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Persuasion theories in the practice of public relations in the 1990's

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PERSUASION THEORIES
IN THE PRACTICE OF
PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN THE 1990'S

by
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ABSTRACT

Owens, Susan

Research Studies on Persuasion Theories in Practice in Public Relations in the 1990's
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Donald Bagin, 1996
Communications Department, Rowan College of New Jersey

The purpose of this study was to present ways in which persuasion theories are currently used in public relations and how persuasion theories could be used in public relations. Some public relations textbooks devote a chapter or section to persuasion theories and how they relate to public relations. The public relations practitioner needed a publication that expanded on these theories and provided cases of how they are used in public relations today.

To research persuasion theories and current application of them, current textbooks and periodicals were reviewed at several libraries. The searches at Rowan College, Richard Stockton College and Ocean City Public Library included CD ROM Newsbank, Business Newsbank and a Full-Text Periodicals database. The on-line card catalog database service at Rowan College was also used. These searches yielded many related articles and books.

The findings that resulted from this research were that public relations practitioners are using a variety of persuasion theories to promote their organizations, such as establishing source credibility, "channeling" their messages to concur with audience attitudes, using emotional appeals, values advocacy and so forth. Further, the findings offered examples of ways that companies are using such theories.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Owens, Susan.

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The purpose of this study was to present ways in which persuasion theories are currently used in public relations and provide the public relations practitioner a publication that provided real-life examples of how persuasion theories are used in public relations today, and how persuasion theories could be used in public relations.

The research findings were that public relations practitioners are using a variety of persuasion theories to promote their organizations. Further, the findings offered examples of ways that real companies are using such theories.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to present ways in which persuasion theories are currently used in public relations and how persuasion theories could be used in public relations.

Background

Many textbooks are devoted to persuasion and persuasion theory. These books primarily define persuasion and persuasion theories. They tell the reader who authored the theories and elaborate on their origin. They explain the theories in a theoretical, but not very practical, way. Some public relations textbooks devote a chapter or section to persuasion and its theories. They briefly describe these theories, and some even give theoretical examples of how they can be used by the public relations practitioner. Many public relations and business periodicals report stories of real companies using persuasion theories in practical application. A varied amount of information from all three sources needed to be brought together in one publication to be used today by the public relations practitioner.

By knowing ways persuasion theories are being used today in public relations, the practitioner can better understand the theories, and, therefore, apply them in practice.

The following quotes, derived from chapters on persuasion in current public relations books, affirm the idea that persuasion is and can be used greatly in public relations.

"It is difficult to imagine any human activity in which persuasion does not exist. The process involves everybody from children convincing parents that bedtime should be delayed a half hour to a salesperson who makes a living persuading people to buy a product. The strategies of persuasion are used daily by public relations practitioners because their job is to engage in purposive communication--with the objective of influencing people in some way."[1]

"In persuasion, the critical factor in opinion change usually is information or the lack of it and how this information is presented or withheld. Social scientist Herbert I. Schiller contends that information is power, and he is correct. Information resides in controllable sources--among the upper echelons of government, business and education. It is made available to the public, Schiller says, through disseminators who usually are public relations people with the power to control the flow of information. Their access to information and their selective use of it combine the tools of power and persuasion."[2]

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[1] Agee, Warren K. and Phillip H. Ault and Dennis L. Wilcox. *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics.* Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1986, 235.
[2] Newsom, Doug and Alan Scott. *This Is PR.* Wadsworth, Inc., 1985, 197.

Need for the Study

The study of persuasion was central to the education of the Greeks. Aristotle was the first to set down the ideas of ethos, logos, and pathos, which roughly translate as "source credibility," "logical argument," and "emotional appeal."

Persuasion is a form of communication, and anyone who communicates with others will inevitably use some form of persuasion, knowingly or not. This is so because of the difference in communicating parties' goals and the ways in which those parties try to achieve those goals. When the goals conflict with each other, persuasion is used to reach agreement.

All persuasion is not always effective. The skill in persuasion is in identifying what matters to the people being persuaded (the audience), presenting the persuader as a credible source, and encouraging the audience to see the persuader's perspective.

An abundance of ways to communicate exists in the world today. Messages are flashed around the world by satellite in seconds. The Internet is a veritable communication goldmine. Therefore, the need for effective, persuasive communicators is perhaps greater than ever. The world needs skilled communicators who can make known the goals and messages of an organization to its publics. These communicators must also be able to inform their employers of their publics' attitudes, guiding them in fashioning their policies, image and messages.

Persuasion is used by public relations practitioners to change or neutralize hostile opinions, solidify potential positive opinions and attitudes, and conserve favorable opinions. Changing hostile opinions is the most difficult form of persuasion. Conserving favorable opinions, or preventive PR, is the easiest and perhaps most effective.

The real-life cases of how persuasion is being used today in public relations will create a better understanding of the connection between persuasion and public relations. Public relations practitioners can use the cases presented in this study as models for fashioning their own methods of persuasion.

Plan of Study

To research cases of persuasion used currently in public relations, several resources were used. These were Savitz Library at Rowan College, Stockton College Library, Ocean City Public Library at the Ocean City Community Center, Journal Graphics, Inc., current television news programs, and radio public service announcements and advertisements.

Chapter 2, the case study section, examines and explains ways in which companies have used persuasion in the practice of public relations.

Chapter 3 describes the procedures used for the compilation of research material, and lists the names of databases searched for the study.

Chapter 4 is a handbook that presents suggestions for how the practitioner could use persuasion in the practice of public relations.

In Chapter 5, the author presents key recommendations for using persuasion in the practice of public relations, as well as recommendations for further study.

Limitations

The main limitation of this project is the fact that only cases from very current literature are presented. The reason for this is to show the connection between persuasion and public relations in the most relevant terms possible in today's world's issues and trends.

It is important to keep in mind that the persuasion techniques in each case presented involved varied research of publics, current attitudes, timing and context. When planning one's own persuasive strategies, these research techniques must be used as well.

It is possible that the examples in Chapter 2 that deal with ethics, as well as, perhaps, examples in other chapters, will cause the reader to question the ethical behavior of such practices. It is not the intent of this thesis to justify any of the strategies practiced in the cases presented. The examples cited in this thesis are presented to the reader without bias.

CHAPTER 2

Case Studies

Before *how* to persuade can be discussed, it is important to discuss some broad but integral factors of persuasion. These are audience analysis and source credibility

Audience Analysis

To persuade it is important the practitioner have knowledge of audience attitudes. This knowledge helps communicators tailor their messages to fulfill a need and suggest a course of action. This can also be referred to as "channeling." Cancer research foundations channel messages that capitalize on the public's general concern for prevention or a cure. If people don't want to get cancer, or want the assurance of a cure if they *were* to get it, isn't it worth a $20 donation?[3]

Another example of channeling is the fast food industry's response to a more and more health-concerned public. Counting calories and examining fat content labels have almost become national pastimes. Fast food chains like McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and Taco Bell have joined in on the fun by offering lower fat selections on their menus.[4]

These are very general techniques of fashioning messages to meet audience needs. More specific techniques will be discussed later in this thesis.

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[3] Agee, 237.
[4] Sullivan, R. Lee. "Leaner Menus," *Forbes*, March 13, 1995, 154.

Source Credibility

Usually, the more credible the source, the more persuasive it is. A source seems more credible if the audience perceives an element of expertise and/or sincerity. Public relations practitioners must provide the right person for an audience. Reporters prefer to talk with the person in the organization who is most directly involved in or knowledgeable about the issue. Up front it can seem difficult to change the source of most messages. But companies are becoming more and more creative in trust-winning tactics.

One industry that has used such tactics is the fast food industry. McDonald's has recently run full-page ads in the Journal of the American Medical Association that offer "nutrition materials about our menu to show your patients how our food fits into a healthful diet." McDonald's, Wendy's and Jack in the Box put up exhibits at the American Dietetic Association's annual meeting. Taco Bell is sending information packets to doctors and nutritionists and sending spokespeople to meet with health care industry associations. Simply associating with these organizations, which are considered health experts, has paid off for the chains. The Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C. recently issued this commending statement from Jayne Hurley, senior nutritionist with the CSPI. "If you choose carefully, you can get a good meal at a fast-food restaurant."[5]

Another example of how companies establish source credibility comes from Apple Computer. Before the company publicly introduced its Apple Macintosh, it spent many months educating key groups within the electronics industry -- software designers, distributors and computer dealers. Regis McKenna, whose public relations firm handled

[5] Sullivan, 154.

this strategy, explained why it was used. "Ninety percent of the world's views are controlled by the 10 percent who are opinion makers. There are probably no more than 20 or 30 people in any one industry who have major impact on trends, standards, and a company's image or character."

The reason for this strategy was to ensure that opinion leaders in the industry were cultivated and informed about the Macintosh before the media picked up the story and began interviewing their sources in the electronics field. Positive statements from the opinion leaders provided important third-party endorsement for the new product.[6]

Similarly, associating with key communicators to attain image credibility is demonstrated by Phillips Flagship, a well-established seafood chain in the United States' Mid-Atlantic region. Within the past two years, Phillips has put particular emphasis on the concierge program. Phillips marketing employees visit concierges to keep them informed of what's going on in the restaurants. In some cases, the restaurants set up a rebate or bounce-back program for concierges who send them business, offering prizes or cash. And last year, Phillips units hosted a Concierge Appreciation Party, which they plan to hold annually.

"First of all, it's extremely time-consuming," said Honey Konicoff, corporate director of marketing. "Secondly, it's a program you have to manage, and you have to develop relationships, so you need to keep visiting them to stay fresh in their minds."[7]

Another way to establish source credibility is for a company to position *itself* as an expert in its field. Here is how Case Design/Remodeling Inc., in Falls Church, Va.

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[6] Agee, 238.
[7] Carmel, Suzanne. "Marketing Ideas that Work," *Restaurants & Institutions*, February 1, 1995, 120.

continues to do it every year. The company holds an annual kitchen-remodeling competition for local high-school drafting students. The company president talks to individual classes, presenting a crash course on the basics of home remodeling.

The president provides students with several "tools," including a floor plan of an existing kitchen and a list of the fictional client's requirements. The students then have two months to complete their designs, and they are free to call Case Design with any questions. A panel of industry experts judges the entries, and the winner is awarded a paid summer internship with Case Design.

The contest attracts a lot of free local publicity that reaches the students' parents, who may someday want to have a kitchen or bathroom remodeled. This strategic program presents the company as an expert in its field.[8]

Likewise, Santin Engineering company in West Peabody, Mass., whose trade association recently cosponsored a seminar that would be transmitted nationwide via satellite, seized the opportunity to showcase its expertise in the industry. The conference topic--using technology to make prototypes rapidly--described the company's business exactly. However, there was no place to view the telecast near Santin Engineering.

For a $400 fee, paid to the conference producers, Drew Santin, the engineering firm's owner, transformed his $4-million company into an authorized viewing site. He also paid $700 to a nearby satellite-dish-rental firm for one day's use of a dish, including installation and setup. Santin Engineering then invited customers to watch the seminar and enjoy a buffet lunch and a company tour. Santin could have held the event at a hotel with a

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[8] Maynard, Roberta. "Enhancing Your Reputation as an Expert in Your Field." *Nation's Business*, June 1995, 12.

satellite dish, but he welcomed the chance to show off his plant. The 50-employee company also sent out news releases about the telecast.

Although guests were given short notice, Santin estimates that more than 60 people attended; about half of them were current customers and half were prospective ones. During the show Santin collected questions from the audience and faxed them to the speakers. He later addressed any questions the panelists hadn't, further confirming his and the company's expertise. In addition, the news releases raised the profile of the 40-year-old family business and resulted in several interviews by local radio and cable stations.[9]

Another example of positioning the company as an expert in its field comes from Phillips Flagship, a restaurant discussed earlier in this thesis. The restaurant ties its downtown Washington unit's small sushi bar to a big annual event, the city's Cherry Blossom Festival. One year, the unit invited master sushi chefs from Japan, who were in Washington for the festival, to come in and do a demonstration in the restaurant. They expected 150 people and wound up with more than 250.[10]

The Great Image Battle

Source credibility is key to the company image. Organizations cannot speak. They cannot attend meetings, either. Only people can do that. So the image projected by the individual tends to become, in the audience's mind, the image of the organization that person represents. And if that individual happens to be the CEO, the depth to which that

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[9] "Satellite Dish for a Day," *Inc.*, June 1995, 95.
[10] Carmel, 120.

image is impressed grows markedly. So the CEO's public image is the organization in the audience's mind.

And strategic audiences, or boundary publics, directly influence the organization's ability to succeed. An organization's ability to function, to succeed, to turn a profit, is directly affected by other organizations and groups at their boundaries. Like individual pieces of glass in a stained-glass window, each is both constrained and supported by its neighbors. For one to grow, for one to even move, its neighbors must cooperate.[11]

International management and organization-design expert Henry Mintzberg says every CEO has three essential duties: 1) Direct supervision; 2) Development of the organization's strategy; and 3) Management of the organization's boundary conditions--its relations with its external environment. To illustrate the importance of top management visibility to company image, we must examine a company who experienced reputation damage because of top management invisibility. Exxon and the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill is a perfect example of this. William Small, writing in *Public Relations Review*, put it this way:

"No company ever spent more to repair the damages of an industrial accident. None worked harder to marshal an army (and navy) to fight the damages to the environment. No corporation had to cover so much territory to repair the results. And probably no other company ever got a more damaging portrayal in the media."[12]

Exxon's post-spill actions did not cause an image problem; the way it communicated those actions did, coupled with the virtual invisibility of top company

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[11] McGrath, John J. "Sell Your CEO! Winning The Corporate-Image Battle in the '90s," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, May 1, 1995, 444.
[12] Ibid.

management. So Exxon's public image was shaped by the State of Alaska, the U.S. Coast Guard, a legion of reporters, and the many environmental groups who never met a large organization they didn't hate.

In a different catastrophic situation, Exxon succeeded in maintaining a positive image with effective communication, which came from top management. On August 2, 1993, an explosion and fire rocked Exxon, the nation's second-largest petroleum refinery, located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Almost from the beginning, Exxon successfully communicated information about the situation through written statements and broadcast stories. In television coverage, the plant manager was the primary source in more than a quarter of the stories. In newspaper coverage, the plant manager was a primary source in more than one-third of the stories.

Exxon communicated corporate responsibility and managerial compassion. Of primary concern was safety, both of workers and the community. Exxon emphasized that it was cooperating with all federal and state agencies, that neighborhood monitoring for hazards was beginning immediately, and that employees were being held off from searching for the missing individuals until the structure was safe for them to enter.

Exxon also framed concern for the community. Starting with its initial release, the company emphasized its "monitoring at Exxon's fence line for hazardous materials." It also notified the media that clean-up crews would be wearing protective gear only because "OSHA regulations require" it. This forewarning prevented the possible frenzy brought on by reports that left readers to assume the protective gear was being used because Exxon had knowledge of hazardous materials caused by the explosion. Exxon also stated that

"Exxon's primary concern will continue to be for the safety of those who work in our plant and for those who live in the surrounding community," which encompassed both safety and concern for community.

Finally, responsibility toward, and compassion for, employees' families were other issues communicated by Exxon. An early news release indicated that the families of the missing had been notified. Expressions of sympathy to the families were also included in a number of later news releases.

One clearly identifiable quote from the news releases was used. It came from Exxon's plant manager, Bill Rainey. The following quote was read on-air by three local anchors: "Our deepest sympathies go to all the families. We share in their loss and grieve with them." Five newspaper articles directly quoted Rainey as well.[13]

Persuasive Nonverbal Communication

It is not only with words, however, that the CEO markets his or her image. Nonverbal communication begins when the CEO enters the event and continues all the time he or she is there. Nonverbal communication is the transfer of information without the use of words, and includes facial expressions, head movements, body positions and acts, tones of voice, clothing and even odor. It can be as powerful as verbal communication, and is often more powerful because people need not be conscious of sending or receiving a message to communicate nonverbally. When verbal and nonverbal messages conflict, audiences almost always dismiss the verbal in favor of the nonverbal.

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[13] Duhe, Sonya Forte. "Framing the Media's Agenda During a Crisis," *Public Relations Quarterly*, Winter 1994-1995, 43.

For example, during President John Kennedy's speech in front of the Berlin Wall, the audience cheers wildly when Kennedy says, "Ich bein ein Berliner!" But there is a brief pause between the remark and the reaction. Why that pause? Some researchers and linguists argue that what Kennedy really was saying as the audience would perceive it was: "I am a jelly doughnut."

You see, residents of Berlin do not call themselves "Berliners." The only thing they do call a "Berliner" is a jelly-filled pastry. No matter what the words actually meant, however, the audience briefly paused and then cheered enthusiastically. Thus Kennedy's intent was communicated clearly by his actions and demeanor. That pause was the time it took the audience to recognize a conflict between verbal and nonverbal messages, then select and react to the nonverbal. The nonverbal "symbolic speech" he delivered overshadowed the literal text he read.[14]

Emotional Appeal Theory

Emotional appeals have been used throughout history. One master of the technique in the twentieth century was Winston Churchill. His speeches, laden with emotional appeal, galvanized entire populations to fight for victory in World War II. He continued to use these techniques after the war, in ways such as in the following excerpt:

"One day President Roosevelt told me that he was asking publicly for suggestions about what the war should be called. I said at once 'The Unnecessary War.' There never was a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle. The human tragedy reaches its climax in the fact that after all

[14] McGrath, 447.

the exertions and sacrifices of hundreds of millions of people and of the victories of the Righteous Cause, we have still not found Peace or Security, and that we lie in the grip of even worse perils than those we have surmounted. It is my earnest hope that pondering upon the past may give guidance in days to come, enable a new generation to repair some of the errors of former years and thus govern, in accordance with the needs and glory of man, the awful unfolding scene of the future."[15]

Strong emotional appeals can be extremely persuasive in merely reinforcing current beliefs and attitudes to changing attitudes to the more difficult task of rousing the public into action.

The Greenpeace organization sends out literature that constitutes strong emotional appeal to save Harp seals. The cover of a direct mail brochure shows a baby Harp seal--all fuzzy, with large liquid eyes --and the headline "Kiss This Baby Good-Bye." Inside, seal behavior is portrayed so the reader can identify the seal's fate with that of a human infant.

"At that tender and vulnerable age, with his mother at his side, he wiggles forward, waggling his whole backside. He goes to meet, in a curious, friendly, playful way, the first human being he has ever seen and is--by the same human--clubbed in the head and skinned on the spot--sometimes while he is still alive."[16]

Similarly and more currently, animal rights activists like PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, have used emotional appeal theory to generate public sympathy for a less cuddly creature--the lobster. Some of their arguments, as aired on ABC News 20/20, are as follows:

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[15] Churchill, Winston S. *The Gathering Storm*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948, iv.
[16] Agee, 245.

"I believe that no compassionate person would boil an animal alive. When you throw a lobster into a pot of boiling water, that lobster whips about wildly, scrapes the sides of the pot in a desperate attempt to escape."[17]

"They have feelings. They do suffer. They do feel the pain and they would like to live. They have a right to have a life."[18]

Although just as strong an appeal as the Harp seal appeal, the lobster appeal did not have nearly the impact. Of course, the subject matter is probably the largest contributing factor of success in these cases. Generally, the public likes cute, fuzzy, friendly animals. The public also generally likes lobster--but for a different reason! The thousands of bulk mail letters sent by Greenpeace on behalf of the Harp seals were extremely successful in creating a groundswell of demand that the harvesting of seals be forbidden. The public outcry became so intense several years ago that the Canadian government hired a public relations firm in New York to present the industry's side of the story.[19]

The public has not been so quick to defend the lobster, however. In fact, the 20/20 episode approached the issue in an almost cynical way. Instead of presenting both sides of the issue in an objective manner, it seemed as if 20/20 were on the side of the lobster lover who loves the lobster dipped in butter! This is the way the story was introduced:

"Well, Hugh, you and I are bound to see one soon--this kind of bumper sticker, that says, "Save the Whales" and then next to it it's going to say, "Save the Lobster."

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[17] "Saving the Lobsters," *ABC News 20/20 Transcript #1608*, Journal Graphics, Inc., February 23, 1996, 13.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Agee, 245.

That's right, lobsters. Animal rights activists have now taken up their cause and if that makes you smile, consider the impact that these protesters have had on people who wear fur. Do lobsters deserve our sympathy? Have they been suffering in silence for the sake of our appetites? With its beady eyes and creepy cold-blooded stare, the lobster gazes out from the prehistoric past. Whatever possessed anyone to turn this monster into a meal? Imagine the courage. Today, gourmets everywhere are grateful."[20]

The story then goes on to quote several consumers of lobster who rave about the tasty cuisine. It also presents the side of a lobster trapper whose livelihood is dependent on the lobster, and who worries that one day his profession might be extinct.

While the emotional appeal theory was successful in motivating the public into action regarding Harp seals, it was not as successful in creating even sympathy from the general public concerning the lobster.

Positive Values Reinforcement

Perhaps one of the easiest uses of persuasion is the reinforcement of current beliefs or values -- expressing values shared by the organization and its audience. This type of persuasion, also termed "values advocacy," can be used to enhance the organization's image, deflect criticism of the organization and/or its policies, products and services and to establish value premises that can be used in later discourse.

[20] "Saving the Lobsters," 12.

Values Advocacy as Image Enhancer

"Images are built over time, developed through the cumulative effect of many messages. Such messages, which take many forms, are frequently not transmitted intentionally. The image of an organization is formed in the minds of customers, citizens, employees, volunteers, investors, or regulators, not simply through official statements of the organization, but through all of its activities."[21]

An organization can establish control of its public image through messages that reinforce popular beliefs and values. Organizations can do this in a number of ways: by praising general public values and condemning their opposites, by associating themselves with worthwhile societal goals, by discussing their involvement in charitable activities, and by linking themselves with public figures who personify American values.

One way an organization can associate itself with societal ethics is by commending societal values and criticizing their opposites. In a full-page advertisement in the Wall Street Journal, United Technologies gave folksy examples of how people are often kept waiting by businesses, co-workers, and doctors. The company then suggested: "Avoid a lot of grief and inconvenience for the people you deal with. Think before you announce how long something will take -- and then deliver what you promised. On time." By praising dependability and decrying irresponsibility, United Technologies situated itself firmly in the mainstream of American values. Other value-based ads by the company praised patriotism, Boy Scouts, perseverance, homemakers, and peace on earth, and

[21] Bostdorff, Denise, M. and Steven L. Vibbert. "Values Advocacy: Enhancing Organizational Images, Deflecting Public Criticism, and Grounding Future Arguments," *Public Relations Review,* Summer 1994, 146.

condemned snobbery, bad manners, drunk driving, and gossip. Now none of these positions put United Technologies out on a controversial limb, but they did allow the company to enhance its public image.[22]

Another way organizations can enhance their image through values advocacy is by associating themselves, their products, or their services with commendable civil goals. The theme of one Du Pont campaign was how the organization's products "make a difference" in the lives of ordinary people. One ad showed a group of African-American men playing basketball under the headline, "For Bill Demby, the difference means getting another shot." The body of the ad explained that when Bill was in Viet Nam, he used to dream of coming home to "play a little ball with the guys" and that the dream was cut short when he lost his legs to a Viet Cong rocket. The ad went on as follows: "But then a group of researchers discovered that a remarkable Du Pont plastic could help make artificial limbs that were more resilient, more flexible, more like life itself. Thanks to these efforts, Bill Demby is back . . . At Du Pont, we make the things that make a difference."[23]

Similarly, US Healthcare is currently running a series of radio spots which recount the stories of its members. The voice-over is a US Healthcare member, singing the praises of US Healthcare through a "letter to a friend." In one of these letters, a woman "writes" to a friend she hasn't seen in three years. "A lot can happen in three years," she proclaims. "Bob and I have six kids. Sound impossible? Not when you have five of them at once!"

She then goes on to say that it cost over one million dollars to have the babies, and US Healthcare paid for all of it, including uterine monitoring and other additional expenses

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[22] Bostdorff, 147.
[23] Ibid.

necessary for giving birth to quintuplets.[24] These companies linked their products and services with established public values and concerns in an effort to create a positive image for themselves.

A third way organizations enhance their image through values advocacy is by talking about their involvement with charitable activities. In one campaign, General Dynamics advocated Project Literacy by asking, "We think every American ought to be able to read this ad. Don't you?" Through this ad, General Dynamics reinforced a commonly held value. After all, what American is against literacy?[25]

Yet another way an organization boosts its image through values advocacy is by linking itself with a public figure who is seen by the general public as morally upstanding. In its recent "I'm the NRA" print campaign, the National Rifle Association featured a number of different praiseworthy people, each explaining why he or she was a member. Celebrities and public figures like movie star Charlton Heston, Senator Barry Goldwater, test pilot Chuck Yeager, and sportscaster Curt Gowdy appeared. In each case, the featured NRA member praised values such as safety, freedom, conservation, tradition, discipline, and family togetherness and then linked these values to the National Rifle Association.

According to Debbie Nauser of the NRA's Public Affairs Department, all of the people in the "I'm the NRA" ads either volunteered to appear or were nominated by others and then agreed to accept the invitation. None of the participants was paid for their testimonials, and they tended to be extremely enthusiastic about their campaign

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[24] US Healthcare radio advertisement, *WMID FM 99.3*, April 20, 1996.
[25] Bostdorff, 148.

involvement. So, not only did the NRA enhance its image with the general public, it also reinforced its positive image with its membership.[26]

Values Advocacy as Deflector of Criticism

Generally, the image that values advocacy helps build for an organization is also a strong barrier against criticism. A shrewd communicator can so associate an organization with moralistic values that criticism of that organization would be seen by the masses as criticism of all-American values.

General Dynamics, which manufactures military weapons and opposes defense cuts in the federal budget, detracts attention away from those acts, but discusses and focuses on the values upon which those acts are premised -- values held in common by the general public.

The National Rifle Association's "I'm the NRA" campaign forced anyone who would criticize the NRA to criticize the typical American citizens it featured in its ads and the values they represent.

Sandoz Agro Inc., a pesticide company (perhaps one of the most embattled of all organizations in today's contentious world), sends out media packages that call for industry to do a better job in tackling its problems and relating to the public about them. It also contains a study providing insight into the public's perception of pesticides and their use. The basic premise is that if industry discussed its problems with the public as candidly as it does its successes, then public opinion of business might stop falling. "Business cannot spend the 1990s dug in and resisting every change that comes along as we did in

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[26] Bostdorff, 148.

the seventies and eighties," reads the copy, "especially since most of the time we actually found ways to make the changes work to our advantage while we were complaining about them. Instead of hiding or being too defensive, American industry would be better served if we would own up and speak out more about all aspects of our businesses, not just the good parts. We need to own up and admit to problems; then tell the world how we are working to make certain situations better. We need to let society know how much we do not know, but how hard we are trying to understand."[27]

Values Advocacy to be used in Later Discourse

In addition to enhancing an organization's image and deflecting criticism from the organization, values advocacy serves another function, as well: It establishes value premises that the organization can draw upon in later discourse.

Mobil Oil Company's "Observations" campaign provides a good example of how values advocacy accomplishes this task. Mobil's advertisements consisted of cartoons, line art, chatty news items, wide-ranging editorial commentary, letters from readers, and a sprinkling of quotations from such diverse sources as John Locke, Robert Frost, Samual Gompers and Will Rogers.

Through such means, Mobil praised values like conservation and common sense and condemned media unfairness and government regulations. For instance, Mobil gave numerous examples of "silly" regulations, from local blue laws that forbade people from carrying bees in their hats to state and federal regulations, such as the 11,400-word document that governed the sale of olives in California. The implied claims in these cases

[27] Heylin, Michael. "A Welcome Ray of Hope," *Chemical & Engineering News*, March 14, 1994, 5.

were unlikely to be disputed, nor were the pieces of evidence provided. Generally, most would agree that antiquated rules are often foolish or unnecessary restrictions of action are wrong. Almost everyone could agree, for instance, that the populace was no longer threatened by people carrying bees in their hats and that the California olive regulations sounded like a case of overkill. What Mobil's pairing of easily accepted claims and data accomplished, however, was the establishment of a more controversial warrant or value premise: Government regulation is bad. In turn, audiences could unquestioningly accept this warrant when Mobil drew upon it in later policy arguments calling for the elimination of particular government regulations.[28]

Likewise, the Clinton campaign employed a video entitled, "The Man From Hope," which abstained from discussing the candidate's explicit policy positions and instead focused on how Clinton's childhood in Hope, Arkansas, had shaped his life. The commercial talked about his grandparents' support for school integration, his mother's struggle to educate herself so she could support him, the hardships Clinton had faced and overcome, his love for his family and country, and so on. In keeping with values advocacy, the advertisement consisted of Clinton praising others and others praising him. At the conclusion, old footage of a parade in Hope and other nostalgic scenes appeared, as Clinton's voice intoned:

"All I am or ever will be came from there. A place and time where nobody locked their doors at night, everybody showed up for a parade on Main Street, and kids like me could dream of being something bigger than themselves. I hope that every day from this

[28] Bostdorff, 151.

day forward, we can be a nation coming together instead of coming apart. And I hope that we as a people will always acknowledge that each child in our country is as important as our own. I still believe these things are possible. I still believe in the promise of America. And I still believe in a place called Hope."[29]

Justifiable Ethics Tactics in the Practice of Public Persuasion

"Public Relations is professional behavior protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution which declares that 'Congress shall make no law respecting ... freedom of speech.' That freedom exists to make possible an open marketplace of information. It should not be bargained away in an effort to assure public credibility and good will. If the persuasive, selective speech of the public relater is protected by law and, to some extent by (a reluctant) society, it is helpful to examine the unique role of public relations. It is a role that may appear destructive and unethical. However, the public relations role can indeed claim to make a vital social contribution. Once role is defined a set of ethics may be set in place."[30]

Society's public philosophy seems to be one of advocacy and adversarial relationships. The judicial system is perhaps the most visible and formal example of socially mandated adversarial behavior, and the philosophy that social benefits emerge when people arrive at collective judgments about public issues through public debate. The adversary process assigns each participant a single function. The judge is to serve as a neutral and passive arbiter. Counsel is to act as a zealous advocate. According to

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[29] Bostdorff, 152.
[30] Barney, Ralph D. and Jay Black. "Ethics and Professional Persuasive Communications," *Public Relations Review*, Fall 1994, 238.

adversary theory, when each participant performs only a single function the dispute before the court will be resolved in the fairest and most efficient way. The strength of such a division of labor is that individual responsibilities are clear. Each works conscientiously to achieve a specifically defined goal.

The adversary system encourages adversaries to find and present their most persuasive evidence. Rare is any class of people which does not, in one way or another, accept a moral obligation to advance the cause of a culture to which it feels loyalty. Lawyers are advocates for their clients--with an overriding obligation to the interests of their clients in an adversary society. Therefore, an advocate arguing a reverse position (prosecutor, defense attorney, etc.) is charged with the obligation of identifying and disclosing the weaknesses in the opposition's case. Each participant in the process has a specific assignment.

This creates a conflict between the lawyer and society, and that conflict is this: the advocate (lawyer) must relegate society's immediate interest to a secondary position behind that of the client. It appears logical that a public relations practitioner encounters the same type of conflict between society and client. Public relations pioneers Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee, three-quarters of a century ago, both claimed that public relations practitioners are expected to serve as lawyers in the court of public opinion. Public relations practitioners argue their cases as advocates/adversaries in the informal court of public opinion.[31]

[31] Barney, 240.

That philosophy recognizes the role of the public relations practitioner as an advocate in an adversary society whose welfare has traditionally been based on a relatively high degree of free enterprise and competition, one whose primary function is to advance a client's interest in the face of such competition by distributing selectively favorable information, placing on others the obligation of generating countering messages if those messages are to be generated.

Robert Solomon, a philosophy scholar, suggests that lies indeed serve an important function in protecting people from various kinds of harm, and in developing and protecting a sense of individuality and privacy. Elaine Englehardt, also a philosophy scholar and writer, concludes that in the field of public relations, any consideration of deception has to include social, personal, or political complications; and admixture of truth telling, lying, and deception are part of daily professional intercourse.[32]

Clear examples of the dilemma abound as public relations practitioners appear to routinely lie in the "best interest" of their client/company:

While U.S. President George Bush lay on the floor behind a banquet table after having vomited in the lap of the Prime Minister of Japan, press spokesman Marlin Fitzwater quickly went before television cameras to assure the world the president was not seriously ill. Fitzwater could not have known of the president's condition at the time.[33]

When Universal Pictures announced it was distributing a movie (ultimately titled "Mr. Baseball" with Tom Selleck) after it had been shelved until new owners (Japanese) took over the company, its spokesperson told *The New York Times* that the movie (about

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[32] Barney, 242.
[33] Ibid.

an American baseball player and his culture shock in Japan) had not been altered to present a more favorable view of Japanese culture under the direction of the new owners. Employees of Universal at the time were aware the movie had been substantially revised under orders from the new owners.

Spokespersons for Dow-Corning declared often and publicly for several weeks the company had no evidence that its breast implants were harmful to recipients. The day after that person's final declaration, company officials announced the company had known for some time of the damaging characteristics.

Larry Speakes, White House press secretary in the early years of the Reagan Administration, listed several instances in which he had fabricated quotations to give to reporters, attributing them to the president. In one instance, Reagan was quoted as having told Mikhail Gorbachev in private: "There is much to divide us, but I believe the world breathes easier because we are talking together."[34]

The wisdom of the above persuasive tactics can be measured subjectively in varied ways by the reader. Use of this type of persuasion should be well-researched and planned. A test for using lies as a means of persuasion is described below by Sissela Bok, a philosophy writer and scholar:

"As we consider different kinds of lies, we must ask, first, whether there are alternative forms of action which will resolve the difficulty without the use of a lie; second, what might be the moral reasons brought forward to excuse the lie, and what reasons can

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[34] Barney, 242.

be raised as counter-arguments. Third, as a test of these two steps, we must ask what a public of reasonable persons might say about such lies."[35]

Persuasion in Media Relations

Many organizations realize the key role the news media can play in building visibility for their companies. They communicate in various ways with the media, attempting to build strong relationships with media representatives.

When the Prince George's County, Md. triple-A baseball stadium was several days away from opening in 1994, engineer/architect Greenhorne & O'Mara distributed press packages and hosted tours for local newspaper reporters. On opening day, the firm's communications manager lined up TV and newspaper reporters for on-the-spot interviews, both with the project manager and with company founder and CEO Jim O'Mara. After the opening, Greenhorne & O'Mara sent a follow-up news release to sports trade press, and included a photo of O'Mara tossing out the first pitch. The campaign netted the firm extensive print coverage--including the front page of The Washington Post--and a spot that aired several times on the Home Team Sports cable channel.

The firm reports not only several calls from potential clients but also increased goodwill within the local community and several employment applications from area engineers. The coverage also got the attention of the National Science Foundation, which asked that an employee of Greenhorne & O'Mara be featured in a film on science careers to be shown in schools, science museums and youth centers nationwide.[36]

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[35] Barney, 246.
[36] Taylor, Cynthia L. "PR Prescription," *Civil Engineering*, May 1995, 76.

The US secretary of energy, concerned about revelations of past government nuclear experiments, hires a consultant to assess and rate reporters as a way of determining who is most receptive to her side of the story.[37]

The tobacco industry declares war on what it considers unfair news reports about the hazards of smoking -- and CBS' "60 Minutes" backs down without a fight.

O.J. Simpson, having backed out of a no-ground-rules interview, continues to get his points across by calling chosen reporters to chat -- while refusing to answer probing questions.

From government to industry, people in the public eye are using new, more aggressive tactics to promote their interests.

In Washington, politicians and lobbyists have long promoted their causes and buffed their images by choosing which reporters to cultivate. Thus it came as a surprise to some there recently when President Clinton reprimanded Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary for hiring a consultant to determine scientifically which journalists offer the most favorable coverage. And even as Clinton and some Republican leaders were disowning O'Leary's tactics as unfairly manipulative, PR consultants confirmed that they routinely rank-order reporters for their corporate clients.[38]

When one of the mass media endorses a campaign, an individual, or a product, this action builds public support for the recipient. A newspaper or radio editorial urging contributions to a United Way campaign is an example; so is a newspaper's preelection marked ballot recommending votes for certain candidates. In its advertisement opposing

[37] Canellos, Peter S. "Manipulating the Messengers," *Boston Globe*, November 26, 1995, A21.
[38] Ibid.

the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia, a nonprofit religious organization quoted two highly respected newspapers, the New York *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as sources of information on the controversy. The passages read as follows:

"What 'emergency' impelled the President to waive the rule requiring Congress to approve arms sales to foreign governments? The New York Times reports that even some Administration officials admit there was no intelligence information showing a likely Iranian air attack on Saudi oilfields."

"Immense quantities of munitions we sold to the Saudis were part of the hoard of PLO weapons discovered by Israeli forces in Lebanon. But this time the danger is especially grave. The Wall Street Journal calls the Stinger 'a perfect weapon against civilian aircraft.'"[39]

Preventing and Dealing with Negative Publicity

As previously stated, perhaps the greatest challenge in persuasion is changing or neutralizing hostile opinions. Once people have decided, for instance, that oil companies are making excessive profits or that a nonprofit agency is wasting public donations, they tend to ignore or disbelieve any contradictory information. People generalize from personal experience and from what peers tell them. For example, if a person has an encounter with a rude clerk, the inclination is to generalize that the entire department store chain is not very good.[40]

[39] Agee, 244.
[40] Agee, 235.

Negative publicity is often viewed as an uncontrollable management problem, but effective ways exist to help minimize the impact of negative publicity. The best way to minimize negative publicity is to try to avoid the occurrence. Proactive managerial and marketing strategies can yield greater control over potentially damaging publicity. The health services industry can typically recount examples of poor patient outcomes that resulted in unfavorable word of mouth. Even though the provider of care may not have been entirely to blame, the negative publicity generated from such an incident can be extremely harmful to a care provider's image.

One strategy employed by the health care provider is the communication of quality. The theory is that advertising is not a substitute for quality, and it is useful to have a specific individual within the organization to implement quality assurance activities. Consumers do not judge the quality of the service solely on the outcome of the service. They also consider the process. For example, patients receiving flu shots do not judge the quality of the service encounter strictly on the effectiveness of the shot, but on variables which may include how quickly they were serviced, the attractiveness of the physical surroundings, and how friendly and caring the doctors and staff appeared.

Once a quality service has been assured, that quality must be effectively communicated to the target market. Patients should leave the service encounter with something tangible as an indication of quality. For example, one cardiology group that employs a nutritional counselor to advise patients on low-fat diets also gives each cardiac patient a regional cuisine, low-fat, low-calorie recipe book and a set of measuring spoons imprinted with the name and logo of the cardiology group. Another example of tangible communication of quality is a breast imaging center that gives each woman a red rose with an attached message wishing her the best of future health following a mammogram.[41]

Such preventive strategies are wise to have, but even the best preventive plan cannot stand up to some of the devastatingly negative publicity some organizations have experienced. In such cases, companies must turn to persuasive crisis communications.

Seizing the initiative is a strategy which has been successfully employed by Johnson & Johnson (Tylenol). Moving aggressively resulted in overwhelming positive public support and recognition. Seizing the initiative ultimately can transform a public relations disaster into an opportunity. For example, because Tylenol immediately seized the initiative and rapidly instituted remedial efforts (massive recall of the product), the product and the company emerged virtually unscathed and stronger in the eyes of the public. In the determination of speed of public response, there is a fine line between responding promptly and responding too promptly. A prompt response is one that occurs before the negative publicity has a change to realize maximum impact on the organization. If the organization were to respond publicly too soon to the negative publicity, they would be doing so without full knowledge of consumer reaction to the situation. The response would be made with incomplete information. The timing of response should depend on public and consumer reaction to the negative information.[42]

A company that seized the initiative simply by exploring all rumors of problems is Procter and Gamble (Rely tampons). When the manufacturer learned of a potential

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[41] Henthorne, Beth Hogan and Tony L. Henthorne, "The Tarnished Image: Anticipating and minimizing the Impact," *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 1994, 47.
[42] Henthorne, 52.

problem, it immediately began an extensive inquiry of the possible link between its product and toxic shock syndrome. Unfavorable publicity or negative word of mouth need not be grounded in fact, and the source may never be identified, but additional investigation will give management more information on which to base organizational response.[43]

One industry that offers advice on how to generate positive publicity from negative or difficult situations is the hotel industry. In Los Angeles, where the fate of natural disasters has given hoteliers ample opportunity to practice persuasive crisis control, Stuart Zanville, of the Christopher Stuart Partners public relations agency, recommends limiting the negative effects of disasters in this way. For hotels not directly affected by the disaster, he suggests they engage in "conspicuous integrity," such as housing families displaced by disaster, extending special rates to rescue workers, or inviting exhausted firefighters to spend a day at the hotel pool. "You don't want to exploit the people involved," Zanville said, "but you can generate positive publicity in a negative situation."[44]

When disaster does strike a hotel directly, Zanville says the worst thing it can do is not respond. He pointed to criticisms of Exxon and Jack-in-the-Box, whose slow responses to the media after their respective oil-spill and tainted-hamburger disasters made them at first appear unconcerned about the people affected.

Jeannie Datz, director of communications for Hilton Hotels Corp., cautioned that since reporters listen to police scanners, they may know about a problem before a hotel spokesperson does. For example, when Datz was a spokesperson at the Hilton Hawaiian

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[43] Henthorne, 50.
[44] Seal, Kathy. "Hotels Can Avoid Negative Publicity," *Hotel & Motel Management*, September 19, 1994, 3.

Village, an NBC reporter called to ask her about a PCB leak on the property. Though the reporter called back every 10 minutes, Datz did not speak to him until she had received a one-hour briefing on PCBs from the county health department. "You can say, 'I'm gathering information at this time. Please come to the hotel at such-and-such time and we'll give you the information then.'" Datz said.[45]

Another way a hotel can spin disaster in a positive direction is to focus on the positive. Bruce Baltin of PKF Partners in Los Angeles gives the following example. Instead of telling reporters that your hotel is closed because of damage, a spokesperson can say, "We have to close for renovations, but we'll be open by Friday." When a positive spin is hard to find, hoteliers should at least furnish reporters with the facts, in order to cement good working relationships with the press, said Peggy Griffin, public relations director for the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills.

When Guess jeans model Anna Nicole Smith had to check herself out of the Peninsula and into a hospital, Griffin had to figure out how to talk to the press without tarnishing the hotel's image. She confined herself to confirming that Smith had been a guest, and had checked out at a certain time. Partnerships built during crises can warm media receptivity to positive stories later, explained Griffin.[46]

Perhaps the most sophisticated advice comes from Baltin, who counsels hoteliers to consider the reporter's perspective and tailor any comments accordingly. That's what Baltin tried to do when reporters asked him about the World Cup not meeting tournament promoters' roomnight predictions. Baltin pointed out that the soccer tournament had

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[45] Seal, 3.
[46] Ibid.

nonetheless focused media attention on Los Angeles, filled up some rooms, and allowed hotels to get their rates up.

Finally, follow-up can be crucial. Griffin always calls to check whether reporters have received correct information and need anything additional. This policy paid off after a small fire in a bathroom of her hotel. Some media mistakenly thought the hotel had been extensively damaged, and that guests had been evacuated. "Had we not made those follow-up calls," Griffin said, "we would have had misinformation printed."[47]

In the hope of regaining the individual and group business they have lost since the 1980's, a group of Rio de Janeiro hoteliers banded together to combat negative publicity about the city. A delegation of 11 people -- including the Rio police commissioner and officials from several Rio hotels -- visited New York recently to discuss the city's success in reducing crime against visitors.

Up until 1992, the number of U.S. visitors to Rio had dropped by a total of 60 to 70 percent since the mid-1980's. This was mostly due to bad press about the city's crime, poverty and pollution. Rio began assuring tourists with its special tourist police force, which consisted of 1,100 multilingual officers. The Rio Tourist Police efforts included patrolling tourist areas 24 hours a day in cars and on bicycles, and maintaining police booths throughout the city. The police also wore T-shirts that said, in Portuguese and English, "I'm looking after you." The city also printed safety brochures, which it distributed at the booths and at area hotels. Because of such efforts, crime against tourists

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[47] Seal, 3.

dropped by 40 to 50 percent, and, during Carnival that year, all hotel rooms were sold out, which had not been the case for about five years.[48]

Another company exhibiting ways to combat a negative image through persuasive means is the United Way of America (UWA). UWA, a national not-for-profit service organization with more than 1,000 local chapters, faced an emergency following the 1992 indictment of its president, William Aramony, for misuse of funds. Aramony was found guilty of fraud and sentenced in June of 1992.[49]

Each United Way is a separate organization, yet "because people did not make the distinction between United Way of America and their local chapters, there were a lot of donors who believed something was wrong with their own United Way," said Martina Martin, UWA's director of marketing. "Some people canceled pledges, others raised grave concerns. In turn, the only action for local chapters was to try to distance themselves from UWA, and so they withheld their membership from us." Pledges from local United Way chapters to the national office declined from $7.2 million in February 1992, to $582,000 in pledges a month later; by the end of 1992, 308 of 1,378 member groups cut ties.[50]

Yet the national organization needed to continue serving its current members and wanted to bring back United Ways that had dropped out. "When the crisis hit, we needed more than ever to hold fast to our commitment to serve local organizations," said Martin.

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[48] R. E. "Rio Redux: Hoteliers Fight Poor Image," *Incentive*, May 1994, 13.
[49] Lucas, Allison. "A United Way to Overcome a Bad Image," *Sales & Marketing Management*, September 1995, 15.
[50] Ibid, 15.

Following the indictment, UWA launched its own public relations blitz to mend chapter and donor relations. UWA documented the value of services it provides, and broke down monetary information for donors. It installed internal audits, controls on hiring procedures, work practices, and officers' compensation. It is for these reasons that the Philadelphia chapter rejoined UWA about a year after leaving . "They fixed the problem thoroughly and strengthened all accountability measures," said Suzanne Perry, the chapter's director of marketing and communications.[51]

Negative Publicity from Environmental Issues

As a result of the nation's growing environmental awareness, lumber companies, along with the pesticide, nuclear power and oil industries, have frequently been labeled as "environmental bad guys." Specifically, the lumber industry has recently come under attack because environmentalists argue that the northern spotted owl, which is a protected species under the Endangered Species Act, nests only in the Pacific Northwest's Douglas fir and ponderosa pine, staples of the lumber industry. Moreover, environmentalists have criticized the lumber industry for harvesting trees faster than they can be grown, and the lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest has been attacked for diminishing supplies of "old growth" timber, such as redwoods.[52]

Legislation that protects the spotted owl by curtailing the cutting of timber has been estimated to cost the lumber industry thousands of forest jobs. If legislation concerning the cutting of old growth timber in the Pacific Northwest becomes too strict,

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[51] Lucas, 15.
[52] Seiter, John S. "Surviving Turbulent Organizational Environments: A Case Study Examination," *Journal of Business Communication*, October 1995, 363.

competition in Canada and elsewhere could benefit at the cost of small U.S. companies. Also, lumber companies could be troubled if their employees believe that they are working for companies that are seriously damaging the environment.

The *Los Angeles Times* recently named the Ganahl Lumber Company one of the top ten air polluting businesses in Southern California. Discussed below are persuasion strategies used by Ganahl Lumber Company to deal with this negativity, as well as previously mentioned negative issues affecting the lumber industry as a whole.

Ganahl management identified employees as an important audience in attempting to deal with the negative issues surrounding itself. Managers noted that "in order to keep morale high and encourage better work performance, employees must like the company for which they work." Also explained by managers was the fact that it is through the employees that other audiences, such as customers and community, are influenced. For example, the assistant to the president explained, "At Ganahl, we don't rely on television or the media to communicate our message. Our employees carry our value message. That's why it's so important they have a good impression of the company." [53]

Ganahl feels it is necessary to persuade employees into thinking of the company as a positive place to work -- one that cares about its employees. If Ganahl can persuade its employees in this way, it theorizes, chances are better that a positive image of the company will be communicated to customers and the general public through employees. The company goes to extremes to communicate that it is an organization that cares about its employees. For example, the company newsletter includes stories, at least one each

[53] Seiter, 369.

week, about employees' accomplishments. Additionally, the personnel manager noted that the company once took out a full-page ad in a local newspaper to thank Ted Payne, one of their employees, for forty years of excellent service to the company. Since one of Ted's goals was to work at Ganahl for 60 years, the management made arrangements to transport him from his rest home to Ganahl three days a week. Although he passed away in 1990, Ted has become one of the company's legends. A picture of him now hangs beside pictures of Christian and John Ganahl just outside the president's office.[54]

Another means by which Ganahl Lumber presents a positive image to its employees is by communicating about the company's concern for the community and Ganahl's customers. For example, Ganahl has presented itself as an environmentally conscious organization in its weekly employee newsletter. The newsletter has included several articles explaining how employees can help the environment by recycling, planting trees, and carpooling. The newsletter also featured an article on Ganahl's acquisition of a steel-band chopper that recycled two and one-half tons of steel in one month alone.

Recently several articles appearing in the company newsletter that attempted to persuade employees to vote for an industry-sponsored proposition on California's November 1990 ballot. Proposition 130 was an attempt to limit timber harvesting more drastically. While many tactics were used, the following arguments appeared most frequently in the newsletter.

Arguments focused on the benefits of being against proposition 130 (prevention of forest fires) and the costs of being for proposition 130. One recurring argument in most of

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[54] Seiter, 370.

the articles was that proposition 130 would not only cost taxpayers $1.3 billion, but could also result in job loss for 75,000 Californians in the lumber industry. Such arguments would presumably be very effective considering that the audience consisted of both taxpayers and employees of the lumber industry.

Several articles made it clear that the proposition was supported by Earth First and noted that this group was known for tree spiking, harassing timber workers and their families, and sabotage of logging equipment. On the other hand, attempts were made to bolster the credibility of those supporting proposition 138, a countering proposition to proposition 130. Such articles explained that proposition 138 was supported by experts such as registered foresters and wildlife biologists.[55]

[55] Seiter, 372.

CHAPTER 3

Procedures

Thesis procedures began with database searches of current and relevant topics to locate case studies on persuasion in the practice of public relations.

Key words used were "persuasion," "public relations," "negative and positive image," and "credibility." The searches at Rowan College, Richard Stockton College and Ocean City Public Library included CD ROM Newsbank, a full-text news resource containing comprehensive coverage of current issues and events from over 500 U.S. and Canadian newspapers, news sources and domestic and international newswires. Business Newsbank, which provided hard-to-find local and regional business news articles and in-depth company and industry news from business journals, newspapers and wire services, was also a researched database. Additionally, the author searched a Full-Text Periodicals database, which contained only the most current (updated monthly) full-text articles from the most popular periodicals. The on-line card catalog database service at Rowan College was also used. These searches yielded many related articles and books.

After thoroughly reading all materials found through the above research, the author was able to extract the most appropriate information to include in this thesis. Only information that clearly related to the purpose of the study was used.

The final chapter of the thesis consists of a mixture of findings from the above researched material. Persuasion theories from researched textbooks and examples of those theories from current periodical articles were used to explain how the public relations practitioner can apply the theories in the practice of public relations. The author also drew on personal experience to demonstrate a persuasion technique.

CHAPTER 4

Ways in which Persuasion *Could* be Used in Public Relations

The following section is devoted to presenting general ideas on how persuasion *could* be used by the public relations practitioner. The examples given thus far have been very specific and tangible in nature because they explained actual events. Because this next section deals with possible future situations, specifics could not be offered in all cases.

When the audience agrees. The task of persuasion is much easier if the message is compatible with the audience's general opinion about a subject. Perhaps the easiest form of persuasion is communication that reinforces favorable opinions. One example is the appeal to patriotism by politicians. Lyndon Johnson called on all patriotic Americans to "support our boys" in Vietnam, and Ronald Reagan urged support for his defense policies because, he said, America is the "hope of the free world."

The public has a distaste for exploitation, so unions talk about "workers as pawns of big business." Pro-gun organizations capitalize on the public's concern about crime and the need to protect one's family. Public relations people, by providing a steady stream of reinforcing messages, keep the reservoir of good will in sound condition.[56]

When the audience disagrees. Perhaps the most difficult persuasion task is to turn hostile opinions into favorable ones. There is much truth to the adage "Don't confuse

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[56] Agee, 237.

me with the facts; my mind is made up." Once people have decided, for instance, that oil companies are making excessive profits or that a nonprofit agency is wasting public donations, they tend to ignore or disbelieve any contradictory information. For example, if a person has an encounter with a rude clerk, the inclination is to generalize that the entire department store chain is not very good.

Sometimes the most practitioners can hope for is that their side of the story will be heard. A utility company president who proposes construction of a nuclear power plant in the neighborhood cannot expect a cordial welcome when addressing an antinuclear alliance. If the official can command respect in a pleasant, frank manner, however, some in the audience may realize that the company president is not the ogre they had imagined. Having achieved this, the speaker can lay out the arguments before the opponents and at least make them aware of the utility's reasoning.[57] Also, beginning a speech with a subject where there is some audience agreement can set the tone of the rest of the presentation.

Frankness is a persuasive tactic that can prove effective with audiences that are not on your side. George Graff, former president of McDonnell Douglas, an aircraft manufacturer, often found himself before hostile audiences who regarded him as a leader in the armaments race. He met this antagonism head-on by opening his speeches thus: "I'd rather have an industry making toasters, but we're in the real world. I'd like to talk to you about that real world." Surprised by this approach, his listeners would give him their attention. People usually respect frankness in others and, while not always admitting it, may grudgingly admire a person for voluntarily facing up to enemies.[58]

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[57] Agee, 235.
[58] Ibid.

The source must be credible. It was stated earlier that public relations practitioners must provide the right person for an audience and that reporters prefer to talk with the person in the organization who is most directly involved in or knowledgeable about the issue. This was Aristotle's concept of ethos, and it explains why organizations use a variety of spokespeople, depending upon the message and the audience.

It may be the chief executive officer or the head of the research laboratory. It is a good idea to use, for example, a physicist or a biologist to address an audience of scientists, or a corporate treasurer to speak to a group of security analysts, because the audiences will accord them more credibility.

The California Strawberry Advisory Board, for example, arranges for a home economist to appear on television talk shows to discuss nutrition and to demonstrate easy-to-follow recipes. The audience for these programs, primarily homemakers, not only identifies with the representative but perceives her as highly credible. Similarly, a sunscreen lotion manufacturer uses a pharmacology professor who is past president of the State Pharmacy Board to discuss the scientific merits of sunscreen versus suntan lotions.

When analyzing the credibility of your speaker or representative, audience analysis is vital.

To speak or not to speak. Organizations frequently rely upon a practitioner's understanding of potential audiences to ensure that a speaking engagement or situation helps the organization get a positive message across. Public relations practitioners are often called upon by upper management for their opinion about whether the company should engage in a speaking situation, and, if so, how they can present its views and policies in a positive way.

Here's a tip that is a little different than most of the usual ones, like knowing your audience, speaking clearly and enthusiastically and developing a rapport with your audience. If you are one of several speakers at an engagement, do some research on your fellow speakers. Then, if possible, request specifically in which slot you would like to speak.

John McGrath, Director of Marketing and Management Communications, Argonne National Laboratory, was one of several speaking to a business group in Nashville. One of his fellow speakers was a bright senior executive who obviously had prepared very hard for her speech. In fact, she had prepared too hard. No doubt at her direction, the company whipped-up several handouts, a video, and slides for the talk. She and several assistants came well-armed with statistics and dull, droning numbers illustrated by many tedious charts.

What happened? The audience, which had been sympathetic initially, moved from interest to apathy to outright hostility. Fortunately for John McGrath, her speech followed rather than preceded his. "The way she left that audience," he said, "Mother Theresa and the Vienna Boys Choir couldn't have won them back."[59]

Self-Interest appeal. Know what is important to your audience and use it. I was recently referred to the Ruth Newman Shapiro Cancer Center for tests. Soon after this visit, I received the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center's newsletter and

[59] McGrath, 447.

contribution request. Although I had never contributed to cancer research, having had a personally terrifying experience (which turned out to be benign), I now contribute regularly to the foundation.

The public relations person, when fashioning messages, must consider the nature of the audience and what it feels is important, then tailor those messages accordingly.

Demonstrate shared concerns with your audiences. This worked so well for President Clinton during the second debate with former President George Bush that it was a turning point in the campaign. When a voter asked about the personal impact the recession had on each of the candidates, President Bush stiffened and fumbled. Clinton left the podium and went to the front of the stage, getting as physically close to the audience as he could and recalled his personal contact with families and businesses that had been hurt by the recession. Even Republican commentators gave him points for that approach.[60]

Be a good corporate citizen. Consider current issues that are directly or indirectly related to the type of business for which you represent. Then, think of creative ways to address those issues or go a step further by offering tips on dealing with any existing conflict surrounding the issue.

By the time the gasoline shortage and the lines at the pumps subsided, the oil industry had to embark on significant damage control. Shell found its solution in the "Answer Man" campaign. Drivers stopping at Shell stations received free pamphlets giving basic advice for problems that affect every car owner, from repairing a flat tire on

[60] Sherman, Mary-Ann. "Helping Insurers Find Their own Answer Man," *Best's Review*, May 1994, 68.

the highway to keeping a car in peak condition. The campaign took the gas station, the source and symbol of consumer frustration during the crisis, and turned it into a source of solutions to driving problems. After it was dropped, company research showed customers still valued the Answer Man.[61]

Do a thorough audience identification audit. Just as you would do a thorough market identification study for the company's products and services, a similar exercise is critical to issues management. Ask yourself questions such as: Which groups and individuals do we need on our side? Which groups could benefit by criticizing the company? Which groups does our company affect positively or negatively? Researching how these groups feel about your company will give managers a clear idea of their key audiences and with which groups the firm needs to start repairing its relationships.

For example, chemical companies that went through audience identification exercises were well-prepared in 1989 when the Community Right-to-Know Law took effect and required all chemical plants to inform local communities about emissions levels. Such an exercise by other industries clearly can help identify potential problems that would result from not communicating and building bridges with appropriate publics.[62]

Timing and context. A message is more persuasive if environmental factors support the message or if the message is received within the context of other messages and situations with which the individual is familiar. A manufacturer of a locking device for computer files got extensive media coverage about its product simply because it followed a rash of news stories about thieves gaining access to bank accounts through computers.

[61] Sherman, 68.
[62] Sherman, 69.

Media gatekeepers, ordinarily uninterested in security devices for computers, found the product newsworthy within the context of the news events.[63]

The agonized debate over race relations that followed the O.J. Simpson verdict was still rattling the national psyche when the Million Man March descended on Washington October 16, 1995. At the largest black civil rights gathering in U.S. history, more than 400,000 black men spent a peaceful day of "atonement and reconciliation," as organizers put it, dedicating themselves to "moral and spiritual renewal" and to practicing self-help. Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the march was not its size nor its message but its leader, Louis Farrakhan. Widely perceived as a publicity-hungry, hate-spouting extremist, the 62-year-old patriarch of the Nation of Islam had somehow managed to mobilize black America.[64]

The tangible success of the event (attendance at the march) is probably due largely to timing and context. As one black woman put it, "Although I do not agree with Louis Farrakhan's racist views and separatist policies, I think that mobilizing the black male population to make an impact on their own communities was an important step in a seemingly endless walk toward equality for all. The first step in recovering from an illness is to recognize that you have it. The general indifference and absence of the positive male role in black America is the disease, and hopefully this march was one booster shot in a series of many. Maybe Farrakhan's power makes people nervous, but fears of every black American being hateful toward every white American are becoming too evident."[65]

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[63] Agee, 241.
[64] "The 25 Most Intriguing People 1995," *People Weekly*, December 25,1995, 83.
[65] "Farrakhan Marches On," *Newsweek*, November 6, 1995, 20.

The technique of values advocacy was also apparent in Farrakhan's messages. Toronto black activist Charles Roach has taken part in dozens of antiracism protests. Like many of the 200 Canadians who traveled to Washington for the March, he came away euphoric. Although Canadian black leaders often disagree with the tactics of Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, the fiery U.S. orator's view that people must take responsibility for their own lives struck a resounding chord. Roach says Farrakhan has earned respect throughout the community. Dan Philip, president of the Montreal-based Black Coalition of Quebec, believes Farrakhan is saying what many blacks want to hear. Says Philip, "They are looking for people of power with solutions."[66]

Take a proactive approach. Sometimes the best policy is to just "fess up" and come clean. Owning up to mistakes or acknowledging negative situations usually is seen positively, and can even earn your audience's respect, however grudgingly.

An environmental investigation revealed that contamination from one manufacturing company had spread to 130 neighboring residential properties. The company had to tell residents that their children had been playing in contaminated yards and their property values were about to plummet. The company took a responsible, proactive approach. Management announced the investigation's results in a way that communicated the company's full responsibility for the cleanup. They also invited residents to be actively involved in the cleanup program. A community advisory council was formed to review the company's plans and to ensure that community concerns were recognized and addressed. A newsletter was distributed periodically to inform the

[66] Fennell, Tom. "A Common Chord in Canada," *Maclean's Magazine*, October 30, 1995, 37.

community on the cleanup progress, and concerns of individual homeowners were addressed promptly and compassionately. The company decontaminated the properties of 130 homeowners.[67]

Begin within. An organization cannot expect to be seen in a positive light by its outside publics if its image is tarnished internally. Employees can play a crucial role in projecting the company image. The public relations professional must make sure the image employees project is as positive as possible.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) smacked three highly publicized lawsuits and millions of dollars in fines on one company, which, as a result, launched a series of sweeping corporate changes. The company knew it needed to end investigations, fines and bad press. Unfortunately, an internal survey showed that employees did not believe the company was serious about improving its environmental performance. Therefore, management planned strategic communications to increase environmental awareness from within to encourage better media coverage from without.[68]

An internal communications and training program sensitized thousands of employees to environmental issues. By doing so, the company brought about a change in the corporate mindset, giving every employee responsibility for meeting environmental goals. Training was geared to communicators, who took a one-day course on key environmental issues, regulations and communications implications. A more advanced risk

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[67] Arnstein, Caren. "How Companies Can Rebuild Credibility and Public Trust," *Public Relations Journal*, April 1994, 28.
[68] Ibid.

communication session was held for the company's media relations, operations and environmental professionals.

A decisive element of the communications strategy was to change the tone of responses to regulatory and media inquiries. The company adopted what it called a "contrition mode," assuming full responsibility for past misdeeds and promising future improvements. The company also began citing success stories that illustrated their positive action. Press releases and other collateral materials that described progress on waste and emissions reductions generated favorable publicity.[69]

Faster is better. Getting your message out before any possible negative messages have a chance to get out is a concept that is beautiful in its simplicity.

A manufacturing firm had to comply with a California regulation that requires companies to identify toxic emissions and their effects on public health. Under this regulation, the company had to send out a form letter prepared by the local air quality management district. The company was also required to hold a public meeting to notify residents near its facility of a cancer risk that exceeded a designated level. The form letter left little room to put risk assessment results into perspective. So before the company sent the letter, it sent a personal letter and fact sheet. The personal letter and fact sheet consisted of information gathered by the company from a public opinion poll, which was used to assess perceptions and test messages. Based on the survey, messages were developed to address public concerns and educate citizens on complex health issues.[70]

[69] Arnstein, 28.
[70] Ibid.

By getting their letter to residents prior to the agency letter, the company was able to take control of the message and reinforce its proactive stance. A telephone information line was also made available. Opening a dialogue with the neighborhood gave the manufacturer a forum to communicate the positive elements of the plant. To help ensure a positive outcome for the required public meeting, designated plant spokespeople received media training that helped them answer reporters' questions effectively and to present the company's key messages. After handling tough questions, listening empathetically to community complaints, and admitting that improvements at the plant were needed, this company began to turn around hostile public opinion.[71]

[71] Arnstein, 28.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Recommendations

Persuasion is a form of communication that everyone inevitably uses. This is so because of the difference in communicating parties' goals and the ways in which those parties try to achieve those goals. When the goals conflict with each other, persuasion is used to reach agreement.

The abundance of ways to communicate in the world today, such as by satellite and through the Internet, makes the need for effective, persuasive communicators greater than ever. The world needs skilled communicators who can make known the goals and messages of an organization to its publics. These communicators must also be able to inform their employers of their publics' attitudes, guiding them in fashioning their policies, image and messages.

By knowing ways persuasion theories are being used today in public relations, the practitioner can better understand the theories, and, therefore, apply them in practice.

Key Recommendations

The key to persuasion is to identify what matters to the audience and then present the persuader as a credible source, encouraging the audience to see the persuader's perspective.

The practitioner must have knowledge of audience attitudes. This knowledge is an essential part of persuasion because it helps the communicator to tailor messages that are salient, answer a felt need, and provide a logical course of action. Polling and census data, as well as pretesting of messages, can accomplish a great deal in structuring messages that build upon group attitudes.

Usually, the more credible the source, the more persuasive it is. A source seems more credible if the audience perceives an element of expertise and/or sincerity. Public relations practitioners must provide the right person for an audience. Two ways to establish credibility are associating with the experts or key communicators in the industry and positioning oneself as an expert in one's field.

Use the persuasive technique of appealing to the emotions. Strong emotional appeals can be extremely persuasive in merely reinforcing current beliefs and attitudes to changing attitudes to the more difficult task of rousing the public into action.

Reinforcing shared positive values can be extremely successful in maintaining the company's positive image. It is also a technique that should be used to build a barrier against criticism.

Build strong relationships with representatives of the media, who can be very influential in building visibility for companies.

If negative publicity cannot be avoided, reacting positively and aggressively can result in positive public support and recognition. Seizing the initiative ultimately can transform a public relations disaster into an opportunity.

Recommendations for Further Study

The study of persuasion in the practice of public relations does not have to be, nor should it be, limited to textbooks and journal articles. For future study the communicator could interview other practitioners in the public relations field. Such study is less limiting than the kind that was used for this work. It allows the researcher to ask questions once examples and cases are presented, thereby gaining more detailed knowledge that can perhaps be more easily applied.

Also, research of current periodical and journal articles could be further studied by attempting to contact the authors of such articles. This, however, could prove to be a difficult and time-consuming task and should be limited to articles of extreme interest to the researcher.

Finally, there are an abundance of excellent management books available. Although they are not solely devoted to persuasion in public relations, many have some applicable lessons and anecdotes that can be used by the public relations practitioner.

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