

INSIDE THE MIND OF THE CEO

Worry and whining about who and what the CEO is listening to – in place of or in addition to us – is one of the age-old traditions of those in public relations. It is the source of much teeth gnashing among other staff functions as well: law, finance, accounting, human resources, security and even strategic planning.

The odd thing, of course, is that none of these functions knows anything about being a CEO, becoming a CEO, or what the challenges of the CEO's job happen to be. Before talking about what most staff functions would like to accomplish, and the strategies to do so, let's do a reality check on the business of being a CEO.

The position of CEO is less and less like it used to be:

- The average tenure of U.S. CEOs is now under 30 months. By contrast, most organizations develop five-year strategic plans. It would appear that this is a fundamental disconnect, which probably needs a remedy.
- One in four CEOs of major British businesses (sales over £500 million) left their jobs ahead of schedule in 2000. That's twice the 1990 rate.
- Huge compensation packages allow CEOs to drop out before they are fired or forced out.
- More and more non-business issues, e.g., globalization, adverse legislation, anti-corporate activism, are intruding on management. These interruptions seem soft and distractive, often requiring moral rather than monetary or business judgment.
- CEOs have yet to be measured on their morality or belief systems, but this is coming.
- In both the U.S. and in Europe, career-defining risks for CEOs are increasing.

Believe it or not, there is no school for CEOs, anywhere. There is no educational organization to teach the next CEO of Coca-Cola how to do that job. Being a CEO is a completely on-the-job training experience. There is only one such position in any organization, and each is completely unique.

Public relations concerns itself with reputation. However, I have yet to sit in on any top-level meeting where there was serious discussion of the actual concept of corporate reputation. I have sat in on discussions about building admiration and how a CEO's peers or peer companies have behaved or experienced similar circumstances, and the lessons potentially learned from those experiences. The concept of reputation is the creation of the public relations industry. The CEO is far more interested in admiration – from his/her peers, employees, the industry served, and from Mom.



PRODUCT DETAILS

Newsletter: 4 pages
Language: English
Price: \$5.00 U.S.

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He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."