



Public relation: what can be gained?

Public Relation – how to use the terms in “our business”?

1. Press relations. The aim of press relations is to place newsworthy information into the news media to attract attention to a person/family; product or activity carried out by the organisation.
2. Product publicity. This involves various efforts to publicise specific products. This would include leaflets and other information; leaflets for parents concerning leukaemia, tumours, coping strategies etc.; and information for children like Chemo-Casper etc.
3. Corporate communications. This activity covers internal and external communications and promotes understanding of the institution. The organisations newsletter, internal papers etc.
4. Lobbying. Lobbying involves dealing with legislators and government officials to promote or defeat legislation and regulation.
5. Counselling. Counselling involves advising management about public issues and company position and image. This is often the situation when the local board wants backing or other help when dealing with local authority or hospitals from the national board.

All these topics or angles are interrelated; however this abstract will focus on the term lobbying *and the use of media in this respect*.

Context

I have five years of experience on this issue in Norway. My organisation (SKB) is a national parent organisation and was established in 1982. We have 13 local chapters with local boards and a national board. I chair the national board and am the public spokesman with regard to contact with central government officials, or the like.

All issues of national interest are being put forward to the national board and dealt with centrally. Issues concerning local government and hospitals are being handled locally, but with the central board as counsellors.

SKB is often in media, either in relation of receiving financial support, or reports on activities carried out locally; sometimes you will find stories of a child with cancer and its family and so on. What you won't find, or at least seldom find are articles on families who are ill-treated or major criticism on conditions of the hospitals.

This does not mean that we are happy or satisfied with the situation at all times, but this criticism are being dealt with either with the hospital management directly or with the local/central government administrators, or even the politicians.

Benefits

- SKB is increasingly being recognised as a serious organisation, that no one is afraid of “dealing with”.
- SKB's media profile is mainly positive issues, focusing on activities for children and their families.
- SKB (we think) is slowly achieving a reputation of something positive; few will be able to think of a negative situation related to our organisation.

Disadvantages

We are not necessarily recognised as a “political organisation”, and thereby we are often not invited to participate in “interesting” public debates.

Establishing a “task force”

SKB’s national board decided five years ago to establish an “SKB political committee”. This group attempts to work systematically towards the national political system, reviewing the forthcoming national budget, proposals from the national health and social committee, and the national church and education committee.

Issues SKB considers important that may not be on the present political agenda are however the most interesting and important ones. This implies that SKB on its own can give impulses and ideas to the political system.

Organising and staffing

Who are included in this group?

- One member of the national board, as a liaison – preferably the chairman.
- People who have one or more of the following qualifications;
 - interest in and knowledge of the political system and processes,
 - ability to “present” their organisation and the issues –
 - ability to do research and develop documentation.
- 3 – 4 people whose skills supplement each other

Why voluntary groups interest government and politicians

- Many voluntary groups represent knowledge within specific areas that are useful for society.
- Government officials may be interested in how rules and regulations works.
- Politicians need feedback in order to make policies.
- It is often positive to make changes that voluntary groups approve upon; it makes them feel good, and it is often useful to have some “goodies” to show.
- A voluntary group often knows the good and bad effects of the present system.

Priorities

When dealing with the central government, it is important to realise that you will never get a perfect world. Nevertheless, something can be done. If you present ten issues you can be sure nothing will happen. However, if you present one or perhaps two issues that are of vital importance, then you can concentrate the limited amount of time available and try to make this sink in. You may have a second and even a third “in the pocket”, but don’t use it before no one is through.

Also politicians may ask questions and bring up issues they work with – and then it would be wrong to stick to your own theme. This is a situation where they want input and angles to legislation they have been thinking on.

You should also be aware that politicians sometimes are very knowledgeable about the subjects.

Planning and tactics

- Priorities - what are the main tasks or legislation that your organisation wants to have /be changed? Are there any changes that would solve 80 % of the problems –i.e. improving a family’s financial support while the child is treated?

- Step by step – you can not get the politicians to solve all your problems, but perhaps one or two of them. This implies that you need some long term planning, and decide what to deal with now, then next year or at the next opportunity etc.
- Neutrality – never make an alliance with one party. Then you will depend on this party's policy and power. Both may change quickly.

Meeting/presentation

- Prepare your tactics
 - Who are leading the delegation?
 - Who presents the case or the cases, if more than one?
- Refer to other critically and chronically ill children as well. Sometimes “children with cancer” open doors that others find closed. Be humble and admit this fact and consider referring to other small groups with critical ill children as well. This means that changes of legislation will apply to other groups as well and this fact may be beneficial since children with cancer are a relatively small group compared to for instance children with asthma.

Handouts

When you have a meeting with politicians regarding changes of legislation, you should prepare a suggested change as to outline exactly which law needs to be changed and a suggested wording that covers the issues you present. This is a professional job, and you may need to talk to professionals dealing with this. This does not need to be costly. You could, use the experts in the national cancer society, at the hospitals, social workers or others that are available. The handout should be no more than one page; otherwise it may not be read. State the problem, consequences and point out how it can be changes and even suggest the wording of the change. Then they have it served on a silver plate.

Taking the credits?

Be very careful – concentrate on getting your view through, and if you gain acceptance or opportunity; be generous and give the politicians the credit in public.

Politicians want to talk to you if you have something to tell. This is actually their living – they need input in order to make politics and new angles. But they never give you credit, even if they act upon your suggestions. But if they get favourable press based on your input, you sure have a friend that you can contact later.

Politicians are under crossfire in many cases and often need something “good to come up with”. Besides, politicians are human too and most understand the seriousness of critically ill children.

Media

- Follow up and newspapers – if you have had a meeting with politicians, be careful of how you phrase the results. Even if the politicians give you everything you asked for be careful. – “We had a positive meeting, and I am glad to say that the politicians are aware of the problems we are facing and seem willing to do something about it”. In this way also the politicians can take advantage of the results and you get a win - win situation.

Checklist

- Make priorities – consider the “80/20 rule”.
- Who to contact - the administration or the politicians?
- Make a short paper to leave behind; state the issue, consequences of present state, and suggest the changes needed.
- Plan the meeting
 - Who chairs you delegation?
 - Which roles will you play during the meeting?
 - Who presents the various issues, or prepares for questions on expected/possible topics?
- Be generous to the politicians in the media.