

Public Relations Training Seminar

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I. THE ROLE AND POWER OF THE MASS MEDIA

Our world today is increasingly driven by a combination of information and entertainment values, and these are both promoted by the explosion of different means of communication, especially electronic communication such as satellite TV and Internet. This means the market for information is extremely competitive and is characterized by the following:

- Overload on the audience, so if you want to catch someone's attention via the mass media you have to produce quality material that is deemed appropriate to use by journalists and deemed worth reading or viewing by the audience.
- Overload on the mass media, so if you want to attract a journalist's or editor's attention and get coverage in their publication or on their channel, you have to produce quality information and PR materials.
- Overload on donors, funders, and advertisers, so it is critically important for NGOs today to produce high quality work if they wish to attract funds from donors or support from companies that have the option to spend their money on direct advertising and promotion.

In order to make best use of the different mass media channels, you should keep in mind what the media themselves see as their primary role, which differs in different contexts. In general, the role of the mass media in global society has been evolving over the past century towards the following goals and duties:

- The media informs the public, provides information and amusement, generates political ideas, mobilizes political and social action groups, and generally helps to shape the public policy agenda and priorities.
- The media plays a role of political accountability and checks-and-balances, keeping an eye on public officials and institutions and constantly challenging them via reports, interviews, debates, etc.
- The media can sometimes play the role of a direct political actor, such as happened in the Watergate or Monica Lewinsky cases in the United States, when revelations by the press sparked political crises and legal actions.
- The mass media also plays an accountability role vis-à-vis the private sector and NGOs, reporting on their activities and making sure that they do not harm the public well-being.

The media primarily reinforce existing views that people hold. This means that you

should carefully define what goal you wish to achieve through the mass media. Usually this goal will be primarily informational, i.e., you will want to inform people and give them facts or information about your work or your cause. You should not expect the media to bring about major or rapid changes in public attitudes. The media is best used to provide factual information in a steady, credible manner, and that knowledge over time helps to change people's attitudes.

NGOs often use the media without precise goals or targets. Often people send press releases or hold press conferences without having sufficiently 'newsy' information to give the press, and this results in poor coverage, or even in situations where some journalists do not respond the next time they are approached by the same NGO. It is important to have a clear, realistic aim when you use the mass media, such as: specific facts to be disseminated, a project announced, an appeal for money or support, introducing a new person or activity, etc. If you do not have newsworthy information, you should not try to use the media to spread your message via free news coverage, but instead use paid advertising or other channels of communication.

II. PUBLIC RELATIONS PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

A good definition of public relations is that it comprises "a variety of marketing tactics that strengthen your credibility, enhance our image, develop goodwill, or influence public opinion."

PR activities aim to inform a target audience about who you are, what you do, and why your work is important. Publicity is one dimension of public relations, involving mass media coverage of your activities. Advertising is another dimension of PR, comprising publicity that is paid for. Effective PR tactics and instruments include the following:

- brochures, flyers and other modest printed materials
- annual reports, books, and other larger printed materials
- web sites
- publicity and media relations, including news releases, press kits, media advisories, news conferences, press tours, personal letters or phone calls to editors and reporters, and briefing lunches or breakfasts for the media
- special events, such as open houses, fund-raisers, trade shows, awards ceremonies, contests, stunts, receptions, and speeches by V.I.Ps
- newsletters, whether printed and mailed or delivered via fax or e-mail
- news sheets and action alerts, brief communications designed only to inform your target audience about something and often to prompt urgent action by the audience

- tip sheets and fact sheets, one-page information sheets designed to give useful information to your audience and also to reaffirm your expertise
- letters to the editor and op-ed articles, to advocate your viewpoint and also to assert your expertise and credibility on a certain issue
- speakers from your organization, at meetings of professional and trade associations, service clubs, civic organizations, and community groups
- sponsorship of a local sports team, musical group, community theater or other activity
- charitable donations local groups
- thank you notes and letters to your target audience, customers, or members

The first task in using PR is to define your goals, which in turn will help you choose the appropriate techniques. Defining your goal can be achieved through the following steps:

- situation analysis of your standing in relation to society and your target audience
- defining your specific targets and goals
- identifying your audience(s)
- identifying your message(s), both broad and specific
- identifying the credible messenger(s) you will use to send your messages to your target audience
- set the measurement criteria you will use to measure and evaluate if your PR effort has been successful, including establishing baseline criteria against which to measure progress
- define the implications of success, in terms of your organization and its staff and budget and routine work load, and what you should do to acknowledge or thank those who respond to your PR effort.

PR activities succeed best when they are undertaken within a wider appreciation of how communications and media operate in society today.

A. The Nature of Information

Information that is transmitted via the mass media and communications channels can be divided into different kinds of materials:

- Factual Information - facts, figures, statistics, and other information designed only to increase the knowledge of the target audience.
- News - anything that is new and/or important and thus is useful for people to know. News must include the element of being 'new', whether a new event

that happened yesterday, or new information about an event that happened in the past.

- Entertainment - anything designed primarily to amuse, please, or entertain people, without necessarily giving them information or news.
- Opinion or Ideology - anything designed to offer ideas and opinions, and usually intended to convince someone else of your views or positions, including attacking or accusatory material.
- Public Relations - any communication process designed to create an image or evoke a favorable sentiment amongst the target audience. Public relations material may not always aim to have the target audience react by taking an action, but instead it may only want to create a positive impression of you amongst the audience (or sometimes the aim of PR is to change a negative impression into a positive one).

B. The Form of Information

Information can be transmitted to the target audience by many different means, or in many different forms, such as:

- Electronic and direct mass media: television, radio, film, video, audio cassette, theater, music.
- Printed materials: newspapers, magazines, newsletters, books, leaflets, brochures, flyers, educational materials.
- Word of mouth: speeches, lectures, talks at religious or tribal gatherings, gossip, rumors, jokes.
- Electronic personal media: e-mail, Internet, beepers, cellular and normal telephones, voice mail.
- Public spaces and actions: street signs, billboards, painting on walls, T-shirts and hats, street banners, flags, balloons, marches, sit-down strikes, demonstrations, charity walks.

C. The Type of Information

You can communicate to your target audience using several types of information, which are a combination of the above two lists:

- Newsy materials: news stories, television reports, and other news reports that are generated by journalists.
- Light features: stories in the press that are entertaining but also about a

serious subject

- Paid advertising: material in the press that you pay for (unlike the first two above which are not paid for).
- Personal opinion or testament: people with respect and credibility in society can be used to spread a message, and that message will be better received than if it were offered by someone who is not well known.
- Public events: special events can be created to attract the attention of the news media, including press conferences, marches, political action, lectures, and other events that are used as a vehicle to transmit your message to the target audience.

III. HOW TO COMMUNICATE SUCCESSFULLY AND TO SEND YOUR MESSAGE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Which combination of the above types and forms of communication should you use to send your message successfully? This depends on

- a) your goal,
- b) your audience
- c) the material and human resources available to you to send your message.

The most successful combination of communication means will be that which is

- a) best able to reach your target audience,
- b) most credible to your target audience, and, consequently,
- c) will achieve your intended goal.

1. Setting your goal(s):

The primary goals will include things such as: Do you wish to inform your audience? entertain them? Change their mind? Make them sad, angry, curious, or happy or some other emotion? Get their attention? Shock them? Make them sympathetic to, or proud of, your cause? Make them critical of a third party? Once you decide your primary goal, you can then determine how to achieve it, by choosing the most appropriate mass-comm channels, but you also should decide your final goals. Final goals are those things that you want to happen as a result of the communication process, such as people spending money to buy something or to donate to a cause, taking political action (voting or protesting), supporting you verbally or emotionally, etc. You can measure success or failure by using polls, surveys, focus group discussions, and other means such as counting new donations

or members of an organization, new customers, inquiries received, visitors to a center, etc.

2. Determining what is credible to your audience:

Messages sent to a target audience will prove to be credible or non-credible depending on the following factors:

- a) The state of mind of your audience
- b) The quality of your information or message: the message you send must be accurate and factual, and relevant to your audience.
- c) The quality of the messenger: the person or institution sending the message must be credible and appropriate, or else the audience will not bother even to listen or receive the message.
- d) The context in which the message is delivered: the medium or channels you use to send a message should be appropriate.

3. Communications tools you can use in a PR effort:

The following are basic tools that you can use in your PR activities:

- electronic mass media (TV, radio, film, internet, e-mail)
- printed materials (newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures)
- verbal information (speeches, rumors, jokes, public meetings, personal meetings)
- public spaces (posters, slogans on walls, banners, T-shirts, hats)
- public events (marches, rallies, open-houses)

4. The importance of being newsworthy:

You get the media's attention by meeting the media's goals of wanting to inform, educate or entertain. When you contact the mass media with an idea for a story or asking them to cover your activities, you should make sure that your subject matter: is timely and relevant, or linked to a current news development; new, innovative, unique or different; will impact on your target audience or community's well-being, health, economy, leisure, or safety; links to a season or holiday; provides new and interesting research information; has emotional appeal with great human interest; or, is simply entertaining or amusing.

5. How to give an impressive interview:

The following tips will allow you to give a good interview and to become a regular

source of information or analysis for the mass media, which is one way of using the media for your PR purposes.

- Know the reporter's agenda, and be clear if your interview is on or off the record.
- Plan ahead by thinking of questions you may be asked and preparing your answers.
- Keep your answers short and to the point, answering the question clearly and then adding any further explanation.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms, and stick to simple language that everyone would understand.
- Make a significant or substantive statement, avoiding generalities and speaking about your achievements when possible.
- Use facts and specific information, which establish your expertise and make the interview more interesting for the audience.
- Don't over-sell your self or your organization, or else the interview you give may not be used.
- Repeat your main point(s) so that the heart of your message gets across if the interview is shortened.
- Only say what you want to be aired in public, and always speak on the record if you can, so that the interviewer sees you have nothing to hide.
- Never say "no comment". If you've made a mistake, admit it. If you need to research an issue before answering, say so. If you don't know the answer, say so.
- Be honest; you have to speak the truth always to be credible.
- Be positive. Emphasize your achievements when you can.
- Be cooperative and courteous, so that the media trusts you and comes back to speak to you often.
- Be sure you can summarize your main point or points in a single statement or even a phrase. It's a good way to get your message across in a simple way that stays with the audience.

6. How to give a good presentation:

- establish a theme right from the start and make it simple and clear; repeat the theme during the presentation and at the end
- create a rapport with the audience
- test any audio-visual materials ahead of time, and use them sparingly, only to illustrate that which you cannot convey through words

- people's attention is strongest at the start and end of a presentation, so make sure your main points are made then, and clearly
- use your eyes and hands well, looking people in the eye and gesturing to stress a point
- raise and lower your voice and pitch to stress points and create mood
- use simple speech and sentences, and avoid technical jargon; tell human stories when possible.
- rehearse your presentation ahead of time
- if you speak to a small group, leave them with a one-page printed summary of your key theme and points.

7. The fundamentals of good writing:

- Define your aim (to stimulate, inform, persuade, prompt to action, or entertain)
- Know your audience
- Set up the structure of your text
- Write the text
- Edit and revise the text

IV. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH PR ACTIVITIES:

1. be newsy; touch on controversy or change when you can without offending
2. be relevant to your audience and its concerns; know your audience's values
3. be entertaining; tell a story about real people when you can
4. summarize your key points in the beginning of your text, talk, film or interview
5. be sure to repeat your main point at the end of your presentation
6. use quotations when you can
7. use testimony of credible people or institutions
8. be specific, not general; use facts and figures to support a point
9. use good timing in scheduling events
10. keep writing and speech simple; avoid technical jargon
11. create slogans and sound bites that summarize your main idea, are easy to remember, and make an impact on the audience

12. use anecdotes and stories of real people; humanize your subject, bring it to life
13. do not sound like a commercial trying to sell a product; be a story-teller
14. be concise and to the point; do not over-write or speak too much.
15. be honest; admit any mistakes or problems and explain them from your perspective; say you don't know if that's the case and then talk about what you do know
16. be positive; stress your strength, and avoid talking negatively of others
17. organize your ideas in a clear, logical manner before you write or talk; arrange your points in a methodical, logical order
18. make sure everything you say is accurate and can be verified; never lie or exaggerate; always tell the truth
19. provide background, context and consequences of the issue you are addressing, but briefly
20. remain cool and polite at all times in public appearances; never attack others
21. identify yourself clearly and put yourself in the story when you want public recognition
22. prove your credibility with facts and data and testimonials from credible other people or institutions
23. stress what you have already achieved, rather than your plans and goals
24. use examples and analogies that are familiar to your audience
25. avoid 'annual review' press conferences; focus instead on specific achievements or activities that are new and newsworthy