

November 1987

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: Communicating About Labor Problems

Downsizing, rationalization, negotiations, or service interruptions caused by strikes are critical exercises in employee relations, damage control, litigation prevention, and in limiting the depth of employee/management wounds. Here are seven useful communications strategies.

- *Keep it in the family.* Talk first to your principal audience -- your employees. Other audiences can wait. (Yes, they can.)
- *Create an events timetable* complete with all known events from both sides. Plan your actions against the timetable. This document will create a context for all actions (and help keep everyone sane).
- *Use statements, not releases.* News releases invite the media to join the bargaining process. They will and it won't be helpful. Use statements and a spokesperson. Pick your own time to answer questions. Create a limited number of messages.
- *Recognize coverage patterns.* Coverage of strikes and job actions focus first on employees. Recognize it. There is nothing you can do about it. Roll with it. Look for the strategic moment to respond and get your messages across.
- *Say something, but only what you mean.* Regardless of what opponents may claim, insinuate, accuse, or allege, stick to your important messages. Resist the urge to respond to anything else.
- *Prioritize your messages and audiences.* Develop your own messages first. They will dictate who important early audiences are and the order in which audiences need to be addressed. As messages evolve, different audiences will have priority. You only need to address the number of audiences necessary to achieve your negotiation objective and no more.
- *Read current labor stories.* If you want to know how the media will cover your labor situation, read labor coverage -- especially that done by *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Economist*. Review past media coverage of the American Airlines situation, United Mine Workers labor dispute, and coverage of railroad labor issues. Other enlightening models would be coverage of the Hormel and Armour meat packers strikes of 1985 and 1986.

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