PR Essential to your Success

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Whether you are a business, non-profit or association manager, your success will depend, to a large degree, on how well you positively impact the behaviors of those outside audiences that most affect your operation. You need to create external stakeholder behavior change – the kind that leads directly to achieving your managerial objectives. And you do that by persuading those important outside folks to your way of thinking, then moving them to take actions that help your department, division or subsidiary succeed.

The road to that success is filled with potholes, but you'll hardly feel them if you have the right roadmap. Like this one: people act on their own perception of the facts before them, which leads to predictable behaviors about which something can be done. When we create, change or reinforce that opinion by reaching, persuading and moving-to-desired-action the very people whose behaviors affect the organization the most, the public relations mission is accomplished. Where can such a blueprint take you? Maybe to more qualified proposals for strategic alliances and joint ventures; or to big givers looking at your 501-c-3; or to interested specifying sources requesting more information; newly qualified prospects showing interest; a big jump in sales floor visits; more requests for membership applications; repeat purchases reappearing; political figures taking a closer look at your unit as a key member of the business, non-profit or association communities; not to mention new contacts from community leaders.

As that business, non-profit or association manager, there are two steps you should take asap. List those outside audiences of yours whose behavior helps or hinders you in reaching your objectives. Then note how severe their impact is, and we'll take a shot at the target audience you show as number one. Sad to say, you probably haven't assembled the information that tells you how most members of that key outside audience view your organization. So, presuming there is no sign of a large professional survey budget in your shop, you and your colleagues will have to handle the job of monitoring external audience perception by asking the questions yourselves. Interrogatives such as "Have you ever met anyone from our organization? Was it a satisfactory experience? What do you know about our services or products?" Stay alert for negative

statements, especially evasive or hesitant replies.

And be on the lookout for false assumptions, untruths, misconceptions, inaccuracies and potentially damaging rumors. Any of those must be corrected because we know they usually produce negative behaviors. Now you must decide which of these nasties is the most dangerous at this moment and correct it before it really starts to hurt. In other words, once you select the specific perception to be altered, you have identified your public relations goal. But there's always a "but." In this case, a PR goal without a strategy to show you how to get there, is like pasta without the sauce. So, you get to select one of three strategies especially useful for creating perception or opinion where there may be none, changing existing perception, or reinforcing it. But be careful that your new goal and the new strategy compliment each other. After all, you wouldn't want to select "change existing perception" when you have a good current perception suggesting a "reinforce" strategy.

Now let's talk about writing ability. This is where your PR team must employ those writing skills and put together a compelling message. One designed to alter your key target audience's perception, as called for by your public relations goal. To boost message credibility, combine your message with a newsworthy announcement – or make it part of a different presentation. Helps downplay the fact that something is being corrected. Message clarity is paramount here, i.e., what perception needs clarification or correction and why? You must be truthful and your language must be persuasive, logical and believable. Experience tells us this is the best way to hold the attention of members of that target audience, and move perception in your direction.

Now let's talk about the tools you will use to carry this persuasive message to the attention of that external audience (I call such tactics "beasts of burden"). This should be the easiest part of your PR effort because there is an endless selection of communications tactics available such as group briefings, letters-to-the-editor, brochures, press releases and personal contacts. Or possibly, radio and newspaper interviews, speeches, newsletters, and many others. A word here. Be careful about the tactics you select. Is there a clear record of how effectively they actually reach people similar to those you call your target stakeholders? At this point, you'll want to anticipate queries about progress by beginning your second perception monitoring session among members of your target audience. There is, however, a considerable difference the second time around.

Using questions similar to those used during your earlier monitoring session, you now will be alert for signs that audience perceptions are beginning to move in your direction. Fortunately, that means progress. Yes, we are also lucky in the PR business that we can move almost any program along at a faster rate by using additional communications tactics, AND by increasing their frequencies. Remember to keep your attention focused sharply on the very groups of outside people – your key external stakeholders -- who play such a major role in just how successful a manager you will be.

And by all means, use a workable blueprint such as that mentioned earlier. One that helps you persuade those important outside stakeholders to your way of thinking, then moves them to take

actions that lead to the success of your department, division or subsidiary.

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