



AHC GROUP, INC.

Featured in



Bruce Piasecki

The insider environmentalist

Saratoga Springs — Meeting **Bruce Piasecki** is like stepping back in time and encountering someone from a bygone era. But determining the proper historical timeframe in which to place this former **RPI** professor is a perplexing task, until one observes his surroundings more closely.

A closer inspection reveals this setting: an office in an old Victorian house in the historic Franklin Square district of Saratoga, complete with the ancient and creaking wooden floors. Papers, magazines and journals stacked on a massive table, surrounded by eight-foot high shelves crammed with assorted books and eclectic bric-a-brac. In the middle, a scholarly gentleman is engaged in methodical problem solving, determined to solve the immediate mystery at hand.

Then it hits you — you've just met Sherlock Homes. But this modern day sleuth-slayer is not engaged in solving a complicated urban murder, but instead an equally complicated mystery: how does one lead major corporations through major changes? Dr. Piasecki has his ways.

"CEO's relate to metaphors," he begins. "This is because they work on an abstract level." As his Dr. Watson, one **David Frazier**, watches and listens attentively, a string of these metaphors is revealed, like important pieces of evidence:

Exhibit A: Catastrophe as an avalanche

Piasecki was in the Rockies when he heard the distinctive *thump* of a major snow shelf breaking free. There was a moment of quietude before the all-encompassing avalanche flowed. He would have been swept away had he been on lower ground and now sees his **AHC Group, Inc.** as being paid to keep mega companies on the high ground.

Piasecki wrote the important *Corporate Environmental Strategy* in 1995, its subheading being *The Avalanche of Change Since Bhopal*. The initial horror of that nuclear disaster caused great pressure to mount, with a ruthless avalanche of economic and legal ramifications descending on global business. The world realized it had not been paying attention to safety.

AHC's mission is to lead companies through what is deemed an 'environmental strategy.' Contrary to some activists' delusions, large corporations want to avoid disasters; their difficulty

is in how to best embrace corporate responsibility. The answer is in cultural shaping, not factory retooling.

Exhibit B: Consultants are surgeons.

Dr. Piasecki had a couple of experiences with knee surgery. Being an inveterate observer, he came away from the experience with both a limp and another metaphor for his business: AHC is a surgeon.

Mr. Frazier, AHC's Managing Editor, marvels at how his boss remains unaffected by the company he keeps and his natural humility. Piasecki addressed the recent **E4** energy technologies conference at the **Gideon Putnam** resort in the same manner as he orders lunch at **Lillian's**.

The firm has a portfolio of war stories to support his principles. AHC consulted with **Toyota** as it planned to reinvent the auto business. An

zen and making a profit. Consumers will return respect.

Dr. Piasecki supports the contentions of **Dr. Helena Barton** in AHC's newsletter "*Corporate Strategies Today*" that between 70 to 85% of all assets are intangible, but go largely unaccounted in financial statements. Slowly, companies are coming to understand the value of their brand and goodwill as being more than say, the 5% claimed by **Coca-Cola**. AHC pitches that being branded as a good corporate citizen is critical — it is good business to be responsible.

The AHC Group has earned the ear of major companies and is not shy about talking, nor is it defensive about working for the 'fat cats,' as Piasecki's wife once pointedly observed. It has gained the trust of people who can make rapid changes worldwide, much faster than any demonstration or legislation. Piasecki is good at whispering to the king.

One technique that AHC utilizes as a "point of entry" is to appeal to the CFO. This seems counter intuitive, as the CEO is 'the man.' However, the CEO must listen to a CFO who goes on record as being concerned about a risk or recommends some specific action. Best of all, it is easy to reach the CFO and they always appreciate good data. Dr. Piasecki has moved 'environmental and energy strategy' closer to mainstream financial diagnostics.

The AHC Group relies upon key alliances, including a multi year agreement with some of the major players in the consulting world. Executives, says Piasecki, should play an important part in corporate responsibility even after they retire. To this end, AHC has a roundtable of former executives providing a deep pool of experience.

There is much going on at AHC: Dr. Piasecki's 'small business' is small only in terms familiar with bean counters and real estate agents. This Sherlock works with a small staff, including his Watson and the business housekeeper **Rachel McCracken**, but that does not make the business *small* in its reach.

Happily mixing metaphors, the plane that flew over the snow ridge causing it to break free was also small. AHC, the little consultancy that could, knows exactly how to resonate within massive companies. Dr. Piasecki makes avalanches that change history - for the better.



Team AHC: Bruce Piasecki, Rachel McCracken and David Frazier. Credit: Photo by Liz Lajaneuse / Stock Photo Studio

Books by Dr. Bruce Piasecki

- Environmental Management & Business Strategy: Leadership Skills for the 21st Century* (1998)
- Corporate Environmental Strategy: The Avalanche of Change Since Bhopal* (1995)
- In Search of Environmental Excellence: Moving Beyond Blame* (1990)
- America's Future in Toxic Waste Management* (1988)
- Beyond Dumping* (1984).

The AHC mission

"To lead companies through what is called 'environmental strategy.'

The first step of a consultant is diagnosis. Piasecki's first surgeon was good at diagnosis, but not strong in prognosis, which is the second step. It is not enough to simply diagnose and cut. An effective change should be planned and executed after BOTH a good diagnosis and a good prognosis. Only then does the change make the most sense for the patient.

AHC may be a small time surgeon, but it has worked on some big time cases. Piasecki, however, seems immune to the doctor superstar syn-

engagement with **Anheuser Busch** revealed a serious concern about the *issues* that are important to consumers and environmentalists. Without threats or prompting, Busch addressed its wastewater problem.

Simply preaching environmentalism is not the AHC approach: instead, the mission is to lead change from within. Cynics say the corporate green effort is merely good P/R, believing results are less important than motive. However, there is no dichotomy between being a good citi-