

October 1988

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: What News Is

It seems almost too simple a question, but it is one of the top questions on the executive communicator's mind -- what does the reporter think news is? Here's a handy checklist for assessing your situation or problem. It will help you determine just how newsworthy you could be.

Reporters believe that news has these attributes:

- **Surprise:** News is about things turning out differently than we had planned. These outcomes aren't always bad, but most of the time they are.
- **Affect:** News has emotional appeal -- it affects people -- which means that news of machines breaking down is not very newsworthy.
- **Effect:** News is about what the result is -- things like death, injury, homelessness, personal harm, etc.
- **Secrecy:** News is about whatever you want to hide. The media wants whatever the world isn't supposed to know.
- **Conflict:** News is usually about conflict arising from one or more of four sources: from insiders, like whistle blowers and disgruntled employees; from outsiders, like our competitors or competing interests; by organized opposition; and/or by unprepared spokespersons.
- **Reporter's interest:** News is more worthy if it hits close to home, i.e., the reporter's nephew works in the plant you just burned down.
- **Mistakes:** News is about when business errs, because American business is expected to function perfectly at all times (see "Surprise").
- **Change:** Newsworthy by definition.
- **Editor's perspective:** News is what the editor thinks it is. If the editor thinks you have a problem . . . you do have a problem.

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