

CAN PROMOTERS EDUCATE AND CAN EDUCATORS PROMOTE?

by

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I am particularly pleased to address myself to the topic "Can Promoters Educate and Can Educators Promote?" for a couple of reasons. I have had some limited experience in the classroom as a high school teacher. And secondly, during the past 10 years, I have worked with the beef information, sales promotion, advertising, and public relations programs of the Meat Board through the Beef Industry Council.

There are three basic areas on which I want to touch. First, I would like to illustrate the fact that educators and promoters really have more in common than we have dissimilarities . . . we're all in the information business. Second, I want to emphasize that the need for effective and expanded communications within the meat industry and agriculture and food production has never been greater than it is today. And third, I would like to illustrate briefly for you how the beef industry wants to work with you and your counterparts across this country to do a more effective job in communicating our meat story, as well as the food and fiber story of American agriculture.

Let us look to see how a true public relations practitioner or advertising executive would approach any communications problem. As I go through these, those of you in education, whether it be the classroom or extension, will find that they are very much the same thought processes through which you go. The first task of a creditable public relations executive is to define his objectives—what does he really want to accomplish in terms of an obtainable objective. Next, he has to determine who is his primary audience and who is his secondary audience. In other words, is he trying to reach all adult women 25-49 who are the primary food shoppers in this country? Or is his primary audience to reach the thought leaders, those who organize boycotts, those who take time to write letters to their Congressmen, those who are community leaders? Once he has determined his objective and his audience, his next task is to determine the current level of understanding of that target audience. What do they currently know about his product, about the idea or concepts that he is trying to disseminate? There are several different ways to find out. The most common way is to survey the target audience and then, on the basis of those research findings, he can

develop the necessary background information. He will call upon gentlemen like yourselves to prepare the detailed background reports and from these, he will determine the message and media strategy. That is not much different from what you do in an educational plan, where you put together the course curriculum and then prepare the lesson plans to reach your ultimate course objectives.

But the area that the promoters and the educators start to differ is in the methods of information dissemination. Techniques and methods vary considerably. It is in this area that the advertiser—the promoter if you prefer—can get into a "gray area." He has a very limited time with his audience, he is competing for their attention, and his job is to zero in on the positive aspects of his product or the idea that he is trying to sell. And if he is not careful, his message can be misleading. The advertising executive's challenge is very similar to that of John Warner who, I believe, is the current husband of Liz Taylor. (I think he's her sixth husband, depending on how you count Richard Burton.) But John Warner is quoted as saying on their wedding day, "I know what I am supposed to do, and I know my time is limited. My challenge is how to make it interesting." That is a little bit the same challenge that the public relations or advertising executive faces.

Let us take an example in the industry which is probably the best way to illustrate the point I am trying to make. In the last five years, without a doubt, the most dramatic illustration of the gap of misunderstanding—the communication gap—between the livestock and meat industry and the public had to be the boycott of 1973. It took place over four years ago during the first week of April—what we often refer to at the Meat Board as the "April Fools Week Boycott."

There is no question that the classroom is the best place to achieve an understanding of something as complex as food and meat prices. There you have a

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controlled audience. There you are able to give enough background information to accomplish the necessary learning experiences. But, needless to say, in the classroom we were not able to reach a broad enough audience. Somehow, through expanded public information programs, through public relations, we had to try to take the message to the general public.

In a rather limited period of time, the meat industry decided the most effective way to spread our message would be to go to the thought leaders, whom I defined earlier—those who organize boycotts, those who take time to write letters to their Congressmen—and to develop an understanding with them. We tried to help them understand that the meat industry is a biological industry, that the beef industry takes three years in production time from conception to consumption. We tried to help them understand the role of weather and its effect on grain prices and the interrelationship. Secretary Butz, in a rather direct way at that time, told consumers the best solution to high beef prices is high beef prices, because that sends the correct signals back to the producers and the farms and ranches to produce more beef, and more beef in the supply pipelines will eventually have the effect of stabilizing and possibly even lowering prices. But those messages were obviously not well received by consumers. In March, we were trying to bring about the understanding that government controls and price ceilings will not work with a commodity like beef. Through the history of time, they have never worked and we tried to emphasize the fact that they only have the effect of creating shortages and over-supply, of accenting both sides of the pendulum. Needless to say, on the short-term we were very ineffective. We were not able to stop the price ceilings. Because the pressure of public opinion was put on Washington, the Nixon Administration put price ceilings on meat. The point that this industry was trying to make to the public did turn out to be true. When the price ceilings went on, we found consumers in August lining up in front of food stores waiting for them to open so they could buy some beef. The same consumers back in April, just a few months previous, were standing in front of the same food stores boycotting.

The shortage was caused by that price ceiling. In September, producers saw live beef prices drop over 30 percent in less than a week. A situation followed out of which the cattleman is still trying to work his way. Now we are at the point in the beef cycle where we are probably going to have overproduction regardless of the price ceilings. The disruption, in the natural working of the market, extended the length of time it took for producers to work their way out of the overproduction.

The point I'm trying to make is not to dwell on the beef boycott; too much has been said about that already. My point is that the truths that this industry's spokesmen were trying to tell the public—although we lost the battle on the short-term—have resulted in benefits to the industry's public information program that are apparent today. Today, you can turn on your television and watch the evening newscast and you will find the weather reporter and other reporters trying to relate the effect of the current weather situation throughout the country to food prices. There is more sensitivity on the part of consumers today to what it really takes to keep a plentiful supply of food and a plentiful supply of red meat available.

A successful educator or promoter depends on his ability to present the facts in such a way that they illuminate the truth and inspire his audience to take the necessary response. An educator or a promoter who tries to sidestep an issue, or tries to whitewash it, or tries to mislead his audience or his students, will ultimately fail. Any advertiser knows that if he oversells the benefits of his products to the extent that consumers are disappointed with them, he will not get repeat sales. Unfortunately, all of us have lived through the most dramatic example of the power of public opinion that our country has ever seen—the Watergate scandal. I personally am convinced that if Richard Nixon had not tried to continue the cover-up, he would not have lost the support of the American public. His Administration's continual desire to try to cover up and mislead ultimately led to his downfall—a classic example of trying to mislead public opinion.

What the American people are really crying out for is candor and straight talk, whether from business, education or government. It was said best by John Hill, an Indiana farm boy and newspaper man who later founded the world's largest public relations firm, when he wrote: "Business needs to close the credibility gap. Obviously, the businessman, like everyone else, wants to put his best foot forward. But when this is attempted by double talk and concealment of pertinent facts which the public has a right to know, the only result is to increase that credibility gap."

Unfortunately, in this age of instant information, I think we as an industry are probably feeling the impact of misinformation as much, if not more, than any other industry. This is mainly because we are so close to consumers and because we have such a sensitive product, one that homemakers are very aware of in terms of price, as well as the family's reaction to it.

I hope I am not too idealistic or Pollyanna in my

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definitions of promoters and educators, because on both sides you can sight several abuses. In the research-education area, two good examples would be Dr. William Connors of the University of Oregon or Dr. Jeremiah Stamler of Northwestern University, formerly with the American Heart Association. These two gentlemen for a long time have spoken out in favor of the dietary hypothesis and support the contention that we are consuming too many animal fats in this country for good health. Both of these gentlemen published books within the last year—Dr. Connors' book was called *Present Knowledge in Nutrition*, and Dr. Stamler published a book entitled *Your Heart and Nine Lives*. Personally, as I hear and watch them on talk shows, read their interviews in newspapers, I think this is an example of people who are so committed to this concept that they are now turning it into a self-serving way of selling their own books. I don't believe that those gentlemen approach the heart disease issue with an open mind. This is an example of educator-researchers turned promoters in trying to sell their own concepts and their own books. Another example would be Dr. Reuben, who a few years ago, told us "Everything About Sex That You Always Wanted To Know but Were Afraid To Ask." Now he's on the TV-newspaper talk show circuit telling us everything about nutrition! Instant authorities in an age of instant information increase our challenge to credibly provide information to the consuming public.

In the area of the government and in the same area of the diet hypothesis controversy, a recent example of double-talk would be the report by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs—the "Dietary Goals for the United States" report that was issued in mid-January. First, you need to understand the motivation behind issuing this report. The committee has held hearings for three or four years, but suddenly a move in Congress to reorganize Senate committees saw the Nutrition Committee was going to be eliminated and merged with the Agriculture Committee. It was the desire of the staff to get a report out fast to show the need of continuing the Senate Select Committee. They did just that. Suddenly, in mid-January, we saw Senators Kennedy, McGovern, Dole and Percy appearing on talk shows and interviews across the country promoting the Dietary Goals.

For those of you that have not had a chance to review this report, I quickly want to quote to you from page 13, the suggested goals to follow in food selection and preparation: "(1) Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and whole grains; (2) decrease

consumption of meat and increase consumption of poultry and fish; (3) decrease consumption of foods high in fat and partially substitute polyunsaturated for saturated fat; (4) substitute non-fat milk for whole milk; (5) decrease consumption of butterfat, eggs and other high cholesterol sources; (6) decrease consumption of sugar and foods high in sugar content; and (7) decrease consumption of salt and foods high in salt content."

To illustrate that there was a disproportionate input to this report from those who are very much in the "polyunsaturated school of thought," I would like to call your attention to this very slick informational piece put out by the Lever Brothers Professional Services Division. The title is "*Diet, Cholesterol and Your Heart—There Is a Connection.*" Ironically, one of our own staff members at the Meat Board found this in her doctor's office. But if you will recall those seven dietary goals I just read and then listen to the recommendations in this particular piece, in response to the question "What food changes will limit my intake of saturated fats?" you will see the similarity with the Dietary Goals: "Eat fish, poultry, and veal more often than beef, lamb, or pork. Select lean cuts of meat and trim off visible fat. Avoid, or use sparingly, bacon and sausage, cold cuts and franks. Avoid deep fat frying, especially with solid fats. Use Promise margarine and vegetable oils that are highly polyunsaturated instead of butter and animal fat. Substitute skim or low fat milk for whole milk and cream; sherbet and ice milk for ice cream. Eat fewer commercial baked goods and mixes containing whole milk and eggs." As you read through this very professionally done booklet, you will notice that they just happen to offer you, on the back cover, a 15¢ coupon to help you purchase your first Promise margarine and get on your way to healthy living.

What is even more frustrating to you, as well as, to us at the Meat Board who are charged with information dissemination on behalf of the red meat industry, is the recommendation to Congress, and I quote from page 65 of the report, ". . . to encourage achievement of the foregoing dietary goals, it is recommended that Congress provide money for a public education program in nutrition based on the foregoing or similar goals. The initial minimum period for the promotion of these dietary goals should be five years. Such a campaign should involve the following five functional areas: (1) Health and nutrition education in the classrooms and cafeterias of our schools; (2) nutrition and health education for school foodservice workers; (3) nutrition education in the Federally funded assistance programs; (4) nutrition education conducted

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by the Extension Service; and (5) extensive use of television to educate the public in the potential benefits of the dietary goals.”

Somehow, those of us in the food and fiber industry have not effectively communicated the role of the meat animal and, as far as beef is concerned, the role of the ruminant animal in the total food chain. A tremendous number of church leaders and others very rightfully are trying to raise our sensitivity to the world food shortage and we must be sensitive to it. We must not, however, allow the meat industry to be the whipping post. We continue to hear that grain and energy are wasted in beef production, that if we would eat less meat in this country—eat less *beef* in this country—we would have more food for the hungry in the world. Somehow, this overshadows the fact that the *real* problem is distribution. Those of us who are in communications have a real obligation to tell the whole story as straightforwardly and candidly as we can.

Let me give you an example. The beef production industry, and, all of you have helped make it happen, take tremendous pride in the fact that since World War II we have continued to increase beef production and consumption in this country. Last year, we consumed a record 129 pounds of beef per capita. You hear this reported time and time again. But how does that relate to a homemaker on the 35th floor of a high rise in New York City that has 1400 square feet in which her family lives, to whom it looks like vast wide-open country out where the cattle people are, and here we are with great pride telling her we are producing 129 pounds of beef per capita. What is she to conclude? She naturally concludes that each member of her family is consuming 129 pounds of beef when in fact, as you know, those are carcass weight figures and the real average is more like 2 ounces of cooked beef per consumer per day in this country. If we took all red meats, the average would be something like 2.98 ounces of cooked meat for each consumer each day. That's far more relevant in addressing a consumer group. The 129 figure makes it easier for those who argue that we are consuming too much beef.

John Allen, Professor of Food Systems Economics and Management at Michigan State University, recently wrote: “A growing number of Americans experience a love-hate feeling with respect to this favorite among foods. Familiar criticisms voiced by shoppers, consumers, and consumer advocates are suggestive of problems increasingly confronting the beef industry.—Beef costs too much, who can afford it?—Beef consumption is linked with cancer of the colon—

Beef is too fatty and exacerbates cholesterol problems—Beef varies too much in quality. Some is tender, some tough; some is wholesome, some unsanitary. Selecting products in the store is a confidence eroding experience. Ralph Nader will never eat another hot-dog!—Beef prices fluctuate too much. Pricing is confusing and frustrating. It creates a high price image for beef—Beef grading for quality is confusing. So are the fanciful names given meat cuts by imaginative merchandisers—Beef packaging in the store is messy—In cooking beef, what should be done with all of the different cuts? Where are the cooking instructions?” Those are the kinds of things that you all are hearing and we are continuing to hear from the marketplace as we try to develop our promotion programs and education programs.

It is out of this frustration that the beef producers of this country three years ago formed the Beef Development Taskforce. They wanted to develop a program that could do something positive in response to these challenges. Eight national organizations have worked in the formulation of the Beef Research and Information Plan—worked in getting enabling legislation through Congress and on to where we are now at the referendum stage. Most of you are probably aware that this is the second week of registration for cattle producers across the country, and from July 5-15, cattlemen will be voting at their ASCS office on whether they want to accept the Beef Research and Information Order. If two-thirds of those cattlemen vote in favor of it, the program will be implemented whereby each cattleman will invest three-tenths of one percent of the market value of his animals into an expanded research, information, promotion, education, and foreign market development program.

I would like to make a comment or two about the program. One of the accusations that I've heard is that it's nothing but a Madison Avenue “rip-off,” that the only real motivation behind these cattlemen in trying to put this program together was to get more money to do more advertising. Either I am listening to the wrong cattlemen or I missed some key meetings, but I can assure you from the three years that I have sat in session with the cattlemen on the Taskforce, that is not their objective. In any discussions I have heard, they are talking in terms of over 50 percent of the total collection (and they estimate it will be \$30-40 million) to be used in all types of research—marketing research, nutrition research, production research, distribution research. Secondly, they see a large part of it going into nutrition education. Let us look at one potential area—nutrition education. There is something like 37 million pupils in the elementary

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schools of this country; we have 15 million pupils in the high schools. If we were to develop a nutrition education program in cooperation with the school systems just for that segment of the market, it is estimated by the National Dairy Council that it would take about 10¢ per pupil to develop the materials, to field test them, and then to get them placed with the schools. So, that to really do the educational job that should be done in nutrition, this industry should be putting in somewhere around \$5-6 million. Currently, the total investment of the National Live Stock and Meat Board in all areas of research, education and information is less than that. Those of you who may be somewhat concerned that this is all going to be used for advertising should not worry—that is not the case. I don't want to mislead you—the Taskforce is not ruling out the possibility of advertising as a means to disseminate information. It is my feeling that the beef industry has never had a greater need to seek the facts and then use all possible means of communications including education, public relations, and advertising to keep meat's rightful place in the diet.

Later on this morning, you are going to see some innovations in the education area. Many other innovations in the communications field could be talked about in advertising and public relations, but I think

the important thing we have to keep in mind is that credible educators, credible promoters and advertisers are on the same side. Often in our work at the Meat Board, we are in the position of interacting with consumer activists, and some of them seem downright antagonistic toward our industry.

It is always a pleasure for me to meet with a group like yourselves where we are all on the same side, so to speak. You may have heard the old story about how the phrase "Hurray for Our Side!" really got started. Legend has it that Lady Godiva asked her husband, Lord of Coventry, to lower the excessive taxes on her people and he agreed to do it if Lady Godiva would agree to ride down the streets of Coventry nude on the back of a horse. Well, finally, Lady Godiva agreed that she would do that, so she rode down the streets of Coventry this particular day, nude on the back of a horse, riding side-saddle. And, as legend has it, half the people that day in Coventry were yelling, "Hooray for our side!"

It has been my privilege to meet with you and attend my first RMC Conference. All of us in agriculture and particularly the meat industry have a tremendous job of getting credible information out for our side.