

A PUBLIC RELATIONS SHORTCOURSE (HED 2227)

- - Joe Johnson

- I. Beginning with three questions:
 - A. What is it?
 - B. Does it do any good?
 - C. Can we do without it?

- II. And three answers:
 - A. Public relations, or relationships with the public, are inevitable.
 - B. Whether public relations are good or bad is determined by whether those relations work for the organization or against it.
 - C. Public relations is a well planned systematic two-way process of communications between an organization and its internal and external publics conducted in a manner to cause or change behaviors.

- III. Behaviors satisfy higher education wants and needs.
 - A. Typical wants/needs: students, gifts, tax dollars, grants, contracts, job opportunities for graduates, good teachers/researchers, and facilities/equipment.
 - B. Wants/needs are satisfied by behaviors, for example: students, the behavior is enrollment; tax dollars, a favorable vote by the legislature; pay for a stadium, get folks to buy a season ticket.

- IV. Behavior is the culmination of what p.r. practitioners call the five-step "diffusion process."
 - A. Diffusion process' five steps: awareness, fact-finding, evaluation, social trial, and adoption.
 - B. Through the process folks decide whether to give us money. It's how students decide whether to enroll.

- V. Influencing the diffusion process – requires an external and internal effort.

P.R. practitioners – folks who work in Office of Public Relations/University Relations – can help influence diffusion process, but only to a point.

- VI. An Office of Public Relations typically is most effective building awareness of organization and meeting information needs of target audiences as they go through fact-finding steps of the diffusion process.

- A. Externally, through the mass media (news releases, audio and video tapes, speech writing, and special events).
 - B. Internally through organization's own publications faculty/staff newsletters, alumni magazines, and annual reports - - and also speeches and video tapes.
 - C. Both "A" and "B" can be categorized as "information transfer," a fundamentally one-way process.
- VII. Office of Public Relations is less effective in the effort to influence the third, fourth and fifth steps of the diffusion process.
- A. Because information, alone, is powerless to change behaviors.
 - B. P.R. practitioners discarded the "bullet theory" – the notion that people would respond appropriately if you could hit them with just the right piece of information.
 - C. Today, there's too much information - - too much to read, to see, to hear.
 - D. 1,200 – 1,300 messages a day.
 - E. We perceive the mass media as having tremendous power and influence, but most of us can't remember the last time we read a newspaper or watched a newscast and, as a result, took any action whatsoever.
- VIII. Pat Jackson, a consultant and past president of the Public Relations Society of America, says we cause or change behaviors only through personal relationship, two-way personal communication.
- A. Jackson says 90 percent of our public relations effort ought be directed to internal audiences.
 - B. Because, as Thomas Wyman, a former executive of CBS, Pillsbury and Polaroid, puts it, "If you can't convince your own people you're doing something decent, intelligent, and important, you're surely not going to convince the outside world."
 - C. Personal experience, and information we receive by word of mouth, speaks louder and more persuasively than headlines, or 30 seconds on the evening news.
 - D. So pick your message. Build awareness. Back it up with facts and then, put your organization - - your alumni association, development councils, your faculty senates, student advisory committees - - put them to work on it.
 - E. Don't rely on facts. They don't count for much. A college degree increases a person's lifetime earnings about \$700,000, but most folks don't go to college. Seat belts save lives, but most of don't wear them.
 - F. Worry more about perceptions. As the former president of People Express says, "We live in an unfair world, where people associate coffee stains on fold-down tray tables with poor engine maintenance."

- IX. Is it public relations, or is it marketing?
- A. These kissing cousins go through the same process of identifying target groups or markets. Both survey opinions/attitudes and both emphasize communications and feedback.
 - B. Goals are even the same - - causing or changing behaviors.
 - C. Marketing can work for higher education.
 - D. But compared with public relations, marketing is a fair weather friend. Marketing can't handle problems or adversary relationships. It can't handle crisis.
- X. If p.r. is effective in times of crisis, it is more effective avoiding such problems altogether.
- A. Joe Marcum, a Tenneco executive, says that what doesn't happen as a result of p.r. advice may be by far the most valuable service p.r. provides.
 - B. Jim Grunig of the University of Maryland says p.r. approaches every target group as a potential adversary and with that perspective works toward cooperation, accord and consensus.
 - C. The only problem says Grunig, is the tendency of management to exclude public relations from decision-making circles - - considering p.r. skills technical rather than strategic.
- XI. Review

A PUBLIC RELATIONS SHORTCOURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY (HED 2227)

Peters, Tom and Nancy Austin. A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference. Random House, 1985. (Especially: chapter 4, Common Courtesy; Chapter 6, "Mere Perception;" and Chapter 7, Quality is Not a Technique.)

Peters, Tom. A Passion for Excellence. A videotaped speech by Peters based on the book.

Jackson, Pat, editor The PR Reporter. PR Publishing Co. Inc. Exeter, New Hampshire. A reading of any dozen or so recent weekly issues provides a good overview of current pr methods. Anecdotes change, but principles are frequently repeated.

Cutlip, Scott M. and Allen H. Center. Effective Public Relations. Prentiss-Hall, Inc., 1978.

Kotler, Phillip and Karen F.A. Fox. Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions. Prentiss-Hall, 1985.

Topor, Robert. Marketing Higher Education: A Practical Guide, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), 1983.

JEJ/bkw

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA (HED 2227)
{Attachment for and to be included with "A Public Relations Shortcourse" (HED 2227)}

- - Joe Johnson

Be truthful and proactive. Avoid a defensive, circle the wagons attitude. Deal with the media in a cooperative spirit - - hat-in-hand, so to speak. And as someone once said, "Never pick a fight with a person who buys his ink by the barrel."

The weekly newsletter, PR Reporter, recommends dealing with crisis on the basis of what caused it. For example:

<u>Crisis By:</u>	<u>Action:</u>
1. Accident	Show concern for victims first, then detail plans to prevent reoccurrence.
2. Scandal	Distance the organization, attribute incident to action of individuals while taking care not to scapegoat.
3. Disagreement	Agree opponents have right to their views, but ...
4. Organizational Failure	Acknowledge, express regret, term it an accident if consistent with facts, detail plans to resolve.

PR Reporter also suggests the crisis workload might be divided in the following way:

1. Decision-making Team	To remove the president from crisis spotlight.
2. Feedback network	To monitor exactly what information is getting to internal and external audiences.
3. Designated Responders	To handle all inquiries and respond with one clear voice.
4. Investigative Team	To objectively get a cause of problem, determine its dimensions, impact, implications - - and suggest to decision-making team what steps can be taken, and announced, to avoid repetition.

AND REMEMBER . . .

- Public relations, or relations with the public, are inevitable.
- People make judgments not on facts, but on perceptions.
- And we live, as the airline president says, "in an unfair world, where people associate coffee stains on the tray table with poor engine maintenance."
- Which means public relations is everybody's business.