

II. RAINING ON THE ACS PARADE

The previous section documented the tobacco industry's strategy to negatively stigmatize pro-health forces by labeling them puritans, social do-gooder or radical zealots. Related to this effort, we uncovered a sophisticated campaign initiated by tobacco industry executives to diminish the effectiveness of the American Cancer Society (ACS). One of the most recognized public service efforts implemented by the ACS is their annual Great American Smokeout (GASO). Tobacco industry documents reveal the GASO concerned the industry greatly. As such, they implemented a number of programs and activities designed to "rain on the Society's parade."

To place the issue in historical perspective, we highlight the copy from a Vons Grocery Company fax, which we found in tobacco industry files. Vons publicly stated this about the initial GASO:

"Well, we've done it again. Last year, California initiated the Great American Smokeout and helped one and a half million cigarette addicts stop smoking for one day. Maybe you remember that day – the air was so clear that Arcadia residents could see the buffalo grazing on Catalina Island. The event was so successful that the entire nation has picked up on it." [GASO.1/p.1]

Tobacco executives note the rapid acceptance of the GASO represents a great threat to their business. In a 1978 Philip Morris inter-office communication, Joan Mebane reports:

"The data indicates that ACS was able to mount an impressive publicity campaign: articles received totaled 2293 and appeared in all 50 states, the District of Colombia, Canada, Mexico and France... It should be noted that Texas led the field with 224; California came in second with 206; and New York was third with 182." [GASO.2/p.1]

In a 1978 edition of PR News titled, "Case Study #1613," the writers describe the underlying concept of the GASO. This aptly summarizes the concerns the GASO presented the tobacco industry.

"If tobacco users can be encouraged to abstain from smoking for just a single day, they would realize it is possible for them to do so and they might go on to quit permanently. Starting around November 1, the ACS activity, with good cooperation from the media, obtained excellent publicity for the undertaking. It also set up Smokeout committees in every state; these, manned mostly by volunteers, stimulated supplementary efforts as schools, hospitals, clinics, business establishments, etc." [GASO.3/p.1]

PR News also points out the benefits of participating in a major public service effort such as the GASO. According to the report, Mutual of Omaha obtained "highly rewarding results" for collaborating with the ACS in the 1977 Great American Smokeout. Significantly, PR News summarized the results of a random survey conducted a month after the conclusion of the GASO. Concerning the impact of the one day event, the study revealed that:

"Nearly 10 percent of Mutual of Omaha smokers had not smoked since the GASO and an additional 47.2 percent had 'cut down.'" [GASO.3/p.3]

A. Response of the Tobacco Industry to the GASO

The documents show the tobacco industry reacted negatively to the GASO. The GASO furthered an effective anti-smoking message. Not only did millions of smokers quit for the day [see GASO.4/p.2-3], but also there were attempts to ban sales in many areas [see GASO.5/p.1]. In response, the industry, led by Philip Morris, orchestrated a strategy to discredit the ACS campaign and subvert the GASO goals.

In a 1982 document, Bill Toohey of the Tobacco Institute, comments about the GASO to the Associated Press:

“The Smokeout is ‘a publicity campaign, a gimmick.’ He said the money would be better spent on basic cancer research.” [GASO.7/p.1]

In a 1983 document, The Tobacco Institute comments on the GASO. The memo states

“The decision to smoke or not is a matter of mature, informed, individual choice. If the ‘Great American Smokeout’ stood as a symbol of choice, or as a symbol of the progress made in cancer research, we would applaud it. But it’s no more than a symbol of press agency at a time when every dollar contributed to the American Cancer Society should be directed at finding the causes of cancer.

The misdirection of funds is regrettable.” [GASO.19/p.1]

In a January 1988 memo, Peter G. Sparber, The Tobacco Institute, elaborates the industry’s growing concern about the GASO. Sparber provides the Members of the Communications Committee with a proposal to deal with next year’s event. Sparber’s alert gives the committee nearly ten months to prepare for the 1988 Smokeout.

“Although we have just dealt with the 1987 Smokeout, attached is a proposal to deal with next year’s event. Your comments and criticisms would be appreciated.” [GASO.20/p.1]

In Sparber’s proposal he notes:

“Over the years, the Smokeout has become a rallying point for the Society [ACS] and other anti-smoking groups and leaders, as literally thousands of local groups participate.

For ten years, the industry did little to offset the impact of the Great American Smokeout. In 1986 Philip Morris countered with the good natured ‘Great American Smoker’ program. In 1987 The Institute issued the ‘Great American Challenge.’

These more aggressive industry responses drew media attention away from the [GASO] event and reportedly caused concern within the Society.” [GASO.20/p.2]

Sparber concludes by highlighting the underlying objectives of the tobacco industry:

“The industry can ‘rain on the Society’s parade’ if the approach is positive and/or tongue-in-cheek.

The Society will prepare to deal with us as an element of its overall Smokeout planning. If the Smokeout becomes an annual opportunity for us, the Society may revise or even abandon it.” [GASO.20/p.2]

Returning to a familiar industry theme, Sparber employs a spin tactic to frame the GASO as an act of “discrimination against smokers.” The tobacco industry claims the ACS uses the annual GASO to subject “smokers to humiliation and harassment.” He re-emphasizes the long-term objective of the tobacco industry:

“To encourage the American Cancer Society to significantly modify or abandon the Smokeout.” [GASO.20/p.3]

Sparber encourages the tobacco industry to hide their direct involvement in this matter. Listed under STRATEGY, Sparber notes the tobacco industry will:

“Communicate to the public with and through allies so we do not position our program as an industry vs. ACS battle.” [GASO.20/p.3]

Sparber proposes the “Great American Welcome” program theme as a counter to the GASO:

“We propose that on November 17, 1988 – the day of the next smokeout – that we encourage American business to extend a ‘Great American Welcome’ to customers who choose to smoke. 55 million American adults may smoke, but that does not begin to describe their choice of services and products, much less their overall buying power.” [GASO.20/p.4]

Sparber budgets \$555,750 for the proposed program. [GASO.20/p.6]

In a 1987 document, Philip Morris executive Jack Nelson reports on the concerns expressed by ACS officials regarding the counter effects of the tobacco industry’s Great American Smoker Program. From the figures presented by Nelson, it appears the tobacco industry’s Smoker program succeeded in reducing the effectiveness of the ACS public health campaign.

“The ACS’s original statement -- that the Smoker program limited participation in the Smokeout -- remains true despite its efforts to confuse the results” [GASO.6/p.1]

B. Intimidation of GASO Volunteers

Our research reveals Philip Morris cultivated an environment of intimidation surrounding the GASO. In 1992, employees at Kraft inadvertently participated in a local health fair associated with the GASO. Craig L. Fuller, PM, states that:

“To say the least, mistakes were made. Working with Kraft and PM USA, swift action was taken during the day to mitigate the damages.” [GASO.9/p.1]

Jim Kilts, Kraft General Foods, in a letter to Stephen Darrah, Senior Vice President, Operations, PM USA, writes:

“When I learned this morning of Kraft's involvement in Saturday's 'health fair,' I was dumbfounded. I can only imagine how you and the thousands of Philip Morris employees in Richmond felt... It goes without saying, but I want you to know that we have withdrawn from the fair and, as far as we can determine, Kraft in no way will be represented there. My hope is the one newspaper ad will be the sole public mention.” [GASO.9/p.2-5]

C. The Great American Smoker Program

The GASO continued to grow, leading the anti-smoking movement. In a November 1982 Section Operations Report, the low morale of Philip Morris Section Manager Lance Jones is evident:

“The Great American Smoke-Out is upon us – once again – in an attempt to lure the untold thousands away from cigarettes. A newspaper article this week predicted a strong sales decline due to the price increases. A local news program told us our hearts couldn't stand the smoke. A magazine article last month warned that cigarette smoke hurts others more than it does the smoker. A television broadcast assumes that if one smoke, they'll never be able to get a job.” [GASO.10/p.3]

To help combat the effectiveness of the GASO, Philip Morris created the “Great American Smoker” [GAS] program. Guy L. Smith comments in November 1986:

“Our Great American Smoker exercise on Wednesday is meant to be a light-hearted event that gives the country's 60 million smokers a different perspective on the Great American Smokeout scheduled for Thursday.” [GASO.11/p.1]

In a related Philip Morris memo, the Marketing Services Department in December 1986 writes:

“In November, 1976, the American Cancer Society instituted the first 'Great American Smokeout,' calling on the American smokers to quit for one day (with the hope that quitting for one day might lead to quitting permanently). Each year since, the American Cancer Society has set aside one day in November for their smokeout; each year the event gets increasingly more media coverage. [continued on next page]

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"Last year, at a press conference preceding the Smokeout, PM representatives gave the industry's point of view, emphasizing the rights of smokers to use a legal product. Media reaction was good.

This year, PM produced a lighthearted 'Great American Smokers' kit for distribution to smokers (sample enclosed). It was unveiled at a satellite press conference originated in Washington, D.C. and beamed to 13 additional cities. PM also produced a 5 minute video tape of Milton Berle commenting on the issue of freedom of choice (in which he is shown smoking a cigar)." [GASO.12/p.1]

PM extended their counter Great American Smoker project worldwide. In a November 1986 inter-office correspondence, Dick Bedler reports to company management on the activities in countries around the world.

"Attached for your information are transcripts and clippings of news coverage on the Great American Smoker project from Belgium, Italy and Austria." [GASO.17/p.1-8]

The *Washington Post* ran a story titled, "Smoke Protectors," describing how Philip Morris battles the smokeout.

"The battle of the lapel stickers is on. In preparation for today's hyped-up Great American Smokeout, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris yesterday introduced the 'Great American Smoker's Kit.' Inside the red, white and blue envelope are packed goodies such as a 'Great American Smoker's Bill of Rights,' a sign to be hung from an office doorknob advertising, 'Great American Smoker at Work' and lapel stickers saying "Smoking: A Great American Right' and 'Smokers Need Love Too.'" [GASO.13/p.1-2]

Smokers' Rights groups followed the PM lead:

"Smoke-in: Demonic Opposite of American Smoke-Out" [GASO.18/p.1-2]

D. Push Polling

Push polling is a political tactic implemented frequently in closely contested races for public office or as a strategy to influence public opinion on a particular issue. As the process is deceptive, survey researchers condemn the practice. In the push polling scheme, phone solicitors contact select respondents and offer them an opportunity to participate in an opinion study. Rather than conduct a scientific interview, push pollsters attempt to establish credibility by asking a short series of neutral questions. Once interviewers gain the trust of respondents, they ask a series of value-laden items. Push polling succeeds by falsely establishing reputability through the introduction questions. Study participants are left with a tainted, or politically charged, perception of the issue or topic of the interview. Answers provided by respondents are generally biased due to the tainted interviewing technique.

In the industry archives, we found tobacco executives frequently used information gathered by Roper public opinion polls to chart the progress of the GASO. Documents suggest the Roper organization aligns closely with the tobacco industry. We see an example of this as William Kloepper, Jr. writes to representatives of all major U.S. tobacco companies as well as the legal firm of Shook, Hardy & Bacon:

"Thursday will be 'Great American Smokeout' and we are now preparing for clearance release for Thursday's a.m.'s covering news of a phone sample conducted for us by Roper. The adult random sample is 500 persons. We covered six questions relating to the smokeout and other current American Cancer Society activities... We believe the results will be of immediate interest to you and your colleagues." [GASO.8/p.1]

The literature on survey research is replete with examples how the ordering and content of questions as well as interviewer technique can affect responses provided by survey participants. Polling specialists agree it is relatively easy to influence respondents' answers to questions even in rigorous "scientific studies." In the Roper study, the format appears to follow a *push polling* schema. After asking three preliminary questions about ACS activities, Roper's interviewers followed up with a question on the GASO.

"The American Cancer Society spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on events like the 'Great American Smokeout.' Do you think that that money would be better spent on basic cancer research that might ultimately benefit both smokers and non-smokers, or do you think spending it on the Great American Smokeout is more effective use of the money than research?" [GASO.8/p.2]

The preceding is a value-laden question. It begins, "The American Cancer Society spends hundreds of thousands of dollars..." The phrase, "hundreds of thousands of dollars" effectively frames the question. To the average American, "hundreds of thousands of dollars" represents a great deal of money. Roper does not provide a context for this amount of money. The "hundreds of thousands of dollars" might represent half of the annual ACS budget – a large expenditure. On the other hand, the "hundreds of thousands of dollars" likely is only a fraction of the overall ACS mission. Roper does not provide study participants with balanced information.

Second, the question adds, spends hundreds of thousands of dollars “on events like the ‘Great American Smokeout.’” This is clearly an unscientific reference. Is the ACS spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on a sole GASO event or many GASO events? The question implies the ACS initiates many events. Professionally written survey questions eliminate, or remedy, potentially confusing clauses.

An additional clue this is a push poll is the clause associated with part one of the actual question, e.g., on basic cancer research “that might ultimately benefit both smokers and non-smokers.” Roper could have ended with only, “on basic cancer research.” The question would stand without the clause smokers and non-smokers included. We interpret the superfluous additional information as a strategic attempt to bias surreptitiously the answers given by the respondents.

Further, before offering respondents the value-laden question, Roper asked the following:

“Have you ever contributed money or do you plan to contribute money to The American Cancer Society?” [GASO.8/p.1]

Experts on survey design consider this a poorly designed question. As there are two parts, they classify the question as double-barreled. A more scientific approach would be to separate the component into two unique questions, e.g.:

Q1: Have you ever contributed money to the ACS?

Q2: Do you plan to contribute money to the ACS in the future?

Finally, research on survey methodology shows people have a tendency to answer surveys in “socially-acceptable” ways. When asking whether an individual intends to contribute to a charity or public program, many people will tell an unknown interviewer that they intent to. In actuality, research shows us that many will not.

Roper reported that close to 72% of the respondents they questioned answered this *push poll* saying they allegedly preferred the ACS to spend money on basic research rather than the Smokeout. As we know tobacco executives vehemently opposed the GASO, we can assume these were exactly the results the industry wanted for their political purposes. The historical record documents that tobacco officials used these results wherever possible in their attempt to derail the GASO – and *rain on the ACS parade*.

E. The Great American Challenge

Associated with Philip Morris activities, The Tobacco Institute [TI] initiated the “Great American Challenge” [GAC] in 1987 [see GASO.15/p.1]. The Tobacco Institute’s plan was to challenge ACS to allow TI to pay for testing the indoor air quality the employees and volunteers for the ACS breathe [see GASO.16/p.1].

From Samuel D. Chilcote, Jr.’s November 1987 memo to TI Executive Committee, it is clear the Challenge intends to counter the effectiveness of the GASO.

“Media efforts this week have centered around The Institute’s ‘Great American Challenge’ to the American Cancer Society to clean up the air in its smoke free offices during the annual ‘Great American Smokeout.’

The Challenge was issued Tuesday, November 17th via mailgrams to 83 state and local offices of the ACS and newspaper advertisements in USA Today, the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Chicago Tribune, and the Pittsburgh Press. The enclosed press materials outlining the Challenge were distributed to approximately 1,500 media outlets in over 60 cities. A satellite press release was fed to television and radio stations nationwide.

It will take us several days to assess the exact impact and exposure the Challenge received, but after a preliminary review we are able to report that the press expressed a great deal of interest in our activities, and in our message.” [GASO.14/p.1]

Chilcote adds that the Challenge was effective:

“...in that it received rather favorable press reaction as not only a feature story, but as an industry response to the Great American Smokeout. The Challenge provided The Institute with a way to reframe press queries on the Smokeout from a reactive mode on ACS activities to an agenda of The Institute’s choosing.” [GASO.14/p.2]