

# Engineering Public Support For Health And Social Welfare Organizations In A Time Of Crisis

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by *EDWARD L. BERNAYS*

I shall discuss with you underlying principles for practical and effective programming for health and social welfare organizations. [This is based on 55 years of experience and observation in working with many of them as a board member and a volunteer in the ranks. I shall also make recommendations to you for possible use, based on this experience.

My first attempt to win public support for social services occurred in 1920. World War I had interrupted the building program of a large New York federation for welfare. It was planning a building fund drive. Invitations to the drive's opening dinner were mailed five weeks in advance on red building bricks. Appeals for public support were pasted on five sides, the name and address of the recipient on the sixth side. Postage costs then were minimal. No brick recipient could throw away his invitation. It would have demolished the waste basket. Instead, the invitations served as paper weight reminders on the prospect's desk. The bricks and the successful dinner received much favorable public visibility. An all night mailing bureau sent a thank you letter to those who attended, with reference to a chance happening at the dinner, mailed at midnight at New York's main post office and delivered in next morning's mail. This too became a cause celebre. The buildings were constructed.

All this happened before social science, scientific polling, sound movies, radio and TV revolutionized public mass appeal. Hunch and insight were mainstays in winning public support.

These horse and buggy days are over. Typical of the new approach is a 69 page pamphlet titled "Motivations for Charitable Giving—A Reference Guide," published by the 501(c)(3) Group, an informal association of charitable organization executives at Suite 600, 1 Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. More than four hundred abstracts of books and articles present the sociological, psychological, legal and economic bases for giving. Fifty years ago we guessed at what to do. Today social scientists are probing human behavior scientifically in regard to giving. A sophisticated planning approach is essential.

You face numerous problems in this much more complex world. New Methods of transportation and mass communication accelerate the spread of ideas. Millions of people, formerly with little exposure to the world, now have immediate access to ideas and events. Competition in the marketplace of profit and non-profit goes on relentlessly for our hearts, minds and pocketbooks through all the media. They apply the findings of the social sciences in their efforts. One authority says we are exposed, each of us, to over three hundred advertising messages per day. A basic truth about your activity is that you compete with every other idea, picture or word that reaches Americans. And you also compete with your colleagues for your share of the \$25.15 billion the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel states Americans gave to philanthropy in 1974. Of that 78.7 percent came from individuals, 8.4 percent from foundations, 8.2 percent from bequests and 4.7 percent from corporations. Over \$1 billion of the total went to the United Way. Religion received \$10.8 billion, health and welfare \$3.9 billion, education \$3.72 billion, social welfare \$2.34 billion, arts and humanities \$1.28 billion, and civic and public welfare \$.71 billion. The final \$2.35 billion went for assorted causes.

In this highly competitive world in which most people who vie for the public's dollar and support are experts, you suffer in that many of your directors and trustees are often amateurs and dilettantes. Other reasons than their expertise have put them in the saddle. They are often ignorant of three vital fields for social service visibility—administration, fund raising and public relations. They often assume authority in

their position of director or trustee, without the know-how to function effectively. Their socio-economic status often makes them feel omniscient and omnipotent.

You also suffer from a lack of continuity in leadership of your organizations. A president and/or board usually have short terms of office. New managements may think and act differently as to how the organization should be run than their predecessors.

And in this period of recession, money flow from individuals, corporations and foundations has dried up. Not so much because the prospective donor is poor, but because he thinks he is. Also, because of the recession your loads have increased and your resources decreased.

In addition to the problems mentioned, your executive director Don Bates has told me of some additional problems you face. You have insufficient budgets to purchase what Henry Luce once described to me as the essential four M's: mindpower, manpower, mechanics and money. You are forced to depend on public service time and space for your advertising and on volunteers, and you have a continuing struggle for credibility and accountability.

With these many internal and external problems, there is regrettably no magical solution. But I do believe an engineering approach to these problems, integrated and carefully planned and carried out, will be most helpful.

In 1947, the *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* published a piece I wrote titled "The Engineering of Consent." I later edited a book with the same title. It applied to other institutions besides government, the thesis that Thomas Jefferson had applied to democratic government; that is, that it depends on the consent of the people. I intend to discuss with you "Engineering Public Support for Health and Social Welfare Organizations in a Time of Crisis." I use the word "engineering" in this sense—the art and science of making practical application of the knowledge of the social sciences to your problems.

I shall touch on the eight-point program necessary in every case.

1. Defining goals.
2. Research to find out whether they are realistic and how they may be attained.
3. Reorientation of goals if research shows them unrealistic.
4. Determination of strategy.
5. Fixing on themes or appeals.
6. Organization.
7. Timing and planning of tactics.
8. Making a budget.

Let us take each up separately:

1. Goals—Often a Board has not decided on goals. Often members of a board differ on goals. There is no consensus and the enterprise functions on a day to day basis. Spell out clearly your goals for three time periods—immediate, intermediate and long time. They should be specific, like "Out of the trenches by Christmas" or "Fifty Four Forty or Fight." Generalities or muzziness as to goals won't help you. Goals should be stated in simple terms, what you would like to have brought about by the end of each time period in whatever the terms, money, personnel, the public's attitudes and actions, the activities your organization carries on. Forget about generalities such as working for better health, less smoking, more hospital beds, better medical care. State your goals in realistic terms, a reduction of "a" percent in the death rate of "y" disease by 1977, "b" percent by 1980, and elimination of the

disease by 1985, if these statements can be justified. The United Way of course does this effectively by stating the amount the drive has for its goal with the date. Goals should not be based solely on hope and desire. They must be based on realities of the situation and what the public will respond to.

2. Research—Research of the public will answer this question and show you how to attain your goals with the public. Research of experts in your own field of activity will help you in framing your questions of the public. Research of the public involves actually sound sampling, questionnaires, tabulations, evaluations, what the areas of public ignorance, wisdom, prejudice towards your goals are, what the attitudes and motives of your publics toward your cause are. How can you win the public's support for your goals? What themes and appeals can motivate what publics for your cause? Pollsters like Burns Roper, George Gallup, Jr. and other able public opinion pollsters and analysts could get the job done and give you answers, with coefficients to decimal points. But if you don't have the resources for this, you can at least try to compensate for your lack of money. You can enlist professors of public opinion research at your local university to become members of an advisory public opinion research committee. You can call on your members, volunteers or high school or college students in your community to assist in the suggested program. Your results may not be the professional ones they might have been. But at least you will not be sailing without some charts to guide you to get to your immediate, intermediate and longtime destinations.

Research provides you with a feedback from the public that tells you whether your goals are realistic and how to reach them, if they are.

3. Reorientation of goals—If your research indicates your goals are impossible to reach because of one or more reasons—public prejudice, ignorance, your resources, apathy, or whatever, you may have to reorient your goals and make them conform to the realities.

4. Strategy—Your strategy will be governed by what your research reveals. Strategy, as differentiated from tactics, covers planning of how and in what combinations you will use your resources of mindpower, manpower, mechanics and money in the proposed activities to reach your goals. Strategy makes the most effective use of your four M's in the light of your research.

5. Themes or appeals—These will also stem from your research. They must meet the basic motives of your publics and arouse specific desires. Motives are the conscious and subconscious pressures created by the desires of your publics. Self-preservation, ambition, pride, love of family and children, the life wish, patriotism, the desire to be a leader and a follower are representative of motives. Themes and appeals are directed to individuals, to subgroups and overall publics. They may be used singly or in combination. They will need, of course, to be reiterated. They can be given credibility by projecting them, validated by authority, factual evidence, reason, persuasion, tradition and emotion. That pamphlet I mentioned, "Charitable Giving," presents many books and articles discussing these motives and appeals.

Your research will have indicated which of them should be emphasized and to what extent. You will find that philologists at universities and heads of copy departments of large advertising agencies may be helpful to you in articulating your themes or appeals in telling form.

6. Organization—This has to do with the effective functioning of your mindpower and manpower people, whether in or outside your office. Organization includes your board, your outside specialists, your executive and administrative staff, your



outside mechanics personnel. A prerequisite to efficient organization in this time of crisis is for the men and women in your high command, trustees or directors to understand the three prime requisites in your work—administration, fund raising and public relations. You can play a role, I am sure, in bringing about membership in your board of experts in these fields, and also in law, accounting and your specific area of service. You can, if need be, through the use of books, pamphlets and other instructional material or even seminars, try to educate your board and give them knowledge of the three fields.

You can save time and money planning your work ahead as much as possible. You can, as an instance, save money by getting bids from purveyors, printers and mailing bureaus for a batch of advance work instead of giving single orders. You can develop systems outlines for repetitive activities, such as luncheons, drive dinners, ceremonial events, even mass mailings. We always used systems outlines and check lists to assure efficient handling of all repetitive actions. And manuals that reduced routine jobs to just that, with less need for supervision and goofs.

We have found that carefully prepared outlines of duties of the personnel make for efficient functioning of an organization. I was once told by a great tycoon that his was a company of men, not of charts. I soon learned the resultant internecine warfare in the organization prevented a united front to fight their common battles.

We also found that a library of relevant books, periodicals and pamphlets saves time and money. Such a library should not only contain books in the specific field of action but reference books covering the three problems that confront you—administration, public relations and fund raising. There are good books in these three fields. The public or private libraries provide valuable supplemental resource materials.

7. Planning and timing of tactics—You have written up a complete statement of your strategy, themes and organization to make most effective use of your resources in meeting the goals of your three time periods.

Now make up three large paper charts for planning and timing of tactics. Your first column will be made up of weeks and months. Your other columns will each list a category of activity you will carry on in the respective time period. You will devote a column to every method open to you to compete in the market place of ideas. For instance, one column will list the conferences you will hold, another your letter contacts with group leaders and opinion molders, another your personal conferences, another your releases to the media, print and broadcast. Obviously you will use the printed and spoken word pictures, overt acts and circumstances. Your three charts will provide you with blueprints of action for the three time periods.

It will also list who does what when.

These charts apply to your peacetime pursuit much the same tactical approach a military commander uses in wartime to win.

Your intermediate and longtime tactical program is subject to change if conditions change drastically. But outside of unforeseen disaster, changes in the United States are gradual and can be anticipated. Remember that in two hundred years, the United States has grown at the rate of four percent annually, despite recession and depression, and presumably will continue to do so.

In planning your tactics in this time of crisis, remember that advisory committees in different fields often may provide manpower and mindpower and even mechanics, all the equivalent of money. Recently we recruited half a million dollars in talent annually in the form of an advisory public relations committee for a non-profit organization. You can look for comparable coincidence of interest tieups

that will both save you money and increase your effectiveness and resources. A public utility may distribute inserts in their bills and save you mailing costs. Always search out coincidences of interest. A broadcast competition, run by a soap manufacturer some years ago, asked listeners to complete a sentence as to why they supported a certain social welfare organization and suggested sending in a contribution with their sentence. This netted millions to these organizations, besides the public visibility they received.

8. Budget—Your budget is part of your documentation. Even with inflation, contemplated expenses for office, executive and administrative and out-of-pocket expenses can and should be planned in advance for the three time periods. The budget amounts will flow naturally from other elements in the eight point program.

It is my considered opinion an engineering approach of this kind will make for a more efficient effective operation. It should save money and help you get more money. It should increase your competitive approach to the potential prospect and dollar. It applies engineering principles to a worthy cause.

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## About the Author

This talk was given by Dr. Edward L. Bernays of Cambridge, Mass. on the occasion of the presentation to him of the 1975 Distinguished Service Award of the National Public Relations Council of Health & Welfare Services, Inc. at a luncheon meeting of the organization at the Hotel Biltmore in New York, October 15, 1975.

The Award plaque carries the inscription "to Edward L. Bernays for his lifelong pioneering efforts in shaping modern communications and public relations to service human needs."

Dr. Bernays is the public relations pioneer who named the profession of counsel on public relations and laid down its principles, practices and ethics in his germinal books, *Crystalizing Public Opinion*, in 1923. A nephew of Sigmund Freud, *Time* and other authorities acknowledge him as U.S. Publicist #1.

In partnership with his wife Doris Fleischman Bernays, he has practiced for over fifty years as counsel on public relations to business, government and voluntary associations. He gave the first course in public relations at New York University in 1923 and has been professor there, at the University of Hawaii and Boston University. He is the author of eight books on public relations and public opinion. His memoirs were published in 1965—*Biography of an Idea*.

Dr. Bernays is a 1912 graduate of Cornell University. He was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities by Boston University. The Medallion of Honor of the City of New York, Office of Public Instruction (France), King Christian Tenth Medal (Denmark) are among other honors. Dr. Bernays recently completed five years as consultant to the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. He is a member of the Public Communication Seminar at Columbia University, a trustee of the New England Conservatory of Music, honorary director of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, a director of the Ford Hall Forum. He is president of the Edward L. Bernays Foundation, Inc.

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The national headquarters of the Council are at 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Telephone is (212) 687-1223. Don Bates is the executive director.

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