programs. One practical approach: set off the personnel functions like benefits, wages, hiring etc into an Employee Services Department (much better semantics than HR); then meld the OD pros, the trainers, the true hr types into a joint pr/hr unit – perhaps with the word relationships in its name
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MINORITY AND INCLUSIVITY ISSUES BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

US has made real gains – but a new generation that did not experience the civil rights and women's rights struggles is demanding instant gratification. Since this is a posture US society strongly imparts to its young, the situation should not be unexpected. Some of the events that suggest these issues will be big:

1. **Workplace lawsuits** simultaneously against four major Atlanta companies – Coke, Georgia Power, Lockheed Martin and Home Depot – with participation by big name attorneys and request for class action status, appear to be part of a concerted effort
2. **Similar suits elsewhere including one against Kodak**, which is significant since the company was the defendant in the first major action of this type decades ago and seemed to be a leader in policies of inclusivity. A court in the Burger King case decided against plaintiffs – but that probably only increases bad feelings and perceptions of unfair treatment, whether actual or not
3. **Mitsubishi's celebrated sexual harassment issue**, supposedly resolved, is getting media coverage again suggesting the company didn't adequately follow through – or maybe take the incident seriously enough. Could explode once more, stimulating cases elsewhere
4. **State flag issue that beset S.C. is starting in Mississippi.** Methodist, Catholic and Episcopal leaders are calling for a new flag that omits the Confederate battle emblem, which they feel is racist. Others see it as simply Southern heritage
5. **Pres-elect Bush's almost total rejection by African Americans** (90% voted for his opponent) and loss to Gore among women and Hispanics (excepting Miami area's anti-Cuban faction). Naming two blacks, a woman and an Hispanic as his first cabinet choices is seen so far as too obvious a ploy by leaders of these groups. His performance may be critical to holding inclusivity issues in balance
6. **Harvard law professor's proposed suit for \$trillions to compensate for slavery**, due to be filed this year if plans mature, can only enflame the issue however right its justification may or may not be
7. **War on Drugs, harsh prison sentences, death sentences, profiling** for motor vehicle stops by police all seem aimed at minorities, particularly blacks. Arab Americans are reportedly subject to airport search or detention far more than other travelers. Such items are daily news and passions are rising – not just among minorities but civil libertarians and fair-minded citizens, as letters-to-the-editor, lawsuits and statements of outrage demonstrate
8. **Immigration** will “enflame passions and become a major polarizing political force” predicts *The Trends Journal*. Ironically, this contrasts with rising anti-Americanism abroad due to American culture's “emphasis on violence, mindless consumption, fake sex and real stupidity” which are viewed as “numbing and dangerous”

Open question: will Hispanics/Latinos/Chicanos join in this year? Without a successor to Cesar Chavez, there have been no visible issue-raisers – to date.

PR HAS AN ETHICAL AND VERY PRACTICAL ROLE

Coke's settlement for \$200 million, on the heels of Texaco's earlier costly case, should make the CFO an ally, even if others in senior management are focused

elsewhere. Evidence in the cited case and others shows many execs assume inclusivity issues were resolved long ago – particularly since most organizations have policies in place. Practitioners will do themselves and their organizations a huge service by making the time to:

1. **Carefully review the policies** – or better yet, get a reliable, experienced, independent outside source to conduct a review. Equal employment, hr and other concerned offices should be involved, of course, but it is reputation and public relations that get battered when cases arise. PR has an obligation to take the lead here, as well as a self-interest
 2. **Inject yourself into whatever unit is assigned to monitor policies** – usually hr or EEOC – to be sure managers and employees are walking the talk. Nearly always the reputation-damaging issues appear because management got overconfident or slipshod. These are New Century issues, not left behind in the 60s. When they hit, they hurt
 3. **Be sure communication, sensitizing and training in showing respect and dignity** to all are not only in place, but fresh and effective. This is a customer, vendor and supplier, and community issue as well as a workplace one
 4. **Remember, inclusivity is more an opportunity than a problem!**
-

ENVIRONMENT IS A LIVE ISSUE, BUT WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES

Not a big topic in the elections – but mentioned, even hotly on occasion, by the major candidates. And remember the three million that voted for Nader's Green party. One of Pres Clinton's final decrees will be to make vast acreages of national forests roadless. One of the first of Pres-elect Bush's initiatives may be to attempt opening the Arctic wildlife preserve to drilling.

- **Symbol:** head of TVA, US' largest electric utility, predicts combination of deregulation of electric industry with resultant power shortages, price rises in both natural gas and oil, and clean air requirements may revive *nuclear power* – once the most emotional issue of the era
- **Augury:** EPA has begun filing suits against *colleges and universities* for pollution discharges or mishandling of toxic substances. Agency is also, after years of discussion, promulgating rules to require power plants to control release of mercury by 2004
- Global climate change (industry's semantics) or global warming (public's phrase) could be the new mantra – and even the oil industry is divided on this one. BP's stakeholder-friendly approach is to advertise that its initials stand for Beyond Petroleum. Others in Big Oil want to avoid the subject

WHERE THE PUBLIC STANDS

Wirthlin Worldwide's tracking study finds "2/3rds of Americans surveyed feel that environmental

standards cannot be too high and continuing improvements must be made, regardless of cost."

1. Water and air pollution remain atop the list of public concerns
-

2. Hormone disrupting chemicals and global warming are the fastest rising topics

Another issue that didn't go away with the 70s. (More from www.wirthlin.com/publicns/library.htm)
