
Scientology from inside out

A former insider reveals strategies
for managing the news media

by Robert Vaughn Young

They say the first step in any recovery program is the admission, so here it is: I handled public relations (PR) and the media for L. Ron Hubbard and his Scientology empire for 20 years.

It is no accident that I avoid saying "Church of Scientology"—the trademarked corporate name. The Scientology world is much larger than merely the "Church" of Scientology (see "Secular," p. 40). It is a labyrinth of corporate shells that, like a hall of mirrors, was designed to baffle all but the initiated. Add to that an arcane language and dedicated "PRs" trained to divert and control inquiries, and it becomes obvious why few outsiders have been able to comprehend the Scientology hydra, let alone write about it. I hope this will make it easier.

From 1969 to 1989, I worked at every echelon of the organization, from a small, new "mission" up to national and then international level, including handling media in other countries and working at Hubbard's personal literary agency. During my tenure, I handled reporters from high school papers and from *The New York Times*. I have appeared as a Scientology spokesman on radio talk shows and national TV news, as well as in magazines, books, and even a documentary film. I was a member of the Guardian's Office, the pseudo-naval Sea Organization, and the glitzy Author Services Inc., Hubbard's literary agency in downtown Hollywood.

When the FBI raided Church of Scientology Guardian offices in Los Angeles and D.C. in 1977, I was the national spokesman, fielding questions on that day and in the months to come.

When Hubbard's secret international headquarters at Gilman

Hot Springs near Hemet, California, was exposed in 1980, I went in to convert the image of the facility overnight. I gave the Los Angeles ABC-TV affiliate a tour of "Golden Era Productions," the image it still has to this day (see "How to fool the press," p. 41).

When Hubbard died in 1986, I was called to his secret California ranch, arriving well before the authorities were called, to help design and implement the strategy to control the media, as well as to calm his followers.

For my training, I studied and had secret directives from Hubbard and others on how to handle reporters, how to deal with police and government agencies, how to create front groups, and how to discredit or destroy a person or a group with Hubbard's "fair game" doctrine.

I also trained other Scientology PRs on how to handle the media, using material from Hubbard. This included how to respond to a question without answering, how to divert the issue, how to tell "an acceptable truth," how to stall for time, how to assume various emotional states to control another, how to "attack the attacker," how to take control of a conversation, how to introvert a person and how to "get the message across" (especially in an age of sound bites), how to help Scientology attorneys write inflammatory legal papers so the PR could then safely use the abusive phrases, and how to appear to be a religion.

This, in brief, is what a journalist faces when encountering a trained and dedicated Scientology PR. The journalist wants a story. The PR wants to kill the story, or at least control it. While this is not particularly unusual, Scientology goes further than most. Scientology stands ready and able to unleash an assault on the journalist that can include private detectives and lawsuits, making it little wonder that publications have grown reluctant

to write about the Hubbard empire. (See "Shudder into silence," *QUILL*, Nov./Dec. 1991.)

Since Scientologists know how the Fourth Estate operates, it's time the journalist had a chance to learn some of the attitudes, rules, tactics, and tricks known only to Scientology.

1. Your local fanatic. Before talking with any Scientology PR or executive, a journalist must know that he or she will be talking to a fanatic—a person seeking to save the world. This is exactly what Scientologists believe they are doing.

Moreover, unless you stand ready to print a Scientology story exactly as presented, you will be viewed as an enemy, an agent of the American Medical Association (AMA), a mouthpiece of psychiatry, or someone ready "to sell out the human race if his editor told him to"—in the words of a Hubbard policy letter of August 14, 1963. (This is a key Scientology document. Ask a PR to give you a copy. If he declines, it can be found in the green policy volumes available in any Scientology bookstore.)

2. You keeping notes? Know that after your meeting (and after each encounter, including phone calls) the PR will write a debrief. This report will usually be E-mailed to the PR's superior and up the command channel—and probably also into an intelligence area for filing. Therefore, start your own notes of everything that transpires.

3. Image is everything. Realize that when you are dealing with a PR or official of the Church of Scientology, religious image is not only a vital PR defense (the ecclesiastical equivalent of wrapping oneself in the flag) but is also crucial for tax-exemption purposes and for court cases. Thus the PR must be sure to demonstrate that Scientology is "an applied religious philosophy." The PR will have many documents to "prove the religious bona fides" of Scientology (but lack anything to the contrary—such as decisions or rulings—of which he may honestly not know).

4. The shell game. When proving the bona fides, PRs make no distinction among the many Scientology corporations. A Los Angeles organization will parade the acceptance of Scientology in London or St. Louis. But when needed, a complex labyrinth of corporations—a veritable hall of mirrors—comes into play. Suddenly no two Scientology organizations touch. Officials of one will act as if they barely know the officials in another. The reason is, of course, the IRS and the courts.

So try to find out which corporation you're talking to and how it relates to the material you are being given. See if the PR or official is willing to go on-record permeating the corporate shells.

Trying to sort out the relations between the Church of Spiritual Technology, World Institute of Scientology Enterprises, and the Religious Technology Center is like trying to solve a Rubik's Cube. Simply take the shortcut: find the unincorporated Sea Organization (SO). Touted as a "fraternal" organization, the SO is the highest inner circle of Scientology; it was the actual alter ego of Hubbard, the hidden nexus that permeates all corporations. Surprisingly, it has escaped scrutiny.

But asking the SO about the SO is like asking the CIA about the CIA. The difference is the CIA must respond to Freedom of Information Act requests.

5. Say what? Politicians are notorious for responding to a question without answering it; Scientology PRs practice the skill for hours on end. The PR will drill how to answer simple questions about Scientology, how to "no-answer" a question, how to stall for time, and how to attack. (According to the original material, this included shouting, banging the desk, pointing at the reporter, and swearing.)

Thus a seemingly innocuous question such as "What is Scientology?" has already been practiced extensively, and there is a ready answer. More probing questions will produce a "no answer." Therefore a reporter can measure sensitivity by avoidance, and you will find that once you understand this, it is quite easy to spot.

To deal with this, first realize that it is part of the PR's training. Listen carefully to his or her answers. (Better yet, tape the interview.) When the PR tries to avoid the question with a non sequitur, repeat your question. Continue to repeat your question until you actually get an answer. Ask the PR what drills he or she did before your interview, and ask to see current organization policies on handling the media. (Many are publicly available in Scientology bookstores.)

6. A dead what? Depending on your story angle, you can easily find yourself buried by packs of documentation. Some are called "DA [dead agent] packs." Hubbard took the phrase from Sun-tzu's "The Art of War," in which different types of agents are described. The "dead agent" is the one who is caught in a lie. The "DA pack" is supposed to counter a lie (thereby rendering the liar "dead" as a credible source) and usually addresses a particular document, from a newspaper article to a book. It is also used to discredit a person or a group that may be a source of criticism of Scientology.

A DA pack can include anything from Hubbard's writings to a piece of press to an affidavit obtained by a private investigator. The purpose is to refute the targeted piece, person or group at virtually any cost. If the article presents no

Bibliography:

There will be no lack of material from Scientology about the movement. But there are a number of works that the Scientologists will not cite. Among them are:

☛ *Los Angeles Times*, June 24-29, 1990. This is a six-part series by Robert W. Welkos and Joel Sappell. It is the most comprehensive series undertaken by a newspaper.

☛ *Time* magazine, May 6, 1991, "The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power," by Richard Behar.

☛ Jon Atack, "A Piece of Blue Sky: Scientology, Dianetics, and L. Ron Hubbard Exposed" (Carol Publishing Group, 1990). This is the most definitive book available.

☛ Russell Miller, "The Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard" (paperback, Sphere Books Ltd., 1987)

☛ Roy Wallis, "The Road To Total Freedom" (Columbia University Press, 1976). Perhaps because this is a sociological study of Scientology, this is a cold, calm, academic dissection of the subject and Hubbard.

PR Attack

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- ☛ How to respond to a question without answering.
- ☛ How to divert the issue, how to tell "an acceptable truth."
- ☛ How to stall for time.
- ☛ How to easily assume various emotional states to control another.
- ☛ How to "attack the attacker."
- ☛ How to take control of a conversation, how to introvert a person and how to "get the message across."
- ☛ How to help Scientology attorneys write inflammatory legal papers so the PR could then safely use the abusive phrases.
- ☛ How to appear to be a religion."

—Robert Vaughn Young

The Secular Side

Scientology actually has two sides: the religious and the secular. Some may prefer to pursue just the secular side. For example:

☛ **The Way to Happiness Foundation**—This was formed to manage distribution of the Hubbard booklet by the same name that he claimed is a “nonreligious moral code.” Others say it is a covert way of establishing Hubbard’s presence.

☛ **Author Services Inc.** (ASI)—This was established in the early 1980s as a for-profit “full service literary agency” with offices on Hollywood’s Sunset Boulevard. The only catch was that Hubbard was the only author. And every staff member was in the Sea Organization.

☛ **Bridge Publications, Inc.** (BPI)—BPI publishes Hubbard’s books and materials and distributes them to Churches of Scientology as well as to commercial outlets. It is located at the Scientology complex in Hollywood.

☛ **Citizens Commission On Human Rights** (CCHR)—Coordinated out of the Office of Special Affairs, CCHR is perhaps Scientology’s oldest effort in the field of social reform. It does not overtly promulgate Scientology but its connection is not denied. Its purpose is to expose the “crimes” of psychiatry.

☛ **Sterling Management**—A large for-profit management consulting firm in Glendale, Calif., Sterling Management holds “seminars” regularly in cities across the United States. Its primary audience appears to be dentists. It says that it is merely using the “administrative technology” of L. Ron Hubbard to help businesses grow. Others say that it is a covert way of bringing money and new people into Scientology. The issue of the connection between the two is currently under litigation in a Los Angeles Superior Court. It is still in the pre-trial stage.

This is but the beginning. There are many more for-profit groups that claim to use Hubbard technology. They are usually members of the **World Institute of Scientology Enterprises** (WISE) which is licensed by RTC to use Hubbard’s name and materials. WISE issues a directory of members, and other publications (such as the “Who, What, Where” directory in Los Angeles) also promote businesses that are Scientologically-oriented and staffed or run by Scientologists.

—Robert Vaughn Young

clearcut falsehoods or errors but paints Scientology in an unfavorable light, the DA becomes a general reply (usually an attack on the source) that may be issued as a pamphlet, an ad, or an article.

Where possible, verify the claims or documentation. Contact the targeted person, group, or author of the article. Also take note of what is *not* refuted or challenged. In Scientology, omission can be as good as admission.

You can ask to talk to the people who produced the DA pack, but chances are you will not be allowed to, because they are not trained to deal with the media. In Scientology, only trained PRs are supposed to talk to the press. If an exception is made, it will be only those that are proofed up or drilled or have a proven track record of talking to the media about Scientology, and then it is often with a PR present. (A recent example will be found in the September issue of *Premiere*. The reporter was denied access to Hollywood celebrities in Scientology.) If you can do it, find some staff members who will talk to you. Find some field Scientologists to interview. You’ll learn more from them.

7. Go for the gold. In Scientology, there is an exact chain of command. Each organization has one. The public version is supposed to be posted on a large wall of the organization. It should show the local position of your PR. What will not be shown is his or her chain of command.

The media are handled by the Office of Special Affairs, or OSA, in the Church of Scientology. The OSA PR will have a senior on the PR chain of command. If the PR is a local OSA staff member (meaning the PR for a city or area), his or her senior will be at the continental level (such as OSA United States, located in Los Angeles) and then at the “int” or international level (OSA Int is also in L.A.). After that, the chain of command jumps to the Religious Technology Center (RTC). In highly unusual circumstances, an RTC official will intervene to handle a journalist, particularly if it is a crucial story for one reason or another, because RTC monitors all OSA activity and is ultimately responsible for any media on Scientology, whether good or bad.

RTC’s chairman of the board is David Miscavige, who is now the admitted head of the Church of Scientology. His latest intervention will be found in the October issue of *Premiere* magazine. For any story on Scientology, Miscavige is the one to

be interviewed. He lives on the Golden Era Productions property at Gilman Hot Springs. The PR assigned to talk to you will know how to get a message to him. If all else fails, call Golden Era Productions. The personnel there know how to reach him.

Conclusion. Scientology is in a state of siege with psychiatry, the media, and anything else perceived as attacking Hubbard or the organization. It has been that way since Hubbard named them as enemies decades ago. Talk to a Scientology PR long enough, and you may begin to sense something vaguely familiar about the attitude. Walk through a Scientology office, and the proliferation of photographs and busts of Hubbard may strike a familiar chord.

Just substitute “Sea Organization” for “Party” in the following passage, and the chilling parallel may be evident:

“Even the humblest Party member is expected to be competent, industrious, and even intelligent within narrow limits, but it is also necessary that he should be a credulous and ignorant fanatic whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation, and orgiastic triumph. In other words it is necessary that he should have the mentality appropriate to a state of war. It does not matter whether the war is actually happening, and, since no decisive victory is possible, it does not matter whether the war is going well or badly. All that is needed is that a state of war should exist. The splitting of the intelligence which the Party requires of its members, and which is more easily achieved in an atmosphere of war, is now almost universal, but the higher up the ranks one goes, the more marked it becomes. It is precisely in the Inner Party that war hysteria and hatred of the enemy are strongest. In his capacity as an administrator, it is often necessary for a member of the Inner Party to know that this or that item of war news is untruthful, and he may often be aware that the entire war is spurious and is either not happening or is being waged for purpose quite other than the declared ones; but such knowledge is easily neutralized by the technique of double-think. Meanwhile no Inner Party member wavers for an instant in his mystical belief that the war is real, and that it is bound to end victoriously, with Oceania the undisputed master of the entire world.”

—George Orwell, “1984”

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How to fool the press

A study in misinformation

BY ROBERT VAUGHN YOUNG

In nearly 20 years of handling the media for Scientology and Hubbard, I dealt with a lot of journalists. One of the most challenging occurred in 1980, when the *Riverside Press-Enterprise* broke a story by Dick Lyneis that Hubbard was secretly ensconced at a nearby desert resort called Gilman Hot Springs.

Since the FBI raid on Scientology offices in 1977, Hubbard had been the target of an increasing number of process servers and government investigators. His location had become one of Scientology's best-kept secrets. When necessary, Hubbard could move and he did.

But the headquarters of Scientology International in Gilman Hot Springs could not move so easily. Although Hubbard claimed not to be running the Church of Scientology, in fact he did. Here was the seat of the Hubbard Holy Empire, 90 minutes east of Los Angeles. Hubbard was not eager for attorneys, the media, or the Internal Revenue Service to know this.

I was sent in to handle the situation.

As in Clearwater, Florida, Scientology had covertly bought the Gilman Hot Springs property and secretly moved in. The phone book listed it as the "Scottish Highland Quietude Club." Few driving by were interested in the few people who occasionally walked between the buildings.

By the time I arrived, Hubbard had disappeared. Most of the staff he had deserted were terrified because the security he had demanded had been blown. They knew his temper and they feared his wrath.

I toured the property and found a small film-making area and an audiotape production unit, called Golden Era, which was supposed to supply materials to the Church of Scientology. Both had been shut down by Hubbard, but I saw my solution. It was,

as he called it, "an acceptable truth." I obtained L.A.'s approval for my plan.

Through that night and into the morning, the facility was converted. I had the paper covering all the windows taken off. Everything was cleaned. Equipment and desks were rearranged to hide certain tasks and to create others. Tapes, films, scripts, and costumes were dragged out and made obvious. Many international management staff were sent off the base to reduce the number of personnel.

The next day, the "Scottish Highland Quietude Club" had become Golden Era Studios. A media tour went without a hitch. The tape-production area wasn't cranking yet, but I did get people busy making costumes and booklets or doing artwork. We found a makeshift studio that "just happened" to be working when the tour came through. Asked about "international management," I said yes, they did manage distribution of films and tapes, which did go to churches worldwide. No one noticed I had avoided the question and diverted attention to the film and tape production.

The news that night was perfect. The *Riverside Press-Enterprise* story had been countered. Gilman was no longer considered the headquarters of Scientology. It was just a bustling film and tape facility that supplied the Church of Scientology.

When the flap died down, international management quietly moved back in. Since then Golden Era Productions has expanded considerably. There are even guided public tours and PR glitz, including an occasional VIP or Scientology celebrity tour of the tape and film facilities. No one asks about the other function we were able to quietly reinstall after the flap was handled, or the other management organizations that were quietly added.

But they're there, just up the hill from the sound stage, not too far from the spa where the hot springs no longer flow.

Experience talks

Some journalists who have been involved with stories about the world of Scientology were willing to offer their advice on how to approach the subject:

Robert Welkos, *Los Angeles Times*: "It helps to know their PRs, so the reporter is not intimidated. On the organization, it's a hydra-headed monster. I tried to not let it baffle me. I decided not to be concerned with how each piece fit into the big strategy. You'll go nuts if you try to prove this or that is the most important arm of Scientology. And be prepared [for] lot of contact and pressure."

John Richardson, *Premiere Magazine*: "Really do your legwork first. Research the history. And act from the start as if you are already in a lawsuit by being straight, honest and keeping good notes and records. When you get into the interview stage, there will be attempts to trip you up and challenge what you do and say as well as attempts to lay groundwork for a case against you. So watch what you say."

Curtis Krueger, *St. Petersburg Times*: "Know the history. It's good to read "Dianetics" to know the terminology and theory. ... [I]t's a good idea to read books, biographies of Hubbard to know the controversy. It's important background. [On working with Scientology]: Expect a lot of runaround, a lot of delaying to get information. It requires a lot of patience. But if you persist, you'll get it."

Bill Home, *American Lawyer*: "The best tactic is to stick with basic journalistic principles. Go back for fair comment. Take heavy notes. I'd suggest tape. ... If you have to interview, keep in mind their tactic of suing so be prepared. And always research before. I did a lot of calls before contact with the church."

Bill Press, Los Angeles radio and TV commentator: "Be prepared to be harassed. They are very protective and aggressive towards anyone who is writing any story on them. I was at their property on a public sidewalk doing a stand-up, never even talked to anyone in Scientology, returned to the TV station 15 minutes later and before I got there they were on the phone to the news director demanding to know the context and wanting equal time. They're very clever, very skilled at media harassment. I was not prepared for that kind of harassment. I never ever received anything like that from any other source. They're an untold story. They've scared a lot of news off. They're getting away with murder. I say put on your asbestos suit and charge."

—Robert Vaughn Young