

The Management Series

Volume 3

The Public Relations Series
The Marketing Series
The Admin Know-How Series

by
L. Ron Hubbard

Published in the USA by
Bridge Publications, Inc.
4751 Fountain Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90029

ISBN 0-88404-674-5

Published in all other countries by
NEW ERA Publications International ApS
Store Kongensgade 55
Copenhagen K, Denmark

ISBN 87-7336-760-5

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Printed in the United States of America

HUBBARD COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, Sussex

HCO POLICY LETTER OF 30 JANUARY 1979
RESTORED 28 JULY 1983

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POSITIONING, PHILOSOPHIC THEORY

Although Madison Avenue has used “POSITIONING” for some years, it has not fully understood the actual philosophical background that makes “POSITIONING” work.

There is an excellent booklet called: “The Positioning Era” put out by Ries Cappiello Colwell, Inc., 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036, which has been reprinted and issued as HCO PL 13 Sept. 88, Marketing Series 24, THE POSITIONING ERA. It is an excellent booklet. It does not, however, give the philosophical background which, probably, is not generally known. Probably it was never discovered. I had to work it out myself.

Buckminster Fuller, an engineer and architect of some renown, says that it is a two-terminal universe. In other words, the universe is built by twos.

In electricity you have heard of two “poles”—the positive and the negative. You only get movement or generated energy in the presence of two poles. That is the principle of the electric motor, why current flows from one point to another point and so forth. There are four possible arrangements of these two poles: they are positive-negative, positive-positive, negative-negative and negative-positive.

In the reactive bank a positive and a negative, when occurring together, tend to bring about a stuck point in time. You sometimes see this in a marriage where the husband is jolly and carefree and the wife is sad and morose. One wonders why these people would ever stay together. The fact of the case is, due to reactivity of the mind, they can't do anything else.

Despite propaganda that “one should live for oneself alone,” the fact is that it is very difficult and most disappointing to do so. Life really can't be lived on the first dynamic alone. If you don't believe it go on out in space 300 miles and sit there for a while; you won't like it. You'd be calling Houston every few minutes.

In any event, one could say that life was at *least* a two-pole activity. Actually, it is not only always just two but certainly it doesn't go along well with just one and goes best with several—ask any popular person.

Fast communication is most easily done by comparisons. When one asks, “What is the book like?” he really is not trying to get you to describe the book.

He means that he wants some comparison. He will be happiest with the answer if he is told that it is like another book with which he is familiar. It would take you a lot longer and involve you in a lot more arguments if you just tried to describe the book to him instead of comparing.

“What does it taste like?” is satisfactorily answered, “Like candy.” That, if it has some shadow of truth and accuracy, is a perfectly satisfactory answer to the other person.

So we get a law which is this:

THE UNFAMILIAR IS RAPIDLY INTRODUCED OR COMMUNICATED BY COMPARING IT TO A FAMILIAR.

Joe knows nothing about practice boxing gloves and there are none there to show him and he will be fairly satisfied if he is given a familiar object, pillows, to compare them to.

Thus, one can achieve a very rapid communication by observing the following law:

ONE CAN ACHIEVE THE APPARENCY OF FAMILIARITY, EVEN WHEN THE PERSON HE IS COMMUNICATING TO HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT OF COMMUNICATION, WHEN HE ASSOCIATES IT IN THE MIND OF THE OTHER WITH SOMETHING WITH WHICH THE OTHER IS FAMILIAR.

Positioning takes advantage of a fact that one can compare the thing he is trying to get the other person to understand with desirable or undesirable objects. Desirable objects are now more commonly used in advertising. Undesirable objects are more commonly used in propaganda. By comparing this unfamiliar thing or the thing he wants to sell to another desirable object or by comparing something he wants people to detest to an undesirable thing, he can achieve a rapid communication and comparison.

Further advantage is taken of the fact that one can position *above* a familiar object, *with* a familiar object, *below* a familiar object, *at*, *to*, *against* and *away from* a familiar object. This opens the door to an opportunity to establish an opinion of the thing one is seeking to communicate. You might call it an “instant” opinion.

For example, we know that an astronaut is a familiar, highly regarded being. Thus, we position a product *above*, *with*, *below*, *at*, *to*, *against* or *away from* an astronaut.

We know that people think angels are good, sweet and kind, so we position another something *above*, *with*, *below*, *at*, *to*, *against* or *away from* angels.

We know people loathe psychiatry, so we communicate something as being loathsome as saying it is *below* (worse than) psychiatry. We could also make people think something was good by saying it was *against* psychiatry, bad because it would bring them to psychiatry, or awful because it used psychiatrists (like the tax people).

A common use of positioning in advertising is to take a product which, by reason of advertising, is familiar to the public and is regarded by them as the leader in the field and then *positioning* a new untried, unfamiliar product above it, with it, or just below it. Thus the new product gains a sudden spurt in sales by being compared to the leader.

In fact, in the field of advertising this has been the primary use of positioning, probably because no one had carried the idea back to a point of formulating the actual laws of it and thus broadening its use. They thought in advertising, evidently, that the basic theory of it was the “pecking order of hens” which means that the whole barnyard is usually found to have a top hen and a bottom hen and they peck each other in that order.

Apparently, from talking to ad guys, they thought that by putting their products in the pecking order against the top product they made their product higher or just with or just below the top hen. That’s what the advertising people get for associating with such “experts” as psychologists.

POSITIONING can be seen to have far, far broader uses than “cola” and “uncola” ads when you study the above basic PL data. The horizon becomes very, very vast and all around because with it you can attain fast communication about the unfamiliar and can formulate “instant opinion.”

When used in advertising, posters, write-ups, PR, propaganda or any one of many activities, forceful and effective positioning requires certain requisites:

1. The selection and identification of the public or person one is trying to cause to have an instant opinion, desire or repugnance.
2. Work out whether you are trying to do a good or bad relationship to the familiar object you will find and what kind of an opinion, desire or repugnance.
3. Survey that public with questions which do not even mention the thing you are eventually going to use the survey for to find what they consider wonderful, popular, useful, etc., etc., or awful, terrible, etc., etc. You can survey for attitudes, objects, professions or anything else you have chosen that will even dimly compare with something you are going to use the survey to push.
4. From the majority answer of this survey, choose an object, profession, attitude, etc., etc., that they think is great or awful or whatever.
5. Get a bright idea of how to compare the thing you were trying to communicate to the familiar object, attitude, profession, etc., that they all firmly have an opinion on.

Do as many other surveys as you like of this same public you are trying to reach to get their attitudes in general or attitudes about what you found or even their general likes and dislikes, vocabulary, habits of dress, etc., so you can write copy and draw pictures that seem to be them or what they would say or do.

Do your drawings and write your copy.

If you have been clever, you will succeed in communicating forcefully and effectively and instantly at a glance something that was very unfamiliar to them previously.

All the other rules of copywriting, art and design, impingement, etc., are dovetailed into this to make more of it.

By doing a lot of practice with this and drill, drill, drill, drill and getting experienced with it, you will suddenly find yourself able to use this in PR, advertising, marketing and communication in general with an impact that will be very effective and very startling.

L. RON HUBBARD
Founder