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# Building Relationships With Community Opinion Leaders: Why, Who and How

**A Report Commissioned By**



THE HOSPITAL & HEALTHSYSTEM  
ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

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# Building Relationships with Community Opinion Leaders: Why, Who And How

## *A Report for the Hospital & Healthsystems Association of Pennsylvania*

### Executive Summary

Hospitals and Healthsystems depend upon the understanding and support of the communities they serve in order to achieve their missions. Increasingly, people make choices about giving their support based, to a significant degree, upon reputation. As a result, actively managing an organization's reputation must be as vital a management priority as any other organizational function. Reputation, in practical terms, has an impact on the bottom line.

Whether or not non-profit hospitals prefer to think of themselves as “businesses,” the not-for-profit hospital community has long since adopted the maxim: “No margin, no mission.” And, according to several recent studies conducted by HAP, nearly 7 out of 10 Pennsylvanians believe that Pennsylvania's hospitals are operated for a profit. In another study,<sup>1</sup> more than one-half of the respondents agreed that “hospitals are just like any other business.”

Decades of social science research have demonstrated that there is a group of people in any community to whom others look to help them to form opinions on important matters like community health and health care. Whether called “thought leaders,” “key leaders” or “opinion leaders,” these people literally *lead* the formation of the opinions and, ultimately, public policies that affect hospitals. Opinion leaders “are people recognized by their peers as having some special competence in a particular subject”<sup>2</sup> and who “influence other individuals' attitudes or overt behavior informally in a desired way with relative frequency.”<sup>3</sup> Influencing the people who influence other people is a critical component of managing an institution's reputation.

This report has been prepared for HAP members to ask and answer three questions:

- *Why* is it necessary for hospitals and healthsystems to build relationships with community opinion leaders in a formal, programmatic way?
- *Who* are opinion leaders?
- *How* do institutions build relationships of trust and understanding with them?

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<sup>1</sup> A study conducted by the author. The sponsoring institution has generously granted the right to refer to specific results anonymously.

<sup>2</sup> “Personal influence: the two-step flow,” in *Milestones in Mass Communication Research* by Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur (Longman, 1995)

<sup>3</sup> *Diffusion of Innovations* by Everett Rogers, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (The Free Press, 1995)

## About This Report

This report was prepared by David Kirk, APR, Fellow PRSA, a corporate communication consultant to the Hospital & Healthsystems Association of Pennsylvania as part of HAP's ongoing public accountability program, "Fulfilling Our Promise: Caring, Quality and Community." It is the second in a series of relationship-building tools that HAP has commissioned for its member institutions; the first was a "Guide to Planning and Managing Relationship Assessments," a tool to help hospitals plan their programs of building relationships with opinion leaders and other constituent groups.

This report draws on three sources of information:

- An extensive review of relevant social science and communication research on the subject of opinion leadership, developed in collaboration with Mark P. McElreath, Ph.D., APR, ABC, author of a leading public relations text book.<sup>4</sup> (An annotated bibliography is included as Appendix A of this report.) All texts, articles, studies and other sources cited in this report are available through HAP's Leadership library.
- A self-administered survey completed by senior representatives of six HAP-member institutions and seven senior representatives of other hospital associations and corporations, all of which were identified by third-parties as representing "best practices" in certain aspects of building relationships with community opinion leaders.
- In-depth telephone surveys with the Chief Executive Officers or other senior officers of the 13 organizations which participated.

*Throughout this report, text that appears in this style is drawn from these in-depth interviews.*

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<sup>4</sup> Managing Systematic and Ethical Public Relations Campaigns, Mark. P. McElreath, second edition, (McGraw Hill, 1997)

## Reputation Matters

Any organization has no more precious asset than its reputation. This is especially apparent for institutions, like hospitals, whose day-to-day actions literally mean life or death for its “customers.” A good reputation cannot be bought. But *investing* in building reputation has enormous payoffs. In 1999, for example, the respected Thomas L. Harris/Impulse Research organization conducted a study of companies listed in *Fortune* magazine’s 1998 Most Admired Companies survey.<sup>5</sup> The study concluded:

*“An analysis of the corporate communications budgets of the participating companies shows that spending decreases for each lower grouping of the Fortune reputation ranking. This would appear to validate a correlation between an investment in corporate communications and a company’s reputation.”*

In fact, the study showed that the 100 top-ranked firms invested more than eight times in communication activities than the lowest-ranked firms.

In a 1996 study conducted in a medium-sized Pennsylvania city, preference ratings for each of three hospitals tested increased by from 54% to more than 1800% when preference ratings were calculated for people who believed that a particular hospital “is most dedicated to a healthier community.”<sup>6</sup>

*I am constantly surprised at how our long years of developing a good reputation have translated. I talk about it as a reservoir of good will. If we need help and ask people to do things to support us it is usually there. It is my job to convince people that we need to replenish that reservoir periodically.*

*Community credibility pays off. Plain and simple. It's our most important resource and asset if we have it. If we don't, we're dead in the water.*

*When you do good things you create a trust bank and the trust bank allows people to have more effective communication in areas yet to be known. When you have developed a level of trust it eventually translates into those situations where you have to tap into that trust bank and the bank is based in a history of open and effective communication.*

Reputation has two components: *performance* that is consistent with the expectations that people have for an organization’s performance and, critically, *communication* about that performance. No amount of communication about poor performance will burnish an organization’s reputation. By the same token, failure to communicate effectively about an organization’s good performance may contribute to a poor reputation. “Hide your light under a bushel basket” is not a good prescription for reputation management.

*If we lost that tax exemption it would wipe this organization out. If we don't from the get go tell people what we are doing, stand accountable to them, admit to our mistakes, if there's ever a food fight around tax exemption, we will lose it.*

<sup>5</sup> “Corporate Communications Spending and Reputations of Fortune 500 Companies,” a study sponsored by the Council of Public Relations Firms, June, 1999

<sup>6</sup> A study conducted by the author. The sponsoring institution has generously granted the right to refer to specific results anonymously.

Yet, even when an organization's performance is unassailable . . .

*"Managing . . . reputation has become increasingly challenging. The proliferation of information and media, intense public scrutiny and constant corporate change has created confusion, distrust and cynicism that erode the reputations of American businesses with their employees and external publics . . . a strong reputation is like an insurance policy, money in the bank for a rainy day. It probably won't help a company avoid a nasty story in the newspaper, but it may keep it to a one-day story rather than the continued hemorrhaging in the media that can take a toll on a company's sales, stock price and strategy."*<sup>7</sup>

Reputation is not built accidentally – unless it is *managed* accidentally. A community-dependent organization like a hospital that fails to develop a systematic, organized approach to managing its reputation does so at its peril.

*Plan it, do it, measure it and improve it. And I would add: tell them you did it. Talk about it. Use marketing 101 and say, "This is what I am going to do. Now we did. This is what we're going to do now." If an organization is trying to build relationships, establish a reputation, you have to keep telling them like flash cards, like kids learning mathematics or spelling. Be focused. Be strategic. Have a reason for everything you do.*

An excellent presentation about the ROI of effective communication can be obtained free of charge at [www.prfirms.org/clients/MerckOffsite.ppt](http://www.prfirms.org/clients/MerckOffsite.ppt)<sup>8</sup> The case for the benefits of effective communication is made in this presentation quite compellingly and includes analyses of the communication spending of *Fortune's* Most Admired Companies and comments from business leaders such as these:

- *"If you lose dollars for the firm by bad decisions, I will be understanding. If you lose reputation for the firm, I will be ruthless."* Warren Buffet  
*"A reputation is an incredible asset, one you can't appreciate until you lose it. And when you do, every aspect of business gets harder and more costly."* Steve Miller, former CEO, Waste Management

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<sup>7</sup> "Building Corporate Reputation," a publication of the Council of Public Relations Firms, 1999

<sup>8</sup> "The ROI of Corporate Communication" a presentation by Jack Bergen, President, Council of Public Relations firms, 9/14/2000

## Community Opinion Leaders Influence Reputation

One of the simplest formulations of the development of opinion is expressed mathematically:

*“Acts + the interpretation of acts = opinion.”<sup>9</sup>*

No matter how an organization performs or “acts,” its actions *will* be interpreted and expressed as public opinion. Institutions themselves must play an active role, through effective communication, of interpreting their own actions to a variety of constituencies. “Best practices” institutions also work diligently to assure that the people who influence other people accurately interpret their actions.

■ *It really is understanding that 10% of the people influence the other 90%.*

■ *In the event we need to access some of those thought leaders for business or public policy reasons, we want them to have an open door policy and a very receptive policy when it comes to dialogue and relationships.*

As several people interviewed for this report said, focusing on opinion leaders seems like “common sense.” Intuitively, dealing with opinion leaders to help shape public opinion *does* make sense. But effective institutional programs to *influence* opinion leaders require much more than common sense. They require a familiarity with the vast body of knowledge that has been produced by social scientists and an institutional commitment to act upon this knowledge in a programmed, consistent way.

To drive home the point by a parallel example: would a multi-million dollar institution with thousands or tens of thousands of employees, representing a major portion of the economic life stream of a community trust its legal matters to someone with “a sense of fairness?” After all, the law is about fairness, isn’t it? The practice of law is based upon a specific, identified body of knowledge – the law – which is codified, accessible and forms the basis for informed management decision-making. Similarly, building effective programs of action and communication to influence opinion leaders to influence public opinion and public policy are grounded in a body of knowledge that is no less rigorous or accessible. Ignorance of “the law” in either domain is no excuse for failure.

For the purposes of this report, we will stand on the assertion that “opinion leaders lead opinion” and focus on the practical implications of this well documented fact. The annotated bibliography in Appendix A lists a number of excellent sources that provide ample evidence for this assertion. Of particular note are The Influentials: People Who Influence People.<sup>10</sup> Also, an excellent 1999 study, “The National Credibility Index” has contributed groundbreaking information to the literature by demonstrating that the credibility of different categories of leaders is variable and issue-specific.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Attributed to Anthony J. Fulginiti, APR, professor, Rowan College, Glassboro NJ

<sup>10</sup> The Influentials: People Who Influence People, by Gabriel Weimann (State University of New York Press, 1994.)

<sup>11</sup> “The National Credibility Index,” a report prepared for Public Relations Society of America Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation, by Hinckley et al, June 1999, available through the PRSA Foundation, New York

## Performance That Builds Good Reputations

Reputation is the sum total of an institution's actions and its communication about those actions. What actions do organizations with excellent reputations engage in? A report<sup>12</sup> issued in 2000 has summarized these behaviors:

*“There are ten widely accepted components of corporate reputation, which together we take as the working definition:*

1. **Ethical:** *[the organization] behaves ethically, is admirable, is worthy of respect and trustworthy.*
2. **Employees/workplace:** *[the organization] has talented employees, treats its people well, is an appealing workplace.*
3. **Financial performance:** *[the organization] is financially strong, has a record of profitability, has growth prospects.*
4. **Leadership:** *[the organization] is a leader rather than a follower, is innovative.*
5. **Management:** *[the organization] is well managed, has high quality management, has a clear vision for the future.*
6. **Social responsibility:** *[the organization] recognizes social responsibilities, supports good causes.*
7. **Customer focus:** *[the organization] cares about customers, is strongly committed to customers.*
8. **Quality:** *[the organization] offers high quality products and services.*
9. **Reliability:** *[the organization] stands behind its products and services, provides consistent service.*
10. **Emotional appeal:** *[the organization] that I feel good about, is kind, is fun.*

This same report contains an excellent overview of nine of the best-known reputation management systems.

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<sup>12</sup> “Corporate Reputation Management and Measurement: Towards a Shared Understanding of Corporate Reputation and Related Concepts,” by Bruce Jeffries-Fox for the Council of Public Relations Firms, September 2000



## Effective Communication About Performance

There is a demonstrable return for effective communication about institutional actions that meet the expectations of opinion leaders. But what is “effective communication?”

*Some businesses could really raise the mark for themselves if they would just talk about it. It would not be a gross display of what we did for you. You have to handle it the right way, too. That's a fine line.*

*Since we started focusing on and communicating about community needs, our market share volumes and bottom line have all improved*

First and foremost, effective communication is a two-way dialogue in which both parties to the “conversation” listen to one another, respond and actually change their behavior as a result of the communication. It is not “we speak, you listen” or “just get our message out there” or “just tell them the facts and they will agree with us.” For effective institutional communication, this implies and demands systems and procedures for listening to opinion leaders and other constituents, for modifying institutional behavior in response and for communicating about that behavior.

*You shouldn't be surprised if someone has a different viewpoint. Listen carefully if people are saying, “We don't like your point of view.” Just because hospitals have a point of view and medicine holds such an arrogant position in knowledge. We have to be sensitive to the fact that we are in an age of consumerism. People's sense of the power of their opinion is much stronger today than it was 10 years ago and that is an absolute revolutionary change in terms of how we need to think about influencing opinion.*

*Sometimes that is difficult because the community may not agree with you. But that's an important part of why we are perceived as we are because we encourage people to come to the table. It is better to all be talking about it and making compromises.*

One of the most familiar formulations of effective communication is “the Seven C’s” model<sup>13</sup>:

- **Credibility:** *communication starts with a climate of belief . . . built by performance on the part of the institution, reflecting an earnest desire to serve stakeholders and publics. Receivers must have high confidence in the sender and high regard for the source's competence on the subject.*
- **Context:** *a communication must square with the realities of the environment.*
- **Content:** *the message must have meaning for receivers, and it must be compatible with their value systems. It must have relevance to the receivers' situation. In general, people select those types of information that promise them the greatest rewards.*
- **Clarity:** *The message must be put in simple terms . . . complex issues must be compressed into themes, slogans or stereotypes that have simplicity and clarity. The farther a message has to travel, the simpler it must be. And organization must speak with one voice, not many voices.*

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<sup>13</sup> *Effective Public Relations*, by Cutlip, Center and Broom, eighth edition, 1999, p.424

- ***Continuity and consistency:*** *Communication is an unending process. It requires repetition to achieve penetration. Repetition – with variation – contributes to both learning and persuasion.*
- ***Channels:*** *Established channels of communication should be used, channels that receivers use and respect. Creating new ones can be difficult, time-consuming and expensive. Selective channels are called for in reaching target audiences.*
- ***Capability of the audience:*** *Communications are most effective when they require the least efforts on the part of receivers. This involves factors of availability, habits, reading ability, and prior knowledge.*

Later sections of this report distill this strategic counsel into practical implications for developing communication programs aimed at opinion leaders.

## Where Opinion Leader Programs Fit In Community Relations

Most organizations, even many of those employing “best practices,” include community leaders as a specific audience within other, broader institutional relationship-building programs such as Community Relations. These programs frequently include other activities such as employee volunteer programs, philanthropy, media relations, cause-related or partnership marketing and lending executive talent. For the most part, this is true of the corporate, association and hospital executives interviewed for this report. As a component of broader Community Relations efforts, some of the literature on best practices in this area, then, is useful to guide the development of community leader communication programs.

For example, a report by the Public Affairs Group, Inc. and LBG Associates,<sup>14</sup> which studied 80 of the Fortune 500 companies, concluded that that the best community relations programs are:

*“. . . holistic in nature (they look at social problems from a ‘big picture’ point-of-view and address community needs from all angles); bottom-line oriented (every aspect of community involvement somehow ties into one or more of its overall business strategies, goals, values or objectives) and; incorporate value-added practices (besides simply giving in terms of cash and best practice companies incorporate other functions in their community relations . . . they embrace community relations and corporate philanthropy as a value, not just a policy or practice [and] effective programs intersect employee values, business interests and community needs in the planning and developmental stages.”*

While many organizations include opinion leaders as “just another audience” in broader programs of “public education” or “community relations,” there is compelling evidence that giving special, customized attention to the leaders of many different community constituent groups, represents a “best practice” among leading edge organizations.

However an institution chooses to *organize* the activities it conducts to build strong relationships with community opinion leaders, it is clear that institutions benefit both qualitatively and quantitatively by identifying opinion leaders as a unique target audience.

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<sup>14</sup> “Best Practices in Corporate Community Relations 1998,” Jared Skok and Linda Gornitzky, The Public Affairs Group, Inc. and LBG Associates, 1998. Available at <http://www.lbg-associates.com/>

## Who Are The People Who Influence People?

Most senior executives interviewed for this report say that they have an intuitive sense of how to identify the people who influence public opinion. Most manage these relationships in a hip-pocket fashion. While most report that these informal programs of enfranchising community opinion leaders “meet or exceed their expectations for their performance,” few of them said that they are familiar with the scientific evidence that helps to define who leads opinion on specific issues, how they differ by issue and for different constituent groups, how the process of opinion formation works and how they can actively shape this process to their benefit. When asked “What would you do if you had to do it all over again?” or “What advice do you have for colleagues?” quite a number of those interviewed said that they would do a better job of understanding and managing the dynamics of how opinions are formed about their organizations.

*If you plopped me down in another hospital I probably would more consciously develop the program. I'll be honest, you back into it, you do it intuitively. In retrospect I think I would have structured it a little more carefully. I would have picked up some of the points in the HAP survey and more consciously defined the program.*

*I would have assigned somebody and made it part of their job description because I was the only one who saw the power and knew it was the single most effective thing we were doing. I was the champion and babysitter and when I moved up in the organization, it fell off. So assigning a champion and then figuring out a technology to make the thing easier [is important.] The whole paper-based thing was just not working.*

*I would keep better track of it because although we have a sense of who we are talking to it is kind of willy nilly.*

*I would have started it sooner. I would have a more direct contacting methodology and I'd have my E-mail system [set-up so] that I could send them a letter every three weeks telling them what's going on.*

In the text Personal Influence<sup>15</sup>, the authors defined opinion leadership as:

*“... leadership at its simplest: it is casually exercised, sometimes unwitting and unbeknown, within the smallest groupings of friends, family members, and neighbors. It is not leadership on the high level of Churchill, nor of a local politico; it is the almost invisible, certainly inconspicuous form of leadership at the person-to-person level of ordinary, intimate, informal, everyday contact.”*

So what *is* there to know about opinion leaders and how opinion is formed? There is an enormous amount of information available on the subject, which has spawned endless research studies and bookshelf yards of texts. The annotated bibliography provided with this report provides an excellent review of the literature from several perspectives:

- Factors within public opinion leaders that define them, how they think and respond;

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<sup>15</sup> Personal Influence, Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, The Free Press, 1955, p. 138

- Factors between public opinion leaders and agents of change who seek to influence them;
- Factors that affect small groups that include opinion leaders;
- Factors within organizations that affect opinion leaders;
- Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders such as external groups, activist publics, media, competitors, regulators and others;
- Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders, such as public policies and laws;
- Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders, such as cultural values and beliefs.

Given that there are literally millions of pages devoted to the subject of opinion leadership, clearly it would be impossible to summarize all of the information that would help hospital leaders to plan and manage effective opinion leader communication programs. With the intent of whetting the appetite for more information and underlining the critical need to include expertise on these issues in the hospital management team, here follow a few useful facts that certainly will arouse the curiosity of serious executives – and hopefully motivate further study and action.

**From The National Credibility Index study<sup>16</sup>:**

- People need to take shortcuts in obtaining information. They rely on others for information – individuals or organizational or institutional actors – but constructive information ultimately has to be credible and this depends on people’s attitudes toward their informants. (p.C1)
- On “social problems and policies,” 25% of people say they go to “organizations and experts” for “truthful information and honest opinion” versus 17% who consult media and 16% who consult government. While the media are important sources of truthful information for the public, people who mention social or moral problems gravitate toward other sources for credible information. It appears that “specialized” problems require “specialized” information. (p.30) The media themselves are not a single source or informant, but rather, they communicate information from sources they in turn cover. The quality of the information that is provided depends on the knowledge that these sources have and whether these knowledgeable sources choose to convey the information. (p.3) Although news media are considered credible in the abstract, they drop well below the “benefit of the doubt” level when specific issues are raised. (p. ix)
- Overall and from issue to issue, “insiders” or “experts” on the matters under consideration receive the highest credibility scores. The credibility of this type of public figure is primarily dependent not on the respondent’s knowledge of the issue but on the respondent’s assessment of the level of knowledge of the public figure being evaluated. Thus, the individuals whom they perceive to be close to, and most informed about an issue will be deemed the most credible sources of information. (p. vii)
- Gender is not a significant factor in determining credibility *except* with respect to social activism. Women ascribe greater credibility to these public figures than do men. Social

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<sup>16</sup> <sup>16</sup> “The National Credibility Index,” a report prepared for Public Relations Society of America Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation, by Hinckley et al, June 1999, available through the PRSA Foundation, New York

activists appear to polarize the public consistently and effectively and social activism issues tend to reflect class and cultural divides such as race, religiosity, political persuasion and socio economic differences. (p. vii)

- Credible communication ultimately comes down to a complex mix of who is saying what to whom, on what issue and in what setting. (p. ix)

**From The Influentials: People Who Influence People<sup>17</sup>:**

- Active medical opinion leaders differ from occasional leaders and non-leaders. They are well-read individuals and have firsthand knowledge of the health facilities or personnel about which they offer advice. A disproportionate number are women. Other important differences relate to social status, gregariousness and the extent to which they exercise influence in other domains. Active leaders are positively correlated with (higher) social class. (p. 58)
- Leaders' tendency to support or block innovation is related to community norms. If the norms are very traditional, the leaders are found to be non-innovative. (p. 59)
- Being an opinion leader in one area does not affect the probability of being an opinion leader in another area. (p.61)
- Product involvement remains the predominant explanation for opinion leaders' conversations about products. (p. 75)
- There are several attributes that cross both time and social boundaries, and remain powerful predictors of opinion leadership. These are:
  - Personal attributes
    - Innovativeness
    - Individuation combined with social conformity
    - Knowledge, familiarity and interest in the subject
    - "Cosmopolitaness"
    - Personal involvement or enduring involvement
  - Social attributes
    - Gregariousness
    - Social activity
    - Centrality in social networks
    - Social accessibility
    - Social recognition
    - Credibility
  - Socio-demographic attributes
    - Profiles change according to [subject] domains
    - Within domains profiles change across cultures and societies
    - Within domain and society, profiles change over time
    - Tendency to similarity of influential and influencee profiles

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<sup>17</sup> The Influentials: People Who Influence People, by Gabriel Weimann (State University of New York Press, 1994.)

“The Interpersonal Context of Communication”<sup>18</sup> addresses the interplay between opinion leaders and media:

*“The media are comparatively rich in news content, whereas personal associates are likely to have had relevant ‘consumer’ experience. Further, since consumption is partly a matter of defining one’s social ‘self,’ other persons would be able to offer normative social guides to appropriate consumption patterns that the media cannot. Finally, some matters may not be dealt with by the media in sufficient depth or detail to satisfy personal information needs.”*

■ *These are the people quoted in the paper, these are the people influencing reporters.*

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<sup>18</sup> In Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research, by Steven H. Chaffee (Sage Publications, 1972, p. 103)

## Best Practices in Building Relationships With Opinion Leaders

At some point, each institution must make the “rubber hit the road” when it comes to planning and managing any vital institutional activity. This paper is designed both to open a window into the theoretical and research-based framework that guides the most effective “best practices” organizations and to provide down-to-earth practical advice. The following list of best practices distills the theoretical foundation into specific strategies and tactics that “best practices” organizations include in their programs of building relationships with opinion leaders.

- A high-level executive in the organization is accountable for, champions and is actively involved in the communication program that targets community opinion leaders.

■ *It has to be leader to leader. HAP CEOs cannot delegate this to somebody else.*

■ *99% of the community leaders program is me [a CEO.] This is not a relatively diffuse effort. I believe that a senior member of management should be as visible as possible in as many community affairs as possible. That gives a face to the organization. You can have lots of people doing things but I think that is less effective.*

■ *Where any activity sits in an organization sends a message to other people outside the organization. So if community health is relegated to somebody who has no visibility and no resources, the world sees it as a half-hearted commitment to community health. It's a big part of where we interface with community leadership. These would be people who are in the trenches, often leaders without all the formality and trappings of opinion leaders.*

■ *The higher up in the organization it is, the more telling and the more informed those leaders are than if they were sort of working with one of the PR staff.*

■ *First of all you have to have the critical component of leadership and high-level support. It has to be a company priority that allows you to go do this whether you have 2 people or 10 people involved. There has to be a value system that says this is important.*

■ *Why they don't do it is because it is very labor intensive and it needs a champion and a babysitter.*

- People involved in the program are and are expected to be community leaders themselves, being actively involved in the life of the community

■ *. . . it can't be perceived by the community as going through it solely for the purposes of going through the effort.*

■ *The community development directors absolutely positively -- we expect them to be leaders. They have a formal work plan where we agree on exactly what boards they will go after and spend their time on. As part of our annual business plan, which flows down to these work plans, we definitely do some strategizing about key involvements.*



*One of our expectations of [the vice president of Development] is to be involved in community activities that aren't necessarily health-related. She attends community affairs and fundraisers that benefit the general community. That is one of the ways we have influenced people. People know we are ready to be of value in some way. We try to benefit the total community.*

*I ask each one of my executives to play a role as a part of their paid responsibilities. I don't say to any of them that they have to be on a certain board but they understand there is an expectation they will participate.*

- Resources – people, money and other institutional resources – are allocated to the program.

*It's how you run and structure the program and what you do with the resources, who you have access to. That is what will determine your success, not how much money you have.*

- Opinion leaders are identified as a specific, distinct target audience, whether or not the communication activities aimed at them are part of other broader institutional programs such as community affairs, community relations, public relations or economic development.

*We believe that the power of opinion leaders to influence the opinion of the general public is high and therefore it is critical to have a strategy that opinion leaders think well of us.*

- Executives who are responsible for the program have their evaluation and compensation tied to the effective performance of the program.

*That process, tying it to compensation . . . takes something that many organizations have to plan that says, "These are really important. They are not fooling around. If we don't do them there is the expectation that there is an implied penalty." You don't get something if you don't perform.*

*As part of the formal review process for managers there is a part that is focused on what they have done with respect to community involvement and personal growth.*

- Research is employed to understand the expectations of community leaders, to plan the program, to set measurable objectives and to measure the results of the program. Best practices organizations tie results to the bottom line.

*I approach this work much like I would approach any business: you have to have an organized structure and a feedback mechanism that tells you whether or not the outcomes are influenced by what you do. You can't have actions that don't really take you closer to the outcome that you want.*

- The program is written and reviewed/revised on a periodic basis.

*Our management goals and objectives, which come out of our strategic plan, focus on meeting specific community targets and specifically they talk about certain health measures. But more important they focus more on community perceptions and expectations and relationships. These are numeric objectives. For example, we may set an objective that in community leaders will score our image above 85 on a survey.*

*We measure perception. It's all in terms of creating the perception and the identity and the good name and the good will. Perception sometimes you could think is smoke and mirrors and it's not.*

*You are measuring something that is extremely ubiquitous, vaporous, not something you can kick the tires of easily. But you can find out very quickly when you have flat tires and you can't get anywhere.*

- The organization makes a long-term commitment to the program

*It has to do with the commitment of the CEO of an organization or somebody at a high level in the organization to stay with this for a long period of time so that when the next fad comes into an organization such as TQM or Management By Objective the organization stays the course. The most important thing is whether to embark on such a program and if so with a sense of the length of time it takes, the amount of resources and the personal commitment of someone respected in the organization. If it is not that, if it's, "We'll do this project for the next two years" it's a waste of money from my perspective if it's not going to be taken on from the long side. I would have you ask others -- and it's hard to get an honest answer because it is so colored by our need to have succeeded -- you should ask, "What type of time does it take to change something that matters?" Having some young person work on it for a year or two really isn't worth the effort.*

*It's a lot of hard work. It takes a lot of time.*

*These things are long, long commitments and if one doesn't have the patience to stay with it they are just set for heartache. Also if the organization isn't willing to commit to a 5-10 year timeframe and have their leadership commit to that they are just kidding themselves. If they are looking for some major change in the community, it is not a one or two year project in my view.*

- The program is *not* tied to product and services marketing efforts.

*We say, "good for the business, good for the community and good for the soul." It has to have the feel good factor but you can't have just that. It has to deliver a benefit to the company and the audience.*

*Health care is not computer science like buying cars or groceries. It is my body and it is everybody's most precious asset. They expect a different approach.*

*We call what I do in these programs marketing by good deeds. Our community support programs are not linked to our products and services.*

- Opinion leaders from all relevant parts of the community are identified and enfranchised, not just government and business leaders. (See Appendix B for a checklist of probable constituent groups whose leaders may affect opinion of and support for hospitals.)

*We believe that for us to touch opinion leaders we need five areas represented: education, health, local government, near neighbor residential and near neighbor business.*

*We maintain a key leaders mailing list of about 1500 in number. We have one vehicle, called [name of publication] for them, which we have had in play for about seven or eight years. It reaches out to everyone from church leaders to civic leaders to mayors and moneyed interest types and retired CEOs and people who spend all their time playing golf at exclusive clubs who network and make contacts nonetheless, people who represent gay and lesbian interests.*

*The interests of a hospital association and of health care reform are not the same interests as the business community. It was best stated to me in the middle of all this [when] we and some others were talking about how to improve the health of the population. The business community and some of the insurers just shocked the hell of me by saying, "What do you mean the health of the population? We are in a free market. We don't ask the Ford Motor Company to improve highways. They build cars. We don't even like this conversation you are having. That sounds socialistic and communistic." We in health care really believe there is some purpose to this, some social reason for going forward and changing things to care for the poor or improve the quality of health. But when you run into the free market approach it's not even the same conversation. A lot of the business leaders seem to have the more free market view of it and they actually get quite uncomfortable in those kind of conversations.*

- Community Advisory Panels, separate from governing boards, are regularly involved in providing advice and feedback regarding institutional programs and performance.

*We have five measures of our community advisory panels to direct the makeup of the panels and one of those is diversity. The others are organizational structure, member participation, information exchange and community outreach.*

*Talk more with the community; make it a truly open dialogue. We all say that because we send out newsletters and annual reports and such that we communicate. It's all one-way communication. Two-way communication has got to improve. Look at the structure of most boards. We say they reflect the community. I'll bet 90% of them are drawn because of their ability to contribute to the hospital. We have confused community leadership with wealth.*

*Relationship and coalition building beyond other special interest groups that we work with on a daily basis is critical to getting things done in our environment.*

- Technology is employed to identify and to manage relationships and communication with opinion leaders but . . .

*If you didn't have the information available to do instant analysis, you might lull yourself into thinking you were doing great things to move the education needle . . . Having this in a database, being able to even keep track of our elected officials at the local state and Federal level in the same database is important in defining the relationships and stakeholders group as broadly as you need to define them.*

- . . . technology is used to empower and supplement person-to-person communication activities, not to replace them.

*Regular meetings -- frequency -- of meeting with community leaders is critical. If you don't do it, even if you have 10 executives on 10 boards, if you don't have a process for bringing that information back in, assimilating it and making the changes you need it won't be really effective. The numbers might look good but I don't know if you are building a whole relationships that will be meaningful for a long time. But without frequent information and face-to-face dialogue, I don't think it lasts very long. I don't think it is sustainable.*

*I admire people who are able to do a lot more on the Internet but I certainly don't feel that the Internet is personal enough for relationship building and I don't think it is an answer.*

- Partnerships with other community organizations and businesses that share common concerns are a fundamental program strategy and activity.<sup>19</sup>

*We would never be able to accomplish what our goals and mission suggest without partnering. We can't do it without the school system, without the Chamber of Commerce understanding what we are trying to do. Anything that is beyond the very narrow definition of medical care probably involves some partner outside of our health system. Our mission statement ends with a commitment that we take seriously and are willing to be judged against which is to build healthy communities and a healthy place to live and work. When you say that you are talking about the police system, the welfare system, housing. You find a host of partners inside and outside the organization.*

*We put most of our senior managers and some of our middle managers through a community leadership project called Leadership [City], we actually helped to start, through the Chamber of Commerce. It takes a year commitment but at the end of the year the individual in the program has been exposed to everything -- riding around with the police at 2:00 in the morning, city council meetings, human service settings, networking with 20 other people who are in the program, who are all in emerging or established leadership programs. Through that we get them networked with other community leaders.*

*In the [small towns] of the world you cannot escape being in the community. You have brothers, sisters generations of people who have worked here for 40 years. It is a spider web of relationships that mirror the community.*

- Each issue is handled differently with each audience, each time, in terms of the research conducted to understand the dimensions of the issue, which leaders are involved with and “move” the issue, which institutional spokespeople are selected to interact with leaders about the issue, vehicles used to communicate and so forth.

*If you think you have a handle on what the community leaders are thinking about your institution you don't. It is changing all the time so you had better keep your hand in the pot so you can find out if it's hot or not.*

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<sup>19</sup> See “The Seven Rules of Successful Collaboration” in *Nonprofit World* magazine, March/April 2000 p.33 and “Bridge Building: enhancing the possibility of partnerships” in *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, May/June 2000, p. 39

- Communication activities provide real value to opinion leaders, providing them with information that helps them to understand the intersections between their interests and the hospital's. "Best practices" organizations provide information that is so valuable to recipients that they have an incentive to help keep institutional records about them up-to-date.<sup>20</sup>
- Communication programs include both "push" (e.g. E-mail, newsletters) and "pull" (e.g. web sites) communication vehicles. Messages are highly customized to different segments of the opinion leader community and emphasis is placed on providing information that is "fresh" and current. Messages are repeated and reinforced frequently.

*Just because you have gotten the message out don't assume that it has been received or understood. You take solace from the fact that you send every living former governor of the state your newsletter. Ok. So what? There has to be follow-up beyond just the function of sending a newsletter out. There has to be some function for follow-up.*

- All employees of the institution, not just those directly involved with community opinion leaders, are given basic tools such as "talking points" and Q&A documents that help them to answer questions and to consistently deliver institutional messages to leaders they encounter.

*It would be important for us to have a more formal approach, a blueprint, templates where anybody -- from the guy who cuts the lawn here to the secretary to a department head to the president of the organization -- anybody could essentially give everybody else a heads-up as to a key contact they have. Everybody here one way or another also should be made aware of the fact that each of us is a community ambassador for our organization and in our comings and going beyond what happens in this building we should always act in that respect and be on the lookout. We need a template, a system.*

*Recently we published a spiral notebook with bullet points of key messages and that was distributed to the next much larger group of 300 middle managers. In all my years of publishing things it was probably the most popular thing I ever did. They loved it. We had to reprint. They really liked knowing what they can and should be saying.*

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<sup>20</sup> See "Put the customer in the information driver seat and build better relationships," in Direct Marketing, January 1998

## Closing Thoughts

This report asks and answers three questions:

- **Q:** *Why* is it necessary for hospitals and health systems to build relationships with community opinion leaders in a formal, programmatic way?
  - **A:** Hospitals and health systems must build relationships with community opinion leaders in a formal, programmatic way because it is too vital a function to be left to chance or informal management. Opinion leaders lead opinion and opinion shapes the public policies that directly affect whether or not hospitals can operate effectively in their communities.
- **Q:** *Who* are opinion leaders?
  - **A:** Opinion leaders differ by issue. Although they can be described by the roles they play in their social structures and they may share some common attributes, they change as issues change. This underlines the importance of actively managing relationships with this ever-fluid group.
- **Q:** *How* do institutions build relationships of trust and understanding with them?
  - **A:** Trust and understanding are produced as the result of performance that meets expectations, consistently, over time in an environment of two-way dialogue in which each party to the conversation adapts his or her behavior as a result of participating in the dialogue.

The art and science of managing reputation is an evolving management practice that is ingrained in the cultures of world-class organizations. As this report has amply demonstrated, reputation is formed both by word and deed. Pennsylvania's hospitals and health systems are arguably among the best in the world when it comes to their "deeds." Yet it surprises and disappoints hospital executives, employees, boards and supportive community leaders to learn that the reputation of hospitals don't always match their superior performance.

While bringing reputation into line with performance is no mean feat, the formula for doing so – and the prescription – are clear. Effective communication must accompany good deeds to result in excellent reputation. Building strong relationships with community opinion leaders is a management challenge – and requirement – for the twenty first century.

**I** *Do it. I have to say in my 20 years of Public Relations practice it is the single most effective thing that almost any organization can do.*

## Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography

# "Turning on" opinion leaders to an organization's agenda: a review of the scientific and professional literature.

*By Mark P. McElreath, Ph.D., APR, ABC*

*Tomson University*

This review of the literature is based on scholarly and professional books and journals in the social and management sciences, specifically public relations, communications, marketing, organizational behavior, business and economics. The focus of the review is on opinion leadership and those factors that might influence an opinion leader to become more aware of and involved with an organization's agenda.

Opinion leadership, in this review, is defined as "the degree to which an individual is able to influence other individuals' attitudes or overt behavior informally in a desired way with relative frequency."<sup>21</sup> While some opinion leaders thrust themselves upon others and may demand unwarranted attention, most opinion leaders "are people recognized by their peers as having some special competence in a particular subject."<sup>22</sup>

The purpose of this review is to help answer these questions:

- What are best practices in "turning on" opinion leaders to an organization's agenda?
- What factors affect these opinion leaders, especially in the health care field?

Key findings from the literature review were placed into a general systems framework often used in the management sciences.<sup>23</sup> Factors affecting opinion leaders at each of the following levels of analysis were identified:

- Within the individual opinion leader, such as a person's sex and education;
- Between the opinion leader and follower or change agent, such as trust and respect;
- Within small groups, such as peer group pressure and "groupthink";
- Within the focal organization, such as management-authorized plans to influence opinion leaders;

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<sup>21</sup> Diffusion of Innovations by Everett Rogers, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> "Personal influence: the two-step flow," in Milestones in Mass Communication Research by Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur (Longman, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Managing Systematic and Ethical Public Relations Campaigns by Mark P. McElreath (McGraw-Hill, 1997). See also, Handbook of Communication Sciences, edited by Chaffee and Berger (Sage, 1987).

- Outside a focal organization, such as various groups and the set of external publics that are networked to the focal organization;
- Public policies and laws, such as regulations requiring public participation and registration of lobbyists; and
- Cultural values and beliefs, such as the public's right to know and freedom of assembly.

### **Factors within each public opinion leader**

- For many opinion leaders, it's an important ethical principle (a duty) to become involved in community issues: it helps them define themselves as good citizens and as leaders. Good leaders step forward to help communities: they see it as their duty to do so. Yet, the same forces making it an ethical imperative for leaders to become involved in communities also are making it difficult for these leaders to achieve their goals. The same social, economic and political conditions that demand leadership from within the community, if conditions are to change, are the same forces working against any such change.<sup>24</sup>
- The degree of experience with a problem or issue will affect how that individual sees the problem and how best to become involved in community planning. The greater the problem recognition, the more likely the leader will want more information about the problem/opportunity; and, the more likely that person is to communicate with others about the issue.<sup>25</sup>
- Two important types of opinion leaders in the health care field: professionals, such as doctors, nurses and health care administrators; and non-professional, such as friends, family members and other influentials who offer advice and opinions about medical issues.<sup>26</sup>
- Women are often non-professional health-care opinion leaders, especially among family and friends, because they are often more focused on issues about care and nurturing.<sup>27</sup>
- Don't forget: while some opinion leaders will support change, others will resist it.<sup>28</sup>
- Key generalizations:
  - Opinion leaders expose themselves to a lot of media--radio, TV, newspapers, books, films, Internet--more than their followers.<sup>29</sup> Opinion leaders do this for a variety of reasons: they like to be informed, they are intellectually curious and naturally inquisitive--and they want to have something to talk about with others.
  - Because it can be costly to accurately profile and properly approach certain opinion leaders, using the mass media may be an effective and less costly

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<sup>24</sup> "Ethical behavior is extraordinary; it's the same as all other behavior: a case study in community planning," by Howard S. Baum, Journal of the American Planning Association, Autumn, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Excellence in public relations and communication management, edited by James Grunig (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Weimann, op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Weimann, ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gabriel Weimann, ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Rogers, op.cit.



way to communicate with some of these opinion leaders, because they consume so much of it anyway.<sup>30</sup>

- Opinion leaders are more worldly and cosmopolitan than their followers.<sup>31</sup>
- Opinion leaders have more contacts with change agents than do their followers.<sup>32</sup>
- Opinion leaders have higher economic status than their followers.<sup>33</sup>
- Opinion leaders are more socially active and participatory than their followers.<sup>34</sup>
- When a social system's norms favor change, opinion leaders are more innovative than their followers; and, conversely, when norms favor the status quo, opinion leaders are not especially innovative--in fact, they may resist change.<sup>35</sup>

### **Factors between the public opinion leaders and change agents**

- Establishing and maintaining trust between an influential opinion leader and a member of top management is critical in the health care industry.<sup>36</sup>
- Personal influence is key to a successful campaign to introduce new products and services to doctors.<sup>37</sup>
- Reciprocity, equality, respect and trust are essential to building and maintaining viable relationships among stakeholders in the health care field.<sup>38</sup>
- Factors in change agent success in influencing an opinion leader:<sup>39</sup>
  - Contact hours: frequency of contacts and "quality time" with the opinion leader.
  - Opinion leader's open-mindedness is more important than the change agent's attitude.
  - The opinion leader's needs must be integrated into the change agent's agenda.
  - The more sincerely empathetic the change agent is to the opinion leader's situation and concerns, the better.

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<sup>30</sup> The Influential: People who influence people, by Gabriel Weimann (State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Rogers, op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Rogers, ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Rogers, ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers, ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Rogers, ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Leadership in healthcare: values at the top," by Carson Dye, Healthcare Executive, Sept./Oct., 2000.

<sup>37</sup> "Opinion leaders in health care," in The Influentials: people who influence people, by Gabriel Weimann (State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> "Public relations in the health care industry," by Laurel Traynowicz Hetherington, Daradirek Ekachai and Michael Parkinson in Handbook of Public Relations, edited by Robert Heath (Sage, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Rogers, op.cit.

- The more similar the change agent and opinion leader are, the better: this includes, socioeconomic status, cosmopolitanism, social participation, and formal education.
- Key roles of change agents:<sup>40</sup>
  - To foster a need for change.
  - To establish a trusting relationship based on sharing accurate information.
  - To diagnose problems for the opinion leader.
  - To help the opinion leader not only see the need for change but also express an intention--to make a commitment--to achieve the desired change.
  - To strategize best ways to turn the opinion leader's intention into action.
  - To support the change process, to keep it on track and to reduce resistance.
  - To develop alternative resources for the opinion leader so that the change agent is no longer needed: to expect and encourage independence on the part of the opinion leader.
- Warning: change agents should not wear out their welcome with an opinion leader: it jeopardizes the actual and perceived independence of the opinion leader. Remember: the hallmark of true leaders is that they are not overly dependent on anyone to make up their minds.<sup>41</sup>

### **Factors affecting small groups that include opinion leaders**

- When working with small groups of opinion leaders, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of groupthink. Resist it at certain times, to unfreeze ideas and generate new approaches; allow it to happen at other times to reach and maintain consensus.<sup>42</sup>
- Encourage groups of opinion leaders to establish a positive image of themselves, and they will become more effective.<sup>43</sup>
- Serving on an advisory board is an excellent and a legally safe way for individual community leaders to become involved with an organization without the liabilities sometimes associated with a directorship.<sup>44</sup>
- When social networks have a variety of people within them with various opinions and little within-group agreement, opinion followers will seek opinion leaders who have higher economic status, more formal education, with a greater degree of mass media exposure, more cosmopolitan, more contact with change agents, and who are more innovative.

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<sup>40</sup> Rogers, op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Alive and well after 25 years: a review of groupthink research," by James Esser, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Feb./March, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> "A social identify maintenance model of groupthink," by Marlene Turner, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Feb./March, 1998.

<sup>44</sup> "Advisory boards," by Peter Webb, New Zealand Management, August, 2000.

## Factors within an organization that affect opinion leaders

- Using geographic information systems (GIS) to display information of interest to stakeholders is the newest way to get opinion leaders involved in community planning.<sup>45</sup>
- "Pushing" information to opinion leaders via the Internet can be an effective way to keep them informed: profiling needs and providing this information via email on a regular basis often provides the busy opinion leader with a value-added service and generates goodwill.<sup>46</sup>
- Opinion leaders who hold corporate codes of conduct with disdain because the codes are poorly defined and weakly enforced by top management are not likely to become involved. Consequently, beef up and publicize your ethics code (get caught doing the right thing) if you want to attract opinion leaders to your organization.<sup>47</sup>
- Management's difficulty with defining what they mean by "community" makes it more difficult to identify the most influential opinion leaders. Also, Western liberal approaches to defining communities may not be best for all cultures and situations.<sup>48</sup>
- Knowing the views of the dominant coalition within an organization toward its principal stakeholders (for example, is a public of concern or not to top management) will help predict and explain an organization's approach to the opinion leaders of these publics.<sup>49</sup>
- Educational programs for professional and non-professional opinion leaders can be most effective if they are community-based. Establishing educational and training programs for opinion leaders is an effective way to influence those who follow these opinion leaders' suggestions. Community-based educational programs sponsored by an organization may help make the opinion leaders who attend become change agents for that organization.<sup>50</sup>
- The relative position of the public relations or community relations unit (compared to other function-based units such as marketing) to key members of the organization's dominant coalition, the knowledge base of the public relations professional, and the expectations for the public relations function by senior management are major predictors of the effectiveness of public relations--and, by extension, community relations--for that organization. The more frequently the senior public relations person is in contact with senior management, the more involved that professional is in measurement and evaluation of public relations activities, including community relations, the more effective the function.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Bottom-up GIS: a new tool for individual and group expressing in participatory planning," by Emily Talen, *Journal of American Planning Association*, Summer, 2000. See also, "The role of GIS imaging in assessment administration," by Michael Skaff and Joseph Murphy, *Assessment Journal*, May/June, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> "One to one: put the customer in the information driver seat and build better relationships," by Michelle Smith, *Direct Marketing*, Jan. 1998.

<sup>47</sup> "Codes of conduct for multinational corporations: an idea whose time has come," *Business and Society Review*, Fall, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Baum, *op.cit.*, pg 7 See also, "Vision of community for community OR," by Gerald Midgley, *Omega*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, April, 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Mark McElreath, *op.cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communications Management*, by David Dozier, Larissa Grunig and James Grunig (Erlbaum Publishers, 1997).

- Opinion leader programs (for example, establishing advisory boards) that involve key stakeholders often produce articulate "assistants" who will echo and reinforce an organization's agenda.<sup>52</sup>
- Diversity considerations are important when staffing community relations; otherwise, key opinion leaders may not be able to identify with the organization.<sup>53</sup>
- Best practices in media relations include recognition of the importance of international public relations, the Internet and other new technologies.<sup>54</sup>

### **Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders**

- Identifying influential people associated with critical cliques of organizations within networks of service providers may be a better way to identify key opinion leaders than focusing on a whole network of organizations and all their stakeholders. Often one clique provides the bulk of services to clients; consequently, opinion leaders associated with that clique are more critical than others.<sup>55</sup>
- Recognizing stakeholders as a continuously interacting group is key to not being surprised that a message targeted to a single public is ineffective. There is no such thing as a single best way to communicate with any one public. All your stakeholders interact somehow. The key to success is to use a multi-public framework when communicating with stakeholders and to recognize public relations as an ongoing negotiation among opinion leaders and key publics.<sup>56</sup>
- Getting involved in public relations campaigns sponsored by industry associations will let opinion leaders in your field know what your organization is involved and can be counted on to help.<sup>57</sup>
- Monitor online newsgroups and other Internet communication to identify cyberspace opinion leaders.<sup>58</sup>
- Tracking relationships with five primary stakeholders, including community relations, are excellent ways to monitor corporate social performance. The other four: employee relations, environment, customers and stockholders.<sup>59</sup>
- Building bridges that support partnerships dealing with contentious community issues is key for involving the best opinion leaders.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Strength in diversity: the place of public relations in higher education institutions," by Barbara DeSanto and Brooks Garner in Handbook of Public Relations, edited by Robert Heath (Sage, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> "Community building checklist," by Jean Shields, Curriculum Administrator, August, 1999.

<sup>54</sup> On Deadline: Managing Media Relations, by Carole Howard and Wilma Matthews, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Waveland Press, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> "Networks within networks: service link overlap, organizational cliques, and network effectiveness," by Keith Provan and Julian Sebastian, Academy of Management Journal, August, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> "Public relations field dynamics," by Jeffrey Springston and Joann Keyton in Handbook of Public Relations, edited by Robert Heath (Sage, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> "An effective industry relations strategy plays a key role in helping boost sales," by Tom Kelly, Nation's Restaurant News, August 9, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> "Newsgroups, activist publics, and corporate apologia: the case of Intel and its Pentium chip," by Keith Michael Hearit, Public Relations Review, Fall, 1999.

<sup>59</sup> "Determining best practices in corporate-stakeholder relations using Data Envelopment Analysis: an industry-level study," by Catherine Lerne Bendheim, Sandra Waddock and Samuel Graves, Business and Society, Sept. 1998.

- Conducting a content analysis of a community's media reportage that identifies five to seven top issues is an efficient way to predict the top five to seven issues of concern to opinion leaders in that community.<sup>61</sup>
- The media set the agenda for what opinion leaders discuss--the media do not tell the opinion leaders what to think about these issues. The opinion leaders may express positive or negative reactions to the issues, but they will discuss these issues because they are top on the media's agenda.<sup>62</sup>
- The media's agenda is reflected in what opinion leaders discuss; and visa versa: what opinion leaders discuss is reflected in the media's agenda.<sup>63</sup>
- Depending on the nature, salience, volatility and sensitivity of an issue, it takes approximately six weeks for an issue, as a regular part of the media's agenda, to be picked up consistently in public opinion polls as being an important topic among opinion leaders.<sup>64</sup>
- The media set each other's agenda: they feed off each other.<sup>65</sup>
- The hallmark of opinion leaders is that they frame issues for their followers--they put issues in certain contexts. When the opinion leaders' frames become part of the media's reportage, even more people are influenced: it affects the direction of public debate.<sup>66</sup>

### **Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders**

- Community Action Panels (CAPs) are much less common in the European Union than in USA, with the exception of the UK.<sup>67</sup>
- Lobbying by nonprofits and charitable organizations is perfectly legal and will not prompt an Internal Revenue Audit, as long as certain rules are followed.<sup>68</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services may issue legal advisories of business plans by organizations in the health care field, which could include formation of advisory boards and other contacts with community leaders.<sup>69</sup>
- Worrisome practice: the vast majority of all public relations practitioners have less than 25% of their work reviewed by lawyers. Most practitioners acknowledge that they know very little about the law; and, unfortunately, they know even less about the law than they think they know. This would include the legal implications of approaching key opinion

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<sup>60</sup> "Bridge building: enhancing the possibility of partnerships," by Fredricka Joyner, The Journal for Quality and Participation, May/June, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> "Issues in the news and the public agenda," by Maxwell McCombs, et. al., in Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, edited by Theodore Glasser and Charles Salmon (The Guilford Press, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> McCombs, et. al., ibid.

<sup>63</sup> McCombs, et. al., ibid.

<sup>64</sup> McCombs, et. al., ibid.

<sup>65</sup> McCombs, et. al., ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Levels of analysis in public opinion research," by Jack McLeod, Zhongdang Pan and Dianne Rucinski, in Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, edited by Theodore Glasser and Charles Salmon (The Guilford Press, 1995).

<sup>67</sup> "Little union over CAPs in European communities," by Alex Scott, Chemical Week, July 5-12, 2000.

<sup>68</sup> "IRS letter alleviates charities' concern about lobbying," in Fund Raising Management, April, 1999.

<sup>69</sup> "Groups: renew advisory program," by Mark Taylor, Modern Healthcare, July 31, 2000.

leaders, especially lawmakers--for example, lobbying and foreign agent registration requirements.<sup>70</sup>

### **Factors outside an organization that affect opinion leaders**

- In the health care field, opinion leaders are concerned about the following key issues in USA: 44 million uninsured Americans, the misdistribution of healthcare resources, and an American public uneducated about healthcare issues.<sup>71</sup>
- Competing values among opinion leaders, among other factors, are key factors predicting organizational change and effectiveness; but, predictions are best within large groups of organizations or industries and are extremely hard to make for single organizations.<sup>72</sup>
- Communitarianism, with its dual themes of personal responsibility and mutually beneficial interdependence, can provide an intellectual framework for establishing viable relationships with a diverse array of opinion leaders.<sup>73</sup>
- Best practices for targeting and engaging opinion leaders varies from culture to culture. Business, government, media and public relations work together in different ways in different countries and cultures.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Public relations law," by Michael Parkinson, Daradirek Ekachai, and Laurel Traynowicz Hetherington, in Handbook of Public Relations, edited by Robert Heath (Sage, 2001).

<sup>71</sup> The challenge of proactive leadership," by Thomas Dolan, Healthcare Executive, Sept/Oct., 2000.

<sup>72</sup> "Creatures, corporations, communities, chaos, complexity," by William Frederick, Business and Society, December, 1998.

<sup>73</sup> "The communitarian green space between market and political rhetoric about environmental law," by Neil Browe and Nancy Kubasek, American Business Law Journal, Fall, 1999. See also, "Community, citizenship and empowerment," by Lena Dominelli, Sociology: the journal of the British Sociological Association, May, 1999.

<sup>74</sup> "Japanese media relations: a quick overview," by Dirk Gibson, Public Relations Review, Fall, 1998. See also, "Media relations in Bosnia: a role for public relations in building civil society," by Maureen Taylor, Public Relations Review, Spring, 2000.

## Appendix B: Checklist of Community Constituent Groups

- θ African American groups
- θ Asian Groups
- θ Business organizations (Chambers of commerce, business councils, etc.)
- θ Civic and service organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, etc.)
- θ Disease-specific organizations and advocates
- θ Economic development organizations
- θ Federal-level elected and appointed officials
- θ Gay and lesbian groups
- θ Higher education
- θ Hispanic Groups
- θ Large business
- θ Local elected and appointed government officials
- θ News media
- θ Partner organizations
- θ Primary and secondary education
- θ Religion groups
- θ Small business
- θ State-level elected and appointed officials
- θ Veterans
- θ Women's groups

## Recommended Reading

Corporate Community Relations: The Principle of the Neighbor of Choice, Edmund M. Burke, Praeger Publishers, 1999

Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, David M. Dozier, with Larissa A. Grunig and James E. Grunig, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Mahwah, NJ, 1995



## Using Database Technology to Manage Relationships

HAP members who participated in the quantitative survey that was employed as part of developing this report, indicated a high degree of interest in having HAP provide information and tools to help them to automate the process of managing institutional relationships. One of the corporate executives interviewed in this report referred to the *Bridges Relationship Management Systems* software the company uses to manage relationships with community opinion leaders, saying:

*If you had an internal Information Systems person look at it they would say, "We could build this." But the fact is it is relatively inexpensive and it works and has all the functionality.*

The developer of that software system, Pontecchio<sup>75</sup> generously provided the following screen shots from its *Pontecchio Bridges Community Relations Manager* system for this report. HAP does not have a business relationship with Pontecchio.

The screenshot displays a web-based form for managing leader information. The interface includes a navigation bar with tabs for 'Leader', 'Addresses', 'Public/Civic', 'Skills/Hobbies', and 'Survey'. The 'Leader' tab is active, showing a form with the following fields:

- Salutation: Mr.
- Name: John Doe
- Title: Director
- Nickname: Johnny
- Type: Director Leader
- Sub-Type: Board
- Geographic Area: Washington
- Sphere of Influence: [Empty]
- Company Region: [Empty]
- Tier: [Empty]
- Comments: [Empty]

Below the main form is a section titled 'Background and Political Information' with a 'Business' sub-section containing contact information:

- Phone: (202) 222-2222
- Fax: [Empty]
- Car: [Empty]
- Pager: [Empty]
- Email: [Empty]

The status bar at the bottom of the window shows 'ELB: 10/2/00 2:15:43 PM Fongv' and 'Leaders 1/1'. The database path '1 of 1 [LEADERS.TABLES\LEADERS.DB]' is visible at the very bottom.

<sup>75</sup> [www.pontecchio.com](http://www.pontecchio.com), 888.668.1515

Leaders

Leader | Addresses | Public/Civic | Skills/Hobbies | Survey

Salutation: Mr.

Name: John Doe

Educational Background: Bachelor of Science in Mathematics

Occupation: Occupation: Active/Retired: Active

Spouse Name: Susan

Political Party: Republican State House District:

Federal District: DC-001 State Senate District:

Wildcard:

Return

Phone: (202) 222-2222 Fax: Car: Pager: Email:

ELB: 10/2/00 2:15:43 PM Fongv Leaders 1/1

Press F9 to end edit mode. Edit

John Doe - Addresses

Leader | Addresses | Public/Civic | Skills/Hobbies | Survey

Address Type Tag: Business Main Mailing Address?

Letter Salutation: Mr. John Doe

Formal Salutation: Mr. Doe

Title: Director Department:

Organization:

Address 1: 123 Main Street

Address 2: County:

City: Washington State: DC Postal Code: 20006 Country:

Country Code: Phone: (202) 222-2222 Ext. Fax: Car Phone:

Pager: Other Phone: Number:

Email: Web Site:

ELB: 10/2/00 2:18:01 PM Fongv John Doe - Addresses 1/1

1 of 1 [LEADERS:TABLES\ADDRESS.DB] Edit

John Doe - Public Office

Leader | Addresses | **Public/Civic** | Skills/Hobbies | Survey

Role/Position Held: **Officer**

City:  State:

Elected/Appointed:  Term:

Status:  Term Expiration:

ELB: 10/2/00 2:33:43 PM Fongv John Doe - Public Office 1/1

1 of 1 [LEADERS:TABLES\PIROFFIC.DB] [Edit]

John Doe - Skills

Leader | Addresses | Public/Civic | **Skills/Hobbies** | Survey

| Skill/Hobby                                    | Comment              |
|--|----------------------|
| <input type="text" value="Stamps Collection"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text" value="Swimming"/>          | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text" value="Hiking"/>            | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text" value="Horse Riding"/>      | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text" value="Chess"/>             | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text" value="Reading"/>           | <input type="text"/> |

ELB: 10/2/00 2:25:36 PM Fongv John Doe - Skills 1/6

1 of 6 [LEADERS:TABLES\SKILLS.DB] [Edit]

The screenshot shows a database application window titled "John Doe - Survey". The window has a menu bar with options: Leader, Addresses, Public/Civic, Skills/Hobbies, and Survey. The main area contains a form with the following fields:

- Field Date: 9/1/00
- Response Date: 10/2/00
- Response: Pro ...
- Follow up Date: 10/15/00
- Comments:

At the bottom left of the window, it says "NEW". At the bottom right, it says "John Doe - Survey 1/1". The status bar at the very bottom shows "1 of 1 [LEADERS.TABLES\SURVEY.DB]", "Edit", and "Locked".

## Participants

The following people and institutions have given generously of their time, institutional resources and wisdom during the preparation of this report.

| <b>Name</b>        | <b>Title</b>  | <b>Organization</b>                   |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Richard Montalbano | Vice President of Management Services   | Abington Memorial Hospital            |
| Laura Tew          | Director, Stakeholder Relations   | Arch Chemicals, Inc.                  |
| Joseph Stewart     | Chief Executive Officer   | Butler Health System                  |
| Cheryl Riddick     | Assistant Vice President, Community Relations, Site Communication, Recognition and Reward | CitiBank                              |
| John McMeekin      | Chief Executive Officer   | Croser-Keystone Health System         |
| Richard Reif       | Chief Executive Officer   | Doylestown Hospital                   |
| Pamela Lux         | Consultant  | Health Partners                       |
| Mike Young         | Chief Executive Officer   | Lancaster Health Alliance             |
| Ron Czajkowski     | Vice President, Communications  | New Jersey Hospital Association       |
| John Cramer        | Chief Executive Officer   | Pinnacle Health Systems               |
| Polly O'Brien      | Director of Community Affairs   | Pitney Bowes                          |
| Don Bernhard       | Manager of Economic Development and Community Affairs                                     | PPL Corporation                       |
| Leo Greenawalt     | President and Chief Executive Officer   | Washington State Hospital Association |