

## Chapter 5:

# ETHICS / TRUST / CREDIBILITY

Being the voice for the “public interest” and doing the “right thing” within our organizations was what Pat emphasized. The rise of the “ethics officer” always dismayed him for he felt it was pr’s role to fill that need.

Situational ethics often throw things into a gray area, but if the underlying premise of win/win, doing the best by everyone, doing what is right for the long-term was the philosophy upon which decisions were made, then appropriate ethics would follow.

### **A Favorite Quote:**

“Sometimes our actions speak so loudly,  
no one can hear what we say.”

Vol.28 No.20  
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"HEALTH HYPE" + EXAGGERATED STATISTICS ON MISSING CHILDREN  
SPOTLIGHT A PROBLEM: HOW TO BALANCE GAINING PUBLIC ATTENTION  
WITH BACKLASH OR BOREDOM AT OVERSTATED CASES?

1. The public loves bad news & sensationalism, studies show.
2. So it is emphasized by media, politicians & opinion leaders who set the agenda at cocktail parties & around the water cooler -- where the real flow of influence occurs.
3. If the subject is need-to-know -- things that affect our daily living -- rather than just nice-to-know, the bad news can be powerful.

"Hyping health is like hyping anything -- the undramatic made to appear dramatic. The cholesterol study is a textbook example, a badly flawed research effort that rode to prominence on the horse called Hype," writes a physician in Republic magazine. (For a copy of his article, write prr.) The problem is a reporting device called relative risk. Researchers compute the difference between a control group that did or didn't eat something or do something and the general population.

In a food poisoning study, e.g., it was claimed the risk was 158 times greater to consume one form of food vs. another. Public health officials issued dire warnings. But looking at the actual occurrences of this type of food poisoning in the first place, only 3 people in a million contract it. Thus, even if the relative

"What's the harm in using a little Madison Avenue terminology in reporting health 'hazards'? It gets people's attention. It really can't hurt anyone. But it can.

"I can think of at least two dangers. First, if exaggeration becomes standard procedure in reporting medical research, eventually no one will be able to distinguish real threats from health hype. Overstated claims can be announced only so many times before all health reports begin to elicit yawning responses. (In fact, the time may have already arrived.)"

The Twentieth Century Fund recently commissioned a report, "Science in the Streets," which attacks medical researchers who "make sweeping judgments on the basis of incomplete, and hence inadequate, data." The report suggests researchers overemphasize personal views and sometimes neglect or even suppress contradictory evidence.

The chairman of the study group blasted journalists. He called their reporting often "mindless," suggests special training in analyzing research data. "Journalists do appear uncharacteristically submissive when it comes to health reporting, their critical questioning skills somewhat sedated."

risk is 158 times greater, that still means only 5 in a million would get it. This actual risk is reality; relative risk is hype.

In the cholesterol studies, the statement made was: "There can no longer be any doubt that cholesterol causes heart disease." But the actual findings, writes the doctor, tell a different story: "In the group treated with (a certain drug) 8.1% came down with heart disease as compared to 9.8% of the control group, a difference of 1.7% over a period of 7-10 years. That's it. Translated, this means if you are a middle-aged man with high cholesterol and you take an expensive (\$150/month), awful-tasting drug 6 times a day for many years, you stand to lessen your chances of heart disease by 1.7%."

The other questionable technique is overgeneralization. Narrow research findings get stretched so they appear universal. Studies on salt as a contributor to high blood pressure are one example. The 10-15% who are genetically predisposed to hypertension may have trouble with salt. But the 85-90% majority aren't involved.

"The Truth About Missing Kids"

That's the headline in Sunday's Denver Post, kicking off an investigation of the "national paranoia" & "epidemic of fear" current on this subject. 50,000 children abducted by strangers each year is the widely circulated figure, put out by organizations & companies working on the problem. Child Find, the oldest such organization, used that number until last year; now feels "there's a tremendous scare on." It says the figure is less than 600.

While one kidnapped child is too many, psychologists fear the affect of overstatement on children's psyches -- & on parents'. "The vast majority of missing children are runaways, but that's not the problem the media's been addressing," Jim Oleson, director of a runaway shelter, told the Post. "Society can accept there's someone terrible out there taking all these children. The fact that the problem is in the family, in the home, well, that's more than they can face."

Says an official of the US Justice Department: "The publicity has made a lot of people aware that children are at risk, but it could go too far.... What shouldn't happen is to raise children's anxiety levels to the point they don't trust adults."

Part of the problem is how crime statistics are kept. All missing kids may be lumped. But 95% are runaways, many of whom return home within hours. 4% are abducted by a parent. Only 1% are kidnapped, according to FBI & law enforcement agencies.

Another common perception is that children who are murdered are the kidnapped ones. In fact, of 897 child murders in '83 (latest available data), the great majority were killed by relatives or acquaintances, not strangers.

As usual, public attention became focused on the problem thru two dramatic events -- the Atlanta murders & John Walsh's brave campaign for legislation after his 6-year-old was abducted & killed. In testimony to Congress, Walsh said 1.5 million kids are reported missing each year and "we don't have clues to what happened to over 50,000 of them." Child Find believes the figure "was pulled out of a hat."

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AS CONSUMER SKEPTICISM HITS THE OVER-PROMOTED COMPUTER BIZ,  
WHAT CAN PRACTITIONERS LEARN ABOUT BUILDING CREDIBILITY & TRUST?  
HOW WILL TOUTED "MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS" HANDLE IT?

Computer people are so transfixed by the wonders of their technology they become missionaries -- and perceivable truth & reality get lost in the hype. It's pretty easy when the product is so exciting and the market a vacuum, eager for whatever you can throw to it.

Having been lionized in the media & elsewhere for their alleged super-skills (granted, most of the laudatory copy was self-generated) hi-tech pr folks took this posture further. They claimed traditional public relations should be replaced by "marketing communications." Computer companies bought the idea. The result of these combined hyperboles is 1) overpromising & a virtual "con job" by the industry, 2) destroyed expectations & rampant confusion for the consumers & other publics, such as employees.

Now the inevitable reaction has come, resulting in faltering companies, a product glut & widespread layoffs. What lessons can the profession learn from this?

1. The concept must be sold before the product. Makers are so busy selling their models that no one successfully pitched the idea of computers -- and their limitations. If there are trade ass'ns doing that job, they haven't penetrated.

2. Product publicity & promo are only half the job, as studies in the diffusion of innovation have taught us for a quarter century. Personal media -- opinion leaders, trusted peers or even salesmen -- must verify & reinforce the impersonal message delivered by news media, advertising, etc. But -- have you talked to some computer

Here are samples of the attitudes the techies must turn around:

"The personal computer business is a business like any other. Products that are over-priced, over-promoted, under-designed and under-supported don't sell when the customers get wise." -- Larry Blasko, Associated Press

"An honest computer company... would be a novelty." -- Lawyer Tom Christo, who specializes in suing computer companies, has won every case he's filed including million-dollar settlements or judgments against IBM, EDS, Burroughs

"Along with her job, she lost faith in the mystique of high technology." -- Boston Globe report on laid-off worker

Computer entrepreneurs behave "more like nineteenth century inventors than twentieth century marketers. Their ignorance about their arrogance on how marketing works compounds their problems." -- Peter Drucker in his new book, Innovation & Entrepreneurship

salespersons? Did they ease your mind...or add to the confusion? General opinion leans heavily toward the latter. The irony is that advertising can give the impersonal messages, only public relations can add the essential personal media.

3. Public relations is still the conscience of an organization. Overpromises, software that doesn't do what it's supposed to, constant planned obsolescence, incompatible systems -- these and many more rip-offs on the buyer are well known to hi-tech pr people. If they have raised a voice in protest, it has not been heard outside the industry (and as these things go, some practitioners indeed may have been vox clamantis in deserto).

4. Even hot new industries require issue anticipation. Screen glare for workers is one example of an issue that seemingly took the field by surprise. Now California may pass consumer protection for computer buyers. Perhaps marketing communicators don't work in issues. But marketing means meeting the needs & values of customers & others.

5. Corporate culture still needs tending, even in new style youth-oriented organizations. pr 6/17 cited a consultant's report, for instance, which noted one big name maker then laying off workers "didn't nurture the corporate culture it had developed" and "it got rotten. You can't just keep adding & promoting people and think everything is going to be hunkydory. You've got to make sure everybody still knows what the game is."

Conclusion: Even hi-tech requires rounded public relations practice, not just marketing communications. No sales boom will go on forever in our competitive, changing world. Selling hard is great as long as you keep one eye out for the changes on the horizon.

Some Good Concepts  
Hi Tech PR Teaches

A. Users' Networks were created by some companies. A means of getting customers to participate in solving problems as they are discovered, finding new uses, providing feedback on design. Has potential as a personal medium to reach non-buyers making purchase decisions.

B. Apply 90/10 Rule says Regis McKenna: "90% of world is influenced by the other 10%" (purview 8/26). His vaunted "Regis Touch" is basically Diffusion Process -- and whether such now troubled clients as Apple used it or not, he's one of few practitioners who has expounded it, despite years of convincing research on the subject. (On the other hand, he denies being in pr: "I've never studied public relations; I've studied technology.")

C. Exciting Projects. Another irony. Despite near total concentration on publicity, often in trade media, some of the best recent projects came from hi tech. Like "Kids Can't Wait" -- Apple offered to put a computer on one teacher's desk in every public school in the country...free. All it asked in return was tax deductibility. The benefits: spare parts sales, add-ons, upgraded models, brand-acclimated young people.

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RECENT EVENTS RAISE BASIC PHILOSOPHIC & STRATEGIC QUESTION:  
IS THE GOAL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CREDIBILITY...OR TRUST?  
AT WHAT POINT DO SMART TACTICS FADE INTO UNETHICAL CONDUCT?

Credibility & trust are not the same, as a rash of gov't events makes clear:

1. On Oct. 9 the Lybian disinformation campaign question broke into general acceptance that the Reagan administration had in fact done it. In resigning as State Dep't spokesman over the incident, Bernard Kalb cited credibility: "Anything that hurts America's credibility hurts America."

2. Simultaneously the gov't denied, but captured mercenary Eugene Hasenfus admitted, that he was a CIA operative working for the Contras against Nicaragua.

3. On Oct. 27 former FAA officials said the agency suppressed an effective air-crash avoidance system developed by Honeywell in 1975 in favor of its own more costly, cumbersome system -- which is still not ready. In the meantime 718 people died in mid-air collisions the system is designed to prevent.

4. Oct. 28 the State Dep't admitted it deliberately covered up misuse of "humanitarian" aid to the Contras. Also that high gov't officials had put together a private Contra support network in defiance of Congress' voted policy barring aid. While the officials are culpable, what about businessmen including Nelson Bunker Hunt, Joe Coors & Peter Grace who, according to newspaper reports, donated the funds? "They found the legal edge of the (Congressional) restrictions and danced consciously around it," one official said.

Government may get away with disinformation -- but practitioners who are a party to it are in clear violation of the field's ethics codes. PRSA's states unambiguously that it is wrong to "intentionally communicate false or misleading information". This seems to rule out situations like fabricating information about new product development to fake out the competition. And raises questions about those glowing forecasts of earnings & profitability which turn out to be so far off the mark it is difficult to believe their disseminators didn't know.

As for using news media to carry disinfo, that's also clearly a no-no, per plank 6: "A member shall not engage in any practice that tends to corrupt the integrity of channels of communication. Yet the grapevine is also a communication channel, so putting out false rumors is also unethical. The prudent course seems clear: tell the truth, the whole truth & nothing but the truth. Maybe it's not a problem. The supposedly "tough" media are going along with the euphemism, disinformation, instead of the straight talk, lying.

Do Bad Guys Get Punished? Have such dishonest acts hurt the administration & its agencies? In the case of the businessmen's donations, does this constitute private citizens interfering with U.S. foreign policy (an illegal act)? Or is it just "charity"? Either way, is it good public relations policy for execs whose companies bear their names?

The pragmatic answer to such questions is what demonstrable effect these events had on trust in the organizations & persons involved. So far there is no evidence the private businessmen or their firms have been affected in any way. Some folks may have been made wary (negative latent readiness) which may have future consequences; but memories are short, as a rule.

As for Reagan & his administration, the President's popularity continues high -- higher than any predecessor, say researchers. George Schultz & his State Dep't enjoy general confidence. And the FAA? Everyone who flies is mad at it anyway for other reasons. But to date nary a ripple...despite this large number of deaths.

Trust Overrides Credibility The conclusion seems to be that overall trust is more important than credibility. At least, a few incidents of dubious credibility -- or, in this case, outright lying -- need not destroy trust won over a period of time. Further evidence comes from studies on Reagan's '84 reelection. Those who voted for him admitted in surveys that they felt he often didn't know what he was talking about & that they disagreed with many of his policies -- but they voted for him because they trusted him & felt him to be a decent human being.

One Theoretical Explanation Credibility is an absolute. Things either are or aren't true or accurate. Each subject is a single topic on a believability scale ranging from 0 - 100. Often credibility is tied to authority, or to reasonableness. Psychologists define credibility as a combination of a) expertise & b) trustworthiness. Thus there are two screens: 1) is the speaker being honest or lying? 2) has he or she got it right or got it wrong?

"You can twist it around and b.s. all you want about it, but people have died who didn't need to die," says an ex-FAA exec about suppression of the Honeywell airborne collision avoidance system. But why didn't that company fight an obviously unjust, callous, death-dealing, bureaucracy-serving decision? Because it didn't want to lose federal contracts, the Honeywell vp in charge of the project told Knight-Ridder Newspapers. Does this Pontius Pilate approach implicate the company as much as the gov't? Remember, over 700 people died...Is it good pr not to anger a customer even if it risks the lives of others?

But trust is a comparative. And it is tied to emotion, to "feel" rather than facts. The questions here are who else could do it better? What circumstances would alter the situation? In evaluating the conflicting Iceland summit explanations, one compares Reagan with Gorbachev -- and who do Americans trust in that comparison?

Familiarity, even notoriety play a role here. Known names are often trusted in this comparative situation regardless of the circumstances that familiarized us with those names. As pols say, just spell my name right. If we are familiar with one person and don't know the alternative person, we "trust the devil we know."

Longer Term Outcome      While the two are linked, trust is more powerful in building relationships than credibility. I may decide whether I trust you based on your credibility -- but not entirely. Emotional, social, & other factors of human nature -- such as compatibility -- override the intellectual, fact-based issue of believability. Most importantly, if I trust you or your organization, I'll probably stick with you thru criticism, mistakes, one or several instances of incredibility -- perhaps even lying. That's what relationships are all about.

¶Of course there is a longer term issue: how long can trust survive without credibility? This is where ethics intrudes, because it raises queries about underlying values. Thus ethics also rises above facts to put questions of personality, which are emotional, back into the equation.

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## USE OF TWO-WAY GLASS IN FOCUS GROUPS: ETHICAL?

Focus groups proliferate despite warnings they are severely limited as a trustworthy research method. Many are conducted in special rooms with representatives of the sponsors looking on through two-way glass. Whether participants are told of this spying is unclear – but doubtful. While such conduct “feels” not quite ethical, some defend it on the grounds it provides untainted data (the ends justify the means?). Here’s what ethics codes say:

- **AAPOR**: (American Association of Public Opinion Research): “Unless the respondent **waives confidentiality** for specified uses, we shall hold as privileged and confidential all information that might identify a respondent with his or her responses.”
- **PRSA** (uniform code of North American PR Council): “A member shall exemplify high standards of **honesty and integrity** while carrying out dual obligations to a client or employer and to the democratic process.” Also: “A member shall **deal fairly** with the public....” And again: “A member shall not engage in any practice which has the purpose of **corrupting** the integrity of channels of communication....”

Since ethics is ultimately pragmatic, the bigger fear may be that a focus group could backfire when someone discovers the peeping toms – thus putting the sponsors’ and researchers’ overall trust and credibility in doubt.

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## ONGOING SAGA OF MALFEASANCE MAKES KEEPING THE FAITH AND BUILDING TRUST THE #1 GOAL

If it isn't enunciated formally in your plan, add it now. Under characteristics of key publics, put in caps, SKEPTICAL. Why? Consider these revelations of last week alone.

1. Habitat for Humanity – like Covenant House last year – had its founder resign on **sexual harassment charges**. Both are church-based.
2. Charges surfaced again that the Reagan-Bush campaign organization used **the dirtiest of tricks** to gain the White House, this time with respected persons making a reasoned case.
3. Bush chief-of-staff Sununu is yet to satisfy critics he isn't **abusing the rules** to get free air flights. [At a press conference involving an airport, present NH Gov. Gregg was asked, "Who'll be the first to use the facilities?" He shot back, "Sununu, of course!"]
4. California insurance department audits showed now-closed Executive Life Insurance Company was **insolvent** from 1983 – but the peoples' protectors did nothing.
5. Accounting biggie Ernst & Young was **fined \$1.5 million** for audit reports showing failed Lincoln S&L was profitable when in fact it lost money. Company's junk bonds were sold based on the audit.
6. Exxon shareholders overwhelmingly **rejected adoption of the Valdez Principles** – established because of the company's Alaska tanker disaster. But thanks to hiked prices due to the Gulf War, Exxon and most oil companies reported large increases in earnings.
7. CEO earnings continue to grow, despite generally poor economic performance. UAL's Stephen Wolf got publicity for an \$18.3 million paycheck same day his company reported a \$157 million loss for the quarter, over 4 times worse than last year. His wages are 1,272 times the starting pay of a flight attendant – who delivers the service most directly to customers. **Average CEO earns 85 times average worker's pay**, says Business Week.

Then there's the question of whether US enticed Kurds to rebel against Iraqi regime – only to let thousands die before even sending food relief. Even if some prove inaccurate, the overall perception here is inescapable

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## DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY PR CIRCUS SPOTLIGHTS IT AND THE PROFESSION – NEGATIVELY

US Dept of Energy Secretary Hazel O’Leary came into office from a supposed pr job, exec vp-corp affairs, Northern States Power (Mpls). Her dept’s recent activities demonstrate how misunderstood pr still can be – not only by its critics, like journalists, but even among those applying its techniques:

1. **Evaluating Media Coverage.** This timeworn tool apparently shocks journalists and other wimps, like the White House. O’Leary has been criticized to the point of threatened job loss for hiring Carma International to do a typical rating of coverage (positive, neutral, negative) and of the reporters who provided it. *Wall Street Journal* professed such horror it ran two major pieces, one a profile of the firms which provide the service – which may stimulate more of it! Other media reacted similarly. Some revealing sidelights:
  - In what is perhaps a clue to its often-flawed communication with the voters, the White House via Press Secretary Mike McCurry said the activity was “unacceptable.” Doesn’t he analyze his media coverage? Is that one reason Pres. Clinton’s points so often don’t get across?
  - In a giveaway that shows media’s true feeling about balanced coverage, one editorial suggested “reporters receiving low marks might well wear this as a badge of honor that they are doing a good job of covering her department.” I.e., finding something to criticize – rather than reporting on developments – is the media’s role.

What hypocrisy. The people who shove a mike in your face and ask how you feel after your family was just wiped out in a disaster are suddenly sensitive that someone would merely analyze their writings.

2. **Hiring “Expensive” PR Counsel.** “O’Leary has \$260-a-day media advisor” is the head over an AP story implying that such counsel to, among other tasks, “elevate her public profile” is wrong. What will strike pr pros is that anyone with sufficient skill to advise a national figure would work for such rates! Reportedly this is for full-time work.

It was this counselor, Audrey Hoffer, who suggested tracking media, says the story. **Another problematic area:** She maintains an office at DOE but works apart from the pa department, “reporting directly to the secretary or her senior advisors.” One Clear Voice?

3. **Large Media Relations Staffs.** The AP article claims DOE has 16 media specialists + a press secretary + a dpa. pr confirmed this and learned their responsibilities are much like any media relations professional in the corporate world – doing media communications plan, drafting media advisories, writing news releases, advising principals, identifying key opinion leaders, etc. “But in

the public sector we have to be more responsive, answering every request for information,” Bill Wicker told pr. Perhaps if DOE spent as much energy and money identifying its opinion leaders and building relationships with them, it could avoid being whipsawed by journalists and build direct rapport with key publics.

## LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT THE ETHICS OF MEDIA / REPORTER TRACKING

The flap over O’Leary’s use of Carma and the subsequent – though not surprisingly biased – coverage deserves some thought by practitioners “just to be sure”:

- **Is there anything inappropriate** in this kind of analysis – for government or any other kind of institution? Is it a Nixonian enemies list, as some media termed it? If so, is that wrong?
- **Is it ok for the private sector but** somehow not for government? Shouldn’t we at last overcome the idea that government should have different standards – that ethical behavior is ethical behavior wherever it occurs?
- **Is this new** – or is it using a computer for what most practitioners have done anyway on a less systematic basis, that makes it suddenly threatening to some?
- **Can it be a useful tool** in helping prepare for interviews by knowing in advance likely issues and attitudes? For other planning and strategizing purposes? Or does it matter?
- **Can it be helpful in letting us know which messages** are not getting across as a starting point for discovering why? If the media isn’t picking them up it may be face-to-face isn’t either; they’re too complicated; they don’t directly affect readers.

We research our publics – why not the media? Does the attention paid to this show that many professionals still have too much focus on the media – or their bosses do?

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**TO BE TRUSTED BY OTHERS YOU MUST TRUST**

Or, rephrase it: To earn the confidence of others, you must show confidence in them. A major reason members of organizations don't trust or have confidence in top management is because top management's policies and behavior too often demonstrate they have no confidence in these colleagues – as evidenced by hierarchical structure, top down decisionmaking, little real empowerment of employees, micromanaging, taking huge salaries that symbolize “only we know how to do things,” etc etc etc. The common word for such behavior is arrogance – CEO disease.

– Pat Jackson

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## COMMERCIALIZING KIDS BECOMES ETHICAL ISSUE FOR EDUCATION, BUSINESS

Is there, should there be, a limit to pushing products – or should our society be one giant selling, marketing and publicity arena? There's evidence anti-materialism philosophies are gaining adherents as telemarketing, direct mail, ubiquitous logos and broadcast commercials sweep over us all. But now the battle between soft drink companies over school contracts, and the fight between shoe and sports clothing makers over college sports teams, present the other side of the picture.

### WHERE CURRENT ISSUE BEGAN

Anyone who has watched a college game, in the bleachers or on tv, must have noticed the Nike swoosh or Addidas signature on helmets or other equipment. College athletic departments accept large "donations" in return for the "advertising space" and exclusive-use deals. Sometimes they're just plain business contracts: we pay the college so much, it agrees to use our products only and lets us put our mark on what sports fans see when the team suits up. Athletic directors tout it as saving money by bringing in money.

- Even for private institutions this raises fairness, if not ethical issues, since every university today is subsidized one way or another by public funds.
- On the other hand, contracts for exclusive use of various items needed to run the institution are signed routinely in the normal course of business, after bidding by interested vendors.
- **What makes this different is the advertising aspect.** So far, there are no reports of banners hanging out of administrative offices saying "We only use Xerox copiers" or whatever.

### THE LATEST WRINKLE

Coca Cola, Pepsi & Dr. Pepper/Seven Up are being asked by school districts – or are pitching them – to become exclusive sellers in their schools and stadiums, **with rights to place ads** in the halls, cafeterias, gyms and elsewhere on school property. School officials who've taken the deals plead need for funds.

- Colorado cut an \$8-million deal with Coke
- Grapevine, Texas \$3.5 million with Dr. Pepper/Seven Up
- *Chicago Tribune* reports Crete-Monee Dist 201-U is seeking \$100,000 from the highest bidder, plus a percentage of sales in its seven schools

### WHITTLE STARTED IT

Channel One Network of Whittle Communications a decade ago began offering schools expensive tv equipment in return for the right to beam in commercials mixed in special news programs. Again, the mea culpa of schools that took the deal was bucks: they couldn't afford to buy the equipment, and it could be used to pull in educational programs. **Now the question is, where will it end ... or will it become the way we do things?**

**BACKLASH UNDERWAY**

Seattle stopped its bidding process when constituents objected. And Wisconsin legislators may pass a bill banning the practice.

- The bill's sponsor asks, "What's next, some large company coughing up money and then telling the social studies department, 'We don't want you saying anything bad about our labor or investment practices?'"
- TV networks provide precedent for the fear. Documented cases show CNN skipped negative news about Ted Turner and NBC did likewise regarding its owner, GE.

**BUILDS ON LONGTIME ISSUE OF PR MATERIALS FOR CLASSROOMS**

For years there has been concern among educators about information and coursework packets provided by

pr people on behalf of their employers/clients. While many of these make data and material available to students they could not get elsewhere, others are very commercial.

- The dairy industry's home economists have been the primary source of nutrition programs for decades – but getting kids to drink milk is deemed a valuable part of their education. And the emphasis is on balancing all food groups, not just dairy products.
- Forest industry's Project Learning Tree is a widely-used environmental program. It does make the point that trees are a crop, like corn or beans, and are a renewable resource meant to be used in lumber, paper and cellulose-based chemicals and other products.

**RISE OF FOUNDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS ADDS ANOTHER CONFLICT POTENTIAL**

They are the fastest growing sector of fundraising. Naturally, businesses are a prime target – and

many contribute. Foundations can pay for programs, supplies and events not covered by school budgets. Public universities have depended on this for decades as tax funds have gotten scarcer.

- But many business donors want more than better schools in return. They expect a marketing or promotion link – e.g. use of their classroom materials or a plug for their product.
- There are legitimate ways of linking but it requires creativity. Supplying speakers on valuable topics for assemblies or classes, e.g., where mentioning the company or product is necessary.

**GENERIC BACKLASH AGAINST OVERCOMMERCIALIZATION**

Sometimes, this plays out as enmity against business period – e.g. the backlash against managed care in healthcare, which ends up being aimed at HMOs and for-profit hospitals.

But consider the overpromotion of long distance phone service. Does anyone want more telemarketing calls, direct mail or tv spots on this topic? Especially when the "deals" offered are so confusing as to approach fraud? The rule these days is:

**People want to be *served*, not *sold*; *involved*, not *told*.**

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## DOES MEDIA COVERAGE INFLUENCE JURIES & PROSECUTORS? CASE RAISES QUESTION WHETHER PR SHOULD SERVE EVERYONE

Eddie Bernays never failed to point out that he withheld his methods from Franco, Hitler and some others who sought his services, because they were anti-social. Since pr's role is to serve society, he argued, those out to harm social rule should not be represented by ethical practitioners.

### FAGAN KIDNAPPING CASE: SPIN 1, PR 0

*Boston Globe* headline reads,  
"PR Firm Puts Positive Spin on

Kidnapping." Regan Group (Boston) is the firm. As the *Globe* puts it:

- "For most observers, what started as a legal disposition ended as a demonstration of the transforming power of public relations as the Fagan family, buoyed by the resources of second wife Harriet Golding, pulled out all the stops to control the image of the man whom, under different circumstances, might have been publicly reviled."

**THE CASE:** A man kidnaps his two daughters, tells them their mother is dead, moves far away and creates a new identity, avoids prosecution for his crime for over 20 years. Then, possibly because of the coverage, gets probation, a fine and 5 years community service.

**THE PR TACTICS:** Wage a smear campaign against the girls' mother; have the daughters defend their father as "a martyr" who "made sacrifices" for them; tell reporters where the girls and Fagan would be dining after the verdict (at a client restaurant) as a photo-op; place the daughters on "Larry King Live," "Today" and other venues.

**QUESTIONS FOR THE PROFESSION:** What does the Uniform Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations say about this, if anything? Does this pave the way one more time for the smearing of pr? Is it a victory for the power of pr, as the newspaper said? Another bit of evidence for those who feel pr is spin doctoring?

Did it demonstrate honesty and integrity to pass out media-style kits filled with documents and news stories of the mother's past *alleged* drinking problems. Did the pr mislead the public – and influence prosecutors? Why was there no coverage of Fagan's past behaviors? Has the Court of Law been taken over by pr influence? Is the law suspended for the well off?

Many remain skeptical of the attack on the mother – who earned her PhD and is now a cellular biologist, remarried and living in Virginia. Has she been victimized by a pr firm? If this is the role of practitioners in lawsuits – and it seems to be now – can that be reconciled with the pr philosophy of creating harmony and bringing people together? Are we just guns for hire after all, as pr's critics loudly proclaim?

PS: It would be interesting to find out the position of the Center for Missing Children on this case.

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## **DOES GLOBAL PR RAISE THE ETHICS STAKES? AMNESTY INT'L ALLEGES PR FIRMS COVER UP TORTURE BY SAUDI ARABIA**

Amnesty International (London) says Saudi Arabia is committing gross human rights violations – including torture, amputations, public executions – and US pr firms are helping to cover them up. AI report titled “Saudi Arabia: A Secret State of Suffering” claims the Riyadh government “spares no effort in keeping its appalling human rights record a secret by employing ... pr firms and lobbyists.” Report goes on to disclose that in 1999 alone, the Saudis spent over \$1 M on such efforts from firms like Boland & Madigan, Cassidy & Assocs, Burson-Marsteller, Dutton & Dutton PC, Powell Tate and Shandwick.

Luckily, “**Most news reports didn’t pick up on the names of the firms,**” AI’s Alistair Howdgett told pr. “We looked at the Department of Justice records and saw that Saudi Arabia employed a large number of pr firms, lawyers, lobbyists etc.” He feels it’s obvious these firms have been fairly successful at smoke screening these abuses because, despite Saudi Arabia’s poor human rights record, the country still enjoys a strong relationship with the US. “The international community must now act to ensure that these brutal human rights violations do not go unnoticed or unchallenged,” warns AI executive director Wm. Schultz.

### **ARE THE FIRMS GUILTY?**

According to the Justice Department, they do pretty basic stuff – “the descriptions that you get are fairly banal, things like representing and assisting in communication, etc.” Howdgett sees “the major problem facing the Saudis is criticism of their human rights record,” so he figures the firms, to be strategic, are most likely involved with covering up alleged abuses. Pretty typical criticism: something’s wrong, pr’s involved, so pr must be the cause.

- It’s widely known Saudi Arabia has its religious police who go after everyone for violations of Muslim law or cleric’s edicts – and may be very hard on Christians, Sikhs and other minorities. And a few years back, a Saudi princess was publicly executed for kissing her fiancé in public

### **DOES THIS ALSO SPOTLIGHT A 2-FACED U.S. POLICY ON RIGHTS?**

The US wants Saudi oil, so does it look the other way on human rights, on the fact the supposed no. 1 terrorist is a Saudi (Osama bin Laden) and also that this nation is about as far as you can get from being a democracy?

- Then why are we being so hard on China, a potentially massive trading partner, for its human rights record and for not being a democracy? One’s an ally, the other treated like the enemy.

### **LESSON FOR ALL PRACTITIONERS**

It’s the ancient issue: Do we merely put forth clients’ voices in the Court of Public Opinion? Or are we duty bound to check out clients’ ethical practices and the info we promulgate? Probably the former approach, while grounded in the free market of ideas and First Amendment, is too sophisticated in this era of immediate opinion – rushing to judgment without thought, better known as

mob rule. Besides, there is the undisputed responsibility for accuracy. Hill & Knowlton was denounced during the Gulf War, remember, for tales out of Kuwait.

At deadline, none of the firms had responded with comment. The activity involved, however, may not be as widespread as Amnesty International thinks. Cassidy & Assocs, Boland & Madigan, Powell Tate and Shandwick are all part of Shandwick International.

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