A Simple Formula for Success

By Robert A. Kelly

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Leaders in the business world need public relations big time, and they show it every day.

How? By staying in touch with their most important external audiences and by carefully monitoring their perceptions about the company, audience member feelings about hot topics at issue, and the behaviors that inevitably follow.

Could there be an angle here for your business?

What I mean is, once you interact with, then learn what that key target audience of yours believes about you and your organization, a corrective public relations goal – a specific behavior change -- can be established.

Which then requires that you identify a strategy. There are just three choices here, create opinion where none exists, change existing opinion, or reinforce it.

It's a logical sequence. With your goal and strategy now set, you need persuasive messages with a good chance of moving perceptions (and thus behaviors) in your organization's direction. But you must make sure the messages talk not only to the current topic at issue, but to any misconceptions or inaccuracies encountered during your information gathering, and to any problems that might be brewing.

What will you do with your new message? You will carry it to the attention of your priority audience. You'll use communications tactics that are credible in the eyes of the receiver, and effective in reaching him or her. You'll also want tactics that stand a good chance of moving opinion in that target audience, on the topic at issue, in your direction.

Fortunately, there are many communications tactics to choose from: newsworthy announcements, letters-to-the-editor, news

releases, radio and newspaper interviews, brochures, speeches and on and on.

Now, you're back to the monitoring mode as you interact once again with members of the key target audience. With your communications tactics hammering away, you keep one eye peeled for signs of target audience opinion shifts in your direction. The other eye, (and ears) stay alert for any references by print and broadcast media, or other local thoughtleaders to your carefully prepared message.

The bottom line is, are perceptions and behaviors within the target audience being modified? If not, adjustments to your communications tactics – often a big increase in, and wider selection -- must be made. Your message may also need to be sharpened and its factual basis strengthened.

Gradually, you'll begin to notice changes in opinion starting to appear along with a growing receptiveness to those messages of yours. This is real progress.

Should you still need encouragement to hang in there with your brand new public relations program, consider this. A single issue – for example, a potentially dangerous, unattended perception among a key audience -- can spread like wildfire nudging any business closer to failure than success.

That statistic alone should make you feel pretty good about public relations.

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Bob Kelly counsels, writes and speaks about the fundamental premise of public relations. He has been DPR, Pepsi-Cola Co.; AGM-PR, Texaco Inc.; VP-PR, Olin Corp.; VP-PR, Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Co.; director of communications, U.S. Department of the Interior, and deputy assistant press secretary, The White House.
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