

# Get PR Off the Bench

By Robert A. Kelly

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Something that results in your most important outside audiences doing what you need them to do should not be warming the bench.

But that's exactly what's happening at organizations that allow their public relations people to play games with tactics like newsletters, press releases and brochures instead of aggressively pursuing the major benefits PR can provide.

If this describes your public relations program, why not give real PR a chance, especially since you're already paying for it?

Tell your public relations counsel you want to see the plan for how s/he will take advantage of the fact that people act on their own perception of the facts before them leading to predictable behaviors about which something can be done.

Ask her/him how aggressively s/he will create, change or reinforce those perceptions by reaching, persuading and moving-to-actions-you-desire those important external audience members whose behaviors really affect your organization?

That's the fundamental premise of public relations and you should be getting your share of that action.

Fact is, this sequence can help you alter the perceptions, and thus behaviors of your most important external target audiences making achievement of your business objectives much easier.

This is good news for managers like you because, when the behavioral changes become apparent, and meet your public relations program's original behavior modification goal, your PR effort has succeeded.

Done right, that's when you'll notice customers making repeat purchases; prospects starting to do business with you; community leaders seeking you out; businesses proposing beneficial joint ventures; and legislators and political leaders viewing you as an

important member of the business community.

And that key target audience is just for starters because other external audiences of importance to you can also be monitored for perceptions, behaviors and corrective communications as needed.

Now, while there's more than one way to peel an orange, here's one high-impact, problem-solving sequence that can work for you.

Start by listing your most important audiences whose behaviors affect your operation in any way. Rank them by how severely their behaviors impact you, and let's work on the target audience at the top of your list.

Of course you should be continually aware of how members of that key target audience view you by taking the opportunity to interact with folks who make up that audience, and ask questions. Have you heard of us? What do you think of our products or services? Listen carefully for signs of negativity and, when you hear them, probe a little deeper to find out details. Stay alert for inaccuracies, mistaken beliefs, rumors or misconceptions.

The answers to your questions will quickly coalesce into your new public relations goal – i.e., the specific perception problem and, thus, behavior change you want. As examples, neutralize that hurtful rumor, clarify that untruth, turn around that misconception or correct an important but inaccurate number.

As of this moment, you have a goal and no strategy. But, for perception and opinion purposes, there are three strategies sitting on the shelf ready to show you how to use your new PR goal.

You can create perception/opinion where there may be none, change existing opinion, or reinforce it. Fortunately, your new public relations goal will indicate clearly which strategy should be used.

The message you send to members of your key target audience is vitally important. After all, its mission is to alter people's perceptions or beliefs which you hope will lead to behaviors that are more helpful to your organization.

Clarity, believability and persuasiveness are the important ingredients of your message. It must present the truth credibly and, to the extent possible, make a compelling case.

Now you trot out your "beasts of burden" – your communications tactics – to carry your message to members of your key target audience. And you have an embarrassment of riches in this regard – consumer meetings, emails, press releases, facility tours, speeches, special events, brochures, radio and newspapers interviews, and many others.

Progress – "Are we making any?" – will rear its head at this juncture. Best way to find out is to go back to members of your

target audience and ask the same questions as before.

Only the big difference now versus your first perception monitoring go-around is, you are now looking for signs that your message and your communications tactics have combined to alter perceptions, and thus behaviors in your direction.

Should progress be too slow, you may need to use a broader selection of communications tactics as well as increasing their frequencies. Also, revisit your message to determine if your facts were persuasive, then adjust as needed.

This is the way to Get PR Off the Bench and into your battle for the hearts and minds of your key target audiences.

By altering perceptions and behaviors in this manner, you take a giant step towards achieving your business objectives.

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