

The Public Image of the American Forest Products Industries and what the Philippines can learn from it *

by

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INTRODUCTION

One feature readily noticeable in the American forestry scene today is the amount of effort being made by the forest products industries to create for themselves a good public image. To a Filipino forester accustomed to the paucity of efforts exerted along this line by the wood-using industries of the Philippines and where, decidedly, there is more call for these industries to project a good image, the amount of image-improving industry information reaching the American public through the various media of communications is simply amazing.

The impression one gathers is that the American forest products industries have gone all out to create a good picture of themselves before the American public. The forestry trade associations and the individual companies are beating their drums and making quite a success of it. Not only is this evident in the volume of periodicals, pamphlets and audio-visual materials reaching the public, but it also seems that cultivating public appreciation has permeated company thinking and, in many of the larger companies, this has become a top management function.

This report has a three-fold objective:

1. To attempt to draw a picture of the current public image of the American

forest products industries and to explain the motivation of the industries in creating a favorable public impression;

2. To underscore the special urgency in the Philippines for the local forest-based industries to create a good public image for themselves; and
3. To offer an outline which the local forestry trade associations and individual lumber companies might use as a basis to work out an image-building program.

Public Image Consciousness of American Forest Products Industries

The flood of systematic informative matters is aside from those the government forestry agencies are themselves disseminating and quite aside, too, from the extensive space and time that the forest industries, in common with other American industries, buy and utilize for what would pass for straight advertisement of their products and services. The campaign is massive embracing the national, state and county levels; the scope has depth touching all possible publics—the government, the stockholders, the consumers, the community, the schools, the legislators, etc.

It is commonplace for companies, individually or in concert with others, to work on their communities, with the company executives, directors and key personnel taking time out to explain company objectives and pro-

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grams over radio and television, and in formal or informal group discussions. Many companies have even gone further. They hold regular orientation workshops for their own personnel with the purpose of making everyone spread the good word outside the company compounds.

The effort has not been confined to the audio-visual media. Many private forest holdings have been opened for recreational use by the public, a gesture that has done much to improve community-company relationship. Tours and visits to woodlands and plants are being encouraged. The job of selling forestry is no longer, as it was not too long ago, that alone of the government and company foresters. It is as if management has wakened up suddenly to the realization that a good public image is essential for the business and management must accordingly provide for it.

Also, the observer will not fail to notice the discarding of the defensive strategy of old and the adoption in its place of an aggressive policy of meeting many of the issues squarely. The covering up of past mistakes and abuses in land disposition and the apologizing for the sad experiences in the handling of the forest holdings have given way to a more positive posture of informing the public of the motivations of the industries and their correct programs of improving the forest properties through better logging methods and better restocking of logged over areas. This seems to underscore the acceptance by the industries of their social responsibility of considering the general interests of the public in their utilization of the forest lands even if these are under private ownership.

It is noticeable, too, that on the part of the public, a better impression of the industries is steadily developing. At least the suspicion of long ago that the wood industries were despoilers of the forests, that lumber barons were taking advantage of the forest patrimony, is giving way to a recognition

that lumbermen are builders of the economy and that the forest industries have a major role in the economic development of the country.

Keeping Tab of the Image Through ORC Polls

Also, the American forest industries take the trouble and the expense to find out at regular intervals how they rate with the public. For this purpose they avail of nationwide public opinion polls. This is being handled for them by the American Forest Products Industries, Inc., an association of over 1,300 member-companies representing all segments of the forest products industries. The prestigious Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey, conducts the surveys for the association. The first ORC survey was made in 1941, the second in 1952, the third in 1956 and the fourth in 1962. A fifth one is being lined up.

Through these surveys, the industries have been able to keep tab of the thinking of the American public and, where indicated, have accordingly taken remedial steps. From these surveys the industries have come to recognize:

1. That they face a continuing struggle for a favorable public image;
2. That what the public believes about the industries are not all borne out by the facts; and
3. That one of the chief deterrents to a broader appreciation of the aims and accomplishments of the industries is the widespread lack of knowledge and the large amount of misinformation people have about the forest and forestry activities.

Findings of the 1962 ORC Poll

The American forest industries are presently concerned about some specific areas indicated in the 1962 ORC poll where a significant portion of the public still enter-

tain misgivings or harbor some misconceptions or misinformation. They found out, for instance:

1. That 56% of the general public still believe that the forests are being cut faster than they are being replaced;
2. That 31% think that there is much wasteful cuttings of timber going on;
3. That 37% believe that there will be wood shortage in 1975;
4. That 25% favor more government ownership of forest lands;
5. That the lumber industry ranks next to steel and oil among those that the public thinks should be regulated more strictly;
6. That lumber ranks second only to steel among the major products the public thinks are priced too high;
7. That 18% have still an unfavorable impression of the lumber industry, while 27% are neutral or have no impression at all;
8. That 35% think that lumbering as practiced today is harmful to wildlife; and
9. That 24% think that lumber is decreasing the water supply.

Common-Front Approach Paying Off

The situation was worse even a few years back. But by concentrating and directing the informative campaign on the problem areas, the situation has been improving with the years. The various forestry trade groups — while they have still their clash of interests in many areas — present more or less a united front when it comes to developing public appreciation for the entire forest products industries. Differences among companies exist, rivalries among forestry industrial leaders will ever be present, but the common-front approach of winning the public confidence for the wood-based industries has begun to pay off. From a comparison of the results of the successive polls, the American forest indus-

tries are gratified to know that they are succeeding in improving their public image. The ORC surveys show these trends:

1. That there is a significant decrease in the number of people who think that the forests are being cut faster than they are being replaced (62% in 1952, 57% in 1956, and 56% in 1962);
2. That there is a decrease in the number of people who think there is much wasteful cutting of timber going on (35% in 1952, 32% in 1956 and 31% in 1962);
3. That there is a decrease in the number of people who think there should be more government ownership of forest lands (29% in 1952, 31% in 1956 and 25% in 1962);
4. That there is a decrease in the number of people who think the prices of lumber are too high (17% in 1952, 25% in 1956 and 18% in 1962);
5. That there is a marked increase in the number of people who have a favorable impression of the lumber industry (49% in 1952, 42% in 1956 and 55% in 1962); and
6. That more people are getting better familiar with tree farms (45% in 1952, 56% in 1956 and 59% in 1962).

Special Need for a Good Image Campaign For the Philippine Forest Industries

In the United States, it could be seen that despite the high literacy and the general awareness of the American public on national and community affairs, the ORC polls still show a disconcertingly high rate of misinformation on forestry matters. The findings reveal that only 14% of the American public are well-informed on forestry matters, 33% are moderately informed, and 53% are poorly informed.

If such an extent of misinformation exists in the United States, the condition in the Philippines can only be conjectured. Considering the very limited information reaching

the Philippine public and the amount of misinformation often times being made to pass for facts, the percentage of our public poorly and ill-informed on forestry issues would be comparatively astounding.

Again, in the United States only 27% of the commercial forest lands are owned by the federal, state and county governments; the larger bulk, or 73%, are privately owned either by corporations or by individuals. Under this situation, the private land owners can, if they wish, do as they please with their private land holdings, use them the way they choose and, generally, there is nothing that the public can do about it. Yet, as we have seen, the forestry industries make a deliberate case of creating a good public impression for themselves. The private forest owners and the public seem to have accepted that a forest land has social and community implications and that what happens to the forested property could not but have an influence on the welfare of the residents in the forest vicinities. Both recognize the built-in influences and services of a forest as protection for soil, sanctuaries for game and wildlife, a place for outdoor recreation, improvement of the landscape, etc. in which the community has decidedly an abiding interest.

Quite a contrast is the forest ownership situation in the Philippines and quite obvious is the social conscience concept that Philippine forestry entrepreneurs must follow in the utilization of the forest lands. In the Philippines, practically all the forest lands are government owned. The public owns the forest lands and this being so the people have the right to demand assurance that the public forest property is being used in a manner that will not prejudice the common weal. As primary and immediate beneficiaries of the forest property the Philippine forest industries must assume the responsibility of keeping the Philippine public well informed of the manner of their custody of the forest

and of allaying whatever fears the masses might be entertaining about the safety and future of their patrimony.

The large areas of the Philippine public grown indifferent to or suspicious of the forest industries, even the rash of onerous government policies and regulations that plague and rock the industries from time to time, can in a large measure be traced to the lack of or desultory efforts of the industries at reaching the public with the facts, or in presenting a fair picture of the facts.

The danger in tolerating a situation where the public is ill-informed is obvious. When not given the facts, gossips and destructive rumors will take over. Fed with wrong information or allowed to make their own conclusions from faulty data or biased interpretation of the data, it has not been surprising why the indifference and suspicions persist. It is not even far-fetched that one day a misled but aroused public sentiment would stampede Congress to pass ill-advised legislation, or for government fiscal and financial agencies to be jittered into issuing ill-conceived regulations. Every year a number of onerous bills are introduced in Congress and from time to time stifling rules and regulations premised on faulty information have been issued by government agencies concerned with forestry matters. These are symptomatic of the ill-temper of the public and portents of more unpleasant things if the situation is allowed to grow worse — and if many a lumberman concerned do not do some soul-searching on their responsibilities as holders of licenses they have been privileged to hold.

The various forestry associations, like the Philippine Association for Permanent Forests, the Philippine Lumber Producers' Association, the Philippine Chamber of Wood Industries, and the Plywood Manufacturers' Association of the Philippines, are doing something but not only is the effort very limited but in many cases the contradictions and varying versions of data and information have at times added more to the confusion.

Again with us in the Philippines, the industries had seemed to conveniently shrug off their shoulders and passed the job of informing the public to the government forestry agencies. Even if these agencies have the resources — which they have not — basically, the perspective of these agencies are different from that of the industries. The government has the task of regulating and perpetuating the use of the forest, the industries have the task of using the forest and informing the public that use and perpetuation have been harmonized. The latter are, and should be, their own best spokesmen.

Unflattering Philippine Picture

There has been no poll of the thinking of the Philippine public relative to our forests and forest industries. But no poll is needed to show that the picture is none too flattering for the industries. A cursory study of articles and views expressed in the press, the public pulse columns, contacts with various sectors of the public, commentaries in forestry and conservation conferences, etc. would show a thick cobweb of misinformation shrouding the industries. The lumbermen have, by commission and omission, created a none-too-good picture of themselves and their industries. The amount of misinformation going around is fantastic, the grave doubts lurking in the thinking of many sections of the public on the motivations of the local forestry entrepreneurs are frightening, and denunciations of the actions of some lumbermen have been sickening and these could not but affect the public picture of the industry as a whole.

The local forest industries, for instance, are not unaware of the following trends of thoughts of our public, or of some segments of our public:

1. That our forest lands have dwindled very fast and that the future of our forest patrimony looks very grim;
2. That lumbermen are despoilers of the forest wealth, in a class with the kaiñgi-

neros, and do nothing to protect their holdings;

3. That the lumbermen are raking in fortunes at the expense of forest conservation;
4. That many of the lumbermen are dummies of aliens;
5. That it has become impossible to enact sound forestry legislation because lumberman-legislators themselves stand on the way;
6. That reforestation is a useless expense of public funds;
7. That lumbermen are unmindful of their destructive way of logging and the wood wastes they leave in the forest;
8. That against the fabulous profits of the lumbermen, the tax the government collects on timber is very ridiculously small;
9. That fragmentation of forest concessions is better for the industry;
10. That getting a forest concession depends on proper connections;
11. That more of the forest lands should be opened up to accommodate the landless; or
12. That the deforestation of the mountains cause floods.

What are the half-truths, what are the outright misinformation, what are the facts that can be explained away or which suggest the need for reform in the industry — all this seems to blend in a picture too distorted to recognize but which the Philippine forest industries have made no concerted effort to correct. And so long as the bad image lasts so long will the public hold the forest industries in distrust. What is worse, both the conscientious and the irresponsible lumber operators are lumped together in the public indictment. Hardly will the public bother to distinguish between the good and the bad individual companies.

Basic Approaches to Good Image Formation for the Philippine Forest Industries

A good image, like a good reputation, is long in the making. Both are formed from an attitude of confidence, both are based on integrity of character. It is aptly said that there is no difference between the way an individual becomes respected and earns the confidence of his community and the way a corporation earns a good image. And an image, like a reputation, is very brittle and easily tarnished. An overt act or an indiscretion can ruin.

The following are suggested as approaches worthwhile considering in a good image campaign:

1. The task of developing a good public image for the industries will come from sustained effort;
2. Creating a favorable impression for the industries rests on putting the industries themselves in a position of integrity and uprightness. It would be a mistake to assume that a good lasting image is formed by covering up faults, twisting the facts, or hood-winking the public. People will eventually discover the truth;
3. To assure coordination of efforts and the efficient utilization of limited resources, the larger and more common interests of the industries are better handled thru a central group; or this failing, by the various forestry trade associations working in concert with one another; and
4. The individual companies themselves should within their capacities conduct their own information campaign to complement what the associations are undertaking.

Outline of an Image Building Program for the Philippine Forestry Trade Associations

There are presently four forestry trade associations in the Philippines, namely, (1)

Philippine Lumber Producers' Association, (2) Philippine Chamber of Wood Industries, (3) Plywood Manufacturers' Association of the Philippines, and (4) Philippine Association for Permanent Forests. Considering that some lumber companies have interlocking memberships in these four associations, it should not prove too difficult to arrive at some cooperative arrangement in drawing up a common program designed to promote the general interests of the industries, nor too much trouble in sharing in the expenses of such a program. Some steps have been tried towards this end, but these have been casual and half-hearted.

To provide the associations a starting point, the following is offered:

A. Organization of a central information committee:

1. First alternative: form a unified standing committee to be composed of a representative from each of the four associations, the committee to be given adequate authority to agree on a common program;
2. Second alternative: an *ad hoc* committee composed of a representative from each association and serving only as a clearing house to achieve even a loose coordination of efforts, or to farm out the activities to be undertaken by each association.

B. Functions of the standing committee:

1. Assess the correct image of the forest-based industries, define the areas needing attention;
2. Determine the scope of the information program needed;
3. Draft (by themselves or with the assistance of an information specialist) the details of the information program;

4. Prepare a budget to finance the program and recommend ways and means of its financing;
 5. Carry out or supervise the implementation of the program.
- C. Suggested activities by or under the sponsorship of the associations:
1. Production of educational films on industry-wide basis;
 2. Radio and TV programs to present the views of industries on pending legislation, taxes, government regulations, etc.
 3. Preparation of brochures, pamphlets and other printed materials on general aspects of protection, utilization and conservation of the forests;
 4. Periodic press releases and articles on commonfront industry policies;
 5. Sponsorship of tours and plant visits for government officials, newspapermen, business and civic leaders, teachers and student groups, etc.;
 6. Participation with suitable exhibits in industrial fairs, trade conferences, etc.;
 7. Presentation of the views of the industry or the association in legislative hearings, investigations, etc.;
 8. Formation of a speakers bureau for appearances in conferences, group discussions affecting the industries;
 9. Furnishing legislators and policy making officials data and information helpful in the formulation of constructive laws and policies.

Pointers on Individual Company Program

Whether big or small, a lumber company is desirous somehow of having a good public image. There are many ways the desired image can be developed and undertaking a good information campaign is one of the most effective. The scope of the information program of a company depends, among others, on its resources and its particular need for the program. It will certainly be helpful for

a company to get the advice of a qualified public relations specialist before going into such a campaign.

The following outline lists some pointers on planning and undertaking a good image building program:

A. Organizing for the program

1. Choices in organizing the staff
 - a. Appoint a full-time public relations manager
 - b. Retain the services of an outside public relations firm
 - c. Assign the job to a company official as a secondary function
2. General functions of the staff
 - a. Draft guide policies on the objectives and scope of the program for the consideration of management
 - b. Prepare a program, including its budget, on the basis of approved plans
 - c. Implement the program

B. Suggested activities and tools

1. Preparation by the staff of:
 - a. Press releases and articles on company activities, products and services, objectives and programs, and anything to win respect and esteem for the company
 - b. Woodland and mill tour guide pamphlets
 - c. Data and information to be furnished legislators and government officials which are useful for constructive legislation and policies
2. Take charge of the arrangements for the production and showing of:
 - a. Informative films on company activities
 - b. Brochures, posters and pamphlets

3. Promotion and handling of:
 - a. Tours of forest operations and mill departments by government officials, business and civic groups, etc.
 - b. Open house for the community
 4. Handling of:
 - a. Company advertising
 - b. Sponsorship of or participation in community civic, cultural, athletic, and social programs
 - c. Company participation in fairs and trade exhibitions
 - d. Company assistance to the community in emergencies and calamities
 5. Arrangements and scheduling of appearance of key company officials in radio and TV programs, group discussions and assemblies.
- C. Harnessing the potentials of company officials and personnel for the image building program
1. Appreciating this potential:
 - a. Company needs to start building a good image from the inside
 - b. Residents of the community judge the company by the people they know working in the company
 - c. Well-informed and enthusiastic company officials and employees can be effective image builders with people they come in contact with
 2. Suggested activities and tools to win and harness this potential:
 - a. Publication of a house organ
 - b. Holding regular assemblies and meetings, seminars and orientation courses
 - c. Holding open houses for families of personnel
 - d. Promoting guided tours and visits of company personnel to other departments of the company
 - e. Brief and informal visits of top key officials to individual workers
 - f. Making available general reports and keeping personnel up to date thru house organ or periodic bulletin on company policies and plans, increasing their knowledge about the company background and organization
 - g. Showing of educational industry films and slides.

CONCLUSION

In the United States a dynamic information campaign by the forest products industries has been going on for some time and a good public image of the industries is emerging. But even here, the industries realize that there is still much to be done to improve their image.

An image building program for the Philippine forest products industries is long overdue. The Philippine public has a distorted picture of the forestry situation and an unflattering impression of the forest industries. Much of this has been the result of the limited information reaching the people or a wrong presentation of information. It is not surprising therefore to find the industry much concerned over some government rules and orders based on misinformation or wrong evaluation of facts. It is even possible that Congress reacting to public clamor might one day be stampeded into passing hasty legislation.

The various forestry trade association will do well to get together — soon — and map out a common-front information campaign. Also, the individual companies should, within their resources and in their respective communities, do their own image building as whatever good will and good image they make for themselves will be one bright facet adding to the improvement of the whole picture of the industry.