GUIDING PRINCIPLES THAT FORMULATE
PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY

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Public relations theory is the foundation for relations practices which management uses to accrue maximum benefits to all functions of the organization. Through a knowledgeable study of all facts concerning a given situation, a plan can be developed to achieve the end result of good relations. The problem of relations with the many publics in the everyday workings of a sanitarian or sanitation organization cannot be met or dismissed by a press release or speech.

To develop a sound public relations program, the principles of theory must be considered. This paper has discussed three major principles. These are (a) consideration of fundamental matters, (b) organization involvement in decisions, and (c) evaluating the public interest. If these points are balanced with the actions of an organization, as a philosophy of management, the results will bring about the most favorable relations possible.

Addressing remarks on the assigned subject of "Public Relations in Theory" presupposes the decision that public relations is a desirable activity for the food sanitarian. A review of the daily problems encountered by those in the profession would make this self-evident. No argument need be made for the activity in any organization. As the symposium will also concern itself with public relations practice in industry and public health, no attempt will be made to outline action programs. However, it is necessary to define the term "public relations" in the context of this paper.

Many definitions will have as their basis the old and simple phrase "to build good will". That definition falls short for those faced with everyday decisions involving vital questions affecting large numbers of people. Reactions to a decision will be as varied as the interests of the groups concerned. As an example, an announcement of changing hours for the local high school would be received with varied reactions. The bus company would have to realign use of equipment to handle student loads. The drivers might threaten to strike because of the change in existing schedules. Employers of after-school students would have to reschedule work hours. Parents would welcome or resent the announcement, based upon their own interests.

In this simple illustration involving individuals as parents, as bus drivers, or as employers, a common interest may bring about the formation of a committee. Large groups such as unions, chambers of commerce, political parties, civic clubs and many more, are examples of individuals banding together for the promotion of a common interest. Every individual falls into several different interest-group categories—such as a parent, a businessman, a professional or laboring man, as a Democrat or Republican, etc.

In order to provide orderly, planned methods of approach for public relations purposes, such groups are referred to as publics. Hence, the public relations policies of a successful organization will be directed toward the special interests of one or more publics. A well-rounded public relations program of a corporation is directed to its various publics, i.e., employees, stockholders, customers, financiers, government agencies, and many others. All publics do not have the same interest in the corporation; therefore, the communications of its activities may and should be varied—each tailored in relation to the particular public's interest.

One broad stroke of the pen, one press release, or one speech does not serve to communicate with the many publics interested in an organization's activities. Public relations activities in the use of publicity, speeches, promotions, campaigns, research, etc., must be carefully designed in order to reach specific publics and reach them effectively.

To present properly the policies and activities of an organization, public relations must be an over-all activity. It is not a specialized activity as is production, engineering, finance, or sales. It is an operating philosophy which management must seek to apply in everything that it does and says. It is a philosophy of doing things. It is the very essence of any organization.

Public relations is about nine-tenths doing and one-tenth talking, though its philosophy is made up of many ingredients—sociology, economics, psychology, communications, as well as other knowledges. All of these combine to form a system of human un-
standing. Although men have created many sciences which enable them to accomplish many great achievements, they have not yet found the catalyst that will fuse these knowledges into a science of human relations. This makes the creation of a simple handbook on how to solve the problems of public relations a virtual impossibility.

The inability to find such a catalyst can be ascribed to the individual's reaction, which has often been described as "rational irrationality." People react to any given situation through their own eyes, in their own interests, based upon their own experiences. Therefore, any general public opinion is only the composite of what the particular public sees. To achieve full unity of public opinion upon any given matter would be a Herculean task, if not an impossibility.

It is the variety of individual reactions to organization policies and actions which makes public relations a vital part of any organization. Stress should be placed upon the word "part," as it is public relations' function to combine and evaluate facts and communicate the results to others. It is the need to communicate within the organization and to communicate to publics outside the organization that makes it necessary for public relations to be concerned with the entire program.

With this brief statement, this paper will deal with three elements in public relations theory. These elements will be classified as (a) consideration of fundamental matters, (b) organization involvement in decision, (c) evaluating the public interest. As the assigned subject pertains only to theory, specific techniques of practice such as speeches, press, employee indoctrination, etc., will only be discussed when necessary to illustrate a point.

Any development of theory relating to specific matter presupposes its use within a given set of circumstances. In this instance, the circumstances will be assumed to be those surrounding the daily working relationships of milk and food sanitarians with producers, processors, government agencies, consumers, and many other publics. However, the decisions will be applicable generally to any organization in government, business, or other organized groups associated for a common purpose.

**Consideration of Fundamental Matters**

Today's complex society has given rise to many conditions which the individual cannot comprehend, even though he has been alerted to them by a vast and rapid network of mass communications. Many of these matters are concerned with the basic human want for food. A necessary part of that want is the need for drugs. The current disasters of the drug thalidomide is an example of a broad knowledge of a happening by the public, but comprehension of the facts by only a few. Another example is the pesticide scare of only a few years ago. Both of these matters were fundamental to the organization of business and government in their relations with the public.

Although written in a jocular vein, an editorial from the September issue of *Forbes Magazine* is to the point.

"For generations Americans have been weaned to the words, 'Now drink your milk.' In my youth, as I recall, all that was needed to be an All-American football hero was the consumption of at least a quart of milk with every meal. Milk made the man. In fact, between doctors and the dairy industry, the cow was rapidly replacing the dog as 'man's best friend'.

"How Now Brown Cow!"

"The beasts may still be sacred in India but the polysaturated old things are no longer safe on Main Street, America.

"Cholesterol's done it.

"I don't quite understand what Cholesterol is, but it sounds like a cross between a chigger and fallout. Whatever it is, it seems that cows spread it around disguised as milk and all these generations we've been pumping poison into these kids. No wonder all our forebears are dead . . ."

"Frankly, I don't know how the presidents of National Dairy, Borden, The Cattlemen's Association, and The Dairymen's Association manage to sleep nights. In fact, maybe they don't. Maybe they're all up all night working to develop a poly-unsaturated cow.

"The whole thing may seem utterly ridiculous, but, you know, it is a food fashion shift involving billions of dollars."

Though facetious, this editorial and many more like it will give rise to quandary in the public mind. The question arises "Why doesn't someone educate the public as to the facts?" The answer lies in the fact that many organizations in government and business have diverse interests and no force has brought them together for a common-ground evaluation of the problem. For the purpose of example, it is enough to say that the problem of cholesterol is a fundamental matter to many organizations.

The element of consideration of fundamental matters as a part of the theory of public relations can be applied to instances of this type in the area of milk and food sanitarians. This application can be made for all, whether they are engaged in corporations, trade associations, or city, county, state or federal sanitation organizations. All organizations should follow the same basic principles and vary only to
the extent of numerical size, geographic area to be covered, and number of groups to be considered.

Daily activities of a city sanitation department run the gamut—from checking the compliance of dog-food formulas to the use of antibiotics in sterilizing milk equipment. The publics involved range from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to the Association of Pharmaceutical Salesmen. Milk is a product that brings into play many forces and publics. An action by the sanitation department could involve dairy producers, equipment dealers, processors, retailers, school authorities, P.T.A.’s, medical authorities, and the consuming public.

The sanitation department faced with the need to change its ordinances prescribing bacterial count, butterfat minimums, or type of container, is considering a fundamental matter in respect to the many publics with which it deals. Regulation of butterfat content may not, in the strictest sense, be a sanitation function, but it is invariably included in drafting regulations. Isolating the one point of butterfat will be enough to illustrate the public relations consideration.

Historically, in many areas, the paying price for raw milk is based upon butterfat content, or a formula in which butterfat is an important factor. A change, up or down, in an ordinance setting minimum fat content is likely to bring cries of anguish from the producers with too high or too low butterfat-producing cows. It is difficult to satisfy both. If the change requires a different paying price for pool milk or manufacturing milk, processors evaluate the ordinance in the light of how it affects them. School authorities view it in relation to their dietitians’ thinking as to school lunch programs. All the publics look through their own eyes and take a stand accordingly.

The burden of providing hearings for communicating the desires of the many publics to the sanitarians and, in turn, the methods he uses to communicate his decision to the publics, falls upon the public relations program. It is evident that a mere publicity release after the action would only create more problems. The facts of the need for a change must be presented to the groups concerned. Their recommendations must then be considered seriously and the best possible solution presented for action by the city governing body.

The example is easily recognized as having a public relations aspect but, many other fundamental matters are not recognized so readily. The changing of a procedure or rule in inspecting a milk processing plant perhaps is not so easily recognized. However, what appears to be desirable and necessary to the sanitarian’s way of thinking may appear catastrophic to the processor, thereby creating serious relations problems. It may place overwhelming burdens of cost, labor, or production problems to the point of jeopardizing the organization.

Decisions on fundamental matters concerning the sanitarian or his organization must always be based upon the various publics involved, as their acceptance will determine the success of the action. To promulgate a rule without consideration of public reaction—a rule too drastic to take in one step, or the omission of educational preparation of the publics, is almost sure to guarantee non-compliance and unmanageable enforcement problems.

To review fundamental matters in the light of their relations effect is not to reduce the sanitation values. It does not mean any lessening of the carrying out of the trust implied in the sanitation function. Properly applied, public relations serves not only as an essential ingredient, but also as a major asset in accomplishing good sanitation practices.

Fundamental matters take into consideration those things affecting the functions of the sanitarian in his relations with many publics. Some of the matters affect so few, and in such a minor way, that only limited consideration need be given to the relative problem. The sanitarian can train himself to evaluate the facts in order to discern those which must have major consideration, and those which are of only minor importance.

**Organization Involvement in Decision**

The ultimate responsibility for making decisions affecting public relations rests with the chief executive officer or directors of the organization. However, to reach a good relations decision, all facets of the matter in question must be considered. Therefore, the element of involvement of all those affecting, or affected by, the decision is necessary to make the theory of public relations work.

To arrive at a sound decision, all those taking part must have knowledge of the reasons making the decision necessary. Although the individual may realize that a problem exists, his effectiveness will be only in relation to his over-all understanding of the public relations policy of the organization. This makes necessary the indoctrination of the entire organization in the philosophy of management. To do otherwise is to run the risk of the old saying “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

Although all members of the organization do not have direct interest in specific decisions, lack of knowledge on the part of just a few can thwart the best-laid public relations plans. Many relations problems have resulted from the confusion that is
apparent when two differing views emanate from the same organization. The broad scope of public relations makes it readily apparent that it is impossible to apprise all personnel of the details concerning all public relations decisions. However, management should keep all personnel informed and provide enough explanatory information to form an understandable basic relations philosophy and policy.

In the above examples, the possibility of a change in procedure or rules for the inspection of milk processors was mentioned. Need for such a change might be motivated by increasing or decreasing budgets, additional personnel, qualification under U. S. Public Health rules, competition from other milk sheds, or any of a great number of reasons. In some instances, such changes can be and are made without consideration of anyone other than the inspectors directly involved.

Internal decisions and actions by an organization have a way of turning into external discussions by the general public. In spite of cautions to the contrary, dinner-table discussions, attendance at church, civic clubs and other meetings, a round of golf, or just plain neighborliness, become forums for discussion of the organization’s actions.

Such discussion soon turns into full-blown “rumor” and “gossip.” Distortion resulting from lack of knowledge by persons involved in the organization creates and multiplies relations problems. By making known the facts surrounding an action, through organization involvement in the decision, distortion and unfounded rumor potential is reduced.

EVALUATING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

In the past two decades, there have been many innovations in milk marketing. In the early 1930s, sanitation ordinances were passed which prohibited the marketing of fluid milk in one-gallon glass containers. Sanitarians ruled that it was impossible to properly clean such a bottle with existing equipment. This was a proper action to protect public health. By the 1950s, new equipment had come into existence which was purported to satisfactorily clean such bottles.

This change set in motion activities that involved many publics in a major way. The processors with tremendous investments in paper or smaller glass unit equipment could envision a new competitive factor in the market. The organization installing the new equipment could envision a sales advantage. The sanitarian was immediately surrounded by relations problems. Regardless of the persuasion of the equipment manufacturer, the processor buying the equipment, the processor retaining the existing equipment, or the desire of particular retail buyers, the first and foremost decision had to be consideration of the ability of the new process to clean the bottle without the possibility of creating unsanitary conditions. Such a decision would be in the general public interest, above and beyond regard to the persuasive special interests. Special interests can and do, in many cases, represent the general public interest and should be considered as having been offered in that light until proven against public interest. Although good public relations practices would not make such a decision all “sweetness and light,” they can and should increase the public understanding and acceptance. Properly planned, a relations program can be an aid to enforcement of the decision.

This type of decision can readily be understood as in the public interest. However, some sanitation practices occur which could be termed “doubtful” as measures concerned with public interest. Fortunately, these are few in number, but just those few can cast doubt on the validity of many.

For example, the workload of the sanitation department is sometimes such that the inspections, or testing, fall short of good sanitation practices. Delays can build up agitation and may even cause economic losses to those organizations being inspected. In a perhaps sincere but false sense of protecting their profession as sanitarians, workable solutions are questioned and rejected in some cases in favor of increasing personnel through expanded budgets.

The public interest has been served by many sanitation departments through providing solutions other than building a bigger department. In some areas, private laboratories have been certified under a system of licensing by the U. S. Public Health Service. Others have used organizations such as county, state, or federal laboratories, etc. These efforts have eased the strain on the city sanitation department, brought about better and more rapid testing, thereby improving the relations and, in the long run, doing a more creditable job of serving the public interest.

A discussion of the overlap of authorities, lack of uniformity, and jurisdiction problems, further points up the problem of general public interest. Although any individual sanitation unit may have sound reasons for promulgating a rule, the public interest ceases to be served when the effect is negated by an overlapping or conflicting rule of another unit. The individual sanitation opinions, when enacted into law, create costs in the market. Sanitarians must constantly strive to bring about uniformity in order to best represent the public.