



10-8 Communications

The New PIO: Building Internal Trust

As a new Public Information Officer (PIO) in any agency, especially if you are coming from “the outside” or from the media, one of your biggest challenges will be to build the internal trust of your co-workers. Although the chief executive who hired you obviously trusts you and believes that you will always do the right thing for the organization, many agencies—especially law enforcement—have entrenched stereotypes of ‘outsiders’.

Here are twelve tips to help build trust internally. Without your colleagues’ trust and belief in you, your job is going to be extremely difficult, and your experience not so positive.

Be Humble

- Go in as a supporter to existing staff
- Listen and learn—institutional knowledge is key
- Understand why things were done in the past before instituting change

Know Your Place in the Organization

- Understand rank structures
- Understand the perception of a civilian in a paramilitary organization

Be in the Right Place in Your Agency

- PIOs should sit at the right hand of the chief executive
- Fight to be there, as reporting through a structure may dilute your message
- At first, this “golden hammer” may be what you need to get the job done

Learn PIO “Tricks of the Trade”

- If you are former media, learn everything you can about the other side of the camera
- Use your journalistic skills for the good of the organization— tell people how stories will be played—what they need to be aware of, and how to minimize or maximize attention

Use Your Existing Relationships with Media

- Distance yourself from perceived ‘friendships’ with your former colleagues
- Take advantage of the reputation you developed in past jobs to accentuate this one

Teach Staff how to Manage Their Message and be Comfortable with the Media

- Be the ‘pro’ - offer learning opportunities to anyone in your organization who is interested

Learn the Lingo

- Every occupation has its own language—learn it, love it—don’t use it with the media!

Be a Good ‘Change Communicator’

- Once you are comfortable in the organization and have an understanding of the corporate mentality, history and institutional knowledge, learn how to communicate change
- Recruit informal opinion-leaders in your organization to take your ideas and change to their people.

Compare Media Tactics to what Your Agency Knows

- People are comfortable with what they know—compare your ideas and tactics to those already used by the organization; e.g. for police, interrogation techniques or block & redirects

Promote Your People, not Your Position

- ALWAYS put your people first in positive or neutral situations
- Promote your people as the experts
- You are a facilitator and conduit of information

Shoulder Responsibility for the Negative

- When it gets ‘bad’ - take responsibility
- Be a strong advisor to your chief officer

Take Your Role Seriously (on and off the job)

- Perception is 90% of the game
- Your dress and deportment on and off the job represents your agency
- You will be watched, you will be talked about, you will be critiqued ...