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Original article

Avoiding “Truth”: Tobacco Industry Promotion of Life Skills Training

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Abstract:

Purpose: To understand why and how two tobacco companies have been promoting the Life Skills Training program (LST), a school-based drug prevention program recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to reduce youth smoking.

Methods: We analyzed internal tobacco industry documents available online as of October 2005. Initial searches were conducted using the keywords “life skills training,” “LST,” and “positive youth development.”

Results: Tobacco industry documents reveal that since 1999, Philip Morris (PM) and Brown and Williamson (B&W) have worked to promote LST and to disseminate the LST program into schools across the country. As part of their effort, the companies hired a public relations firm to promote LST and a separate firm to evaluate the program. The evaluation conducted for the two companies did not show that LST was effective at reducing smoking after the first or second year of implementing the program. Even so, the tobacco companies continued to award grants to schools for the program. PM and B&W’s role in promoting LST is part of a public relations strategy to shift the “youth smoking paradigm” away from programs that highlight the tobacco industry’s behavior and toward programs in which the industry can be a partner.

Conclusions: Individuals and organizations responsible for developing and implementing tobacco control and youth smoking prevention programs should be aware of PM and B&W’s role and motivations to encourage the wide-spread adoption of LST in schools. © 2006 Society for Adolescent Medicine. All rights reserved.

Keywords:

Tobacco; Adolescent; Prevention; Education; Youth; Smoking; Evaluation; Tobacco control programs

The tobacco industry has used its ineffective Youth Smoking Prevention (YSP) programs worldwide to avoid legislation harmful to the industry’s profits [1–3]. The industry has also used its YSP programs to argue that governments need not establish tobacco control programs [4], to strengthen its relationship with governments [3], and to blame others for youth smoking [5]. Industry created or sponsored YSP programs have involved efforts to prevent youth access to cigarettes (i.e., Philip Morris’ “Action Against Access”), encourage “responsible choices” about

tobacco (i.e., Philip Morris’ “Yo Tengo Poder” [“I’ve got the Power”] [6], and Japan Tobacco International’s “Be cool, be yourself” [1]), as well as programs to promote “responsible parenting (Philip Morris’ *Raising Kids Who Don’t Smoke* brochure series). None of these programs address the role that the tobacco industry plays in encouraging youth smoking through its marketing efforts or includes a strong anti-smoking media campaign [5,7–9]. There is no evidence that industry-sponsored programs were effective at actually reducing smoking [1,10].

In May 1997, after an evaluation process that included an independent board of experts, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health, through its Research to Classroom Project, identified two curricula, *Life Skills Training* (LST) and

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Project Towards No Tobacco Use (TNT) as “Programs that work,” which showed evidence of reducing adolescent tobacco use [11].

After selecting the two programs, the CDC’s Programs That Work website included a curriculum fact sheet for LST and TNT. According to the CDC’s fact sheet, the LST curriculum, developed by Dr. Gilbert Botvin (Director of Cornell University’s Institute for Preventative Research), is based on a person-environment interactionist model that assumes multiple pathways leading toward tobacco, alcohol and drug use [12]. LST was originally developed as a youth smoking prevention approach with the initial evaluation funding coming from several National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants to test its efficacy for preventing smoking. Later, the LST model was extended and tested to determine its impact on alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drugs, as well as on tobacco. The curriculum focuses on social risk factors including media influence and peer pressure, as well as personal risk factors such as anxiety and low self-esteem [12]. Three of LST’s 12 units—Smoking: Myths and Realities, Smoking and Biofeedback, and Advertising—focus primarily on tobacco. One unit focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of the immediate physical consequences and long-term health consequences of smoking. The Advertising unit, which is split between cigarettes and alcohol, seeks to “increase students’ awareness of the techniques employed by advertisers to manipulate consumer behavior and to teach students how to resist these techniques” ([13], p. 10.1) The unit does not address the tobacco industry’s long history of marketing tobacco products to youth.

The other educational program recognized by the CDC, Project TNT, concentrates exclusively on tobacco use. The theory behind TNT is that young people will be best able to resist using tobacco products if they (1) are aware of misleading social information that facilitates tobacco use; (2) have skills to counteract the social pressures to achieve approval by using tobacco; and (3) appreciate the physical consequences of tobacco on their own lives (e.g., beginning of addiction) [14]. TNT is a 10-day social program that examines media celebrity, and peer portrayal of tobacco use in 10 core lessons and two booster sessions one year later.

In 1998, the year after the CDC identified these two programs as “effective,” the proposed “global settlement” of all public and private litigation against the tobacco industry that would have effectively immunized the industry from future litigation in the United States, collapsed [15]. During this time, the industry sought new opportunities to gain public support and credibility and to protect itself against future litigation [16]. In November 1998, The Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) signed by the four major tobacco companies and 46 state attorneys general in the United States made an estimated \$200 billion available to the participating states over the first 25 years [17]. The states were not required to spend the money in a particular

way, but many states did announce intentions to spend part of it on tobacco control programs [18]. In 1999, the CDC issued a *Best Practices* guide [19] to encourage states to take a comprehensive approach to their respective tobacco control efforts by including multiple components. However, because the reality is that most states spend much less on tobacco control than recommended by the CDC [18], school-based programs compete with other tobacco control interventions, such as media campaigns and community-based programs, for the limited tobacco control resources.

This article examines Philip Morris’ (PM) and Brown and Williamson’s (B&W) promotion both domestically and internationally—often through third parties—of LST as part of a complex corporate and government affairs strategy. LST fit the companies’ youth smoking prevention criteria because its recommendation from the CDC would improve the public’s perception of the industry and because LST focuses on risk factors peer pressure and low self-esteem as well as marijuana and alcohol in addition to tobacco. Finally, except for part of a single unit on advertising, LST fails to highlight the tobacco industry’s behavior as an important contributor to youth smoking. After the MSA, LST provided the tobacco companies with a channel to suggest directing MSA and other state tobacco control funds into LST and other positive youth development prevention programs and away from programs that directly confront the industry [8,20–25].

Methods

We analyzed internal tobacco industry documents available online (legacy.library.ucsf.edu and ltdlftd.library.ucsf.edu) using standard techniques [26]. Exhaustive searches were conducted using the snowball method from May 2004 to October 2005, beginning with the keywords “life skills training,” “LST,” and “positive youth development,” followed by searches of key individuals (e.g., Botvin) and organizations (e.g., Princeton Health Press) identified in the initial searches. We also searched adjacent Bates (identifying) numbers for important documents to find related materials that may not have been well indexed.

Results

Choosing Life Skills Training

A memorandum from Haney H. Bell (Lorillard Tobacco Associate General Counsel) on April 29, 1998 to Dr. A. W. Spears (Lorillard CEO) explains that because of the collapse of the global settlement, the tobacco industry had set up a Task Force on youth smoking [16] consisting of executives from the major U.S. tobacco companies. According to Bell, Mike McGraw, the chief legal officer for British American Tobacco (BAT) and its American subsidiary Brown and Williamson (B&W), began the initial Task Force meeting

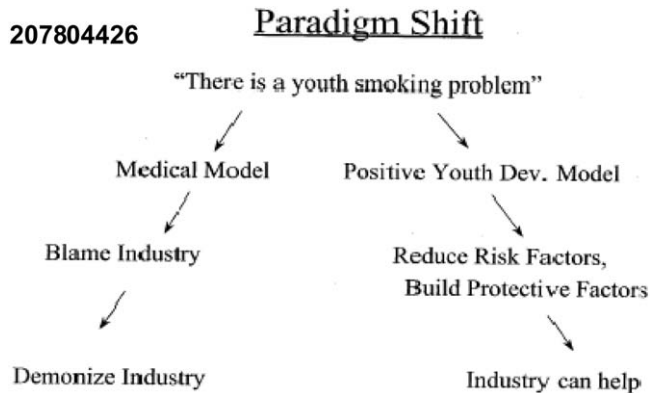


Figure 1. This slide, from a 1999 Philip Morris (PM) “Key Initiative Update,” describes how it hoped to use its youth smoking prevention strategy as it sought a “paradigm shift” [30] away from the “medical model,” such as the California Tobacco Control Program [31], which highlights the industry’s deceptive behavior to a “positive youth development model” that permits the industry to be viewed as a partner in reducing youth smoking. PM selected Life Skills Training (LST) because it believed that LST supported this objective.

by stating that “The parent company CEOs’ had expressed the desire to ‘do something big’ regarding youth smoking in conjunction with the announcement that the Industry was ending its participation in the Congressional ‘settlement’ negotiations” [16]. In contrast to the widely accepted view among public health professionals [27], all Task Force members agreed “that cigarette advertising was not a significant factor in influencing kids to smoke” [28]. A Task Force Report in July 1998 stated that the objective was “to explore and evaluate alternatives for jointly sponsored national initiatives to reduce teenage tobacco use” and that the *Life Skills Training* was “the vehicle that meets and exceeds all of our objectives” [29].

A 1999 Philip Morris Key Initiative Update [30] identified as a “problem” that its credibility was low. It proposed as a “solution,” building credibility by shifting the “Youth Smoking Paradigm” away from the so-called “medical model” that highlighted industry behavior to a “positive youth development” in which the tobacco industry would be viewed as a potential partner (Figure 1). What PM called the “medical model” was not programs centered on the health effects of smoking, but ones that focused on the behavior of the tobacco industry, such as the California Tobacco Control Program [31] and, later, the “truth” campaign developed in Florida [32] and extended by the American Legacy Foundation [7].

If successful, such a shift would move tobacco control programs away from the “industry manipulation” theme, which has proven successful in large-scale state tobacco programs [8,20–23]. It would also serve to strengthen the industry’s relationship with youth-serving organizations and build the industry’s credibility as socially responsible, which the industry viewed as a way to allow the tobacco companies to participate in discussions on youth smoking

and tobacco policy in general [33]. The Task Force believed that LST met these objectives and outlined opportunities and future steps to promote and implement the program [29], which, according to a copy of a 1998 version of the LST website found in a Lorillard External Relations file, was not well known to most schools at the time [34].

By the time the Industry Task Force issued its report in July 1998, at least one member of the Task Force had reported a meeting with LST developer Gilbert Botvin and stated that, “Dr. Botvin has a high level of interest in working with the tobacco industry to help kids by extending the use of his program” [29]. Botvin did express concern about working with the tobacco industry. A September 16, 1998 letter from Corky Newton (B&W Vice President, Corporate and Youth Responsibility Programs) to Botvin described how the industry would deal with his concerns:

We certainly understand your concerns over having any close association with the Tobacco Industry, and promise to be careful to avoid putting you in a position which could reflect negatively on you or your program [35].

Although PM and B&W were committed to promoting and institutionalizing LST and working with Botvin, the Task Force’s proposal to support the program did not generate a consensus among all the tobacco companies. On August 7, 1998, Lorillard’s Bell reported to Spears that she and Carolyn Brinkley (Manager of Public Affairs, R.J. Reynolds [RJR]) felt that because of “legislative, regulatory, and litigation uncertainties” it was premature to fund the Task Force LST project. Bell noted that the proposed budget, to be split by the companies, would be around \$10 million to put the program into the nation’s schools. The proposed budget, Bell explained, would include \$5.8 million to influence decision-makers and around \$3.3 million to train teachers, as well as \$300,000 for an outside firm to develop an “implementation plan” [36]. Without financial support from RJR and Lorillard, PM and B&W continued with the Task Force plan to implement LST in schools nationwide.

The implementation of Life Skills Training

The “outside firm” PM and B&W chose to develop the implementation plan for the LST project was APCO Associates Inc. APCO is a “full-service public affairs, program development and strategic communications consulting firm” [37] founded in 1984 by the Washington, DC-based law firm Arnold & Porter (which represents the tobacco industry). APCO was acquired in 1991 by Grey Advertising (one of the largest communication firms in the world) whom, at the time of the proposal, was handling BAT’s worldwide advertising [37]. In its November 20, 1998 proposal to the Industry Task Force on Youth Smoking Prevention, APCO highlighted its extensive work for the tobacco industry on issues ranging from the industry’s sponsorship of social programs to tort reform, and explained the firm’s “sustained

trusting partnership with the tobacco industry” as an “intermediary with targeted external audiences” [37].

APCO’s proposal to the Task Force “to assist with an effort to significantly expand utilization of the *Life Skills Training Program* in schools across the United States” [37] listed three main objectives:

- To develop and implement a plan to significantly expand utilization of the LST program in middle schools and junior highs across the United States;
- Measure and document LST’s efficacy in reducing youth risk behaviors, including smoking, and the project’s efficacy in achieving expansion goals (qualitatively measuring the success the firm had expanding the utilization of LST); and
- *Protect the program’s integrity against possible adverse reactions to tobacco industry sponsorship* [37] [emphasis added]

In January 1999, PM and B&W hired APCO [38]. APCO’s job included:

identification of an appropriate role for Dr. Botvin, taking into account his reputation and the Life Skills Training program’s reputation, identification of an appropriate management structure for implementation of the Project, and development of a plan for proceeding with sponsorship if Dr. Botvin elects not to be actively involved [38].

For the first six months, APCO’s fees were capped at \$60,000 per month, with up to an additional \$15,000 per month for expenses [39]. In June, the agreement was amended to extend through December 1999 [40].

West Virginia: statewide LST

APCO, on behalf of PM and B&W, worked through a key decision-maker in West Virginia: State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Henry Marockie. In May 1999, Marockie accepted money from the two companies on behalf of the state to implement the LST curriculum on a statewide basis [41]. On May 21, 1999, Marockie sent a memorandum to the Faculty Senate Chairs of West Virginia schools announcing that “special funds targeted for school-based prevention programs” had become available on a statewide basis [41]. He did not mention that “special funding” for training teachers on LST was directly from PM and B&W.

A May 26, 1999 letter from Marockie to APCO’s Ellen Mignoni (Senior Vice President, Director, Corporate Community Strategies) explains that a draft agreement between the West Virginia Department of Education (WV DOE) and APCO was ready to be sent to Carolyn Levy (Senior Vice President, PM YSP) for discussion and approval [42]. The draft stipulated that APCO and the parties it represented (PM and B&W) would provide funding for the use of LST curriculum for three years beginning in June 1999 [43].

The June 3, 1999 press conference, which announced PM and B&W as the funding source, did receive criticism. The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, a national tobacco control advocacy group, issued a press release denouncing the WV DOE decision to accept tobacco industry funds [44]. The Associated Press [45] and *Charleston Gazette* [46] reported that PM and B&W were providing \$4.5 million to the WV DOE to implement LST over three years and mentioned Tobacco Free Kids’ criticism.

A discussion draft of talking points for PM on the June 3 announcement found in PM’s Manager of Communications Corporate Affairs files highlights that PM should argue that:

Today’s announcement by Governor (Name) of West Virginia is a major step forward in making available life skills training curricula emphasizing youth smoking prevention in the educational setting. Philip Morris U.S.A is proud to provide, with other members of the tobacco industry, a grant that will enable the highly successful Life Skills Training Program to be offered to sixth graders throughout the state of West Virginia [47].

PM planned to highlight that LST was a program developed independently of the tobacco industry [47] and that it had been chosen as one of only two “programs that work” by the CDC and had been rated highly effective by the American Medical Association [47].

On June 4, Newton e-mailed Botvin regarding a number of issues including the news conference. She wrote:

Hi Gil,

Glad to hear you’ve been having some productive talks with APCO regarding training for the Life Skills Training program and other issues.

Apparently we have made good progress in West Virginia, and are very close to signing an agreement for funding the LST program in all of their middle schools, including the costs of teacher training and materials for students and teachers. (This news is particularly timely since the agreement was announced by the Governor of West Virginia yesterday in a news conference) [48].

The next day Botvin responded to B&W’s Newton:

I received an e-mail from APCO regarding the impending announcement by the Governor of WV and then a copy of the press release from Bill Novelli and Matt Meyers. So, I’m aware of what’s happening down there. It sounds like you are indeed making progress [48].

In the same June 4 e-mail, Newton expressed PM and B&W’s desire to have an independent third-party measurement of the effectiveness of the program’s expansion. In his response, although wary of third-party evaluators with inappropriate credentials, Botvin agreed to provide a copy of his research instrument to the evaluator and to discuss design methodology [48].

On June 10, 1999, Levy sent Marockie a check for \$1,292,796 for the first year of implementation [49]. The

accompanying letter noted that in addition to funding the implementation of the program, the companies would be paying for an independent evaluator to provide annual and final evaluation of LST in West Virginia [49].

PM's Media Affairs Department sent approved talking points on PM's funding of the program to the *Charleston Daily Mail* and the *Charleston Gazette*, which ran stories on June 17 [50]. In the June 17 article in the *Daily Mail*, PM spokesperson Brendan McCormick said that the company had no hidden agenda and repeated well-established industry rhetoric [1] that PM simply wanted to reduce underage smoking. McCormick said that PM realized that they had a long way to go in terms of being credible on this issue and asked that PM be "judged by our actions" [51].

Expanding the project

In December 1999, APCO sent a report to PM and B&W on the first year's results of the national LST project, along with future strategies and goals. During the initial months of work, APCO reported that they worked on "[d]evelopment of marketing opportunities for both the program and Dr. Botvin as the key spokesperson for LST, including re-design of the program brochure and creation of other marketing materials" [52].

According to APCO, during the preceding six months they had approximately 35 meetings with school officials across the country (state superintendents, school board members, state legislators and school substance abuse and health specialists) (Table 1). APCO reported that schools initially contacted that showed concern about funding from the tobacco industry were not invited to submit proposals. Based on the number of grant proposals that had been approved by PM and B&W, APCO concluded that in the first year its expansion effort reached 75,453 sixth and seventh graders, 2950 teachers, and 572 schools at an average cost (paid by the companies through grants) of \$50.72 per student [52].

Evaluating Year 1

In July 1999, PM's Levy wrote Dale Mann, Managing Director of Interactive Inc., an education evaluation firm, requesting a proposal to evaluate the national implementation of LST [53]. In August, Interactive sent Levy and B&W's Newton a revised research plan that was "more responsive to the needs of the LST evaluation sponsors (PM and B&W)" [54]. The proposal planned to set up two advisory boards: a research board and a policy board, which could help advise the firm on their research and on policy possibilities to make LST more widespread.

On January 27, 2000, Interactive sent a progress report to PM and B&W that included an initial West Virginia statewide analysis and discussions on methods, sampling, and initial relations with LST training sites across the country. Marockie, who at the time was still West Virginia Super-

Table 1
APCO outreach status chart December 1999 [52]

Schools/school district	Agreement to participate	Number of schools
Arizona Charter School	Pending	8
Arizona Public Schools	Yes	2*
Baton Rouge, LA	Yes	21
Bibb County, GA	Declined	
Boston Catholic	Yes	10
Cabarrus County, NC	Pending	
Charlotte/Mecklenburg Private Schools	Declined	
Charlotte/Mecklenburg Public Schools	Delayed	
Cherry Hill, NJ	Pending	
Chesterfield County, VA	Yes	11
Chicago Catholic	Yes	TBD
Chicago Public Schools	Declined	
Cold Springs Harbor, NY	Pending	
Denver, CO	Declined	
Espanola, NM	Yes	1
Hanover County, CA	Pending	
Hartford, CT	Delayed	
Henrico Country, VA	Pending	
Indian Valley, OH	Yes	1
Jefferson County Catholic	Yes	32
Kannapolis Schools, NC	Pending	
Milwaukee, WI	Yes	55
New Mexico (state)	Pending	
New York District 6	Yes	20
New York District 17	Yes	10
New York Catholic	Yes	10
Pojoaque, NM	Yes	1
Pomona, CA	Declined	
Richmond Public Schools	Yes	10
Richmond Catholic Schools	Pending	
San Diego, CA	Declined	
Tennessee (state)	Yes	198
Twiggs County, GA	Declined	
West Virginia (state)	Yes	205
Wilson County, NC	Declined	

* More expected.

intendent of Schools, served as paid (by PM and B&W through Interactive [55]) Chair of the LST Policy Advisory Board [56].

On August 21, 2000, Interactive produced its Year 1 Evaluation of the LST implementation project [57]. The evaluation used a longitudinal design beginning with three groups of sixth grade students: 1985 from a "national sample" drawn from programs in 24 states (excluding West Virginia) that were implementing LST through APCO's efforts, 2452 students from West Virginia (the only state to implement LST statewide), and 547 students in a national "control group" ([57], p. 18, 21). The experimental design was to compare the results in the national and West Virginia LST sites on tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use over time and between the intervention and control sites ([57], p. 15). The results showed that there was no change in the social acceptability of smoking ([57], p. 35), the variable that showed the strongest correlation with smoking ([57], p. 35–37), after completing the LST curriculum [57]. Al-

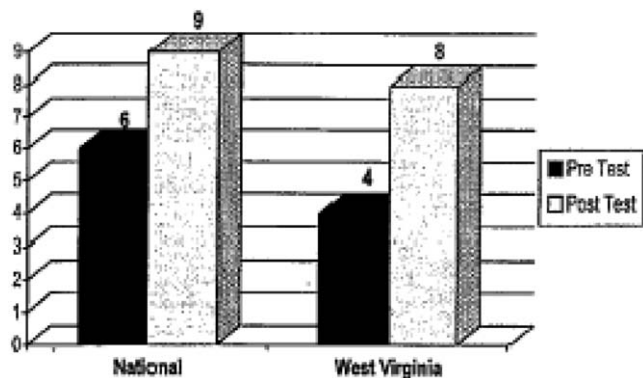


Figure 2. According to the longitudinal evaluation conducted for Philip Morris and Brown & Williamson, prevalence of cigarette use in the last 30 days increased among sixth graders after completing the first year of the Life Skills Training curriculum ([57], p. 26). The data were collected in 1999–2000.

though Interactive did find a statistically significant increase in knowledge about the physiological effects of smoking in both the national and West Virginia samples, it also found *reductions* in decision-making skills. Interactive reported increases in 30-day cigarette use after LST in both the national and West Virginia samples compared with pretest [57] (Figure 2).

Interactive attributed this increase in smoking (and other behaviors that LST was designed to reduce) to the fact that, as students get older, they engage in more of these behaviors ([57], p. 22–23). Interactive could have tested the hypothesis that LST slowed the increase in smoking by comparing the results obtained in the national sample with the 547 students in the control group, but did not report this comparison. Interactive’s explanation for failing to use the control group was that it was different demographically from the national sample ([57], p. 17). However, the results in an appendix to the report show virtually identical 30-day smoking rates in the national sample and control group (7% vs. 6%, $p = .47$) [57]. Interactive’s report does not explain why it decided not to make this comparison or why it selected control groups that differed from the intervention.

Interactive also included detailed recommendations on how APCO could more effectively disseminate LST ([57], pp. 61–63) The primary barriers for dissemination beyond what was being supported by the tobacco industry through APCO identified by Interactive were the failure of the states to allocate substantial MSA funds to tobacco prevention and the high cost of LST (\$42 per student per annum, compared with \$16 for Project TNT) [57].

LST outreach

To promote LST nationally, PM planned to market LST to key audiences including civic leaders, board members, educators, the “youth serving community” [58] (It is not clear if B&W was involved.) A September 7, 2000 PM

discussion draft titled Youth Smoking Prevention Media Plan presents national tactics to:

- Use national and state education publications to generate news coverage of the opportunity for school districts to use MSA funding to support Life Skills Training.
- Reach out to education or teacher-oriented web sites to increase awareness of Life Skills Training [58].

PM also paid for at least one LST print advertisement. According to PM documents, Princeton Health Press (PHP), the company that publishes LST curriculum, was willing to accept the tobacco industry’s financial help advertising the program as long as the connections were not direct. In April 2000, Karen Daragan (Director PM YSP Programs) e-mailed Henry Fernandez (PM Youth Smoking Prevention) and Ellen Mignoni (APCO) about advertising the program, including paying the costs for expanding LST’s advertising [59]. Following-up two months later, Fernandez explained that:

Carrie [Williams, Youth Smoking Prevention Employee, PM Management Company] has been talking with Mignoni [APCO] about the employee suggestion that we advertise in Curriculum Administrator magazine. Mignoni ran it past Princeton Health Press, and it looks like *as long as we don’t want to create our own ad, and put PM’s name on it, they would be willing to accept this in-kind gift. In fact, they asked if we would be interested in paying for more advertising for the program.* This was a pleasant surprise. This is an additional way to support LST long-term . . . pay for marketing and merchandising of the program among curriculum administrators and policy makers, etc. They [PHP] will be forwarding their current media plan [60]. [emphasis added]

On June 15, 2000 Mignoni wrote Williams:

. . . I spoke to Steve Brod at PHP (he is the go to guy on these types of issue for Dr. Botvin). According to Steve, Dr. Botvin is ok with the company doing a one-time placement through APCO. If you are talking about a more aggressive campaign – several publications with multiple ads – he would like to talk to you [61].

On June 21, 2000, Williams responded with suggestions for other ways that PM could help PHP market LST. Her suggestions included placing additional ads in magazines and disseminating the brochure to targeted mailing lists, including middle school principals [62]. The next day Fernandez reported that he planned on providing an “expanded marketing, outreach plan—costs, venues, etc.” in preparation for a meeting with PHP’s Steve Brod on June 29, 2000 [63]. For the meeting with PHP, PM worked with their public relations firm, Burson-Marsteller, to draft a new marketing plan for LST and PHP [64,65].

In July 2000, according to a letter Fernandez wrote APCO’s Farr, Botvin would have no objections if PM were to market the program on its own. Fernandez wrote:

When Dr. Botvin met with me and others in NY, I mentioned to him PM's desire to help "market" the program. Basically, as we all agree, he wants to remain independent from the tobacco companies. If Philip Morris paid for marketing the program on our own—without Dr. Botvin collaborating, similar to how we have awarded schools funds to pay for LST, I understand Dr. Botvin would have no objections [66].

According to Fernandez, PM wanted to do a "test" by placing an ad in the September/October issue of *Curriculum Administrator* magazine. Nothing about PM would appear in the ad, which would be the same as one PHP had already placed in *Education Week* [65].

On July 7, 2000 Fernandez e-mailed Daragan and Levy to clarify the situation between PM, Botvin and PHP:

APCO, Carrie [Williams, PM] and I have spoken with Steve Brod from PHP, and we are working on a mechanism to better market LST with PM support yet independent from PHP. *Botvin does NOT want PM to directly pay for marketing; S. Brod suggested that perhaps it can be done through a third party.* We do not yet have a clear understanding of what is comfortable with Dr. Botvin . . .

[We] are working not only how to place the ad in that journal but also how to market LST [67]. [emphasis added]

On August 28, 2000, Fernandez ordered a full-page LST ad to appear in the October 2000 issue of *Curriculum Administrator* at a cost of \$6302.75 [68]. On October 19, Steve Broad (PHP) e-mailed Fernandez to tell him that PHP "only had several calls in response to the *Curriculum Administrator* ad" and that he wished there were more [69]. We were not able to locate any more evidence of ads paid for by PM.

Evaluating Year 2

The Interactive Year 2 Report delivered to PM and B&W in September 2001 posed two major questions: "How effective is LST?" and "How might LST be more widely adopted?" [70].

In terms of program effectiveness, the Year 2 data confirmed LST's discouraging results from the Year 1 report [70]. Compared with the baseline measurements taken before starting the program, students' knowledge of the physiological effects increased significantly in the national sample, but in West Virginia, knowledge actually decreased significantly ([70], p. vi). In both the national and West Virginia samples, scores for refusal and decision-making skills decreased significantly ([70], p. vi–vii) Consistent with these findings, 30-day cigarette use continued to increase (to 12% in the national sample and 11% in West Virginia) ([70], p. 53).

As with the Year 1 report, Interactive did not use the control data they had collected, again arguing that there were unspecified differences between the control group and the intervention groups. In an e-mail to fellow PM YSP

executives, Fernandez identified the lack of control groups as "the most important methodological issue" of the evaluation [71].

Although Interactive attempted to present its results in a positive light, it did recognize that after Year 2, "We are not at the point in the evaluation where conclusions about outcomes are supportable." To do that, Interactive reported that they needed data for all three years ([70], p. 45).

Despite the evidence from the first two years of implementation that their LST project was not significantly reducing youth smoking—and its own concerns about this point—Interactive's Year 2 report continued to identify how PM and B&W could further disseminate LST. Interactive highlighted the importance of the fact that the "CDC-endorsed status" of LST facilitated adoption and deflected controversy associated with the tobacco industry's involvement:

. . . Schools are not as rational as some might wish. Anecdotal evidence, "windshield surveys" were just as compelling as YRBS survey [the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted in cooperation with the states] results for encouraging adoption In any case, a lack of quantified data of need was not a barrier to adoption.

. . . *They [schools] were encouraged in that by the relative absence of controversy: only half the sites experienced controversy . . . The federal government-endorsed status of LST helped manage any controversy and make the program 'safe' to recommend.*

. . . there is a reason to be encouraged about continued adoption, with or without subsidies from the Companies. *Only one site mentioned the Master Settlement Agreement as a source of funding and that suggests an information campaign yet to be completed* [70]. [emphasis added]

The report also explained that school administrators kept the adoption of the "program off public agendas to avoid triggering opposition" [70]. A Year 3 Report could not be located in the industry documents. We were unable to locate any evidence that the West Virginia Department of Education continued to use the LST program.

Directing MSA funds toward LST

A goal of PM and B&W's was to direct state MSA money toward the LST program, as articulated in a July 27, 1999 memo:

Ultimately, we [PM] hope that the effectiveness of the program will convince state legislatures throughout the country to use a significant portion of their Master Settlement Agreement funds to support youth smoking prevention efforts, including support of programs like LST [72].

By June 2001, PM was working to direct MSA funding toward LST through a matching-grants initiative with the objective of having states eventually fund the program

themselves, the purpose of which is clearly defined in an e-mail to employees at PM State Government Affairs Department:

This year, PMUSA/Youth Smoking Prevention set aside funds for several grants to states to stimulate the use of the Life Skills Training (LST) curriculum. These grants are up to \$1 million per state, with a matching requirement by the state.

. . . The purpose of these LST grants is to motivate state departments of education or health to place a line item in its budget for LST/Smoking Prevention. We are asking that the state match dollar-for-dollar our grant. Those state funds could come from MSA, foundations, general funds, or other sources. We would prefer that the states pay for the full price of LST implementation, but that may only happen in only a couple of states [73].

In December 2001, APCO announced to LST grant recipients that PM and B&W agreed to offer grants to support the full cost of Training of Trainer workshops made available through National Health Promotion Associates (Botvin's consulting firm) or other qualified training providers [74]. Even though the evaluation funded by PM and BAT had not demonstrated that LST significantly reduced youth smoking, APCO announced that the two companies were offering Year 4 matching grants on a 1:1 matching basis to grantee sites that had already implemented three years of LST [74].

On January 14, 2002, PM's Fernandez suggested that the company monitor the Year 4 grantees' success at raising the matching funds and suggested awarding LST grants to YSP priority states [75]. PM's State Government Affairs YSP priority rankings seem to be based on a number of factors, including a state's share of MSA money and the CDC *Best Practices* [19] recommended state tobacco control funding level [76]. PM YSP's "single most important initiative for 2002" as determined by the "PM USA Senior Team" was "to gain additional funding to spend towards positive youth development" [77]. As of October 2005, the PM website reports that between 1999 and 2004, the company "provided over \$26 million to schools and school districts in 23 states for the implementation of Life Skills Training." The website also claimed that because of PM support, "more than 630,000 middle-school students have been reached with this program" [78].

Global intentions

In addition to their work in the United States, the two tobacco companies have explored opportunities to promote their vision of positive youth development and LST internationally. A May 23, 2000 e-mail from Newton (B&W) to colleagues at BAT, PM International, Japan Tobacco International, and PM (Carolyn Levy), explains the tobacco industry's involvement and the importance of sponsoring third-party allies to promote programs that don't indict tobacco industry behavior:

I'm writing to further articulate my strong belief that *working with third-party organizations* could be an extremely positive component of youth smoking prevention programs in many countries . . .

We don't even have to agree with all of the content of the programs that we sponsor. We only have to agree that they are likely to be effective in preventing youth smoking. The way to know this is to be sure such programs are designed based on solid research that has been conducted about risk factors and protective factors, about the importance of connections to school and family, and about the reasons why kids take risks.

This research base is widely available and highly consistent regarding the root causes/underlying factors about youth smoking and a range of other youth risk behaviors. *This data does not indict advertising as a cause of such behaviors, nor does it indict tobacco company behavior* [79]. [emphasis added]

The same day, Newton wrote to BAT Russia Corporate Affairs describing "the research study we are sponsoring for the Life Skills Training project here in the US" [80]. Newton explained that the company conducting the evaluation was Interactive and that the head of the project, Dale Mann, "happens to have extensive experience working in Russia." Newton continued to explain that Mann was "close personal friends and allies" with Victor Bolotoff (deputy prime minister) and Dr. Konstatin Usahkov (director for the Russian Federal Institute for the UpGrading of Educational Professionals in Moscow) [80].

Three days later, Newton sent an e-mail to Botvin to report the new "international fame among a new coalition of tobacco companies" [81]. There is no indication of a concern that there was no evaluation data showing that LST would work in the former Soviet Union, where the socioeconomic conditions—and level of aggressive tobacco industry advertising—is quite different from in the United States. On the other hand, the companies did view their involvement promoting youth smoking prevention internationally as a way to promote themselves as socially responsible [33]. In face of the negotiations of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control [33], this strategy duplicates what they had planned to do in the United States after the collapse of the global settlement agreement in 1998.

Discussion

PM and B&W's promotion of the *Life Skills Training* program in the United States is a continuation of its long-standing strategy of promoting "youth smoking prevention" programs [1] to compete with tobacco control programs run by states and other public agencies. There are several reasons that the LST program may be acceptable to the tobacco industry. Relatively little of the LST program is focused on reducing tobacco use directly. In contrast to a program like TNT that focuses exclusively on tobacco, the tobacco ele-

ment is diluted by the “poly drug” approach LST takes. PM has also used its support of LST as defense against litigation [82]. PM government affairs experts had a strategic goal to direct MSA (and other tobacco control funds) toward LST and programs like it to avoid “demonizing” the tobacco industry (Figure 1).

The tobacco industry’s role in promoting and implementing LST in schools across the United States has not been entirely disclosed. The two tobacco companies have worked through third parties similar to the way the industry has worked through the hospitality industry to oppose smoke-free policies [83–91].

Likewise, LST has downplayed the connection between LST and the two tobacco companies. In January 2005, the LST program’s website stated that, “We have never accepted funding from any tobacco company for the evaluation, updating, promotion, or for any other aspect of the *Life Skills Training* (LST) program” [92]. This statement, although true, is misleading. There is evidence that PM paid for a LST ad in *Curriculum Administrator* magazine. Furthermore, PM and B&W, both directly and through a public relations firm, have worked to encourage schools across the United States to purchase LST with their company grants. PM’s long-term goal was that schools would eventually fund the program on their own using tobacco control funding sources, particularly the MSA. We were unable to determine how successful they have been in accomplishing this goal and to determine how much MSA funds, if any, have been directed to pay for such school programs.

The industry’s evaluation

A key element of PM and B&W’s success in promoting LST has been its recognition as “effective” by the CDC. The large independent evaluation of LST that PM and B&W commissioned [57,70] did not provide evidence that LST reduced youth smoking in real world implementation. This evaluation found, both in the national sample and when implemented throughout an entire state (West Virginia) that, although LST was associated with an increase in knowledge of the health effects of smoking, decision-making skills actually moved in the wrong direction. These process findings are consistent with the observations that despite exposure to LST, there was an associated increase in 30-day smoking prevalence consistent with overall national patterns for middle school students (9.2% in 1999 [93] to 11% in 2000 [94]). The fact that the two tobacco companies continued to promote LST in the face of this evidence and the fact that Interactive did not publish the results, raises questions about the tobacco industry’s commitment to reducing youth smoking.

Global implications

There is no evidence that school-based programs focusing on youth development would be more successful in

other countries than in the United States. In Canada, a similar program was shown not to work [95].

Globally, PM and BAT have worked to promote their vision of positive youth development directly with government officials. In many ways the industry efforts outside the United States mirror what was done there before public suspicion of the industry developed. Philip Morris International’s Youth Access Prevention programs in Australia, Hungary, Russia, Japan and the United Kingdom [96] are identical to U.S. programs that have been criticized as counterproductive [97]. In Malaysia, the tobacco industry launched programs to offset tobacco control legislation while still heavily targeting the teenage market [3].

Both PM and BAT, and in addition, Japan Tobacco International, promote their support of these programs as part of their social responsibility and global corporate citizenship [33]. In Australia, the tobacco industry’s current policy is consistent with their support of LST. The industry works to blame others for youth smoking and frame the industry as socially responsible through their voluntary marketing codes, youth access programs, and school education programs [5]. The WHO Tobacco Free Initiative recommends that government and nongovernment organizations avoid partnering with the industry YSP programs because the programs have been proven ineffective and are used to leverage governments to opt for weaker legislation [98].

Limitations

One important limitation of this research is that Philip Morris destroyed e-mails related to its youth smoking prevention programs [99], which may limit the completeness of the picture of its activities related to this area that are reflected in the tobacco industry documents. A final limitation is that we did not conduct interviews with the players identified in the documents.

Conclusion

The LST story illustrates the conundrum that groups like the CDC have in recommending programs when recommendations are not updated regularly. The Programs That Work recommendation was one aspect of the broader CDC *Best Practices* [19] guidelines for administrators in the United States. Importantly, these guidelines were developed before there was evidence that aggressive campaigns such as the “truth” campaign that include strong media elements and highlight the tobacco industry’s behavior, have rapid and substantial effects on youth smoking [8,20–23]. The CDC and other similar guidelines need to be updated to reflect improved understanding of the relative efficacy of different tobacco control strategies. The tobacco industry benefits from promoting LST whether it works or not because doing so provides the industry with good public relations (unless it

is challenged by public health authorities) and a mechanism to displace more aggressive tobacco prevention programming. Individuals and organizations responsible for developing and implementing tobacco control programs need to be aware of the tobacco industry's role and motivation behind promoting the LST program.

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