

January/February/March 1993

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: Reducing the Media's Power -- Part I*: Move Around Them

Never before has the American news media seemed so emotionally committed to their work. Extraordinary competition, marketplace fragmentation, and Perot/Clinton audience direct campaign techniques have permanently altered the way the news media chooses, responds to, and develops stories.

Reporters have become alarmists, allegationists, interpreters, intervenors, speculators . . . even story participants. No matter what the medium, the local news weekly or television station, cable news or the networks, there are fewer gate-keepers, ethical restraints and editorial barriers. Those few left are crumbling. What news is, has often become degrees of emotionalism and editorializing.

Issues, problems, ideas, products, and behaviors are treated emotionally by the news media because:

- We're still operating on obsolete notions -- "the news media should be objective" and "our audience is still there waiting to see, view or hear our messages". We still believe that if we write it well enough, the media will do what we want. The trouble is, they don't do their jobs the same way any more and audiences behave differently, too.
- We keep relying on the media instead of by-passing them and going directly to audiences. Continue using the media as a principal conduit, and your information will be filtered, altered, modified, editorialized, and emotionalized; or ignored altogether. You need another way.

Two ways to reduce the media's power are:

- Talk to the media only when it is in the interest of your strategy or when they ask you questions. Never substitute media relations for directly reaching those most directly affected, first. In other words, move around the media, go direct.
- Go face-to-face, door-to-door, belly button-to-belly button. If your audiences hear it from your lips directly, what the media says and does will matter a whole lot less.

Address the real issues which concern your publics. Answer the questions your audiences are really asking. Stay focused on issues which concern them the most (you find that out by face-to-face interaction). Do these aggressively, and what the media says and does simply becomes less and less relevant.

* 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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