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Oil Comment

Gulf Oil Officials Learn 'Under Fire'

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GULF OIL CORP. is conducting a novel series of meetings around the nation to expose its executives to rough and tumble situations which they may encounter in public.

A two-day session at Hilton Inn last week, drew some 75 executives each day. The program is believed unique within the oil industry and has strong support from Gulf's hierarchy. It is one which other companies, especially those in the energy field, might find useful in these days of anti-everything.

Some 650 persons have been exposed to the program since it kicked off last October in San Diego. Since then it has been held in Houston, Atlanta and New Orleans. From here the group will go to Houston again and then to Philadelphia in May.

EXECUTIVES INVITED to the sessions have no inkling as to their part in the program. Everyone is given a basic set of facts about mythical places and situations. From that point on, everyone is fair game. No punches are pulled.

E. (Buck) Buchwald, president of Burson-Marsteller, a New York public relations firm, ramrods the production and even plays the part of an antagonistic city councilman in one sketch. Gulf officials sit in on the "panel" and are bombarded with hostile questions, insulted and out-shouted.

There is a strain on the executives who must keep their cool and provide intelligent answers to questions they know are loaded. To top off this portion of the program, the Gulf men are "interview-

ed" immediately after the panel discussion by a "television reporter."

There is an instant replay on TV sets which the audience — and these interviewed — may view. High-pressure is maintained throughout the program.

IT IS INTERESTING to note the rapt attention of the audience as they express empathy for the Gulf man on the spot before them. Not a word or gesture is missed. And no wonder, because each person in the audience knows he may be the next one on the griddle.

It is a tough way to learn, but as one spokesman said "It is a lot better to be exposed to extreme situations here than to run into them cold in front of the public."

POSSIBLY IT IS the first such experience for many of the officials, but several who have appeared on public panels and in public gatherings say the simulated situation is not too much different in atmosphere than the real thing they have experienced.

The program is divided into segments in which the executives are faced with problems involving civil rights, physical disasters, consumer groups, unions and a number of other real-life situations.

Additional pressures are put on the Gulf personnel since they may be caught up in mythical situations not directly related to their particular training. Still, they are expected to use common sense and make snap judgments under fire.

An extra benefit of the program is the bringing together of management personnel who otherwise would not have the opportunity to meet.