

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THESE INFLATIONARY TIMES

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In inflationary times, it is critically important that our relations with our publics are honest, open, and continuing in order to gain public support and acceptance for our programs and products as the competition for dollars increases and the value of the dollar diminishes. We need to develop good public relations in order to establish a two-way communications flow which will keep people informed about our products and programs -- and equally important keep us informed of the changing needs, concerns and problems of people. We need good public relations to create an environment of understanding, cooperation and interaction that is necessary and indispensable for the successful growth and development of our programs, our products, our businesses and institutions. We need good public relations to achieve our full potential as educators and businessmen. We need to see to it that our public relations efforts are well thought out -- and well organized.

So where do we begin -- the methods for public relations like the reasons for doing them are numerous and many sided. They include all of the devices and communications media that are readily available to us -- news stories, letters, brochures, speeches, meetings, booklets, open houses, and what have you -- all designed to help us tell the public about our programs and our products if we will take the time and exert the efforts to use them.

Whatever we use -- it is critically important that we tailor our efforts to our audience -- and that means a variety of efforts -- to reach the broad variety of groups and individuals that make up our clientele -- and we can't forget the general public either. Each effort needs to be different -- and the message needs to be shaped to accomplish the primary objective of public relations -- better understanding and greater acceptance and support for our programs and our products.

Think of public relations as a circle -- that begins and ends with integrity and understanding. First, there has to be integrity on our part -- a basic and fundamental attempt to be honest and open in our presentations. Seems ridiculous that we should even have to mention honesty -- except that the events of the recent years would indicate we can't just take it for granted -- we have to continually work at it. Second, we must have understanding. Understanding our purpose -- our organization -- our products or programs -- our clientele groups -- the methods and devices available to us for communicating our story -- and an understanding of what it is we want to say, to whom we want to say it -- and why.

Using this understanding we need to apply our judgement -- making sure that what we are planning to do will further our public relations purpose.

Then we prepare our message -- putting it into the appropriate form for dissemination to the public we have selected as our target -- either general or specific.

Now we're ready to deliver our message -- to tell our story -- and if we've planned well we should be able to do it with confidence, pride and enthusiasm.

As we complete one effort we're back again to understanding -- trying to understand how well our message was understood, the effect it had and the nature of the public's reaction.

This of course lays the foundation for our next public relations effort and the cycle continues. Public relations is a continuous process -- and good public relations should be our continuing goal as we strive for success in our products or programs and in our relationships with people.

Effective public relations -- involves each of us, thinking enough about our publics to keep them informed.

Effective public relations involves each of us thinking enough about our products and programs and our organizations to tell the public about them.

Effective public relations involves each of us making our publics feel that they are as important to us and our goals -- as we would like our products and programs to be to them and their lives.

Effective public relations involves each of us helping our publics to understand how important our products and programs are to them, and how important their support is to us.

Good public relations, that focus on understanding, acceptance and mutual trust in our relationships, interactions and organized efforts with people -- is where it's at in the years ahead.

Given the nature of the situation in which we find ourselves today, -- with our high dependency on the support and understanding of people, it is obvious that our ultimate success and effectiveness will be greatly influenced by our success and effectiveness in the area of public relations.

Let me "put it in terms of agriculture --". In today's inflationary environment we face the challenge of making our communications as good as our production -- our story as good as our products -- our relationship with the American public as good as our goals and aspirations. That's public relations.

To do these things effectively will require enthusiasm -- positive thinking -- a great deal of effort -- and the ability to deal effectively with the complexities, conflicts, uncertainties and challenges which are a part of life today.

Let me close by citing the six characteristics that I feel are important for dealing with today's world. I drew on the criteria developed by the Space Agency officials for selecting space personnel in making my list because those criteria were designed to identify people with that something extra, beyond skills and technical ability, that made them able to deal with a whole new thing that had not yet come into being. A situation similar to what we're experiencing today -- and then I added my own observations.

The first characteristic for living effectively in today's world is self-acceptance and self-respect. It means "I'm my own person." It means beginning with my own priorities as a person and the kind of person I want to be or become. It means I don't have to always check with someone else to develop my position on various issues and problems. It means that I can accept my weaknesses, my unique personal traits and my differing physical features as being a legitimate part of me. It also means I don't try to be something I'm not, by trying to cover up, throw away or live in fear of any weaknesses I may have. In all of us there is an under-developed or shadow part that makes us want to be bad or mean on occasion. Self-acceptance allows us to accept that shadow part -- even though we may not always like it.

Personally, I think the most dangerous people in the world today are the people who feel they are completely good. These goody-goody are dangerous because they have probably put their bad someplace else, in an institution, a group or an "ism".

What I'm trying to say is this. Self-acceptance means feeling one's bad side as well as one's good side and living with both of them. When we achieve self-acceptance and self-respect we are well on our way toward being a real person -- fully adjusted to participate in change and growth.

Self-acceptance means that somewhere we begin to get a distinction between fate on the one hand and personal destiny on the other. Fate is what life does to me. Destiny is my response to it. I have a peculiar destiny of my own and so do each of you. Finding that destiny and having the courage, conviction and dedication to live it fully is our unique opportunity and ours alone. Self-acceptance is the first characteristic.

The second characteristic is a good sense of humor -- I put a sense of humor on my list of characteristics because it's my hobby -- because it represents an

ultimate form of communication, because it's a useful and healthy way for putting our problems and frustrations into their proper perspective and because it's a force to be recognized and reckoned with in developing social progress. Besides that, what better way for use to relax -- forget our troubles -- and relieve our tensions. There's a lot to be said about the power and force of humor.

This isn't to say, of course, that humor can do everything or that we can solve our problems or deal with our issues by simply laughing them off or taking them lightly. To do so would be to live in a fool's paradise. What I do propose to you this noon is that there is an important place for humor -- and that we can accomplish more with humor, love and understanding than we can through profanity, hate and violence. Hopefully even the most alienated in our society are beginning to find this out. It's up to each of us to see that they do.

The third characteristic that people need to live effectively in today's world is the ability to function well in the face of ambiguity -- "ambiguity", now there's at least a \$2.00 word. All it means is a situation where everything is all confused, messed up and unclear. The ability to function well in the face of ambiguity simply means the ability to get along real well without having everything in order and all spelled out for us.

It's a trait that can be acquired. For you and me, living in a world where things are hardly ever or never neatly spelled out for us, it means we do all we can to get ready for a situation, a job, a career, a marriage or what have you -- (the many things we need to deal with) and then once we have done all we can to get ourselves ready -- we stay loose and flexible -- adjustable and responsive to experiences and options that are dealt to us.

Ambiguity is a real and growing part of our lives -- and our ability to cope with it -- and to teach others to cope with it -- will greatly determine our success or failure. The ability to function effectively in the face of ambiguity is the third characteristic.

The fourth characteristic needed for success in today's world is a minimum of what I'll call a "no-no" style and a maximum of a "yes-yes" style. A very trite kind of cliché perhaps -- it simply means that people who try to function with a whole series of repressions, hang-ups or negative feelings probably won't be creative, successful or happy.

"No-no" people get so caught up in rules and regulations that they can't see the forest for the trees -- and they're always worried about something going wrong -- or what people might say. "Yes-yes" people on the other hand, don't worry about it all that much. Oh, they're concerned -- probably more concerned than the "no-no" people but they are doers rather than hand-wringers.

"Yes-yes" people seem to have the capacity to say, "I have no guarantee, no insurance policy, no assurance that I can make it all come out right, that I can achieve all my goals, -- or do all the things I want or need to do, but I am confident that whatever life hands me -- I'll get some enjoyment and satisfaction out of dealing with it. And while I have no special bag of tricks to assure success, I do have faith in myself, I believe in my ability, and maybe if I work at it, I'll be able to do something positive and good with my life -- for myself and those who depend on me. The fourth characteristic is a "Yes-yes" style.

The fifth characteristic we need today -- is the ability to feel and to say "WOW" on occasion.

My psychologist friends tell me that the most well-adjusted people in the world today are those who know when to say "yes", when to say "no" and when to say "wow"!

- . WOW is our imagination -- coming up with ideas -- with solutions -- with compliments.
- . WOW is when we feel thrilled by our accomplishments or when we feel thrilled by the accomplishments of others -- and tell them so.
- . WOW is being infectiously enthusiastic -- interesting and encouraging.

- . WOW is excitement -- thrills and happiness and making others feel it too.
- . WOW is letting our emotions show.
- . WOW is a wonderful characteristic -- for many reasons -- not the least of which is the fact that it helps us to use our personal energy more fully and effectively.

Each of us has much more energy than we can ever totally expend. Our bodies create it faster than we can use it. Most of us get tired before we should because we spend too much time in the "no" world and not enough time in the world of "WOW".

In each of us there is a little child of the past and a larger child of the future. In every man there is a little boy -- in every woman a little girl. And it is through them, if we don't unduly repress them, that we enter the wonderful world of "WOW". WOW is the fifth characteristic.

The sixth and final characteristic is the "capacity for mutuality" -- another \$2.00 word. It means teamwork, the opposite of being a loner -- the capacity for working as a part of a team. "Mutuality" means that if I believe I have something good in me, then I assume you have something good in you. It has to begin with me -- because I won't see more in you than I see in myself. It's only as I see something in me -- it's only as I respect myself -- that I can see something in you and accept and respect you.

Our behavior changes in mutuality (when we share and work together) because if we truly get involved the total is always more than the sum of its parts. A capacity for mutuality, for teamwork, is critically important in today's world because involvement is the key, group action is the force, and public decisions are the need for achieving progress, meaning and happiness today and in the years ahead.

Twenty minutes ago I posed the question -- "Ever wonder what a person needs to live effectively in today's world?"

People who have devoted their lives to this question say that we need to begin by accepting and respecting ourselves, we need a good sense of humor, we need to be able to function effectively in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety, we need to live in a "yes-yes" life style, we need to cultivate a "wow" personality and we need to develop the capacity for mutuality. All of these characteristics can be acquired by each of us -- if we work at it -- and each are basic to good public relations.

To that I can only add "RIGHT ON" -- and "WOW"!

In preparing these remarks the speaker has drawn on a presentation "Priorities Begin With Me" -- presented by Otis Maxfield, President, American Association of Pastoral Counseling; and Director of Training, American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, New York -- at a Minnesota Agricultural Extension Conference, St. Paul, Minnesota, October, 1974.