

October/November/December 1992

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: Axioms of Influence: The Truth About Your Relationship With Audiences*

When communications and issue managers go back to examine why strategies put in place to influence public attitudes did or didn't work, they often find that one or more of several basic communications truths were overlooked or ignored. Those who ignore the four Axioms of Influence risk failure, uncontrolled exposure, and sometimes backlash, even organized opposition.

Axiom #1: Message Velocities Vary by Audience

Messages move through audiences at different levels and different velocities because audiences have different abilities to absorb them. Messages about retiree benefits have little or no meaning to audiences younger than 50.

Axiom #2: The More Direct and Specific Your Communication, the Better Your Chances of Impact

Channels of communications multiply daily. The old fashioned news sources -- television networks, daily newspapers, news magazines -- now have tremendous competition for viewer, reader and listener attention. Audiences are being broken down into smaller and smaller, increasingly diverse bundles.

Axiom #3: Allowing the Media to Drive Your Strategy Is a Recipe for Failure

Mega situations such as the Exxon Valdez will always cause intense media interest which must be managed. Ironically, excessive spin control can keep the media coming back for new twists, which means the media, if we let them, control how we respond to various situations. The more we manipulate the media, the more we are manipulated in return.

Axiom #4: Some Audiences Will Never Care

Accept it. Believe it. One of the beauties and realities of democracy is that we all have the right not to know and not to care. Focus on those who do.

Corollary #1: Influencing Audiences Requires Messages and Actions They Care About

To determine how much certain audiences really ought to care, step back from your favorite tactics and strategies and carefully and honestly examine how each is directly affected. No direct affect, little or no influence.

* Adapted from *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies That Reduce the Media's Power*, copyright © 1992, James E. Lukaszewski. Copies may be obtained by calling or writing Issue Action Publications, 207 Loudoun Street, S.E., Leesburg, VA 22075-3115, (703) 777-8450.

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