Public Relations Planning
Phase 2: Strategy

Strategy deals with planning that focuses on the desired outcomes and the conceptual ways of achieving them. It's not about specific tools of communication but rather deciding where to go and how to get there.

Strategy is the organization's overall plan. Building on the research from Phase 1, this strategy section sets out the organization's decision on what it wants to achieve and how it wants to achieve it. Strategy focuses on being both proactive and responsive, as the situation calls for. It also deals with the content and presentation of the organization's messages.

This phase is interrelated and interdependent. Goals guide the development of objectives. These in turn help drive decisions about what persuasive approaches to use and who can best present the message.

Later, in the next phase, the decisions made here will guide the various tactics that will present the organization's message to its publics.

Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this step is to clearly indicate the direction you are heading toward addressing the key publics about the situation. This involves articulating both the general direction and the specific marks of success. Here are short definitions of key concepts used in this step.

- A **positioning statement** is a general expression of how an organization wants it publics to distinguish it vis-à-vis its competition.
- A **goal** is a global indication of how an issue should be resolved.
- An **objective** is a statement of a specific outcome expected for a public, indicating a way to more precisely conceptualize the goal.

Positioning

As you spell out the desired interaction with your publics, focus first on positioning. This means asking yourself a simple question: What do we want the key public to think about us?

Positioning is the process of managing how an organization distinguishes itself with a unique meaning in the mind of its publics—that is, how it wants to be seen and known by its publics. This usually means an implicit comparison with the organization's competitors. A **position statement** is the articulation of this desired positioning.

Most organizations are known for their distinctiveness: the large public university, the small church-affiliated college, the high-priced two-year private school, the community college with open access, the midsized public institution that began as a teachers college and so on.

Make sure your desired position is realistic. Who wouldn't want to be known as "the best in (whatever)"? But there can be only one best, and public relations is not about pretense or stretching beyond possibility. Here are some reasonable positioning statements:

- A great value, reflecting low cost and high quality
- The most economical
- The hospital preferred by women
- The family-friendly restaurant
- The eco-friendly garden center

Goal

With the positioning statement as a guidepost, turn your attention to the **goal**. This is a short, simple statement rooted in the organization's mission that indicates the desired outcome for the situation. A goal is stated in general terms, lacking measures (these will come later in the objectives).

Think in terms of three types of goals focused on reputation, relationships and tasks.

1. Reputation management goals deal with the identity and perception of the organization. Here are some examples of this:

- Improve the university's reputation for science education
- Reinforce the museum's image with potential donors
- Enhance the hospital's reputation for cancer treatment.

2. Relationship management goals focus on how the organization connects with its publics.

- Reduce opposition to the building of a wind farm near an affluent community
- Enhance the relationship between the store and its customers;
- Maintain a favorable relationship with season-ticket holders.

3. Task management goals are concerned with getting certain things done.

- Influence motorists to refrain from texting while driving;
- Attract a sell-out crowd for the concert
- Foster continued growth in the number of new customers.

Objective

In public relations, an **objective** is a statement giving detail about the goal and providing markers for measuring progress toward achieving the goal. Here are some elements of an objective:

- **Goal rooted**—growing from and giving detail to the goals.
- **Public focused**—linked firmly to a specific key public.
- **Impact oriented**—defining the effect you hope to make on the public by focusing on intended achievements rather than tools to reach these.
- **Research based**—consistent with the data obtained in the first phase of the strategic planning process.
- **Explicit**—offering a concrete and precise indication of the intended outcome.
- **Measurable**—with metrics indicating quantifiable performance indicators.
- **Time definite**—with a clear timeframe for achieving the results.
- **Singular**—focusing on only one desired response for each objective.
- **Challenging**—offering the organization something to stretch toward.
- **Attainable**—yet also able to be achieved.
- **Acceptable**—earning the buy-in of the organization's managers.

Objectives are presented in a logical progression through three stages of persuasion: awareness, acceptance and action.

Awareness objectives deal with what people know about the organization. This is the cognitive (informational) component of a message. It deals both with visibility and reputation, allowing an organization to build on accurate and positive awareness or to attempt to counter misinformation.

These awareness objectives often are used for transmitting functional information, for communicating on noncontroversial issues, and for the early stages of any communication campaign.

Acceptance objectives focus on the interest in and attitudes of the publics based on what they know. These objectives deal with the affective (feeling) part of the message. They indicate the level of interest or the kind of attitude an organization hopes to generate in its publics.

These objectives are useful in forming interests and attitudes where none existed before, reinforcing existing interests and attitudes, and changing existing positive or negative attitudes.

Action objectives articulate how we want the publics to act, based on what they think or feel about what they know. They offer two types of action: opinion (verbal action) and behavior (physical action).

These action objectives may attempt to create new behaviors or change existing ones, positively or negatively.

Generally a goal should have at least one of each of these three types of objective. Here is a scenario to help you understand how these fit together. Let's say they are for a task management goal of obtaining volunteers among university students for a program called MMS, Mentors in Math and Science.

- To *create awareness* of the MMS program among students, specifically to have 40 percent of the 25,000 students (10,000) at three area colleges and universities understand the program and the benefits of volunteering, within six months.
- To *create acceptance* among these students, specifically generating interest among 5 percent of the student population (1,250 students), within six months.
- To *generate action* among the students, specifically to achieve an action rate of 1 percent, achieving 250 volunteers after a six-month campaign.

Notice how each level grows from the previous one. Notice also that there will be no guessing about whether success is achieved. The outcomes of measures and timeframes are identified clearly.

TOYOTA. The world's largest automaker Toyota has shown the importance of reputation goals, which are particularly significant in crisis situations.

With auto recalls in 2009 and 2010, Toyota endured what was initially called the worst handled auto recall in history, with predictions that the reputation of the Toyota brand would be damaged for years. Faulty accelerators were linked to 19 deaths, and consumers were reaching near-panic levels. The company that had built its reputation on quality and safety recalled 9 million vehicles, shaking consumer confidence and causing stock prices to fall by 15 percent.

Toyota's confidence in its own reputation may have caused the company to fumble its public relations in the early stage of the recall crisis. Some critics accused the company of corporate arrogance: withholding internal test reports, hiding the problem from unsuspecting customers, and paying off lawsuits behind closed doors without remedying the problems.

Supporters countered that the company acted as quickly when information became available. It took full-page newspaper ads alerting consumers of the recall, and it temporary halted sales and shut down production. American and Japanese officials gave television interviews, presenting the company's message of reassurance.

The strategy seemed to work. Within a year, Toyota stock prices were even higher than before the recall and the Toyota reputation was once again an asset to the international corporation. Toyota continued as the No. 1 automaker in the world.

Polls show that Toyota had fewer complaints than American and most other imported automakers, another testimony to the importance of keeping reputation as a top goal of any organization. Also, in the aftermath of the crisis, Toyota set a renewed priority on customer responsiveness.

Step 4 Worksheet: Establish Goals and Objectives

Step 4 turned the gaze both inward and outward, focusing on the organization's anticipated outcome. It's all about what the organization wants people to know and feel and how it expects them to act on these factors.

Here are the basic questions for this step:

1. **What position do you seek?**
2. **What are the goals to achieve this positioning?**
3. **What are the specific objectives (awareness, acceptance and action) for each public and each goal?**

As necessary, flesh out these questions with additional information about the viability and practicality of the position and goals, the level of support for the position and goals, and the consistency of each objective with previous decisions about the organization's publics.

Consensus Check

At this point, meet with your planning colleagues and with your boss or client. Make sure that agreement and harmony exists within the organization about the recommended objectives, because what is formulated here will be the basis for subsequent strategies and tactics.

If there is agreement and buy-in, proceed to Step 5. If not, consider the value and/or possibility of achieving consensus before proceeding.

Planning Example for Step 4

As a *position statement*, G^X wants to be the go-to source for international professional engagements.

Two *goals* are associated with this:

• A *reputation management goal* to promote the visibility and reputation of G^X among young business professionals and the companies or organizations that employ them.

• A *task management goal* of increasing the number of participants in its engagement and exchange programs.

Objectives for Public #1 (individual professionals):

1. To have an effect on the *awareness* of young professionals about G^X, specifically to increase their understanding of the advantages that G^X offers by 50 percent within one year.
2. To have an effect on their *acceptance*, specifically to increase their interest in the engagement/exchange programs by 25 percent within one year.
3. To have an effect on their *action*, specifically to generate 10 applicants for long-term exchange programs and 40 for short-term engagement programs within one year.

Objectives for Public #2 (organizations):

4. To have an effect on *acceptance*, specifically to increase the awareness of corporate executives and human resources staff about the G^X program opportunities (50 percent of identified organizations within one year).
5. To have an effect on their *acceptance*, specifically to generate feedback and inquiries from these organizations (15 percent within one year).
6. To have an effect on their *action*, specifically to generate invitations for G^X to meet with organizational leaders (25 organizations within one year).

Objectives for Public #3 (news media):

7. To have an effect on their *awareness*, specifically to increase their knowledge about the G^X programs (journalists at 50 percent of identified news media and news blogs within one year).
8. To have an effect on their *acceptance*, specifically to generate inquiries from these journalists (25 percent of identified news venues within one year).
9. To have an effect on their *action*, specifically to see publication/broadcast of positive/neutral pieces by 10 percent of identified news venues within one year).

Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies

Actions speak louder than words, and effective public relations involves the ability of an organization to perform services and provide goods that reflect benefits to users. Public relations strategists have several options, which generally fit into one of two categories: proactive or reactive.

Proactive strategies come into play at the organization's initiative, such as when it launches a campaign or initiates contact with the news media to publicize a new product or service. Typical proactive elements involve generating publicity, presenting newsworthy information, and developing a transparent communication process.

Reactive strategies are those through which an organization responds to influences and opportunities from its environment, including hostile pressures from the outside.

Proactive Strategy 1: Action

The first category of proactive public relations involves tangible deeds undertaken by the organization to achieve its objectives.

Organizational performance is a key type of proactive action. It involves assessing and, when necessary, changing the output of an organization. This process is known as **adaptation**, in which an organization changes itself to better interact with its environment.

A publicity campaign on behalf of a restaurant that serves mediocre food won't be very successful until the food improves. A politician who fails to address the interests of voters isn't going to attract much support.

Review Steps 2 and 3 of this strategic planning process. Compare the output of the organization with the wants, interests, needs and expectations of the publics. Then address any differences between the two.

Audience engagement is another important proactive strategy. This involves using two-way communication to understand and address audience interests. If possible, build in opportunities for your publics to participate in the program.

For example, Bosque de Chapultepec in Mexico City, the hemisphere's oldest urban park, invited thousands of volunteers to pick up trash as part of a wider effort to encourage its 15 million visitors to use sanitary facilities. The involvement of these volunteers spurred the campaign and created thousands of environmental ambassadors who continued to look after park sanitation and cleanliness long after their volunteer cleanup ended. Audience engagement also involves creating feedback opportunities, such as online sur4veys and interactive websites

Organizations sometimes sponsor a **staged event** to generate audience participation. These are activities created by the organization as a focal point for public involvement and potential media attention. Staged events can involve positive activities such as tree-planting ceremonies, recitals, competitions such as sporting events or essay contests, parades and anniversary events. They also could feature more confrontational approaches such as rallies, demonstrations and other activist events.

Organizations with a common goal sometimes join together in **alliances and coalitions**, a strength-in-numbers approach that compounds their influence and often generates media attention as it works toward organizational goals. For example, the North Carolina Health Literacy Council put together a coalition of health centers, public health agencies, religious groups, insurance companies, school groups and medical research centers—all with the goal of helping people become more knowledgeable about health issues.

Related to alliances are **sponsorships**, through which an organization provides financial, personnel and other resources to support a community project. The relationship should be a strategic one with mutual benefits. For example, a technology company might sponsor a science fair, or a newspaper might support a literacy program.

Some sponsorships are based on existing marketing relationships. For example, Lexus sponsors polo championships because enthusiasts of that sport reflect the luxury car's customer base. So too with Budweiser's sponsorship of the Super Bowl and Snickers' arrangement as the official candy of Little League Baseball and U.S. Youth Soccer.

Activism is another proactive strategy, a confrontational approach focused on persuasive communication and advocacy. It's a strong strategy with pros and cons, and because it can generate opposition as well as support, organizations are cautious about engaging in activism. But this strategy can be very successful, especially for cause-related organizations and movements dealing with social issues, environmental matters, political concerns and so on.

Some of the tactics associated with this strategy include boycotts, marches, petitions, pickets, rallies, sit-ins, strikes, vigils and outright civil disobedience.

Sometimes activism takes the form of street theater, such as when Amnesty International coordinated a protest in 83 cities around the world, mostly near military bases or embassies. Protestors dressed in orange jumpsuits and black hoods, courting media attention to protest the lack of due process for suspected terrorists detained for years by the US military at Guantanamo Bay.

Some activism is in-your-face, literally, as pie-throwing became a publicity tactic to protest designer use of fur (pieing Oscar de la Renta), euro currency (Dutch finance minister Gerrit Zalm), endangered sea turtles (Renato Ruggiero, director general of the World Trade Organization), seal hunting (Canadian oceans minister Gail Shea), and the faces associated with many other causes.

> ***ONLINE ACTIVISM***. *With the mushrooming of the Internet globally, many organizations have embraced* ***online activism****. Also called* ***cyberactivism****, this strategy harnesses the power of the Internet for social engagement. It erases geographical boundaries, circumvents local media interests, and allows organizations to engage their publics directly and frequently.*
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> *The Internet thus extends and organization's reach beyond traditional media. Additionally, sites such as Facebook are making e-activist tools available to their users, making it easy for supporters to volunteer, donate and share the organization's message to their own list of online friends.*
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> *Cyberactivism has been a catalyst for social protests such as the Arab Spring, the Greek economic protests and the Occupy movement. As a tool of social engagement for public relations purposes, cyberactivism can involve advocacy, mobilization and action/reaction, making it useful in fundraising, lobbying and community building.*
>
> *Groups such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace have embraced online activism in a big way. Such organizations long have encouraged volunteers to sign petitions and contact government leaders and corporate executives on behalf of various causes. Now visitors can go to the organizations' websites to learn about current campaigns and to sign up to receive information on topics of particular interest.*

At amnesty.org, for example, members and supporters can help pressure the UN to protect civilians in Sudan or urge governments to free political prisoners, end disappearances and abductions, and otherwise protect human rights. They can join others in advocating for free expression, international justice, support for refugees, and fair treatment of gays, women and other oppressed people.

The advantages of cyberactivism fit neatly into the game plan of Greenpeace, which uses its website (greenpeace.org) to update visitors on various environmental issues and campaigns around the world. With a simple mouse click, visitors to the website can add their name to petitions and mail campaigns directed toward government officials and corporate executives on a range of issues: global warming, forests and oceans, endangered animals, green energy production and sustainable fishing.

Friends of the Earth (foe.co.uk) offers online petitions and social media support for clean air, bees, sanitation, biodiversity and support for a green economy.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (peta.org) invites online visitors to contact lawmakers and advertisers and to spread the word via their own Facebook, Twitter and other social media networking.

Cyberactivism sometimes co-opts the Internet in more direct ways. For example, Greenpeace used GPA technology and the Internet to help the indigenous Deni people of the Amazon protect their land from logging.

Proactive Strategy 2: Communication

Another category of proactive public relations strategies deals with communication, specifically the various options an organization has to communicate with its publics.

At some time, every organization seeks **publicity** to gain attention through the news media. The value of this is that information reported by newspapers, blogs and TV broadcasts has both credibility and potentially a wide audience. A limitation is that the information must be considered newsworthy, a decision that is made by media **gatekeepers** (editors and news directors who determine what gets reported).

To attract media interest, news and publicity also should have a strong **visual element**. Stand-up commentators or talking heads don’t make it on most TV news reports. Audiences demand active, even entertaining, visual presentation of their news.

This is where the strategy of staged events mentioned above can come into play. For example, the Nuns on the Bus information tour during the 2012 US presidential campaign had plenty of visual appeal. A group of Catholic nuns traveled through eight states in a brightly painted bus. With backdrops of homeless shelters and soup kitchens along the way, as well as legislative offices, the nuns focused international media attention and much local awareness as they lobbied legislators and otherwise provided a platform to speak out on social justice in opposition to budget-cutting proposals in congress that they said would unduly hurt the poor.

For publicity efforts to be successful, organizations must have newsworthy information. Sometimes this happens spontaneously, although unexpected news often is bad news (accidents, fires, hostile takeovers and so on).

But public relations strategists know how to generate news that can be more favorable for their organizations. Here’s a short list of some ways to create news.

1. Give an award to draw attention to values and issues.
2. Hold a contest to involve others in your values and issues.
3. Select personnel to head a new program or begin a new project.
4. Comment on a local need or problem.
5. Conduct research and issue a report about a local need or problem.
6. Launch a campaign to accomplish something.
7. Give a speech to a significant audience and tell the media about it.
8. Involve a celebrity to visit and/or address your organization on a topic of concern to you.
9. Tie into an issue already high on the public or media agenda or link your organization to the top news of the day.
10. Localize a general report. [For more on how to generate news, see another textbook by this author, *Becoming a Public Relations Writer*, 5th edition, 2017, Routledge/Taylor and Francis.]

Regardless of its genesis, information coming from organizations must be **newsworthy**. A lot of information is important to an organization but not news as media gatekeepers would see it. For example, the fact that an organization is planning a major fundraising dinner and needs advance meal reservations may be important, but the news media are not going to report it three weeks early just so the caterer can get a head count. The organization would have to find other ways of reaching its key publics.

Look back to Chapter 4 for the section "What Is News?" Recall that we define news as *significant information relevant to a local media audience, presented with balance and objectivity and in a timely manner*.

Strategic public relations planners try to find that topics associated with all three groups (media, publics and the organization) involved in the dissemination of newsworthy information. At the intersection of these three groups is a **news peg**—a topic on which the media is already reporting that interests audiences and publics and also touches in some way on the organization.

For example, if the media are reporting on a national story involving an international crisis in Asia, a local Asian-based cultural organization may contact the media and offer an informed local perspective on events half a world away. Or if a high-profile celebrity goes public with a diagnosis of depression, a mental-health clinic might move quickly to offer media interviews on how to identify and deal with the illness.

Here are two real-world examples of effective public relations use of news pegs.

> *DAWN DETERGENT. Every time there is an environmental disaster involving oil-covered birds, Proctor and Gamble gets the opportunity to note that its Dawn detergent is a cleaning agent of choice for groups such as the International Bird Rescue Research Center and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.*
>
> *The company generates news releases, promotes interviews, and uses internal and social media to communicate directly with its consumers—all ways to enhance Dawn's positioning as a skin-friendly but high-powered cleaner.*

> *OAKLEY SUNGLASSES. When the world watched as 35 miners were rescued in Chile after being trapped underground for 69 days, Oakley donated sunglasses to help the miners' eyes return to normal after so much time without sunlight.*
>
> *At a retail cost of $180 (£115, €142) for each pair of sunglasses, the company turned an investment of $6,400 (£4,075, €5,000) into international media exposure estimated to be worth $41 million (£26.1 million, €32.4 million).*

Proactive public relations also calls for **transparent communication**, which moves an organization beyond the just-trust-us model and openly makes the case to its publics.

Several years ago, the CIA was asked to investigate the crash of TWA flight 800 off Long Island. The report not only detailed what the investigators found, but it also included a thorough discussion of the investigation process that led to the conclusion. "Report goes beyond being 'open,' " wrote the late Pat Jackson in *PR Reporter*. "Open implies something else is closed, which raises questions. CIA's report is transparent—everything is laid on the line. Its thoroughness leaves no questions."

Organizations engage in transparent communication when they lay out for their publics the issues, background, influences and options. If financial pressures are pushing your organization to curtail services, let your publics know about the financial problems and the various options before announcing a service cutback. Nobody likes bad surprises, especially when it suggests that the organization has been hiding information from key publics.

Reactive Strategy 1: Pre-Emptive Action

A pre-emptive strike is one taken before an opponent launches its first charge against the organization. From a public relations perspective, it's a **prebuttal** (a play on the word *rebuttal*). An organization may present advance information defending itself when bad news is inevitable, or it may announce opposition to something not yet formally introduced.

> *POLITICAL OPPOSITION. It was pre-emptive action when congressional Republican leaders criticized President Obama's health-care bill, Iraq policy and jobs proposal even before the president had issued any of these. They anticipated what he would propose and registered their opposition first.*
>
> *Similarly, it was a prebuttal when Obama responded to the shooting of school children and their teachers in Newtown, Conn. His plan was to reduce gun violence while at the same time respecting the Second Amendment—a move toward minimizing the impact of expected opposition from the National Rifle Association. Obama even co-opted several NRA proposals: improving school safety, tightening mental-health screens, and enforcing existing gun laws with increased vigor.*
>
> *The concept underlying a prebuttal—the benefit it offers—is the notion that the first one to tell the story sets the tone, against which all alternative versions must compete.*

Reactive Strategy 2: Offensive Response

Public relations planners sometimes try to operate from a position of strength in the face of opposition. For example, they may use the **attack** strategy, claiming that an accusation of wrongdoing is motivated by an accuser who is negligent or malicious.

Another offensive strategy is **embarrassment**, in which an organization tries to lessen an opponent's influence by using shame or humiliation. In 2003, the Liberian Women's Peace Movement held street demonstrations to embarrass the government into ending a violent civil war. They locked down a conference hall until a peace accord signed was signed. Soon after, the UN soon charged Liberia's president with crimes against humanity. The president resigned; he was exiled and replaced—by a woman.

Embarrassment sometimes takes a turn toward alarm, with attempts to **shock** people with information.

Sometimes organizations use **threat** as an offensive strategy, promising that harm will come to the accuser or the purveyor of bad news.

> ***PETA***. *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has built a reputation for outrageous strategies in its animal-rights campaigns. PETA used shock strategy to force McDonald's to agree to more humane practices in chicken coops and slaughterhouses.*
>
> *For example, PETA distributed "Son of Ron Unhappy Meal" boxes with a plastic cow in bloodstained hay, a plastic butchered pig, and a Ronald McDonald figure wearing a blood-spattered butcher's apron and wielding a meat cleaver. Some parents complained that PETA was upsetting their children, though the group said more people expressed disgust with how McDonalds treated animals.*

Reactive Strategy 3: Defensive Response

Another set of strategies involves a more overt defensive approach by the organization. One such strategy is **denial**, in which an organizations tries not to accept a problem by claiming that the problem doesn't exist. The explanation may be one of innocence ("We didn't do it"), mistaken identity ("You have us confused with someone else") or blame shifting ("So-and-so did it").

Another common defensive strategy is **excuse**, through which the organization tries to mitigate wrongdoing. This may be based on provocation ("We didn't have a choice"), lack of control ("The problem was caused at a higher level"), accident ("We were at the whim of natural causes beyond out control"), victimization ("A culprit outside our organization caused this") or mere association ("We inherited this problem").

Justification is a related defensive response, with the organization admitting to the deed but explaining that it did so for a good reason. One type of justification is based on good intention ("We were trying to avoid worse harm"), context ("Look at this from our side"), idealism ("We are following higher principles") or mitigation ("We did this, but it was the result of impairment/illness/coercion/etc.").

Another defensive response strategy is **reversal**, in which an organization under criticism tries to gain the upper hand.

> ***PEPSI***. *The cola giant faced an accusation in 1993 that medical syringes had been found in cans of diet soft drink. After the news media reported the first case in Tacoma, Washington, similar claims popped up through the US.*
>
> *Pepsi used defensive strategies by saying that it was an innocent victim and by denying that any crisis even existed. It supported this denial with video news releases showing how its production process made it impossible to contaminate the product before it left the plant.*
>
> *The company also used offensive strategies by claiming that the accusers had planted the objects and by vowing to pursue legal action against people making false claims. Pepsi later produced video news releases showing the arrest of a tamperer, and the circulated convenience store surveillance videos of the tampering incident.*
>
> *It quickly became clear that there was no basis to the claims, and thus no continuing crisis. Pepsi concluded with a campaign to thank loyal customers, with advertising headlines that read: "Pepsi is pleased to announce…nothing."*

Reactive Strategy 4: Diversionary Response

Sometimes an organization tries to divert attention away from itself and the problem it is associated with. One way to do this is through **concession** ("We can't fix this problem, but we can do something else that you will like"). An organization may give an aggrieved public something that both value, drawing attention away from the problem that remains.

Related to this is **ingratiation** ("Let's try to divert them by tossing a bone"). This approach, which raises ethical questions, involves giving a public something insignificant under the pretense that it has value.

Disassociation ("We've just fired the people who caused this problem") is another diversionary response in which an organization tries to distance itself from the wrongdoing associated with it. Sometimes this involves firing employees who violated organizational policy, such as when groups such schools and youth organizations move quickly to get rid of employees or volunteers accused of abusing children.

An associated strategy is **relabeling** ("We'll change the name so people won't think of us about this problem"). This has led Al Qaeda in Yemen to change its name to Ansar al Sharia, Philip Morris tobacco corporation calling itself Altria Group, and Exxon successively changing the name of the notorious tanker *Valdez* to *Sea River Mediterranean*, later sold and renamed *Dong Fang Ocean* and most recently *Oriental Nicety*.

CALIFORNIA PRUNE BOARD*. Which would you rather eat: Chinese gooseberry or kiwi? Dolphin fish or mahi mahi? Rapeseed oil or Canola? Toothfish or Chilean sea bass? Slimehead or orange roughy? You get the idea: Labels matter.*

That was the concept facing prune farmers in California, which grows 60 percent of the world's prunes and supplies all of the US market. In parts of Europe, prunes are popular fruits. But in the US, prunes were known primarily as laxatives to help old people with their bowel movements.

With support from California legislators, the Food and Drug Administration gave permission for a relabeling. The California Prune Board began a $10 million (£6.4 million, €8 million) rebranding effort involving public relations, advertising, sales promotion and education. For American consumers, prunes became dried plums. Same fruit. Same taste. But a much more appealing name.

Surveys by the newly renamed California Dried Plum Board found that most Americans didn't realize that what they knew as prunes are, by definition, dried plums. Research showed that 70 percent of consumers preferred the new name. Taste tests gave a 9-1 edge for "dried plums" over "prunes." Focus groups confirmed that people thought of dried plums as fresh and appealing. The new name was more consistent with the image of plums, which many Americans knew from imports from Japan and elsewhere and associations with plum wine, plum brandy and the sugarplum fairy.

Marketers responded with a new array of the fruit: dried plums dipped in chocolate, individually wrapped, enhanced with lemon or orange essence, wrapped in snack packs for lunch boxes and backpacks. They can be pureed into an oil for baking brownies and cake.

Recently the board partnered with swimmer Natalie Coughlin (the most-decorated American female athlete in the 2008 and 2004 Olympics) promoting dried plums as part of comprehensive nutrition, energy and fitness lifestyle.

PAPA JOHN'S PIZZA*. When a franchise causes problems for a global corporation, the home office should be quick to respond. That's what happened when one Papa John's franchise owner, a fan of Washington Wizards basketball, tried to distract an opposing team's star player during an NBA play-off game.*

The franchise distributed "Cry Baby" T-shirts ridiculing LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers, known for complaining about being fowled. One photo of the provocative T-shirt was posted on the SoGood.com food blog, and 12 hours later Cav fans had started a nationwide boycott of Papa John's.

Papa John's acted quickly with a Sunday afternoon emergency strategy session with its Fleishman-Hillard agency. The client first considered an advertising response, but public relations planners successfully argued the merits of a proactive media response.

First, the corporation distanced itself from the franchise with an apology to James, his fans and the city of Cleveland. Such distancing is standard with a diversionary response.

Then Papa John's maneuvered another diversionary responses by offering fans two concessions. It donated $10,000 to the Cavalier's Youth Fund and an additional $10,000 to James' own foundation for kids. The corporation also prepared its 115 franchises in and around Northeast Ohio for a special promotion four days later, when it sold 66,000 pizzas for 23 cents each (reflecting James' jersey number).

The result was positive international news coverage of corporate philanthropy, thousands of happy customers, online chat rooms and blogs gushing with praise for the way Papa John's made up for one franchise's mistake, and in Cleveland a 15 percent increase in pizza sales that lasted several months.

Reactive Strategy #5: Vocal Commiseration

Another family of strategies deals with ways in which an organization expresses empathy and understanding about the misfortune. The least apologetic of these is **concern** ("This is a serious and troubling situation") with the organization expressing distress but not admitting any culpability.

Condolence ("We are deeply sorry that this happened") is the next level, with the organization expressing grief over someone's loss or misfortune, again without admitting guilt.

Next comes **regret** ("Words cannot express how sorry we are for our role in this accident"), with the organization admitting its role but not necessarily accepting responsibility or admitting wrongdoing. This often is a crisis response endorsed by public relations practitioners who understand that publics generally need to see and hear that the organization is not minimizing its role in problem situations.

Occasionally organizations express regret for the actions of others. Congress incurred the wrath of the Turkish government when one of its committees passed a nonbinding resolution labeling as "genocide" the Turkish massacre of 1.5 million Armenians during World War I. Formal consideration of the resolution, which threatened US security interests in the Middle East, was stalled. The irony is that congress had yet to apologize to its own people for black slavery in the American South, the forced relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II, or the relocation and ethnic cleansing campaigns against American Indians.

The highest level of vocal commiseration is the **apology** ("We are sorry we did this; please forgive us"). With an apology, the organization publicly accepts responsibility and asks pardon. Particularly in crisis situations, public relations strategists point out that an apology often can shorten the lifespan of a crisis. A public apology also can minimize negative legal and financial consequences.

Strategists also are quick to point out the dangers of a **nonapology** ("I'm sorry if you too offense").

> ***MATTEL TOYS***. *Like all strategies, an apology must be considered in light of the both public and the cultural context. That was the issue as concern grew about the safety of Mattel toys made in China, including lead paint in some of the toys.*
>
> *A top Mattel official met with China's product-safety official to issue an apology to consumers. Mattel said it was sorry for the recall of millions of toys and that it would try to prevent future problems—at least, that's the version reported in Europe and North America.*
>
> *The Chinese version went more like this: "Mattel is sorry for having to recall Chinese-made toys due to the company's design flaws and for harming the reputation of Chinese manufacturing companies."*
>
> *Actually, the Chinese version got it right. It was a design flaw that had caused the recall of more than 17 million toys. Only 2 million of those were recalled because the Chinese firms used lead paint, which is prohibited in the United States.*
>
> *China had previously been stung by a series of recalls undermining confidence in its manufactured goods (pet food, toothpaste, packaged seafood and baby cribs).*
>
> *China needed the public apology, and it needed for the explanation to be clear that the fault was with Mattel that, critics agreed, deserved the bigger blame because of corporate policies to cut costs and speed up production.*

Reactive Strategy #6: Rectifying Behavior

A positive response to opposition and criticism involves action on the part of the organization to repair the damage. One such strategy is **investigation** ("We are looking into the cause of this problem"). This may buy time for the organization, but it also sets up expectations that the investigation will be reported and acted upon.

Corrective action ("Here's how we will fix this problem") involves taking steps to contain a problem, repair the damage and/or prevent its recurrence. This was part of Johnson & Johnson's response to the classic crisis of the cyanide murders associated with Tylenol. The company, clearly a victim along with its customers, took responsibility for repackaging the product to prevent future tampering, thus setting a new standard for the entire pharmaceutical industry.

Another rectifying behavior that serves the interests of both the organization and its publics is **restitution** ("Here's how we will make this right"). This involves making amends by compensating victims or restoring the situation to its earlier condition.

The strongest type of rectifying behavior is **repentance** ("We did something wrong, and here's what we are doing to make sure it never happens again"). This involves both a change of heart and a change of policy. It signals an organization's full atonement in the classic sense that it turns away from a former position and becomes an advocate for a new way of doing business.

DENNY'S. The story of Denny's restaurant chain is one of transformation from a symbol of corporate racism to a model of workplace diversity.

Denny's faced lawsuits for racial discrimination at several restaurants during the 1990s. One of the most notorious cases involved 21 members of the Secret Service. While 15 white agents were served quickly, a waitress and manager delayed serving six black agents for nearly an hour, allowing their food to get cold.

The ensuing publicity highlighted a series of lawsuits for similar acts of discrimination at other Denny's restaurants: Asian American students refused service and beaten by customers, Hispanic customers refused service, Muslim customers served pork after asking for a vegetarian menu, men of Middle Eastern descent kicked out of a restaurant, and a blind woman refused service because she was accompanied by her service dog.

Denny's eventually paid $54 million (£34.5 million, €42.9 million) in legal settlements. The company's chief diversity officer later looked back on that "historic low point" in the company's history as presenting "huge opportunities. We had no place to go but up."

Dramatically, the company seems to have embraced the strategy of corporate repentance. It adopted an aggressive antidiscrimination policy that included hiring minority managers, training employees and firing those who discriminated. Denny's increased minority franchise ownership from one to 109 over five years (currently 40 percent of all Denny's franchises, with 44 percent of its board of directors as minorities and/or women.)

The company launched a $2 million (£1.2 million, €1.6 million) antidiscrimination advertising series. Each year it purchases goods worth more than $100 million (£63.8 million, €79.5 million) from minority vendors. It supports the King Center in Atlanta, civil rights groups and United Negro College Fund and has worked with the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility and the NAACP.

A result of this turnaround is that Denny's ranked No. 1 in Fortune magazine's listing of best companies for minorities, two years running. It received similar awards from Black Enterprise, Essence, Asian Enterprise and Hispanic Business magazines.

This story is not without its irony. So successful is Denny's commitment to diversity, some white-nativist organizations called for boycotts because the company has become too multicultural.

Reactive Strategy #7: Deliberate Inaction

Sometimes, the best response is no response. **Strategic silence** is the situation in which an organization does not respond to criticism, though it may take follow-up action. That was the case with Perrier, the upscale European company that produces bottled water. When cancer-causing benzene was discovered in some of the water, the company pulled millions of bottles from store shelves but refused to give any information to the news media.

A related approach is **strategic ambiguity**, the refusal to be pinned down to a particular response. This involves the artful dodging of a question, though often it's more a clear evasion of responding.

The final category is **strategic inaction**, neither making a statement now taking any overt action. Instead, the organization simply waits it out and allows the situation to fade. While this may be a useful approach if the stakes are not too high, some problems do not fade away, especially those fanned by the opposition. By doing nothing, the organization risks allow the problem to fester.

STATE DEPARTMENT. For years, the United States has walked a tightrope regarding the political status of Taiwan. China claims the island, but the US and a handful of other countries refuse to recognize this claim.

US diplomats have been deliberately vague, using strategic ambiguity to provide at least a semblance of options over the international dispute. The State Department uses terms such as "acknowledging" rather than "recognizing" a single Chinese political entity. US, UK and Canadian diplomats "take note of" rather than "support" Beijing's claim to be the legitimate government China.

When President George W. Bush strayed from the standard party line and referred to Taiwan as a country, his aides quickly gave behind-the-scenes disclaimers that this was merely an informal designation and not a shift in US foreign policy.

Worksheet for Step 5: Formulate Action and Response Strategies

Step 5 dealt with the "doing" part of public relations campaign—what the organization does proactively or reactively. It grows from the notion that actions speak louder than words, reminding you to build your public relations message (in the next step) on a solid foundation of deeds.

Here are the basic questions to guide your planning for this step.

Action Strategies:

1. **If the organization is proactively initiating a public relations campaign, what kind of action or adaptation is appropriate?**
2. **What approach to news and information can be developed?**

Response strategies

3. **If the organization is responding to forces in its environment, to what extent is pre-emptive action appropriate?**
4. **… Offensive response?**
5. **…Defensive response?**
6. **…Diversionary response?**
7. **…Vocal commiseration?**
8. **…Rectifying behavior?**
9. **…Deliberate inaction?**

Planning Example for Step 5

G^X is confident that its performance level is high. There have been no mishaps or embarrassments in recent years, and "graduates" of the engagement and exchange programs consistently give positive feedback. Additionally, the program involves careful training of staff and volunteers to provide high levels of service.

One strategy that G^X will undertake is to enhance *audience participation* by involving business leaders in planning for international activities. Another strategy is to forge strong *alliances* with like-minded organizations, particularly university exchange programs (which generally are long term) and shorter-term visits arranged through professional organizations.

G^X also will proactively seek to generate *newsworthy information* for local news media.

The one potentially negative incidents involve a small but vocal group of single-issue dissidents in the community who rail against any international engagements because of an exaggerated sense of patriotism. Their message is that this country is No. 1 in its culture and thus does not need to engage other countries. G^X will adopt a strategy of *strategic silence* toward these vocal opponents, who have shown from past incidents with other organizations that they are incapable of civil discussion and that, when they attract media attention, they discredit their own cause by their blatant and simple-minded diatribes against organizations that would participate in the international community.

Step 6: Developing the Message Strategy

Having identified publics (Step 3), established objectives (Step 4) and set into motion the way the organization is preparing to act to achieve those objectives (Step 5), it's time to turn your attention to the issue of how to communicate.

Effective public relations campaigns involve the sharing of information. Generally they also involve advocacy and attempts to persuade. Sometimes they aim for understanding, consensus building, conflict resolution and improved relationships. Communication is central to each of these models.

One way to approach communication planning is to look to the three-fold analysis developed 23 centuries ago by Aristotle: Effective communication involves ethos, logos and pathos. That is, effective communication rests on a credible speaker, logical arguments and a sympathetic approach to storytelling.

Ethos: Selecting Message Sources

Years of research have produced a snapshot of an effective message source. This is someone who is credible, has charisma, and exercises some kind of control over the audience.

Credibility is the power to inspire belief. Even audiences that don't understand an issue well often will accept a message from someone they think is believable. Credibility rests on how the audience perceives three qualities:

- The speaker is seen as an **expert** in the discipline being addressed.
- The speaker has a certain organizational or professional **status**.
- He or she is **competent** in speaking, remaining calm under pressure and able to articulate clearly.
- Finally, the credible speaker is perceived as being **honest**, both unbiased on the topic and not having a vested interest in it.

Charisma is the second characteristic of an effective message source. Charisma is a matter of perception, varying from one person to another. It has several components:

- A charismatic speaker is **familiar** to the audience.
- She or he is **liked** by the audience, as least to the extent that the audience thinks it knows the person.
- Generally, an effective charismatic speaker is **similar** to the audience, sharing (or appearing to share) its interests and values, and often reflecting demographic factors such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, sociopolitical perspectives and so on.
- Finally, and least important, a charismatic message source is seen as someone the audience considers to be physically **attractive**.

Control is the third quality of an effective message source. This is the extent to which a speaker has some command over the audience and the perceived willingness to exercise that control. It has three components:

- An effective speaker can exert a certain **power** of the audience, such as the ability to reward or punish.
- He or she is may be in a position of **authority**, which implies that the audience more or less willingly has granted the right of control and thus will give obedience. The authority may be based on family, occupational, religious or some other important set of relationships in the life of audience members.
- The persuasive speaker has the ability to examine, giving **scrutiny** over members of the audience.
- With this understanding of effective message sources, public relations strategists try to identify appropriate spokespersons to present their organizational message.

Some campaigns rely on **celebrity spokespersons**. Celebrities often are charismatic and familiar, but they aren't necessarily perceived as being credible. Nonprofit organizations such as charities for cancer and other diseases find that celebrities can attract attention to their cause. Social causes such as those focused on human rights, environmental issue and humanitarian concerns also find that star power can attract other supporters and donors.

But celebrities have baggage. Many organizations, both corporations and nonprofits, have been publicly embarrassed by their celebrity endorsers. Think of Tiger Woods, one of the highest-rated celebrities who annually earned $105 million (£63.8 million, €83.5 million) in endorsements before the scandal of his marriage and extramarital relationships.

Also, celebrities sometimes wish to avoid being linked with controversial products or partisan issues. Few celebrities would promote tobacco products, for example. While some feel strongly enough about politics to lend their name, others follow the example of Michael Jordan who, when asked to endorse a black Democrat in a senate election, refused "because Republicans buy sneakers too."

Some organizations rely on **company spokespeople**, on the notion that people close to the organization will be viewed as more expert. But expertise may not outweigh a perceived lack of credibility. Also, some company executives may not have the "stage presence" to be effective public spokespersons.

Your job at this point in the planning process is to identify the person (or perhaps several persons) to carry your message to the key publics.

CELEBRITY ENDORSERS. Businesses and nonprofit organizations have found that they need to exercise discretion in identifying celebrity spokespersons. Fame draws attention, but that attention is not always positive.

Soccer great David Beckham lost endorsements when British tabloid press reported that he had cheated on his wife. After the scandal died down, he emerged with a $10 million (£7.9 million, €6.3 million) contact with Gillette, followed by a $161 million (£103 million, €128 million) lifetime deal with Adidas.

Tiger Woods was earning $1 billion (£630 million, €800 million) in endorsements before his fall from grace (car accident, call girls, a bajillion extramarital affairs, public apology, messy divorce), which left him without his car, home, wife and endorsement contracts with Nike, AT&T, Gatorade and Gillette.

Other corporate sponsors have been embarrassed by their spokespersons: Michael Vicks (dropped by Nike, Coke, Hasbro, Reebok and Kraft for illegal dog fighting), Kate Moss (dropped by Chanel, Burberry and H&M Clothing after snorting cocaine on camera at a fashion show), Kirstie Alley (dropped by Jenny Craig after she gained more than a little weight), and Michael Phelps (dropped by Kellogg's after he was photographed taking a hit from a bong).

Cyclist Lance Armstrong began to distance himself from his own Livestrong foundation after being stripped of his Tour de France and Olympic titles and banned from the sport for life following numerous allegations of doping. He resigned as chairman of the foundation that originally bore his name and a few weeks later left its board of directors. Three months after that, the cyclist went on Oprah Winfrey's cable network to admit to the doping charges, despite his long-standing vociferous denials. Nike, Giro helmets, Trek bicycles, Oakley glasses, Radio Shack and Anheuser-Busch quickly canceled endorsement contracts worth an estimated $150 million (€113 million, £95 million), though several said they would continue to support Livestrong now that the cyclist had several all ties with the cancer foundation.

Meanwhile, the social and political activism of some celebrities—Angelina Jolie, Sean Penn, Bono and Susan Sarandon, for example—has limited their commercial value as corporate spokespersons.

Some examples of wayward celebrity spokespersons fall into the "What were they thinking?" category. The Beef Industry Council dropped Cybill Shepherd after she revealed one of her beauty secrets: avoiding red meat. PETA publicly fired volunteer supermodel Naomi Campbell who had pledged not to wear natural fur after she wore it for fashion ads in Europe. And when Brylcreem sales dropped 25 percent after its celebrity hairdo guy David Beckham shaved his head, the football/soccer celeb lost his contract worth $7.9 million (£5 million, €6.3 million).

Logos: Appealing to Reason

Having selected the spokesperson, strategic planning next focuses on the content of the message. What will be said, and how will the message be framed?

Effective messages are build on solid reasoning, with clear claims and supportive evidence. The primary idea in a speech, editorial, advertisement, TV program or any type of communication—and there should be only one idea per message—is a **proposition**. There are four kinds of propositions:

- **Factual propositions** claim that something exists, such as urban air pollution or a link between education and income.
- **Conjecture propositions** state that something probably exists, such as likely outcomes of particular economic or political alternatives.
- **Value propositions** assert the merits or folly of something, such as health-care reform or school arts programs.
- **Policy propositions** identify courses of action and encourage adoption, such as advocating to change the legal drinking age or extending the school year.

Each proposition should be supported by evidence. When evidence is clear and indisputable, it's called **physical evidence**, and the proposition is easily provable. For example, if a city is spending more than it takes in, it clearly is dealing with an economic problem of major magnitude. As a factual proposition, that's an easy one.

But the parallel policy proposition—what to do about it?—may not be so easily resolved. Consider the various alternatives: raising taxes, selling off city-owned land, cutting services, reducing the workforce, reducing quality. Each of these impacts various principles and priorities, and there may be no clear solution on which everyone can agree.

Arguments for these alternatives rest on **verbal evidence**, which is less clear than physical evidence and open to varying interpretations. Verbal evidence takes various forms: **analogy** ("This problem is sort of like…"), **comparison** ("This problem is similar to another"), **example** ("Here's an illustration of this problem"), **statistics** ("This data sheds light on the problem"), **endorsement** ("I'm famous, and I recommend this to you") and **testimonial** ("I've used this, and I recommend it to you").

Pathos: Appealing to Sentiment

Human beings are not mere thinking machines. Much as we'd like to believe that we make decisions logically and based on evidence, we also rely heavily on feelings. Effective communication strategists take this into account and build an emotional appeal.

Some emotional appeals are positive. Here are a few types.

- A **love appeal** can feature various approaches: bittersweet poignancy, family togetherness, nostalgia, pity, compassion, romance, sensitivity, sympathy and more. Pleasant images lead consumers to remember the persuasive message because it makes them feel good.
- A **virtual appeal** can evoke any of the various values that society or individuals hold in esteem: justice, loyalty, bravery, piety, social tolerance and so on. Consider how natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods inspire volunteerism, blood donations and financial contributions to relief agencies.
- A **humor appeal** harnesses the power of comedy and amusement to gain attention and make the speaker more likeable. But humor gets old fast. In today's 24/7 news cycle, it's risky when politicians or organizational spokespeople repeat jokes or humorous incidents that were previously communicated to a wide audience. Additionally, for humor to be

effective it should be relevant, tasteful, perhaps self-deprecating but not disparaging of others, and above all funny (not an easy thing to achieve when what is funny to one person may be droll, too cute, ludicrous or simply unfunny to others).

- A **sex appeal** can range from nudity to double entendres to shock. Messages with sex appeal can be effective in gaining attention, though whether the attention is positive or negative depends on the audience. But sex appeal is notoriously bad at linking the message with long-term retention and eventual action.

Persuasive messages sometimes are based on one of two negative emotions. Used in moderation, these can be powerful advocacy tools.

- A **fear appeal** is intended to arouse anxiety or worry among audiences. Political messages often are based on fear (such as pending economic doom, high taxation, erosion of rights and freedom). So too with advertisements for some health products (tooth decay) and grooming aids (body odor). For fear appeals to be effective, they should be moderate in the amount of anxiety they generate, and they should be capped with an easy-to-achieve resolution of the problem (buy this product, vote for my candidate, use that medicine).
- A **guilt appeal** is another common persuasive technique, particularly in the area of marketing communication and fundraising. Like fear appeals, this approach is best done in moderation. For example, seeking support for refugees by making readers a bit uneasy in their relative comfort can become a turn-off if the guilt level becomes too intense. Also like fear appeals, guilt-based messages should feature solutions to the problem of conscience that they raise.
- A **hate appeal**, though sometimes effective in a short-term situation, is unethical at its base and is not used by public relations professionals.

Effective Verbal Communication

Both kinds of appeals—logical and emotional—can be communicated verbally or nonverbally. **Verbal communication** involves the right words, and the right use of those words. Here are some of the elements associated with effective verbal communication.

- **Message Structure**. Research suggests that **one-sided arguments** are useful in reinforcing opinions, especially among friendly audiences with low knowledge levels. **Two-sided arguments** that present both pros and cons are more effective with better-educated or undecided audiences. A common technique is to **sandwich** the message, first presenting your positive message, then refuting opposing points, and finally restate your theme.
- **Message Content**. Effective messages have several common elements. They use simple language that can be clearly understood by the audience. They offer what advertisers call the **unique selling proposition**, that clear statement of the benefit to the audience. They involve **grabbers** or **power words** that get attention and are easily recalled ("eco friendly," "job creators," "human rights"). They also feature memorable quotes and strong product or program names. Finally, they use ethical language that does not strength beyond the breaking point, as well as language that respects legal issues such as defamation and privacy.

Nonverbal communication occurs through actions and cues other than words. Some estimates are that 80 percent of what we learn comes to us nonverbally.

A whole range of **body language** issues can communicate information to us. These include eye behavior, facial expressions, touch and space between people. There also is a wide range of external aspects of visual communication. Here are some of these.

- **Symbols** can be powerful emotional elements of communication. Some are general, such as the national flag and wedding rings. Others are issue-specific symbols such as baby harp seals and pink breast-cancer ribbons. Certain photos take on a symbolic value, such as the attack on the World Trade Center or the iconic Vietnam-era photo of the running girl who was burned by napalm.
- **Corporate logos** identify businesses, nonprofit organizations and other groups. Some, such as the Nike swoosh or the Olympic rings have become so descriptive that often they no longer need the words.
- **Music** often has a symbolic value, such as the singing of a national anthem or songs associated with birthdays, holidays and religious events, even sport.
- **Language** itself takes on symbolic tones, often when it is used within religious traditions or in discussions of official national languages, such as some of the language issues in Quebec, many of the Southwestern states in the US, and among indigenous peoples throughout the world.
- **Physical artifacts and clothing** sometimes become symbolic—a judge's gavel, burning of a religious book, or wearing of a police uniform or religious garb. Women's clothing has symbolic significance in many countries and cultures.
- **People** such as the queen, the Dalai Lama and the pope sometimes are used symbolically.
- **Mascots** sometimes serve as symbols, such as Ronald McDonald, Smokey Bear or the Philly Phanatic, or more generically the koala or the panda.

Branding the Strategic Message

A concept drawn from marketing, **branding**, means the creation of a clear and consistent message for an organization. The purpose of branding, which is rooted in a strategic communication plan, is to foster understanding and goodwill and to encourage participation and support.

Corporations have been using branding for years. A car dealership has "the greatest deals in town." This toothpaste cleans "better than all the rest." That medical facility is "the hospital preferred by women."

Note that these branding statements have is an implied comparison with the competition. Would it be appropriate for an educational institution to claim to be "the state's best university" or an environmental action group to proclaim itself "more effective than all the other tree-huggers put together"? Probably not, but the university may want to be known as "a top educator for science and technology" and the conservation group as having "proven results in saving the woodlands."

This step of the strategic planning process ends with attention to the message package. It may involve a **slogan**, a succinct catch phrase that has been called a **verbal logo**. Nokia is about "Connecting People." At Allstate insurance, "You're in good hands." "Take action for the climate" is what Greenpeace wants.

Note that branding takes us back to the positioning statement in Step 4, where we began thinking strategically about the public relations situation and desired outcomes.

Worksheet for Step 6: Develop the Message Strategy

In Step 6, you have considered the practical elements of the message: who will serve as spokesperson, how you might appeal to both logic and sentiment, how you can be effective in both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Here are the basic questions to get you started:

1. **Who will be the spokesperson for this campaign? Why?**
2. **What is the logical part of the message (the proposition and evidence for it)?**
3. **What emotional appeal(s) can be used in this campaign?**
4. **How does this come together with a slogan or branded message?**

Follow-up questions regarding the message source might deal with ways to enhance the perceived credibility of your spokesperson. When considering message appeals, consider the appropriate balance between the two.

Finally, flesh out verbal communication by giving your attention to creating a clear and understandable message and using powerful language in your message. Give attention to the various elements of nonverbal communication—symbols, logos, music, and so on—that can enhance your message.

Planning Example for Step 6

There will be two *spokespersons* for this campaign.

- Sophie Mercier is G^X executive director. She is articulate in speech, professional in demeanor, and quick with information and anecdotes about the exchange and engagement program and the benefits that past participants and company have enjoyed.
- Kito Kawa-Jones is a young engineer with Serene Gardens Landscape Design in this community. He participated in a four-month exchange program in Japan, allowing his company to expand its professional services and increase its customer base.

The *logical element* of the message consists of facts and data about the low cost, high personal benefits to participants and parallel benefits to employers in terms of productivity, professional networking, and enhanced service to customers.

The *emotional element* consists of messaging about the value of personal development, the adventure of international work, and significance of an added professional credential.

Branding will consist of several variations, from the humorous "Help your boss. Leave the country" to the more serious "Forging global alliances for local businesses."