Profiles of Success
Stories of Emerging Leaders in Public Relations
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Stories of Emerging Leaders in Public Relations

Sponsored by Heyman Associates, Inc. and produced by Graduate Students in the Advertising & Public Relations Department, University of Alabama,

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The development of excellent leaders in public relations is important to the success of the organizations they serve and to the future and reputation of the profession. In a recent national survey, public relations practitioners said that strong role models—in the workplace, classroom, home or elsewhere—exerted the greatest influence on their own leadership values, practices and beliefs. Role models, then, represent a potentially rich source of leadership insights and development for public relations students and young professionals.

This book is rooted in that possibility. We tell the stories of 20 women and men, ages 28-40, who are successful and emerging leaders in the field. They are a diverse group who work in a variety of organizations and public relations practice arenas. They were selected based on awards or recognition they have received, or the recommendations of leaders in the practice. Though they represent just a few of the many success stories in public relations, we wanted to try to “bring them life” so that other young professionals and students might benefit from their experiences, insights and passion for the profession.

The book was researched, designed, written and produced by public relations and advertising graduate students as a class project at the University of Alabama.
the 20 professionals, collected additional biographical data and wrote the 2,500-word chapters. They also analyzed the interview transcripts to determine whether the professionals shared similar perceptions and insights about success and leadership. This analysis is summarized in the last section of the book.

To the 20 professionals who gave so generously of their time, insights and encouragement in these interviews, thank you. One quality shared by many excellent professionals is “giving back,” and you have demonstrated that quality.

To the students who participated in the class project, thank you. I’m extremely proud of your individual and collective accomplishments this semester. This book is testament to your dedication, energy, skills and aspirations.

To student and professional readers of this book, we hope these stories will inspire and encourage you.

Bruce K. Berger, Ph.D.

Professor of the APR 592 Graduate Project Course

April 2008
A Brief Letter to the Readers:

This book depicts some of the characteristics and qualities of 20 young, successful leaders in the public relations field by presenting their stories that were generated from in-depth interviews conducted by advertising and public relations graduate students at the University of Alabama. The interviews were then analyzed for common themes or patterns regarding professional skills, values and experiences. We hope that these stories will inspire others in the field.

“Profiles of Success” resulted from a partnership between business and academia when Heyman Associates of New York and Dr. Bruce Berger of the University of Alabama agreed to work in conjunction to develop a deeper understanding of leadership in public relations. Dr. Berger and CEO of Heyman Associates, Bill Heyman, sought to understand how leadership plays a role in the practices of both the individual professional and the public relations industry as a whole. Dr. Berger’s graduate students were given the opportunity to assist in developing this insight by interviewing 20 young, emerging public relations leaders. Those individuals profiled in the book were selected by Heyman Associates based on their previous honors and accomplishments in public relations, as well as through recommendations by seasoned professionals.
who recognized their talents.

“Profiles of Success” strives to expand upon the knowledge of leadership and its role in the public relations field. This book goes beyond depicting the key characteristics and themes of excellent leadership in public relations; it provides students and young professionals with 20 potential role models for success. Regardless of one’s degree of experience in the field, this book offers a fresh perspective on a timeless subject in an attempt to identify and promote those practices that benefit the profession through quality leadership.

On behalf of all the advertising and public relations graduate students at the University of Alabama, the editorial team would like to thank Heyman Associates for supporting us through this endeavor and giving us the opportunity to work on an important research project. In particular, we would like to thank Bill Heyman and Dr. Berger for entrusting us with the responsibility of producing this book. The process served as an exceptional learning experience, in that for an entire semester we were immersed in discussing and analyzing leadership skills, which in turn enabled leadership qualities to be embraced and evolved within our own skill sets. Embarking into the professional world with the knowledge developed from this experience will no doubt enhance our capabilities in our individual careers.

As a result of this experience, we have developed a more thorough understanding of what characteristics make a leader and their implications in the public relations field. The magnitude of leadership in public relations rests solely upon the individual shoulders
of each practitioner, but this book attempts to exemplify leadership attributes in 20 profiles that tell the story of those already having chosen to carry that responsibility. These 20 public relations professionals have given us an example on which we can model our futures as professionals. Our hope for others is that, by reading these chapters, some lessons in leadership are learned.

The Editorial Team:

Shannon E. Creamer
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Shannelle Armstrong sure stands out. Perhaps her height helps her stand out: she is 5’11 and wears high heels. Perhaps it is her manners and quick wit. Or perhaps, it is some intrinsic force coming from within. But as the manager of U.S. communications for McDonald’s Corporation, Shannelle Armstrong does stand out, and she helps to keep the politics of public relations leadership moving forward.

Armstrong began her professional career in politics, working for a think-tank in Washington and later for the Democratic National Party, on the Gore/Lieberman Presidential Campaign. Coming from a family of “politicals” and academics, Armstrong said that she never saw herself as becoming a part of the business world. In fact, she said, “If someone would have told me that in college, I would have been like ‘You are Mad!,’ I am going to be the president of the United States.” Perhaps it was this strong focus on public service that allowed Armstrong to excel within the field of public relations. While Armstrong has not become President of the United States, at least not yet, she has certainly served as a leader in other avenues.

9/11 also seems to have been a turning point for Armstrong. “After 9/11, it just changed a lot of us. I mean, I was in D.C. and it was very difficult when you saw the hummers go up Pennsylvania Avenue and armed soldiers in the street. I think the word ‘difficult’ doesn’t even encapsulate how huge and monumental[ly] that affected all of us.” After the startling effects of 9/11, Armstrong decided to follow her dreams to live in a big city, and Chicago was where she set her sights. Determined to not be discouraged by others, she packed up and
sold her home without telling anyone. Finally, about 20 or so days before the move, she let people know that she was going. And so she moved to Chicago, never looking back, and entered the public relations field so that she could “speak for those who can’t speak for themselves... making what you do with your leadership capacities worthwhile.”

Armstrong says the tipping point in her career came when she worked on her first big account for Schiefflin & Somerset, and helped re-launch Moet and Chandon. “I think there is where I really took off because, you know, I started to understand profitability,” said Armstrong. “I started to understand that PR is really a driver of sales and really started to understand that this is an initiative and not a party. People use it to gain visibility, increase awareness for products or services, and there has to be some return on investment.”

“People want to do business with people that they like. Who they trust. But how do you get there if you don’t have a sense of compassion, vulnerability and transparency?”

Developing relationships appears to be a benchmark trait for Armstrong. Through mentoring these young girls, she served as a role model but also claims that she was inspired by them. “I was so humbled by what they got from our relationship,” Armstrong said. “And by their fear for what the world had for them, and their openness and vulnerability to their fear. And they were more impressed with me because I worked here, I worked there, I had these degrees...they were more impressed and more enamored with me because I cared about them and that I showed up. And I showed up 100 percent. I showed up looking like someone that they should be. You don’t need to be me, but you need to understand that you need to show up completely and that everything you do says something about you.”

Armstrong feels that people need to be true to themselves and they need to be proud of their work. “Be committed to being you,” said Armstrong. And be proud of the work that you are putting out into the world. “If my name is going on it,”

[Showing Up]

Leadership does not come from a single dimension, as Armstrong proves. One of her greatest leadership roles has been serving as a mentor, outside of the professional arena. Working with young women from ninth to twelfth grade, in a program sponsored by her sorority, called Del-Teens, Armstrong said, “It was the first time I understood how powerful your presence can be to another person.”
Armstrong said, “and it is going to be put in lights, camera, print, you [know], it’s got to be something that is realistic, truthful. It’s got to be honest, collaborative. It’s got to be a number of things to make it a project.”

Armstrong believes that public relations practitioners offer real value to other executives. Times of challenge and crisis are times when public relations practitioners can truly shine. “You walk in with a sense of leadership and calm to a crisis situation or celebratory event…you are weighted, you are calm,” said Armstrong. As a leader within an organization, people will look to you for answers and as a source of knowledge for how to handle situations. “To be a leader in situations that are most trying is also about having a sense of emotional maturity,” she said. “Being strategic, but also understanding when a tactic is necessary.”

Although communicators are often a source of knowledge to their publics, Armstrong said that there is room for improvement. “I find as a whole among communicators, that some, not all, focus on PR in a vacuum,” she said. “They don’t focus on advertising, they don’t focus on if you were in a retail environment, what your stores are looking at, they focus only on what they do. If you don’t understand all the P’s of marketing, then you are focused in a very narrow way. And if you understand how the marketing machine works, that generates growth for your organization, you become much more of a leader, because it is not just a focus on we need this story placed, it is ‘Hey,’ this is when communications need to solve a business problem, and this is where communications needs to solve a communications challenge.” To be a strong communicator and leader, Armstrong said, one should be “able to discern the two of them.”

The fours P’s of marketing seem to be ingrained into Armstrong’s mindset. She offers two more: a ‘P’ for passion, and a ‘P’ for people. People and relationships are important to Armstrong, and
the cultivation of these reflect her leadership style. The key to success is when, “You have people that are passionately committed...they feel they are valued, rewarded, respected and they are compensated. When people are committed to the business, you create an environment where people feel like they are all in it to win, together,” said Armstrong. These relationships are the building blocks for success. “People want to do business with people that they like, and who they trust. But how do you get there if you don’t have a sense of compassion, vulnerability and transparency?”

“You don’t get credit for wanting the right answer.”

Armstrong also firmly believes in manners and the cultivation of relationships. “I think that the relationships with people you have really define who you are. Because who you choose to put in your circle reflects back on who you are.” Compassion is also important. “There is compassion in everything that we do.” Having an inner circle or “truth commission,” as she put it, allows individuals to get real feedback and advice about behaviors, challenges and issues they are trying to manage and build relationships.

Armstrong said that Terrie Williams, of the Terrie Williams Agency, is one of the biggest influences on her professional career. Williams gave Armstrong her first job, but also helped Armstrong to be true to herself. Williams book, The Personal Touch, also helped to shape personal and professional relationships for Armstrong. “Her book focused on you being you,” Armstrong said, “but also remembering those things that you were taught growing up -- manners, politeness, looking people in the eye, returning calls when you say you will, acknowledging people in conversation, listening and not talking over others, all of these things. It is all about the personal touch. And I have found that these things, throughout my life and career, have surfaced in every area.”

New challenges always loom on the horizon in the communications field, but Armstrong has a saying for overcoming these issues: “You just got to ‘move it forward’.” Moving forward past challenges and mistakes is key to being a leader, she said. “The best is when I fall head first, because then you get up,” she said. Working through the mistakes and challenges is when true leadership shines through. When troubles arise, Armstrong said that you need to stand up for what you believe in, stand firm, and no matter what, move forward.

“Moving it forward” seems to a favorite mantra for Armstrong and applies to every aspect of her life. Full of wit and quips, Armstrong offered this analogy on dealing...
with anger and frustrations, “Carrying around anger is like [carrying around] hot rocks; you are the only one who will get burned.” When confronting a major problem or challenge, leaders set the benchmark for the team’s response. True leaders should have the emotional maturity to let go of things, and move forward.

Leadership is something that Armstrong feels passionately about. “I don’t think that you can teach leadership,” she said. “I am of the school of thought that leadership is inherent, because if leadership was taught, that is kind of like calculus. This is the way to do it. That is not your leadership. That is somebody else’s leadership style you have adopted. So I believe that leadership is intrinsic, it is organic, you either have it or you don’t. When you walk into a room are you trying to meet people or cuddle in a corner? Can you speak truth to power? Can you take the criticism and keep it moving? I mean those are the real signs of leadership.”

[The ‘It Factor’]

But Armstrong believes there is something more in leadership, too. She calls it the “It Factor.” “The ‘It Factor’ is when you walk into a room does someone say, ‘Who is that? Who are you?’ It is that ‘It Factor’ that comes in. And so some people have it and some people don’t. And I think to truly be a leader, you have to have an ‘It Factor.’ When you walk into a room somebody is going to float to you, somebody wants to meet you.”

When asked what future public relations practitioners should be working on to be successful, Armstrong said, “You got to be a triple threat in the industry. A triple threat is that you know strategy, what it takes to get it done; you understand the tactical execution, and the nuts and bolts to a ‘T’; and then creativity. Creativity breaks through the clutter, engages your consumers and engages your audiences internally. You need to be a triple threat. Don’t just be a one horse pony and focus on only one thing.” She added that practitioners need to further develop their own skill sets, especially writing. “Opportunity may come knocking for some practitioners, but some people still rely heavily on certain things that get them by and not continue to develop their own skill set.”

Armstrong cites transparency and fairness as her strongest leadership attributes. “You know where you stand with me. There are no hidden agendas. There is no, say one thing, then say something else behind your back,” she said. When asked how her colleagues would
describe her, Armstrong said, “They would more than likely say that Shannelle is firm but fair. No nonsense, and really knows the business.” Armstrong showed her inner leadership when she said, “And you wouldn’t work for me, you work with me, everything as a team. That is what really motivates me.”

Armstrong appears to see every day as a gift, and a chance to overcome new challenges. In the morning, “I am starting my day, it is a great day and I don’t know what the universe has for me,” she said. I don’t know what my challenges are going to be. I don’t know what my joys are going to be. I don’t know because it is a brand new moment."

Regarding her best advice to new practitioners, Armstrong shared some wisdom from her father. “Someone may try to slow you down, but they can’t stop you unless you want them to,” she said. Judging from the determination that is apparent in her practice, Armstrong is not going to slow down until she has left a legacy of leadership in her wake. You can be sure that no matter what challenges may be in store for Armstrong, she will just “keep moving it forward.”

Kelly E. Backus
Bachelor of Arts, Advertising
Hometown: Pensacola, Florida
“I can twirl a mean rifle.” And that was it. That was the only time Fred Bateman even remotely took credit for his accomplishments. Obviously, this particular talent has nothing to do with his highly successful, technology-focused public relations firm in San Francisco, nor his growing reputation as a leader in the public relations industry. Nope, these particular bragging rights concerned his stint as a world champion performer in color guard and drum and bugle corps while growing up in Boston.

Recently named by PRWeek Magazine one of the “40 Under 40” public relations professionals “who have achieved tremendous feats before the age of 40", Bateman, 38, arrived in San Francisco in 1998 to open the first regional office for Cambridge, Mass.-based FitzGerald Communications, now part of Fleishman-Hillard, one of the largest public relations firms in the world. He then went on to found his own company, the Bateman Group, in 2003. He accomplished this despite the infamous 2001-2003 downturn that hit the high-tech industry, especially Silicon Valley, and collapsed careers as relentlessly as a hurricane collapses buildings. One by one, companies were going under. Nevertheless, Bateman managed to come out of the stormy crisis with a successful firm that dared to be different by making a bigger market impact for a smaller, more select group of clients.

Perhaps life was preparing Bateman for this moment. At least it seems so. First, there was his success in the highly competitive world of drum and bugle corps and color guard, which he claims instilled confidence and a desire to win. Then, wisely following the
advice of Marilyn Matelski, Bateman’s faculty advisor at Boston College, Bateman discovered the field of public relations at a time he was seriously considering a career in dance. 

After completing an unpleasant internship at an advertising agency, Bateman realized he needed a more mentally challenging yet nurturing atmosphere. It was at that time that Matelski recommended that he consider an internship at a well-known technology-focused public relations firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts called The Weber Group.

From that point on, Bateman never looked back. A couple of job changes and promotions later, in 1996 he landed at FitzGerald Communications and promptly won the firm its first million dollar account, Bay Networks (now a part of Nortel Networks). Shortly thereafter, at the ripe old age of 27, Bateman opened the first regional office of Fitzgerald Communication, a challenge which guided him to Silicon Valley and eventually his own company.

Despite these accomplishments, Bateman turns every compliment to others. He attributes his success to the people he has come in contact with, from Marilyn Matelski to the employees of the Bateman Group he proudly refers to as “family.” His passion for public relations, relationships with others, and love of technology seems unmatched. He may have “twirled a mean rifle” in his teenage years, but today he’s an innovator in the public relations industry with his own fast-growing firm known for integrating comprehensive knowledge of the technology market with “old school” values – keeping client retention high and employee turnover low.

[One Key Ingredient: Passion] Bateman’s passion for his work shows through in his dedication to his employees, clients and enjoyment of every aspect of his work day. Each employee is a friend, and every client his most valued customer. He stresses the importance of having passion for what you do and loving your work. “[Public relations] as a craft is something that you have to love, or learn to fake it really well, because those around you will know instinctively.” He explained how variety plays a large role in why he enjoys his career to such a degree. “I don’t think there is another job in the business world where one’s daily tasks encompass such a wide variety of things, each requiring a different skill to accomplish.”

He also thoroughly enjoys the whole vibe of a public relations agency. He characterizes public relations agencies as
more of a nurturing, fun-filled atmosphere in comparison to corporate public relations departments, ad agencies or other services-based professions. “It’s not the type of industry that throws you to the wolves right away,” said Bateman. Through his description of the relationships developed in the public relations profession, he revealed the importance of having a strong team orientation and the emphasis on looking out for one another. Although Bateman does relate to how this “nurturing” can make some feel held back, he goes on to explain, “If you want to pace yourself slowly and move up the ladder more cautiously, you can do that. If you really want to get aggressive with your career and take on more and do more, that option is always open too.”

In fact, it was the lack of nurturing typical of most business environments that led Bateman into the public relations industry in the first place. After an internship at a large, nationally-known advertising agency in Boston, he found himself turned off by the lack of camaraderie among the staff and distant nature of his managers. It was at this time that Matelski stepped in by praising his writing capabilities and suggesting the field of public relations. From her guidance, Bateman felt motivated to try some classes and internships. After interning with a local public relations firm, he became inspired by the character and drive of the professionals. “I felt I could relate easily to public relations professionals and that we shared a common set of values, such as a passion for the English language.” From that point 18 years ago, Bateman has carried on the passion that first attracted him to public relations to his own company today.

[Lead by Example: Clichéd, but True]

Leadership is an integral part of the everyday activities that Bateman experiences. He believes that the best kind of leadership is setting a good example for employees.
and co-workers. Bateman believes that as he continues to evolve and grow as a leader, he will become more of an asset to his current clients and continue to attract new ones. He credits much of his portfolio of clientele to his team-building skills and his ability to lead “by example.” By recruiting, training and retaining high-caliber employees, Bateman is able to sell the benefits of working with the Bateman Group by revealing “[the] skills and [the] past experiences” of the whole firm.

“I am client-service oriented to a fault,” said Bateman. He believes that if companies are willing to select his firm over others and invest their time and money in a partnership, then his firm has an obligation to do the same, if not more. “I get very invested in my clients, and I think that showing that passion is the best sort of leadership attribute I can demonstrate to my employees.” Bateman believes that leadership without passion wouldn’t inspire others. In a work environment void of passion, employees would have little faith in their supervisors or one another, and clients would have less faith in the abilities of their team.

Because the Bateman Group is a technology-focused public relations firm, the people who work for his company “must be passionate about technology and how it’s changing our day-to-day lives so dramatically.” Bateman explains, “They don’t have to love every single sector in the industry, many of which are very difficult to understand and sometimes boring. What’s important is finding one thing that gets them excited about each client. If it’s not the technology they sell, then maybe it’s the business problem the company is trying to solve.”

In new business pursuits, Bateman also thinks it’s important to find at least one inspiring thing about each prospect.” He never goes after clients with whom he is not intrigued in some way. “There must be a communications challenge I find exciting and feel we can really help them overcome,” he said. Bateman has such passion for his work that it’s only natural he becomes very attached to every client. “I will do anything for my clients, and I have -- including pull all-nighters, work all weekend and cancel vacations. I don’t expect that of my employees, but I do of myself, especially since starting my own company. When I put my name on the door, I felt even more compelled to go the very last mile for each and every client.”

This seems positively correlated with the
success of the Bateman Group. Known for limiting the client roster to a select group of companies and lavishing them with attention, the agency tries to set the industry standard for customer service, based on old principles, like the importance of relationships.

[Invest in & Value Your Employees]

Not only are relationships with customers of utmost importance, but Bateman says that the relationships employees develop with him and with each other are crucial ingredients for success. Fred Bateman never places a monetary value on his employees because he knows that without them neither his business nor personal life would be as fulfilling. “Maintaining my close relationships with the people I work with comes before any kind of financial gain.”

Bateman encourages his employees to live their lives outside of work. He sees each employee as a crucial building block to the success of the Bateman Group. His name may be the only one mentioned in the company logo, but it is the “Group” he credits with the achievements of this business, so keeping employee turnover low is critical. One way he does this is by allowing women with children to construct their own customized work schedule so they don’t have to choose between having career and being a mom.

Another way he keeps turnover down is by limiting growth. “My objective is not to get rich by growing rapidly, sell the firm and then step over the bodies of my employees on my way out the door,” he said. “There are a lot of agency founders who are focused on their exit strategy with little concern about how uncontrolled growth impacts the people serving the clients today. They start these firms off for one reason and one reason only -- money. I wanted to create more of a lifestyle firm, one that accommodates different lifestyles, whether it's motherhood, fatherhood or an urge to take time off to write a novel, whatever. It is important to me that these people are part of my whole life and not only while I’m working.”

[Not Only on the Cutting Edge of Technology]

Many problems face the public relations industry today. Among them, Bateman believes the lack of racial diversity is one of the most pressing. “On the agency-side, the public relations practitioner is usually a white female. We need more men and [statistical minorities] selecting PR as a career.” He thinks colleges could better assist in the diversification of the field by motivating more men and
more minority students to get interested in the field. He also believes that public relations practitioners “do not do a good enough job of promoting our own industry... to a diverse set of college students. I wish someone or something, maybe PRSA, would begin an outreach program to colleges and universities to teach them about the field. Many people in academia just don’t understand exactly what it is we do.”

Bateman sees this problem as a roadblock to growth and providing the best possible services to his clients. “We are most inhibited by our inability to find good people,” Bateman said, “not due to a lack of available work.” He also views a more diverse staff as an asset that could differentiate the firm when competing for new business.

Bateman credits challenges with recruiting to the lack of diversity among public relations professionals. The challenge of maintaining diversity is also matched with the difficulty of finding a potential candidate with the appropriate education and professional experience. “I’m trying to find an account manager right now and have listed the job description on Craigslist, the most popular site for job seekers in the Bay Area. The quality of candidates who reply is not good. Keeping the firm’s turnover at 0% isn’t a choice, but a business necessity. I have no idea where our next new hire will come from and the places to turn for help -- the online job boards and executive recruiters -- are either ineffective, too expensive or both.”

[Credit to Everyone but Me]

When Bateman was asked to mention three or four personal attributes he possessed that he thought led to his success, he once again turned the conversation toward others. He discussed how much he values his employees and credits them for the strong brand image of the Bateman Group. He gave much credit to the mentors who guided him through his professional career, such as Pat Colpitts, a past manager who taught him to embrace good grammar and AP Style and teach it to others. “Those things that she taught me about the written word have stuck with me through the years.”

Although Bateman failed to mention the personal attributes he thinks enabled his success, these qualities become apparent through his description of leadership in public relations, the Bateman Group, and the public relations industry as a whole. First, Bateman is filled with passion for both his firm and the public relations industry. Second, he is attentive, as revealed through his close associations...
with employees, clients and mentors. Finally, Bateman is innovative. He’s willing to experiment with whatever changes are necessary for the public relations industry to better market itself as a compelling career choice to a larger, more diverse group of college graduates. Therefore, Bateman exemplifies the values and characteristics of a leader in the public relations field.

Abby R. Orr  
Bachelor of Science, Marketing  
Hometown: Montgomery, Alabama
Retain your foundation. That is the theme interwoven throughout the life and career of Jeff Beringer. Like Marlon Brando and Henry Fonda before him, Beringer found his way from Omaha, Nebraska to a different kind of life in a different kind of city. Whether in Los Angeles, Dallas or Chicago, Jeff Beringer has been a key player in the digital media revolution of the public relations industry.

[PR Isn’t About Spin]
Every public relations professional knows that their responsibility to their clients and their ethical obligations are the lifeblood of their profession. Beringer referenced, GolinHarris founder, Al Golin, as an example of a successful practitioner who possesses “impeccable integrity.” The value that Beringer places on integrity can be traced through every step of his career.

Beringer is up front about the perception some hold of the industry and said, “Our profession is misunderstood in some circles. Many mistakenly think of PR professionals as spin doctors who appear on television, defending people who probably shouldn’t be defended in the first place.” He contends the role of public relations is to get at the heart of what makes each organization unique and tell its stories authentically.

Technology is reshaping the PR business, and Beringer believes the dialogue which “open” channels stimulate keeps communicators honest. “We’re in the midst of a great transformation, and many in our field are getting a quick education on the new ‘rules’ of communication. There’s no room for spin or disingenuous speak. Authenticity is more important than ever before.”
Another fundamental belief of his professional work resonates in that clear-cut mentality: clients first. The purpose of he and his team’s work within the GolinHarris agency is, “To move the needle on the client’s business...in a way that’s ethical and that reflects the essence of each organization or brand.” Beringer makes it clear that there should be no confusion, no question of practitioner intention; the client is the primary benefactor of the professional exchange. “In the end, having those harder discussions with clients and giving them the right counsel based on your gut and what you know is right, will benefit them and ultimately your relationship. Relationships between practitioners and clients are built on mutual trust and respect. Both PR pros and those we represent need to foster an open exchange of ideas.”

This client-focused mentality can too easily pit the present needs against future possibilities. Beringer would agree that too often long-term needs are sacrificed for “short-term flash,” particularly in the digital age. He related one particular experience: “Over the past few years, it’s been hard to pick up an industry publication without the mention of blogs and social media. Many organizations jumped into the fray of social media when they weren’t suitably prepared. No matter the tool, technology or tactic, PR initiatives should always support specific communications needs and higher order business objectives.”

Clients first, client-focused; there’s no confusion. Success is seen in the fact that, as Beringer put it: “Our job is to serve our clients, and that’s how we color it.”

[Us, Not I]

When asked about personal accomplishments, one might be struck by Beringer’s frequent use of “us” that resounds far above the “I.” Humility in the public relations field is not a common attribute among its leaders, but Beringer wears it proudly (or the humble equivalent). His noted “personal” accomplishments were those he depicted as team efforts. Cited most recently was his creation and implementation of a professional education platform for GolinHarris titled Dialogue University. It provides every GolinHarris member, from executive to intern, the chance to receive hands-on, continuing education in the perpetually changing world of public relations. Beringer may have helped conceive it, but he’s quick to point out that many people collaborated to make it work.

While he may not boast about it, Beringer and his firm have a great deal to be proud of. In 2007, GolinHarris teamed
up with Nintendo to launch the gaming and cultural phenomenon of Wii. That same year GolinHarris was awarded the trifecta of public relations awards: PR Week’s Agency of the year, Editors Choice of PR Week, and Paul Homes’ Agency of the Year. When referencing what the future might hold, he noted: “How we top that, none of us know, but we’re certainly going to try.”

[“Trustmark, Not Trademark”]
Al Golin is not a CEO of mythical proportions, whose subordinates know only by a picture or plaque. If you linger around the Chicago offices of GolinHarris long enough, you should be able to catch a glimpse of this self-created public relations icon. Jeff Beringer related the stories of his CEO with affection and admiration. Over 50 years ago the agency started with a single cold call from Golin to Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald’s. A bit of convincing and a $500 monthly retainer later birthed McDonald’s first public relations efforts, led by Golin. This initially concerned McDonald’s CFO, who couldn’t justify $500 payments for press and publicity.

This relationship has surely grown over time, though the lessons learned are invaluable. Golin resonates a 50-year-old truth of trust through his corporation today, often referring to the “trust bank.” This belief embraces the philosophy of building a trust bank over years. According to Beringer, “The idea is essentially that in good times you make deposits into a trust bank, you do good things for the community and contribute as a good corporate citizen. These investments build preference for your brand, trust in your organization, so that in challenging times you can draw from that trust bank.”

Beringer cited McDonald’s responsible action in the health and wellness debate a couple years ago: “As some consumers began questioning healthy eating choices, McDonald’s was able to communicate its dedication to choice and healthy options, combined with physical activity.
Consistent in Consistency

As a company McDonald’s has done many of good things over the years for the communities in which it operates, and consumers were more open to listening to McDonald’s side of the story.” Trust has truly been a foundation for GolinHarris, and is expressed in their mission statement: “GolinHarris is dedicated to building long-term partnerships based on mutual trust,” and equally emulated in their employees. With both being evidences of success.

In Al Golin’s book, “Truth or Consequences,” a CEO who was interviewed told employees that the company’s trademarks were not as important as their “trustmark” with customers. This truth of trust has had the positive trickle-down effect and is a cornerstone for the success that both Golin and Beringer have experienced.

What Gets You Out of Bed?

With the aforementioned humility, one could be quick to believe that Beringer might not recognize his own success. Most recently in March 2008, he was promoted to Senior Vice President of GolinHarris, recognizing his ascent as a thought leader in the industry. His achievement can certainly be attributed to hard work and talent, but dig a little deeper and one might discover additional characteristics that set him apart in this competitive industry.

Simply put: Jeff Beringer enjoys his job. A student posed a question of whether they should seek their passion or their “True North,” as author Bill George describes. Beringer replied that a person really has to figure out “what he or she enjoys -- what gets you out of bed in the morning.” The career spans the need for success or income, it’s a personal investment. Furthermore, Beringer encourages individuals to find a career that they personally find stimulating, “you come into the office, and it’s not so much a job as it is an adventure.” His passion rings true in his enthusiasm and conversation.

It is evident that he does not merely toil, he progresses.

In addition to personal fulfillment comes the ability to network. A necessary skill, whether grown or uncovered, is aligning with other people inside your organization and business partners. This networking capability is invaluable. “It’s important to understand where the seats of power are in every organization,” Beringer said, “and know how to make your point of view known with the right decision makers.”

Lastly, comes the ability to articulate effectively. “One thing that kills people in this industry, frankly, is over-speaking. I’ve seen so many great ideas get squashed because they weren’t communicated well. The ability to articulate a thought quickly can mean the difference between a
program getting approved or dismissed.” The ability to build coalitions and relationships, along with strong interpersonal communication skills are two critical elements for those entering the public relations field. Beringer calls for more academic training in these areas to help prepare the industry’s future leaders.

[Perseverance Drives Performance]

“Often times the ideas we have to fight hardest for have the biggest potential to impact a client’s business,” Beringer said. “Perseverance is really important from folks at all levels of the organization. If you believe in an idea, be prepared to fight for it respectfully. Perseverance really pays off.” In addressing his personal recipe for success, he lists: integrity, curiosity, and perseverance. Practitioners need to have thick skin and be able to lobby for things they believe in.

“I think a lot of people in our business try to take short cuts or settle for ‘average’ thinking. The strongest relationships in PR are built around practitioners and clients who openly exchange ideas, and aren’t afraid to disagree. The people who win show up every day to push for what’s in the long-term interest of their clients. PR adds real value when we serve as strategic counselors, not just arms and legs to execute tasks.”

As current senior vice president of an acclaimed international public relations agency, Beringer did not rely on favors or lofty friends, he simply had initiative. Malcolm Gladwell’s book, “The Tipping Point,” discussed how small changes may have profound effects. Beringer fondly discusses his own Tipping Point: “After moving my family twice to support my career, I followed my wife to Texas to support her aspirations. While I was still working for another firm, GH had a sizeable presence in Dallas. I made a couple phone calls and met with the managing director of the region. Ultimately, that meeting set the stage for me to move to GolinHarris and to later build and lead our digital group. I think identifying those opportunities, making some calls and meeting the right people with the right vision was a big tipping point for me.”

Beringer has created success in his life from his hard work ethic. A piece of that was creating and maintaining a personal relevance in the field. His interests in digital media allowed him to create a niche for himself. “I’ve worn a lot of different hats inside the industry. I started out on the traditional PR side managing traditional media programs, running mobile tours, supporting what’s historically been our ‘core’ business. I basically carved out a
niche for myself in the digital and social media world when about 10 years ago clients began asking how digital media fit into the PR mix. Like many others, I saw this as a huge opportunity. One of the ways that I’ve been able to get ahead in public relations is to try a lot of new things and expose myself to different pieces of the PR puzzle. As communication becomes more integrated and there’s less differentiation between marketing disciplines, I’ve also found it beneficial to look for opportunities outside of what many might traditionally define as PR."

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it undoubtedly birthed success of the PR practitioner. Intellectual curiosity is a fundamental element for success in public relations, especially in the digital media niche that Beringer has skillfully carved out for himself. His curiosity is professionally and personally evident, and one quality is obvious: he hungers for knowledge. His reading list spans all periodicals from economics to travel to health; one might call him a virtual intellectual renaissance man.

When discussing the three important characteristics of public relations professionals today, along with integrity and perseverance he includes curiosity. “Curiosity propels people in this industry ahead. People who are intellectually curious...are going to stay ahead of the trends. They are going to be invaluable inside of organizations in a time of great communication transformation." This foundation for learning was implemented during his undergraduate studies. He recalled “a certain journalism professor who took great pride quizzing students about the top stories du jour from the major daily newspapers...While some students were sure to glance at the headlines before entering his classroom, others clearly didn’t dive any deeper into the newspaper than the drink specials listed on the back of the sports page. And they paid for it. It’s difficult to be an effective communicator if you don’t have a deep understanding of the news environment."

These professors, though some might say forcibly, intended to stimulate curiosity and awareness. This habit continues on a daily basis in his scanning of countless traditional news sources, and additionally, hundreds of RSS feeds and social media outlets he peruses for the next big idea. One might argue that laziness could inhibit curiosity, but in Beringer’s case that is not an issue; he maintains a renaissance pursuit, both professionally and personally, for the bigger, better, newest, and next.
Beringer displays it on a personal level, believes curiosity must be an organizational value, starting at the top. “Our chief executive is an intellectually curious guy. When Second Life was hot, he created his own profile because he wanted to experience it himself. He’s genuinely interested and sets a good example by investing personally to understand new opportunities.” Beringer believes this kind of participation from leaders is critical to driving innovation in the field at all levels.

A brief conversation with Beringer quickly leads one to believe that he is intellectually curious in all of life. His conversational German is evidence of the fact that travel is not only a professional “hobby,” but a personal one, too. He is a self-described “serial mover,” having changed homes and hometowns frequently. In the past 10 years Beringer has lived in Chicago twice, Los Angeles and Dallas. He and his wife “have found great excitement moving into new communities and exploring the best each city has to offer.”

Clearly, Beringer has passion for the industry and possesses an ethical uprightness, and selfless mentality. He has a vigor for these facets of his life and profession that is contagious. Beringer has proven himself as an exemplary professional in the field, and possesses the versatile professional and personal attributes to allow him to become an exemplary leader, too.
A significant moment in her 12-year career was earning IABC’s highly-regarded “accredited business communicator” credential—one that only 6 percent of its 14,000+ worldwide members have achieved. Just a couple of years after this achievement, Shonali Burke, ABC, vice president, media & communications for the ASPCA (The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), was named one of the “Top 40 under 40” professional leaders in public relations by PRWeek in 2007. However, Burke’s success began many years before she received these honors.

Born and raised in Calcutta, India, Burke was passionate about acting at a young age—a passion she took as far pursuing it at a post-graduate level. After graduating from drama school, however, she realized that even though theatre was her passion, it did not guarantee a steady income or quality of life that she aspired to. Burke thought, “What can I do to supplement this?” Because she had some name recognition from acting, as well as her directorial and DJ stints, Burke was able to undertake event management and public relations on a contract basis in Calcutta. As a result, her first agency experience was in the public relations department of Ammirati Puris Lintas’ Calcutta office. Burke also ran her own event management business, and accepted periodic public relations and communications projects.

When discussing the somewhat-unorthodox beginning of her career in public relations, Burke said, “It suited me very well because, since I was my own boss, I could also take the time to do theatre or other acting or directing jobs. Since that’s
what I loved to do, it was great fun.” So, for Burke, this was the time where she began to transition into PR. “That’s kind of how I moved into it,” Burke said, “and I was a natural, I just had a knack for it.” Well, that “knack” provided Burke with the skills to become an excellent professional and young leader in the public relations field.

Some years later, Burke moved to the San Francisco Bay area. While adjusting to the United States, she debated whether to try and go back to the theatre. “I decided that I had enjoyed my PR experiences and everything I had done in the field, and I truly just didn’t want to start all over again when it came to theatre. I had an accent, I looked different, I just did not want to have to go through the grind because I had worked very hard and achieved a certain level in India. Quite honestly, I didn’t feel I should have to pay my theatre dues all over again.”

For Burke, public relations was the obvious alternative. She started networking and that is how she gained her first job. Burke stated, “I am really, really glad that I did do that, because I love what I do and I think I am good at it.” Burke became an account executive for a boutique, integrated PR & marketing agency called Browne Zukow Associates (later re-branded as Charles Zukow Associates). “My work and the agency’s efforts,” said Burke, “focused strongly on traditional media relations and good old-fashioned pitching. We had an extremely aggressive pitch list and prided ourselves on securing ink in all major daily, weekly and monthly print media, as well as the major TV and radio news shows.”

Even though Burke decided to pursue her public relations career path, one of her most powerful learning experiences was doing theatre and drama because it opened up communication in a different way. During her theatrical years, Burke had to work hard in several disciplines requiring extreme physical and mental training, and in the end the theatre experience boosted her confidence. When Burke was asked what she wanted to be when she was growing up, her response was, “This is going to sound terrible, but I was extremely shy and under-confident, and as a result I just wanted to be successful, in an extremely ephemeral way.” Not only did acting change her mind and help build her confidence, but it prepared her for the communications field in other ways.

In the theatre, she gained skills she uses everyday as a public relations professional. For example, she is an excellent observer and listener, picks up quickly on body language and non-verbal cues, pays
close attention to detail, and can speak impromptu on many topics. These qualities enhance her professional work. Therefore, while seemingly unrelated, Burke’s theatre and acting experiences helped her to become a recognized, honored and excellent professional in the public relations field.

[Doing Something Worthwhile]

In her current position at ASPCA, Burke leads an integrated communications team that focuses on traditional and social media, multi-media, editorial and internal communications, as well as research and measurement. She enjoys working for a mission-based organization such as ASPCA because it gives her the opportunity to help animals -- another passion. Even though Burke focuses more on strategy now, media relations has been the most exciting aspect of her job and what she considers her foundational training. “There is just something about it,” she said, “when you get that hit, or when you pitch a story and it works out just the way you want it to. I still get an adrenaline rush, and I still pump my hands every time I get a story, or I help someone else get a story.” Even so, according to Burke, what is most important to her is that effective public relations helps people get the information they need. She said, “I am not just doing my organization a great service, but I am able to provide a great service to our publics, because they are getting the right information at the right time, which helps them as they live their lives.” She enjoys strategy development and believes that PR and communications are crucial parts of overall business strategy. “At the end of the day, it’s that feeling of satisfaction that you did something worthwhile, that you really helped someone’s life.”

One of Burke’s most significant accomplishments is the recent pet food recall in which 90 brands of dog and cat food ingredients were contaminated. By the end of the crisis, 200 brands had been recalled. In the process of providing life-saving
information from the ASPCA to the public, Burke helped to save many animals’ lives. She said it was exhausting but rewarding to know that she helped make a difference in the lives of people and their pets.

Burke also led the ASPCA’s communications during the federal investigation of the 2007 Michael Vick case, where the organization provided invaluable assistance to federal authorities, educating the public along the way. What many people are not aware of is that animal cruelty takes place everyday. This case drew attention to the fact that anyone can be involved in these activities, no matter who they are, or what their public stature. According to Burke, “Crimes like dog fighting are not new; they’ve been taking place for more than a century now. It’s the public awareness and disgust for them that have reached a new high. Awareness is the first step to affecting change, and that’s what we achieved – heightened awareness.”

[Passing the Baton]

When defining excellent leadership, Burke said, “Excellent leadership in public relations is that rare combination of skill, vision, strategies, and mentoring that provides communications support for an organization’s business objectives, but also paves the way for new blood to come in and do so.” Burke believes that if you are outstanding at what you do, you must “pass the baton” to the next person because if not, “It may be brilliant and excellent while it lasts, but it’s going to die out with you.”

Excellence in public relations is only meaningful if you know how to share what you know and teach what you have learned to the next group of professionals. This helps to “build a template that others can use because there is no point in being excellent if that excellence is going to remain within you.”

Burke has gained this belief in sharing what you know from her two professional role models in the field: Katie Delahaye Paine and Charles Zukow. According to Burke, Paine is a smart, excellent leader who gives and shares what she learns. “I consider Katie a “guru” as well as a personal friend and mentor,” said Burke. “She is a brilliant thought-leader and one of the most generous and insightful persons I’ve had the good fortune to meet in my life.”

Zukow, whom Burke worked for at her first public relations job in San Francisco, was a great teacher and always encouraged Burke in her career. He gave Burke some of the best advice she ever received when he told her to “Never bring up one client in front of another; every client you have
From the Stage to a Public Relations Leader

should feel as if they are your top priority. That applies even when you work in-house, since the different departments you work with should be treated like clients."

[Measuring is the Key]
Burke’s success also is grounded on the crucial concepts of research and measurement. “You have to be willing to be quantifiable. You must be willing to do, and be excited by research and measurement because, at the end of the day, we live in a business world, and numbers are what drives the world,” she said. Burke has learned through experiences that if we cannot talk the language of other business people as public relations professionals, then we are always going to be left behind.

As a leader, then, Burke focuses on research and measurement in the work that she does. A major turning point in her career came when she moved from Ruder Finn to the ASPCA, where she was given the freedom to re-build the organization’s then non-existent department from just two people to a team of 12 (and projected to grow to 18 in 2008). With this move, Burke was also able to pursue research and measurement much more aggressively, because at ASPCA she was able to decide what the budget should be; at the agency level, it was the client’s budget.

[Going With Your Gut]
Another quality Burke feels is important to public relations is intuition. “I think you’ve got to listen to your gut a lot, since that keeps you in line with your ethics,” said Burke. “I strongly believe you should never do anything that is not in line with your ethics—and usually your gut tells you what that is.” She also believes that you have to be willing to be objective in situations where you must make a decision. You should listen to all sides of an argument, and then listen to what your gut is telling you to do. As far as public relations leaders are concerned, being able to predict things is a big part of what a manager must do. Burke believes that when it comes to leadership, inherited or not, everyone can be groomed to a certain extent, but there are some who have more talent for it than others. “There are people who just have that vision, that drive to get out there way before and way better then anyone else.” They are invariably the ones who go with their gut and use intuition to help make the right decision.

Burke said that her most important professional qualities are that she is driven and she is ambitious. One of her personal role models is Anamika Haksar, a professor in drama school, who was paralyzed for some time but never gave up...
From the Stage to a Public Relations Leader

trying to recover. After trying many unsuccessful treatments, she eventually went to a natural medicine center and, a few months later, was healed. Burke was inspired by this incident, and now she never stops until she gets something right. Her other role model is her mother, who Burke said is her “rock.” Burke’s mother has always encouraged her to be the best that she can be. These two role models have greatly influenced Burke’s drive in her work and other aspects of her life.

Burke is also extremely resourceful. She belongs to several public relations and communications groups, including the International Association of Business Communicators and Washington Women in PR. She’s an avid reader of their publications and attends as many professional development programs as possible, both real and virtual programs. “Since I travel extensively between New York and Washington, D.C., I am fortunate to be able to avail myself of professional development events in both cities on a regular basis,” Burke said. “When I speak or present at conferences, I try to attend as many other sessions as I can, to see what others are doing and what I can learn from them.”

She subscribes to industry newsletters such as the Ragan Report, PRWeek and the Chronicle of Philanthropy, which is important for those who work in the non-profit world. Burke is active on “LinkedIn,” where she answers public relations and communications-related questions. “I love real books and real reading, so I try to do as much of that as I can (yes, even in this day of social media and Web 2.0, it’s tough to beat books!).”

[That Knack]

For Burke, going from the stage to the public relations profession was the right choice. She has become a successful, credible leader because of her commitment to hard work, drive and strict adherence to the ethics she holds most dear to her heart. Doing something worthwhile, passing the baton, willingness to embrace change, investing in measurability, and listening to her intuition are important reasons why Burke is a successful public relations leader. That natural “knack” for public relations Burke had from the beginning of her career has helped her to make an impact on the field today.

Blaire E. Boswell
Bachelor of Arts, Dance and Advertising
Hometown: Robertsdale, Alabama
Robert Christie, current vice president of communications at Dow Jones & Company, found public relations practice largely by accident. In fact, one could say the practice found him.

Christie went to Mansfield University on a football scholarship. He was a formidable center for the Mountaineers. However, his football career was short-lived, as his hopes of becoming a star college athlete were dashed following a career-ending shoulder injury.

Christie’s ambitions, however, were not so easily stifled. He did not give up on his passions, and he continued to pursue one of his greatest interests—sports. Christie said, “I was avidly interested in sports, and I wanted to work in the Mansfield University Sports Information Department and for the school newspaper as a reporter. I ended up doing both. I enjoyed the writing and editing of the student newspaper and the sports of the Sports Information Department.” His success in these endeavors paved the way for his career in public relations.

Christie’s hardworking attitude and competitive nature, coupled with his love of sports, afforded him the opportunity to work under a highly influential mentor and secure the underpinnings of a promising career in public relations. After finishing college, he assumed positions at several large businesses. Recently, he was designated one of PR Week’s “Top 40 under 40” professionals in the field. In short, Christie is well on his way to having his name permanently inscribed on the roll of outstanding public relations leaders.
relations practitioner, Christie landed positions at powerhouse companies like Sony and General Motors before assuming his position at Dow Jones. At Sony, he revised the way his company communicated to the media at the Consumer Electronics Show. He stated, “We developed strategy in how key announcements were made, and, after those announcements were made, how the media were managed. The whole process became much more cohesive and media friendly.”

With GM, Christie learned that consumers were frustrated that the auto manufacturer’s concept cars were not available for purchase. He effectively communicated the need for top management to produce these vehicles for public use. By listening to consumers and conveying their desires to management, he helped take GM concept cars from the showroom to the conveyor belt.

Currently, Christie plays multiple roles at Dow Jones, including promoting The Wall Street Journal, crisis management, media relations and strategizing and communicating with internal and external constituents.

Christie reported the most rewarding aspect of his career is the sense of fulfillment gained from a job well done. “For me, it’s the personal accomplishments… seeing strategies put into action and the end results. You can really see the cause and effect, and that is extremely rewarding.” While Christie described public relations as largely a behind-the-scenes job and difficult to quantify, he also stated that practitioners are “instrumental in establishing externally and internally the agenda of the company.”

According to Christie, one of the most challenging aspects of public relations is communicating the value of the practice to top executives. “Most organizational management does not understand what PR is. Companies know when they don’t have good PR. That’s when they appreciate it. When they have good PR, they largely don’t know it and don’t appreciate it.” He said that practitioners must earn the respect of management and gain some authority to act in order to be successful and to develop enduring leadership skills.

Christie reported that the best advice he has ever given or received is “never lie to the media and never sit on a story.” He believes that effective media relations are at the core of public relations, and solid, productive relationships can be developed by making events and announcements media friendly and by helping the media construct stories about the organization.
He explained, “Most people have a disdain for the media. They feel like they’re getting their hands dirty by working with them. Positioning, communicating and getting to the theory of what a plan should accomplish is all important, but it’s not nearly as valuable if you don’t get good publicity from it. The media is an incredible resource—the only way a PR practitioner can do his or her job effectively is to appreciate the role of the media and strive to form a positive working relationship with it.”

[“Knowing a Little About a Lot”]

Christie said that effective public relations practice demands a holistic group of skills, including “superb understanding of the organization, awareness of current events, constituents, customers, management and subordinates, and knowing when and how to be assertive.” In short, successful practice entails “knowing a little about a lot, and a lot about a few things.” Christie explained that education can aide in creating a holistic knowledge of the world and more effective practice.

Christie earned his bachelor’s degree in communications from Mansfield University. However, he explained that elective classes were equally instrumental in shaping his career. He specifically cited humanities, foreign language, business and economics, sociology, theater, mass communications and political science courses. Taking such courses exposed him to diverse cultures, experiences and perspectives, which helped him become the leader he is today.

[A Changing Landscape]

According to Christie, the evolution of technology and a changing political landscape are the two major developments that affect public relations today. “When I started working in PR in 1990, the ways we communicated were completely different from the ways we communicate today,” he said. “You never heard of Blackberries or email.

Fun Facts:

Interesting fact:  
- He went to college on a football scholarship

Favorite travel destination:  
- Paris, France

Hobbies:  
- Golf, sports & cooking

Dream job as a kid:  
- To be an airplane pilot

Three things never without:  
- Blackberry, cell phone & I.D.
It’s All About Integrity

The fax machine was how people communicated—I haven’t used a fax machine in years. The only thing you can do now is embrace technology, try to understand it and leverage it to your benefit.”

As for the dynamic political landscape, Christie said, “Politics, politicians and the tone and temperament of the country affect everything. I don’t know how much we can do about that.”

[The Qualities that Matter]

When asked to cite the professional skills or personal qualities that contribute most to his success in public relations, Christie first named patience and media relations. “As a whole, I am not patient. I had to learn from being around people who were very successful at a young age.” Learning from mistakes requires patience and an understanding that perfection does not happen overnight. Patience, then, is a quality that allows a person to focus on the task at hand, learn from mistakes and take the time to understand clients and their needs.

The second quality, media relations, requires “having a command of how media function, what they need and how to work with them effectively.” Christie stated that these two qualities are “at the core of PR; they are the basic building blocks and, without these qualities, practitioners will never be able to do their jobs effectively.”

Christie believes that approximately 90 percent of what it takes to be an effective leader can be learned. The keys to developing leadership skills, according to Christie, include learning from mentors—those already experienced in the profession—learning from mistakes and gaining the confidence to lead others.

Christie met Bob Blake, his most influential mentor, during his first job in public relations. “Blake embodied everything that I wanted in my own career, from personal integrity to a consistent professional and someone who excelled at every aspect of his career,” said Christie. “Blake had a wide range of experience, having met every President from Truman to Reagan. He made the profession an enjoyable career.” Christie said that Blake is the reason he pursued a career in public relations and is still in the industry today.

Christie also said that mistakes are the sources of his greatest learning experiences. “I learn from my mistakes,” he said. “I will never make them again, and I will never get down about the things I have done wrong throughout my career.” He went on to reference the value of learning.
from the mistakes of peers and mentors. The ability to learn from personal mistakes and the mistakes of others, and rebound from those negative consequences, boosts confidence and enhances professional development.

Without self-confidence, it is impossible to win the confidence of others. This is why self-efficacy is another component of leadership. Christie pointed out that leaders not only require the confidence of their subordinates and peers, but also that of top management. “If those around me do not have confidence in me, they will never buy into any recommendations I suggest.”

What can young professionals do to hone their own leadership skills and abilities? According to Christie, development begins early in a career, usually within a few years after college. This provides the individual time to gain experience and knowledge of the industry. Practitioners also have to “be willing to be successful and adopt a long-term perspective,” because success in the industry does not occur overnight. Aspiring public relations practitioners need the foresight to plan for and even anticipate future events. Finally, aspiring young professionals must be willing to sacrifice. Whether the sacrifice comes from personal or professional realms, it is almost always necessary for a serious and successful career in public relations.

According to Christie, sacrifice often means “taking a better job.” While taking a better job may not sound like sacrifice, he explained that “the better job often pays less money.” For example, the “better job” is usually one that provides quality, hands-on experience and the opportunity to work with a powerful mentor, as opposed to one that offers a hefty pay check. In the end, the “better job” will almost always pay off.

[Setting the Standard]

In the wake of organizational melt-downs such as Enron and Tyco, Dow Jones & Company is an organization regarded by many as a model for effective business practices. This is largely due to its high organizational standards. According to Christie, each January, the company redefines its code of conduct, which outlines policies of personal behavior and ethics. Dow Jones requires each and every employee to sign this yearly agreement.

Christie explained that the company’s policies and expectations are written in black and white, and there is no misunderstanding among employees about what will happen if they violate this strict code. He believes strongly in setting high self-standards, citing integrity
as the one value at the core of his professional practice. “I never lie. I never cheat. I never steal,” he said. Dedication to his own personal code of conduct aligns with Dow Jones’ strong statement of professional values. “Personal and organizational values go hand in hand,” he said. “If we are not operating from the same baseline, we cannot produce a product that is so highly regarded as The Wall Street Journal.”

[What the Future Holds]
While Robert Christie’s name is not among the college football greats, it is increasingly recognized within the public relations profession. He acknowledges that his first job found him, and that there was a little luck involved in his career. However, Christie saw the potential for an outstanding career in public relations and worked to improve his abilities as a practitioner. His competitive nature, media relations skills, comprehensive knowledge of the industry and strong ethical orientation have combined to produce professional success and recognized leadership capabilities.

Brinkley L. Clanton
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology
Hometown: Thomasville, Alabama
All work and no play? Not in the office of Howard Clabo, manager of go-to-market media relations for FedEx Services. Mixing hard work with fun, he has emerged as a leader in public relations who uses his creativity and exceptional communication skills to deliver first-class results; he's the “go-to” guy for communications.

Not taking himself too seriously, but seriously enough, is one way to describe Clabo. As a child, he wanted to be a stand-up comedian. Perhaps an obvious connection, but when asked to mention something he does everyday to enhance his work performance, Clabo simply stated, “laugh.”

But that’s just one side of Clabo. The other side is a driven professional looking to maximize the success of his company. He understands the business he’s in, and he understands communication strategy. At FedEx, it all comes down to delivering packages. Delivering on the promise of the brand is the job of Howard Clabo.

Clabo grew up in Philadelphia and attended college at Tulane University in New Orleans, where he majored in political science. He began college in more of a sports marketing role, but said he always had an interest in public relations. Right out of school, Clabo began his public relations career as an assistant account executive at the global PR agency, GCI Group, in New York City. Working on the agency side allowed him to get experience in a broad range of issues and projects, providing insights that would guide his career.
First-Class Communications

took a giant leap forward when GCI Group appointed him general manager at its office in Mexico City. The move there was an incredibly valuable opportunity, according to Clabo, who gained experience managing people, and learning firsthand about the cultural issues of communications. Additionally, he realized the growing importance of global communications, giving him a new perspective of the business.

To make things even more challenging to the young professional, the office in Mexico City was an under-performing operation, meaning change was absolutely essential. “When I took on the GM role, there was an immediate need to address the staffing situation in terms of where resources were focused and the training for those positions,” said Clabo. “I wanted to move quickly to get what was needed done, but in the process learned a very important lesson about managing people through change.” That lesson was: the importance of communicating change to others, explaining why change is needed and making sure employees are aware of their expectations.

Throughout his career, Clabo has worked in a wide range of PR areas, including media relations, corporate communications, financial communications and mergers and acquisitions. These experiences have helped shape his ability to lead, while also helping him understand the many aspects of communications. “When you work in communications, you really have to be able to understand a little bit of everything,” said Clabo. Clabo’s variety of work experiences has helped him understand the industry at a much higher level.

According to Clabo, excellent leadership in public relations combines “a strong understanding of the business, a strong understanding of communication strategy, and a healthy amount of creativity.” Clabo deals with a variety of people each day, communicating internally with FedEx employees, as well as externally with the media. Thus, he places a heavy emphasis on effective communication strategy combined with good listening skills. He has to be able to communicate with and understand different perspectives. To do this, he talks in the language of the business, so that everyone he deals with can understand the strategy and objectives of the organization.

Excellent leaders have a number
of skills that make them successful in a business environment. They are “people who understand talent management, understand not only how to deliver results, but also understand how to build and grow an organization,” said Clabo.

An essential component of public relations, and one that often goes without saying, is the need for fundamental skills. Clabo stresses the importance of both written and verbal forms of communication. To be successful in public relations, “you need to have those basic skills and you have to be a good writer,” said Clabo. Good communication helps an organization coordinate its objectives across the company, as well as enhancing strategic development.

The ability to articulate is another important skill in public relations. “The ability of a company to not only articulate its products to its customers, but also to articulate or motivate its employees to deliver on the promise of the brand, has become an incredibly important part of how businesses are going to be successful,” said Clabo.

Clabo’s concept of leadership is one that can be applied to any industry, not just public relations. He believes leadership is a learned skill, even for people born with natural abilities. And what is the best way to develop leadership skills? “Well there’s no better way to do it than to lead,” said Clabo. He recommends finding projects, regardless of the level, where you can take on a leadership role.

Having a management that understands the role and importance of communication is a huge advantage for people working in the profession. Clabo lists a number of ways to help others understand the role of public relations. “You have to be a business partner. You have to talk in the language of the business and the priorities of the business. You have to show how you are adding value. How is what you’re doing benefiting the overall company?”

One of the most rewarding aspects of Clabo’s job is
“having a seat at the table in terms of helping to define the organization and helping to bring those strategies to life across so many different aspects of the business.” His role at FedEx is a very broad one, allowing him to take on a range of responsibilities, making his job in public relations one of excitement and constant change.

A creative person himself, Clabo enjoys managing and work with other creative people. “I think there are a different set of skills that one needs to manage creative people because you need to understand the creative process,” he said. “Sometimes it’s a matter of, how do you maintain a strategy and balance it with the creativity?” And leave it up to Clabo to do the job. He understands the creative process and how to coordinate it to fit the objectives of the company.

A large part of his understanding comes from watching other leaders in his field. Clabo attributes a big part of FedEx’s favorable image to Bill Margaritis, FedEx corporate vice president of worldwide communications and investor relations. “Bill has an incredible understanding of the business,” Clabo said. “He’s very creative. He has a very strong understanding of communication strategy, and he’s a charismatic guy. I think those are the kinds of things that you need to have a successful organization, especially at this size.”

Clabo was also fortunate enough to have an excellent role model early in his career. Bruce Bishop, the CFO of a company he worked for previously, helped Clabo understand not only the business of public relations, but also the business world. His advice taught Clabo to view his profession from a variety of angles, learning to balance the business side with other elements, like creativity.

[A Team Effort]
Just like the importance of a good leader, having a great team of employees yields success for a company. Part of Clabo’s success at FedEx can be attributed to his ability to assess skill and talent in others. Finding the right mix of skills, talents, and backgrounds is something Clabo looks for when hiring his employees, and he considers the team he built at FedEx the proudest achievement of his career.

The relationship he has developed with his team at FedEx is a good indicator of the continued achievement and strong reputation of the company. “I think that people need to have a very good understanding of what their role in the organization is,” Clabo said. “People need to have a scorecard of success—an
First-Class Communications

understanding of whether or not they’re doing a good job. People need good feedback on an ongoing basis of how they’re performing. And people need to feel success is celebrated and that failure is not the end of the world; it just needs to be explored into why you failed.”

The environment of a workplace also can make a huge difference in the performance of its employees. “I’m a believer in working hard, but also having fun at the same time,” Clabo said. “So, I think that our environment here is a really good balance of fun and hard work.” In addition to finding that balance, honesty is the most important value in Clabo’s professional practice. He pointed out that being honest with the people you work with, being honest with the media, and being honest with yourself are all crucial elements in his profession.

[Major Changes in the Profession]

Being able to adapt to change is an important part of leadership, and in public relations, change is occurring rapidly. One of the most significant changes in the industry is the growth of the Internet. “You have a platform to tell a much more powerful story,” said Clabo. “We’re able to target very specific audiences with very specific stories and messages that we simply couldn’t do without that medium.”

The impact of the Internet is a change Clabo has seen largely represented by new professionals entering the field. “They bring a different perspective, and a different understanding of what communications can do,” said Clabo. “Listening and understanding the next generation is critically important to us because those are our next customers, and those are our next employees.” Clabo values the ideas and perspectives of future generations and sees them as a significant opportunity for the growth of public relations.

Beyond the Internet, Clabo identified two other major developments affecting public relations: the pressure of time and the global mix of communication with media relations. The public relations profession operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, making the issue of time extremely significant. Whether it’s following a developing story or simply sending out an email, the expectation of response—the speed of response—has grown exponentially.

From managing an office in Mexico City to working for the global FedEx corporation, communication at a global level is an issue that really hits home with Clabo. “We truly are operating in a global communications environment, which has a lot of challenges and opportunities.”
The industry of public relations is full with growing opportunities. Within these opportunities lies the ever present need for strong leadership. Howard Clabo has combined his understanding of the business with an innovative approach to leadership to generate enthusiasm and excellence in every aspect of his work. Valuing the performances of others and utilizing his own deep knowledge of communications, Clabo has become a respected leader in public relations, one who makes every day at work a little more exciting.

Shannon E. Creamer  
Bachelor of Arts, Advertising  
Hometown: Midland, Texas
A Strong Work Ethic From Strong Roots

Liliana Esposito
Senior Vice President, Mercury Public Affairs

Working on a vegetable farm in Rhode Island from age 14 through her college years and being raised by a single mother, Liliana Esposito learned early how hard you have to work to get things done. In fact, Esposito’s mother is the most important role model in her life and one of the smartest people she knows. Despite the fact that her mother was unable to attend college, she made sure that Esposito and her sister did. Working two or three jobs at a time, Esposito’s mother instilled the idea of a strong work ethic in her daughters.

“If you are the person answering the phone or the person running the company, your work ethic is important, and it is personal to you as opposed to something that is specific to a job,” Esposito said.

Growing up, Esposito’s mother performed secretarial work; however, Esposito and her sister thought their mother ran the company because she took such pride in her work and always acted as if her name was on the door. Only later in life did they realize their mother was not the company’s CEO. She always did what needed to be done, though it might not have been included in her job description.

Esposito took her powerful childhood learning experiences and carried them throughout her career, which began inauspiciously.

[From Internship to Profession]

The only place Esposito received an interview for an internship while in college was at Burson-Marsteller, a leading public relations and public affairs global firm. She had no knowledge about the public relations industry prior to this time, but she knew that she liked to write, and she
liked public policy and public affairs related news. When she realized there were jobs available that encompassed what she was interested in reading and learning about, she decided to make that her career.

After her tenure at Burson-Marsteller, Esposito took a job at Mars Incorporated, a global, family-owned business that produces snack foods, pet care products, food and drinks. She no longer felt as if she was just playing at being a public relations professional, rather, the responsibility was now on her shoulders.

[A Professional Challenge Accomplished]

At Mars, Esposito took on what she considered to be her biggest accomplishment to date: building a professional public affairs network, a team that would monitor and react to federal and state-level government affairs challenges.

The strong work ethic her mother instilled in her came into play when Esposito undertook this challenge. She had to do what she considered to be one of the most demanding aspects of her profession—demonstrating the business value of communications and government affairs work.

“The most challenging part is being able to show a client what the end result is going to be. It can be difficult to convince them that they need to put their trust in you, and they need to put their budget resources in your hands. You have the knowledge of what is possible, but it can be challenging to make the client see it the same way,” said Esposito.

One of the biggest weaknesses of public relations professionals, according to Esposito, is believing that what they do is inherently valuable, irrespective of what their clients’ needs are. When she was creating the government affairs program, she had to prove that the plans she developed would support the businesses’ objectives. She had to show the value of what she was doing by effectively communicating with her organization, so they would understand the challenges they were facing as well as the opportunities they had to solve their problems.

Her strong work ethic provided her with the ability to complete her goal despite the fact that it took longer than she initially imagined. While she considers creating this program to be one of the biggest accomplishments in her career, she also thinks she still could have done more, although the company was happy with the results.
Esposito feels that it is not so important how much education a person has, but rather the thirst for knowledge and the ability to think analytically about problems that is more important to professional success.

"An education is crucial, but I think it's more about the importance of intellectual curiosity and just being smart. I think you can be smart without a college education, and I think you can have 27 degrees and still not be smart. I think that your ultimate goal is to operate at the highest level of a company or organization, and those people are really smart and you need to be, too. If you can't hold your own intellectually, you are not going to do well in this business," Esposito said.

Esposito received a bachelor's degree in government and foreign affairs from the University of Virginia, and while she does not revisit her textbooks to solve the problems she encounters in her day-to-day world, her education did provide her with an appreciation for the political process and understanding of the history behind it. College's challenging intellectual environment provided her with the ability to think critically about problems and analyze the situations she faces in her career.

Esposito took a job at Mercury Public Affairs shortly after her tenure at Mars Incorporated. While working at Mercury, where she is now a senior vice president, she completed law school, where she learned more about how to reason and persuade someone to listen to her opinion, a valuable skill in the public relations profession. Esposito feels that law school was like learning a new language every day. She was challenged every time she went to class, and this has carried over into her leadership style and abilities.

When asked how her colleagues would describe her, Esposito replied, “I hope as a smart, hard-working individual who is completely invested in my clients' success.”

Utilizing the skills she acquired in college and in law
A Strong Work Ethic From Strong Roots

school, Esposito is 100 percent invested in her clients and her co-workers. She is dedicated to analytically thinking about and evaluating every aspect of her clients’ needs and successes. In addition, she makes sure those who work with her are challenged intellectually and engaged on a day-to-day basis.

“When you work for these large corporations, you are also representing all of the employees that work for them,” said Esposito. “Those people’s jobs rely on the success of the business and often communication challenges can greatly affect that.”

[Attracting & Retaining Talent]

Esposito feels the biggest issue facing public relations leaders today is attracting and keeping the smartest people in the field. It is difficult in her mind to retain quality professionals in the public relations industry without challenging these people with the work they are given. Those who want to be successful in life have a need to be challenged, and if the public relations executives in the world could effectively challenge those who are entering the profession, they will have a better chance of retaining those bright, young minds.

“Top talent coming out of undergraduate institutions have the ability to work in fields like finance where they can make a lot of money right away and have a lot of cache in their profession,” Esposito said. “It is a challenge for the public relations field to make sure we are getting our share of the smart folks and keeping them. Keeping them engaged, challenged and in the field. I have seen a lot of very smart people leave the public relations field, which is troubling.”

She stressed the importance of not only being a practitioner, but also being an effective manager. Effective leaders need to know how to manage their clients and take care of the business. They also need to look out for those who work with them and to ensure they are learning and are developing professionally.

Esposito has made it a personal challenge to inspire those with whom she works. Having a strong vision and being able to inspire others to believe in that vision is how she feels that excellent leaders are able to motivate those who work with them.

She defines an excellent leader as, “someone who works as hard as everyone under them and is seen always as leading the team by example. Someone who is not necessarily good at every discipline, but is very good at recognizing excellence in others and promoting that. A leader allows

“I think you can be smart without a college education, and I think you can have 27 degrees and still not be smart.”
the members of the team to excel in the areas of their strengths which, makes the work product better for the whole team.”

Esposito values qualities in other leaders like being tough but fair to those who work with her. Leaders who take time out of their schedule to mentor junior people and teach them rather than simply telling them how things are done.

Honesty and integrity are also important to her leadership style, as well as central to her ethical core. While inspiring those around her to be the best they can be, Esposito is constantly evaluating herself as a co-worker and as a leader. She examines what she can do better and assesses her weaknesses, so she will know her strengths when it comes time to work in a team. Esposito feels that leaders share no particular trait, but she thinks that being honest with herself and her co-workers about her weaknesses is the best way to genuinely lead those around her.

“Integrity, being honest with your clients and honest with the people that you work with [are at the core of my professional practice]. I think I could have succeeded more had I had been less ethical at times,” Esposito said. “That is just something that would not have been acceptable to me. Having a strong work ethic, showing up, going to work every day and always being responsive to my clients and to my organization is important to me. Whether on the agency or corporate side, I’ve always focused on what needed to be done as opposed to what I had to do.”

In short, Esposito has applied the work ethic and values she learned at an early age throughout her professional career.

She encourages those who are entering the profession to be open-minded about what they work on and who they work with. She urges them not to get bogged down in the glitz and glamour of the public relations profession, but rather to look more deeply, at how it can actually help people and organizations. And to always focus on the team.

“I would always pick the best team over the client with the most impressive name,” she said. “Focus on working with really smart people, regardless of whether the client is a household name; some of the most unglamorous industries and clients can often be the most challenging and rewarding.”

According to Esposito, the bottom line to finding success in the public relations field: surround yourself with smart people and always challenge yourself to be better. She has managed to do that in her short professional tenure. Not only has she been
successful and managed to challenge herself on a daily basis, she inspires those around her to challenge themselves as well.

S. Denise Donald
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Port Gibson, Mississippi
The greats: Winston Churchill, JFK, Paul Bear Bryant and Chris Finnegan...well maybe not quite yet. But this 31-year-old emerging public relations professional, who has worked at top agencies such as Ketchum, Hill & Knowlton and now Discovery Communications, is well on his way to becoming a legend of his own.

With childhood dreams of pounding the gridiron, Finnegan changed his direction when he realized that he had a talent for understanding people, being able to put himself in other people's shoes. “Emotional intelligence,” as he likes to call it, is what he believes to be one of the top qualities for success in public relations. But being a manager and a leader in any field isn’t only about walking the walk or even talking the talk, it’s more about talking the walk -- a combination of leading by example and having the ability to showcase your individual talents.

For Finnegan, currently the vice president of communications for the Discovery Health and Discovery Kids cable networks, his 10 year climb to the top has been filled with ups and downs, but the success he has found is based on four leadership principles: understanding audiences, leading by example, learning from every experience and working hard through times of uncertainty. These four principles were not something that he initially developed as an equation for success, but they have become something he has realized and wants to pass on to the public relations community.

[Audiences & Emotional Intelligence]

Knowing your audience, Finnegan said, was the
best piece of advice he ever received regarding public relations. It can be a complicated process, but the key is to first understand what public relations practitioners’ roles are in that process, and then understand how to “identify with someone other than yourself” by using emotional intelligence.

The main goal of public relations practitioners, according to Finnegan, is to fulfill a goal for an organization “whether it be someone that we’re representing as an agency, or working in house with our latest campaign...what we want to do is figure out, if there’s a goal, then how do we communicate messages were trying to get out to people who need to hear them.” He also said public relations people have to “figure out where the audiences are that you want to reach, and where the best channels are to reach that audience.” Public relations people serve an important role in business environments. In fact, Finnegan believes that “if all the PR people in the world disappeared, it would be a lot harder to communicate, and people wouldn’t get the information that they need when they need.”

For companies to know who to reach and how to reach them, they have to know how to identify with someone other than themselves, which is the second aspect of understanding audiences. Finnegan believes that emotional intelligence is one of the biggest ideas a public relations person needs to understand. Clients have many options as to where they can take their business, so to obtain and maintain that business, companies have to be certain they provide the best possible work. Clients choose the agencies, not vice versa. This means that a communication team will work with a variety of clients, targeting a variety of demographics.

For example, one of the TV shows that Finnegan worked on was a series called “Jon and Kate Plus 8.” The concept for the show is a couple, Jon and Kate, who have one set of twins and a group of sextuplets for a total of eight children under the age of seven. The fact that this program is targeted towards women 25-54 with children, and Finnegan is a 31-year-old guy with no kids, suggests that he did not quite understand the market at first. After extensive research and utilization of emotional intelligence, Finnegan and his team discovered their audience and how to approach them. As a result, communications and public relations were key drivers in the show becoming the highest rated program on Discovery Health and now one of cable’s most-watched shows on sister network TLC.
[Leading by Example]

Another aspect of leadership in the profession is leading by example. In organizational settings, everyone has a boss they like or dislike at one time or another. Finnegan feels that having different leaders provides people the opportunity to learn from these individuals, whether good leaders or bad. Having a leader who completely embodies excellent leadership characteristics can be beneficial to an organization so that others may try to emulate their actions. On the other hand, working in an organization where leadership is not present, people can often sense the leadership void, and productivity and morale may disappear.

In his own leadership style, Finnegan believes in a “horizontal management approach.” He said, “I don’t like to get caught up in titles, where the vice president does this, the director does this, the managers do this and the publicist does this. When you start thinking about that, you’re more occupied with what you shouldn’t do, or what you can’t do, than what you can do.”

Finnegan said his first encounter with someone who led by powerful example was a man named Jon Higgins, then the office director at Ketchum in San Francisco, where Finnegan worked earlier in his career. Finnegan said that Higgins, “had such a great public persona... he was just someone who practiced what he preached and had a lot of the positive leadership attributes that I mentioned.” As a leader, “Higgins personified the values that he was trying to communicate to his audiences,” said Finnegan. This experience made him realize that “a leader or manager has the opportunity to set a tone in a company,” and Finnegan wanted to emulate that as much as possible as he moved forward in his career.

[Fun Facts]

Interesting fact:
-He has a great CD collection

Three things never without:
-iPod, wallet & cell phone

Hobbies:
-Following sports, pop culture, politics & seeing live music

Best PR advice received:
-Know your audience

Dream job as a kid:
-To play in the NFL

[Leveraging Opportunities to Learn]

The third aspect of leadership in public relations has to do
with leveraging opportunities so that they can be used as learning devices. Finnegan believes that every opportunity should be used to learn something new, whether a good or bad experience. When people fail, find out why they failed; when people succeed, find out what they did that helped them do so well. This approach gives people confidence in projects that they do so that the next time can be successful. Earlier in his career, when Finnegan was finally given the opportunity to run his own project, he received praise and recognition from his leaders for his work. This praise and recognition motivated him to receive that same positive reinforcement on his next project. The experience helped him learn that, now as a leader, he wants to “give people the opportunity to run their own show...when it works out, I make sure they know they’ve done a good job.”

Another situation in which Finnegan learned from his experiences occurred when he received a bad review from his manager. During a project at his first public relations job, his boss implemented a six-month review where “truth be told [he] could have been doing a better job.” When he received the review, the 22-year-old was surprised to see that he had earned a poor job performance evaluation. In fact, his boss even questioned whether he should stay in the public relations field. “I walked out of that office...with an enormous chip on my shoulder,” he said. “And I vowed to never receive a bad review again.” To this day, he has not. “That chip on my shoulder ended up being a pretty good motivator,” said Finnegan, “and every once in a while I think about that time, and it still motivates me.” He said that experience, plus his new found motivation, equaled “a magic formula,” and 10 years later, the math still works.

Another learning experience has grown out of the ever changing media that his industry and all industries are currently facing. For public relations, however, the media are proving to be a big part of everyday opportunities and challenges from which professionals must learn. The media are no longer just TV, newspaper, magazines and radio. “Everything started changing with the proliferation of the Internet,” said Finnegan who frequents Web sites like NYT.com, metacritic, pitchfork, drudgereport and ESPN.com. “It’s like finding a needle in a haystack sometimes communicating to the new media,” according to Finnegan. “You’ve got 50 people looking at this blog, 50 people looking at that one...and there’s about a zillion different blogs out there.”

Dealing with this issue is all about
“being flexible and making sure that you can continue to have your strategy and your outreach evolve in a parallel pattern with the media,” he said. In today’s era of “RSS feeds and Google alerts, I can pick random topics that are of interest to me like my company, my network or my shows that I’m promoting,” said Finnegan, “and basically I leverage different search engines and any kind of mechanism that calls for the news for me.” Best advice? “Know everything about everything all the time and eat breakfast; it makes the day go much better.”

[Dealing With Uncertainty]

The final aspect of leadership in public relations, according to Finnegan, has to do with how people deal with stress and stressful situations. Finnegan’s advice: “Remain cool when things get uncertain.” Times of uncertainty are inevitable, but the key is, “Instead of freaking out and going to the coffee room and being nervous with your friends,” Finnegan said, “always see chaos as an opportunity to be a leader and show your skills.”

Finnegan experienced this first hand, when he was put in charge of an important pharmaceutical meeting in Sweden, targeting worldwide medical journalists. With his second language being only a fragmented Spanish, he was out of his comfort zone, but he asked questions, learned the culture and did his job. He recalled, “It’s just hard going out there and being resourceful and trying to understand the people as quickly as possible, figuring out what are the tricks and what are the best ways to get the information you want in front of these people so they will act on it.” In the end, Finnegan put together an aggressive campaign to position this event and drive the media to it. As a result, he was able to double the expected attendance at the event, which solidified his reputation as a professional.

Finnegan believes that uncertain times and problems provide people the opportunity to emerge as true leaders. These times provide people with the opportunity to shine through chaos and establish their reputation in the professional arena. Reputation, Finnegan said, is one of the most important things in the world. Through reputation and using skills, people can set themselves apart from others and shine through as a leader.

Although things have changed dramatically for Finnegan since his days as a busboy at 14, he said success now is all about letting people know what you can do for them. “By saying from day one that I know what my strengths and skills sets
are, anything I don’t know, I’ll learn as quickly as possible and I’ll work to improve my weaknesses. From there it’s all a matter of hard work, dedication and some long hours.”

Finnegan said he has seen this in current leaders at Discovery Communication. David Leavy, Discovery Communications’ executive vice president of communications and corporate affairs, is a “very good ambassador in terms of articulating the values of public relations to the key decision makers at Discovery,” Finnegan said. “He practices and preaches the power of communications to the decision makers of the company, which ultimately trickles down so that people understand the vital role that communications people play for the company.” Finnegan believes that Leavy is a role model for “how a CEO/communication practitioner relationship should work.”

Because public relations professionals wear many hats, it’s no wonder that they have different ideas about what constitutes a perfect leader in the field. Finnegan, however, believes strongly in what he needs to do to be a leader in his professional life. His leadership formula includes the principles of understanding audiences, leading by example, using all experiences as a learning tool and keeping cool in times of stress. By adapting and using these four principles, professionals can emerge as leaders, and leaders can emerge as greats.

Catherine E. Edwards
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Paducah, Kentucky
“Everything I’ve ever learned in my career has been from strong leaders and strong managers.” Megan Frank said her knowledge and experiences came from “being in the trenches,” living it and always doing what she feels is right. She relied on everything she had ever learned during one “trench” moment that fell on a fateful Tuesday.

[Not Just Any Other Day]
Frank worked for Morgan Stanley, the largest tenant of the World Trade Center. Thankfully, her office, located in the second tower, was empty on September 11, 2001. When the planes hit, she and the rest of her team were at their Midtown office; they held weekly global conference calls that were always conducted on Tuesdays. Frank can still remember the immediate reactions after hearing about the attacks. Phones rang off the hook while everyone in Morgan Stanley’s Corporate Communications group office worked frantically to begin managing the largest crisis the company and the country had ever seen.

Knowing that going home to hide that day and the weeks following was not an option, Frank threw it into high gear and exhibited great courage and determination for her company. As Frank said, “That was really a time and experience where you had to step up and lead by example.” She couldn’t have been more correct. The first thing on the agenda: handle the hundreds of calls that came into Morgan Stanley’s Communication group office. “We were just so inundated with calls, as you can imagine, calls from clients, from employees, employees from other companies that didn’t know who to call.” She
remembers people calling and telling her that they were just on the phone with a friend who was in one of the towers, and the call was suddenly cut off. It must have been extremely difficult to then tell those worried callers that she had no idea of the whereabouts of those people. “It was very challenging, very exhausting, but I think it was really an experience where, not just me, but my entire team really stepped up to the challenge and led by example. There’s no way that we would have been able to get through it, and do what we needed to do, if we weren’t all working together as part of a team and really leading the company.”

For many weeks following the attacks, Megan Frank and her colleagues continued to feel the aftermath. They worked tirelessly dispelling rumors, putting out press releases and were the first company to set up an 800 number for employees to call. Those were only some of the many tasks that had become part of the everyday to-do list at Morgan Stanley. Days like this went on for months. However, it was that first week that Frank remembers as the most grueling. “We were in the office every single day until 10 or 11 o’clock trying to find our employees.” It was a week where it seemed that every single second was a defining experience.

Frank and her team were immediately thrown into many situations in which they each became leaders at Morgan Stanley. “It was a defining experience where you kind of stepped into your own and had to be a leader and had to lead the organization, lead our CEO, and lead this battered group of employees.” Frank said the goal of her team was to get Morgan Stanley back to business as usual and to make it to a day where they could go into work and the first thing everyone talked about would actually be something other than September 11th.

“I am a jack of all trades.”

Morgan Stanley eventually reached its goals, but one thing had to be done before the company and its routine were completely back to normal. On the day of the attacks, a group of financial advisors from across the country was attending a Morgan Stanley training class being held in Two World Trade. Most of these new advisors were fresh out of college and many had never been to New York. When the first plane hit, they were forced to evacuate the building. Once they were actually out of the building, many were stranded in the city. By the time they all returned to their homes, they had become local celebrities who were sought out constantly for interviews.

In normal circumstances, this might be good news. The problem was, though,
that Morgan Stanley had a strict policy on who could talk to the press. “They were young, junior-level people who had been employed by the firm for months, if anything. They weren’t necessarily the ideal spokespeople that we would have wanted to put forward.” And may of these trainees were doing interviews with their local press without getting approval from Corporate Communications. In one instance, for example, a trainee made a statement to his local newspaper suggesting that Morgan Stanley might not be able to stay in business. Frank remembered CNN picking up on that and reporting that Morgan Stanley was closing up shop!

In the end, it was decided that they be allowed to do the interviews. “We basically let them do the interviews because we thought it would be a cathartic experience for them to talk about it,” Frank said. She managed every interview opportunity and coached trainees for those interviews.

“There’s nothing in my mind that I could ever think about experiencing that would come close to dealing with that situation,” Frank said. “Getting through that crisis, I think, prepared me for anything that would be thrown at me. It was horrible, but also one of those defining experiences.”

[From the Beginning]

Frank has had her share of defining experiences. Through them all, she has relied on a strong foundation built in her childhood. “My parents are my role models,” she said. “They have both demonstrated outstanding leadership—both personally and professionally—and have provided me with the building blocks I need to be successful—again, both personally and professionally.”

She has played many different roles throughout her career. Frank said, “I am a jack of all trades. I’m the only person handling PR for Allianz Global Investors in the U.S. So, I get involved in everything from philanthropy to also managing our internal communications function.” Her responsibilities with internal

Fun Facts:

Dream job as a kid:
-A veterinarian

Favorite food:
-Cheese

Interesting fact:
-She loves to play poker & recently won a poker tournament

Favorite music:
-Classic rock or 80s

To enhance work performance:
-She reads the newspaper every morning
communications include employee communications, communications with her CEO and liaising with Allianz headquarters in Munich and other Allianz communications people worldwide.

Though her title is vice president and director of public relations at Allianz Global Investors, she did not wake up one day while a young child and say, “I want to go into public relations and be a vice president when I grow up.” In fact, her passion throughout high school and in her undergraduate experience at Colgate University was math and science. Her first declared major in college was chemistry, and she spent the summer after her freshman year working as a lab assistant, where she ran tests hoping to find a link between a certain species of salamanders and the human heart.

When she realized that she was too extroverted and outgoing for a career that required her to spend all of her time in a laboratory, she stopped searching for a cure for heart disease and moved on to major in political science. She returned from a semester abroad in Italy the spring of her junior year in great need of a summer job. After searching through job and internship opportunities at her school’s career center, she found a public relations internship opportunity. Frank said, “I had no idea what public relations was because I went to a liberal arts college, so we didn’t have public relations as a major or communications as a major.” Despite her lack of knowledge in the public relations field, she made a quick decision that would change her career path and life. “I sort of blindly took this summer job and ended up really liking it,” she said.

The position was with one of New York’s largest public relations firms, Rubinstein Public Relations, and Frank spent most of the summer working with the entertainment group. She worked on big events for big-name clients, including Diana Ross. The biggest event of her summer was working on Donald Trump’s 50th birthday celebration. She said that it ended up being a surprise party that he threw for himself, and if you can imagine, it was, well, unimaginable. One of her many jobs for the evening was making sure the paparazzi stayed in one room and didn’t sneak away to other areas that were off-limits to anyone but the celebrities who appeared and followed the red carpet leading them into the Trump extravaganza.

“It was very challenging, very exhausting, but I think it was really an experience where, not just me, but my entire team really stepped up to the challenge.”
found to be what I enjoy the most,” Frank said. “So to anybody coming out of college, I highly recommend working at a PR agency where you have the opportunity to work on a lot of different accounts in a lot of different industries. So you can get your feet wet in a lot of different areas to focus on what you’re most interested in. I don’t think if I had had that experience I would have ended up where I am today.”

[High Expectations]

Management is an act that has been crucial throughout Frank’s career. Managing the expectations of company executives and clients is one of the most essential skills for excellent leaders in public relations. To Frank, an excellent leader in public relations knows how to manage internally and externally, as well as how to manage the expectations of clients and company executives. She said, “I think that’s a really important quality of somebody who is going to excel in this field. It’s as much managing internally as it is managing things externally.”

“At Burson-Marsteller, we were taught that perception is reality, and it really rings true,” Frank said. “Regardless of the facts, if the public believes something to be true, you need to prepare and respond as if it is.” In addition, she said, “You have to proceed assuming that [the public] has already made up its mind, and try to address that reality.” She has witnessed instances, she said, when public relations professionals sat back and nodded their heads in agreement with whatever the executives or clients were expecting from a campaign or from media coverage of an issue. The problem, she said, was that the professionals never turned the tables and tried to explain what the truly realistic expectations were.

She said this skill is especially crucial during crisis situations, when being on top of things and being prepared to explain the reality of what is happening, and what the public responses may be, are two critical leadership abilities. “I don’t think you can be prepared and put a plan in place in a crisis situation if you’re not having those conversations and acting as a counselor to your business executives or to your clients,” Frank said. This has been particularly true in the financial services industry. She said, “There are a lot of issues affecting the industry,” she said. “The press loves to focus on the negative to a certain extent, and you sort of become jaded after a while in this industry.”

Frank said that the press loves scandals and helps to perpetuate them. “When an issue arises where it looks like individuals are being harmed, or companies aren’t
doing what’s in the best interest of their clients, [the media] sometimes reports on the issue without fully knowing the facts and sometimes without even talking to the company,” she said. This is when managing expectations and managing internally becomes even more important. Frank said if you don’t stay on your toes, then the “next thing you know, you have a crisis on your hands and people have no idea what’s going on.”

According to Frank, passion is yet another important aspect of successful leadership, and she’s passionate about her work. Frank said she enjoys going into the office everyday and reading the newspaper at her desk. She looks forward to what her day will bring and learning about what is going on around her. “You really have to keep on top of things and on top of stories and trends. If you don’t have a passion for that and really enjoy coming into work and reading the newspaper, it’s not the right field for you.”

She is fervent about staying up-to-date on the world so that she can lead public relations in her company and in her field. Part of the job is educating the company executives on the value of public relations and how much it can contribute to the achievement of company strategy. “It’s kind of demonstrating over time the value of public relations and communications.” That is exactly what Frank has done.

Working in the public relations industry without possessing any form of zeal for what you are doing is like expecting a four-way stop at the end of a dead-end road. “There’s a certain skill set and a distinct person that excels in PR. You really have to have a passion for this, and you have to be a strong communicator,” Frank said. “I’ve definitely had those bosses and managers who were not the best communicators, and you can’t be a strong leader, specifically in public relations, if you’re not a strong communicator.” To lead successfully in this field, one must have passion for the value of public relations, passion for clients, passion for the news and for being a strong communicator.

Given her many responsibilities, Frank nevertheless finds time for reading, classical piano and Sudoku! “I have my blackberry with me at all times. There could always be something. I mean, you never know what’s going to come up.” It is this focus, and the enthusiasm for her job at Allianz, which prove her love for her industry and career.

So what makes a great leader? Is it the ability to manage well? Is it having courage and a steady hand during crises? Is it possessing a driving passion
throughout one’s career? It’s all of those things, according to Frank. And more. “Just leading by example is important, too,” she said. “If you have a manager that is really motivational and inspiring, there’s nothing stronger than that.”

Dana M. Edwards
Bachelor of Science, Broadcast Journalism and Advertising
Hometown: Carrollton, Georgia
Philadelphia Phillies third basemen? Architect? Public relations practitioner? All of these career choices are ones that have run through the mind of Andy Hilton, whose journey to public relations started many years before he even knew about the profession.

Growing up in the small rural town of Milford, Pennsylvania, Hilton started working at age 13 at a local restaurant. This restaurant was owned by two homosexual men in the town, which, at the time, was an identifiable trait of the restaurant to the people in the town. At this young age, Hilton was not familiar with the prejudices associated with homosexuality, and therefore was able to keep an open mind and use this job as a valuable learning experience. “I learned in that situation to be open-minded and accepting of all types of people, and to learn from their varied perspectives,” Hilton said. The owners of the restaurant were accepting of him and educated him in ways far beyond a formal education. In addition, he was taught responsibility and given opportunities that turned out to be what he believes one of the most powerful learning experiences of his life. By working at this restaurant, he was able to see the world through open eyes, which led him to explore opportunities outside of the small town of Milford.

[Career Path]

His desire to see what the world had to offer led him to college at Syracuse University in New York. While at Syracuse, he began as a journalism student but wanted to combine that with a business focus. The hybrid of journalism and business led him to major in public relations. He said, “Public
relations suited my goals and my personality perspective. The most important thing for me in my career was diversity in my day-to-day life, which could afford me interesting, diverse experiences.”

Hilton thinks an education in public relations has many benefits. You are able to build a network, initiated at the college level, to further yourself in the industry. Having a tie or contact in the industry is a huge advantage when you’re first starting your career. The liberal arts education teaches you to be curious and ask a lot of questions in a learning environment, while also sharpening the tactical part of your education, which are the writing and editing skills.

Choosing public relations at Syracuse, and the network he built there, led Hilton to an internship with Ketchum the summer between his junior and senior years of college. Upon his graduation, Hilton was offered a full-time position as an assistant account executive at Ketchum in New York City. After working at Ketchum for two years, his former boss brought him over to Peppercom, where he had the opportunity to open the San Francisco office. This opportunity accelerated his career overnight from the normal agency progression to starting a new division of a company effectively by himself. Hilton said, “That gave me a lot of confidence and a whole new vocabulary to go and talk to other leaders and be able to advance my career further.”

After six years at Peppercom, Hilton returned back to Ketchum before starting his current job as director of public relations of ITT Corporation. “All of the things I did after that experience, I don’t think that any of those things would’ve opened up to me if I didn’t have that fundamental experience at that restaurant, where my eyes were opened up to the world outside that small town where I grew up.”

These experiences have helped to define Hilton as a person and develop his career. Hilton mentioned that most recently in his job at ITT, he has realized a rewarding aspect of corporate public relations. He describes the communication and public relations function as being the steward of the company’s reputation. As public relations practitioners, it is our job to articulate, build and maintain the company’s reputation with employees as well as externally with the various stakeholders. To Hilton, this is a rewarding process, but it also has its own set of challenges. One of the challenges that Hilton and many public relations practitioners face is being able to set a value on public relations because the
function does not produce an easily-measured product or service. Being able to demonstrate the value of public relations and help the public understand more about public relations is one of the rewarding aspects of being a practitioner. Hilton said, “I have the benefit in my organization of an enlightened leadership team that inherently ‘gets it,’ which makes my job a little easier.”

[Mentors & Leaders]

Hilton has been fortunate to work with many excellent leaders throughout his experiences at different companies and organizations. He mentioned vision, patience, humility and being able to unite people around a single idea as the most important qualities of an excellent leader. “A good leader is going to have a holistic view of the organization and is going to view himself or herself as a business partner versus a tactician,” Hilton said.

When defining excellent leaders, he mentioned the examples of several leaders with whom he has worked. Tom Martin, former senior vice president and director of corporate relations at ITT Corporation, was at the top of his list. Martin is one of Hilton’s mentors in public relations. Hilton first became associated with Martin early in his career, as ITT was Hilton’s first client at Ketchum right out of college. “The best advice I could give to an emerging leader is to build and nurture a broad professional network. Tom was the linchpin in my network. In addition to giving me sage advice about how to be a better practitioner, he has always been willing to put his web of relationships to work for me,” Hilton said.

Hilton said that Martin once characterized the public relations function as being the “conscience of an organization,” which has inspired Hilton’s approach to the business. He tries to think about his work by gathering many different perspectives, being a great listener, and always being curious so that he can help the organization make better decisions by infusing a unique professional network. Tom was the linchpin in my network. In addition to giving me sage advice about how to be a better practitioner, he has always been willing to put his web of relationships to work for me,” Hilton said.

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Fun Facts:

- Favorite book: "All the Presidents Men"
- Hobbies: Golf, skiing & being a dad
- Favorite movie: "American History X"
- Three things never without: Blackberry, iPod loaded with family pictures & reading material
- Dream job as a kid: Third baseman for the Phillies or an architect
More companies are placing a higher value on the field of public relations as the profession is growing, but this has not always been the case. According to Hilton, leaders like Martin, who are committed to the growth and development of the public relations function, “paved the way” and are the reason why public relations is seen as a higher management function in many companies today. “Tom Martin is one of the best,” Hilton said. “He cares immensely about the future of this profession, evidenced by the fact that he chose to use his retirement to continue teaching the craft to the generation of leaders that will follow me and my peers. He’s one of a kind.”

Rob Flaherty, a senior partner at Ketchum, is another person Hilton cites as an excellent leader. Hilton said that Flaherty always leads with character. But in addition to character, Hilton said that Flaherty “leads with a spirit of camaraderie and with an energy that people rally around. He inspires the kind of commitment that would lead his teams to follow him into a fire if that’s where he guided them.” These traits are sometimes overlooked and not necessarily standard definitions for excellent leadership, but are certainly beneficial in a work environment. It also helps that you like the people you work with and have fun doing it. According to Hilton, Flaherty also created a work environment where people enjoyed coming to work every day.

When asked if he had ever led by example, Hilton said, “I hope I do it everyday.” One particular way Hilton led by example was when he opened up the San Francisco branch of Peppercom. “I’d like to think that I led with a vision of what I wanted that office to be and was able to rally a small, yet mighty, team behind me to open that office and help establish the agency in that important market,” Hilton said.

The way Hilton is able to lead by example is through humility in all aspects of his job. “Humility, it’s probably the best trait that I bring to leadership.” Hilton noted that it is important to know your strengths and weaknesses in all aspects of your job. Hilton said, “You have to recognize when you’re wrong and not the expert in some situation, and surround yourself with people who are experts” in order to successfully reach the organization’s goals. You will never be able to succeed until you can admit your faults and that you’re not an expert in all situations. “Part of leadership,” he said, “is being able to course correct your mistake and right the ship back on the track that you’re heading as an organization.”
Hilton instantly linked this sense of humility to ITT’s chairman, Steve Loranger, and his leadership skills. He first described Loranger as an individual who leads his company with a clear sense of his own personal values, and puts those to work everyday. Hilton then added that “[Loranger] is extremely intelligent and has been very successful at ITT, which you have to attribute partly to his ability to surround himself with a team that can move ITT to that next level in every aspect.” According to Hilton, Loranger’s ability to identify great leaders who can fill gaps in his own capabilities is one of the qualities that make him a great leader and has allowed him to achieve great success in his career. Like the other leaders Hilton mentioned, they are humble people who are experts in some areas, but surround themselves with people who are experts in other areas and therefore able to achieve success as a team.

[Personal Values]

Hilton said that he, too, uses a set of personal values in his profession - humility, integrity, and respect - which he thinks have contributed to his success in public relations. Instead of ranking his set of values, he said they are all weighed equally, linked and tied together. Hilton stressed the importance of being respectful and accepting of diverse points of view and experiences of others. Concerning integrity, he noted that a public relations profession that loses his or her integrity has no chance of long-term success in the field.

While discussing his personal values, he said that they were developed at home. “My parents are very humble and respectful people who lived those values everyday and engrained them in my siblings and me,” Hilton said. At the same time, college friends and employers have also helped him develop these values. He said, “I just happen to gravitate to people who share those values and they become reinforced.”

Having a strong set of personal values is important to keep in mind in your career. Sometimes, client and organizational goals may conflict with personal goals, and you have to know where to draw the line in these areas. Hilton said, “ITT is an extremely ethical organization” which he indicated was one of the main reasons he joined the company. In the public relations industry, there are times that practitioners are sometimes going to come in contact with challenges to their personal beliefs. Hilton said, “There are situations where you have to step away from the situation and say, ‘I’m not willing to do that,’ and put that piece of business or that relationship at risk as a result.” In these situations, “you
have to stay true to your values or you lose your credibility. People who have a reputation for having great credibility and integrity stand out in this profession. Perhaps that’s a sad commentary resulting from our profession’s long association with spin-doctoring, but it’s true,” Hilton said.

[Understanding the Business]

To enhance the importance of public relations within an organization, Hilton foresees a need for practitioners to conquer new challenges, which are associated with the business aspects of an organization. Many college graduates do not have a broad understanding of how businesses operate and succeed. Even though Hilton is mainly focused on the corporate side of public relations, he sees a need for a better understanding of finance for public relations personnel. He also emphasized a need for “understanding how businesses operate and make money; understanding the profit/loss proposition is very important.” Hilton views this as a means of jumpstarting a career and becoming more vital to the employer.

In the future, Hilton believes that the importance of public relations will slowly evolve, becoming more and more significant as companies realize the challenges associated with managing a reputation in an increasingly complex and fast-paced world of communication. Hilton recognizes the direct impact most college graduates have now with their extensive knowledge and familiarity of the Internet as a source of acquiring and managing information.

While he didn’t gain an extensive business background in college, he has acquired it over his 11 years in the public relations industry. By devouring all types of media everyday--newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet -- he enhances his work performance. He can apply his acquired skill set to many different industries and fields -- a major source of enjoyment and satisfaction for him.

Hilton said that he enjoys immensely his choice of occupations. In public relations, he is able to take advantage of his natural internal clock, which seems to maximize late in the afternoon. The creative juices seem to flow better in the afternoon for him, but being a late afternoon guy also has its drawbacks for Hilton. By being tied up at work in the afternoon, he isn’t able to race home to his most important job -- being a dad to his son Charlie.

Meredith B. Hall
Bachelor of Arts, Telecommunication & Film
Hometown: Montgomery, Alabama
Everyone has a defense and everybody has a story,” said Brian Hoyt. “You need to understand that one of the beauties of America is our freedom of speech, that everyone deserves his or her day in court, and everybody deserves to defend themselves in the realm of public opinion as well.”

With this belief, Hoyt approaches each client and each job situation. Fashioning successful communication approaches from this framework, he has managed to continually serve Orbitz Worldwide as a critical team member in all facets of the company’s successful growth.

As a young man, the course of Hoyt’s life was dramatically altered after viewing the documentary film, “The War Room.” The documentary chronicled Bill Clinton’s political campaign as he fought for his presidential win in 1992. “It was really a life-changing documentary for me – a real Plato coming out of the cave sort of moment,” Hoyt said. “It really got me interested in volunteering in political campaigns, and this led to a more active involvement in the 1996 election, during which I volunteered for Bob Dole’s presidential bid, Gov. Bill Weld’s Senate race and other congressional candidates in Massachusetts. In 1998, I worked on Rep. Mike Pappas’ reelection bid in New Jersey. I should add that they all lost.”

Despite his start, working on political campaigns, Hoyt never had a burning desire to work for politicians “after the election.” Ultimately, the big public relations agencies and smaller consultancies that resided on K Street -- Powell Tate, Ogilvy, Porter Novelli, Brodeur -- held the most attraction for Hoyt. “I found that I really didn’t want to
work on Capitol Hill – as noble a profession as that truly is for the many who do serve within the public sector. I discovered that what I really wanted to do was work more within the ‘business of Washington,’ building on a career within the public affairs space. So my life took a little detour from the Hill, but I ended up learning from some of the best in the business on K Street.”

Hoyt’s increasing involvement in political campaign work, after a brief consumer marketing stint at a travel firm called Middleton & Gendron in New York, led him to the K Street corridor in Washington, DC. Less interested in working on Capitol Hill, Hoyt’s time on K Street, amidst spin doctors and lobbyists, helped shape his skills as a public relations practitioner. “Everything is a campaign, no matter if you are selling a widget or an idea,” said Hoyt. “Being a student of political campaigns helps you to understand what it takes to build momentum – long lasting buzz – for a client or your company’s external publicity programs. K Street helps you understand that no matter what side of the aisle you’re sitting on, communications is a business.” Though Hoyt now works in a corporate communications role for Orbitz Worldwide in Chicago vs. his other life on K Street in Washington, DC, he does not forget lessons learned through his experience with politics. “Grassroots. Messaging. Media relations. These skills and tactics are the chapters in a public relations textbook. You learn it all on the campaign trail.”

During his tenure in Washington, DC, Hoyt took on clients within the travel, digital music and chemical industries. In navigating his career path, he gradually built up his network of connections and learned how various industries worked in Washington, and more importantly, how they owed their continued success to the skillful execution of public affairs programs. Hoyt’s ability to call upon and renewish relationships from these earlier years in Washington, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and now Chicago helped him build a strong set of connections, many of which he calls upon even today. Indeed, the creation of honest, loyal relationships is the foundation of his professional success and leadership abilities.

"The people who helped you become successful are the folks you stick with because no one makes it alone."

[Leadership Through Service]

Molded by his life in regulatory affairs, public relations and also what he calls “the business of politics” and a “Jesuit education,” Hoyt believes in the essence of service to the client, the candidate and one’s own agency or corporation. “It is helpful to be creative and hard working.
It is helpful to think outside of the box. But at the end of the day, it is important to remember we are there to serve someone else; it is a service we provide.”

Hoyt said that one of the greatest challenges facing leadership in public relations is the ability to effectively lead others. “We studied political science and took creative writing courses,” said Hoyt, “but how many of us ever cracked open a book on organizational behavior? Yet we find ourselves in leadership positions only a few years into our careers. It’s not a lack of leadership in the sense of being a visionary or a motivator. I think we are bred to be those people within an organization,” he said. For Hoyt, who admitted lacking self-confidence as a manager in his early career, his core belief that public relations is a service industry became the foundation of his leadership style. “In being of service to my clients, my company and my own team members...it was the only way I felt I could demonstrate any semblance of leadership in public relations.” While an understanding of service as a core tenant of public relations is important in being a strong leader, according to Hoyt, other qualities also are essential.

For example, in the summer of 2007, Hoyt and his team played an integral role in taking Orbitz Worldwide public. The company, on September 5th of that year, participated in the opening bell ceremony at the New York Stock Exchange. At the same time, the company launched a new service called OrbitzTLC Traveler Update. Ultimately, the planning process included many late nights, which tested his team, his agency and Hoyt’s own abilities as a leader. “It was an exhausting process. The only way I knew how to lead was by rolling up my sleeves and getting as involved as everyone on my staff and within my agency,” he said. “I suppose this is leadership in the sense that you are an example, you are putting in the same grueling hours and being there side-by-side with your colleagues until the job is done.” The end result was a feature for OrbitzTLC in the New York Times.

**Fun Facts:**

- Best PR advice received: Control the money; control the client money you bring in
- Hobbies: Sailing, writing, reading, being a dad & husband
- Dream job as a kid: To be an astronaut
- Interesting fact: He is an avid sailor
- Favorite music: Rock (I’m a deadhead)

If a sense of service and a strong work ethic is critical to successful leadership, so too is loyalty. When asked to define some unique qualities contributing to his leadership success, Hoyt said, “I would say that I am a somewhat creative person, a somewhat stubborn person, and I am a somewhat loyal person. I am loyal to the people who are loyal to me.”

[Loyalty & Mentorship]

Creativity and stubbornness are arguably important to a successful communications plan, strategy, execution and one’s ability to effectively advise clients or management. But perhaps one of Hoyt’s most unique qualities is his intense belief in loyalty and his harsh self criticism of the times where he felt he had been disloyal in his own life. “The ability to build out a network of people who have helped you in your career, I think, may very well lead you to that next opportunity,” says Hoyt, “You stay loyal to your mentors, your colleagues, your company, your family, your friends.” This belief is evident in Hoyt’s willingness to acknowledge those mentors, friends and colleagues who helped mold his career.

One of his earliest partnerships came from his work at Ogilvy PR. “I really learned a lot from some pretty extraordinary public affairs specialists during the brief time I was there: Michael Law, Ralph Posner, and John Wentzel. I learned a lot from those three guys.” His time at Ogilvy PR helped expand his knowledge and appreciation for public affairs, but perhaps his most important working relationship grew out of an earlier relationship forged in Washington, DC, as an intern at Powell Tate. For almost ten years Hoyt has continued to learn from his friend and colleague, Jerry Johnson. Hoyt worked for Johnson as the deputy director of Brodeur PR’s public affairs practice after leaving Ogilvy PR. The Washington insider has been one of Hoyt’s greatest mentors.

“Jerry is one of the unsung heroes in the PR industry. He is a master communicator,” Hoyt said. “When crap hits the fan for a company, they call Jerry Johnson. I think we worked well together when he was my boss at Brodeur PR and in recent years when I’ve retained Brodeur to work on projects where I’ve been...be it AOL or Orbitz. I think it was due to the fact that we both had the ability to close. To be a closer at the end of the day means you need to be able to generate the expected volume of earned media coverage or buzz for a client, and not just any volume, but the volume that expresses that appropriate
and impactful message that influences the influencers. Jerry Johnson is the guy in Washington that helped me sell, helped me close the story that at the end of the day made a difference. The real leaders in public relations are the folks who have figured out how to provide guidance to their senior leaders, how to define a message verbally and in the written word, and they are the folks who can close. Jerry Johnson is one of those guys.”

Hoyt believes in a sense of business karma. “It is all connected. The people you see on the way up, you see on the way down,” Hoyt said. It is this system of belief that speaks to his success in the industry. “The people who helped you become successful are the folks you stick with, because no one makes it alone,” he said.

[Consistency & Building Blocks]

Hoyt is consistent if nothing else. He preaches about loyalty and being of service to others as a means to creating mutually beneficial relationships. His consistency in these beliefs has led to greater opportunities and responsibilities. And he sees a dotted line connecting all these experiences. He calls it “the building blocks” of his success.

“I remember being very proud of one of the first stories I can remember landing on my own, a story that had actual significance in Washington circles. I got the story placed in a trade publication called the Legal Times. It’s funny how a trade story can lead to bigger national media stories – but they really do,” Hoyt said. “It was a real example to me, in terms of learning the craft of media relations, how one story is a building block to the next. A lot of the success in my career can be tied back to that story in the Legal Times, I think. Success with one client led to other chances to succeed or fail. It is true what they say: success really breeds success. But you need to understand how to build the blocks of story or a campaign to get to that point, and you need to be consistent in your execution to be remembered.”

[The Human Element]

While Hoyt continues to lead a successful career in public relations, perhaps his most revealing qualities as a leader are those which humanize him. When asked to describe his hobbies, he answered in a whimsical manner, “Being a dad and a somewhat less screw-up of a husband.” This response underscores his pride as both a father and a husband.

When asked to describe those who have been instrumental or inspiring in his career,
Hoyt quickly mentioned business associates, members of his current team and former colleagues. But then he paused and said, “My wife Stephanie has been helpful to me in my career, and that’s because I married another PR professional. We actually worked at competing firms when we first met, I think she complements me in skills sets and we make a complete publicist. I have always said that we should start a firm together one day.”

As vice president of corporate communications and government affairs for Orbitz Worldwide, it may be commonplace to view Hoyt as successful in public relations and business. But as indicated, that success has been helped and inspired by many others, including his wife Stephanie. “The skills she has really rounds me out...I am not the greatest writer in the world and I am an okay strategist...and so to be able to go home at night and troubleshoot and talk about things that I am working on, on a day-to-day basis, has been so very beneficial to my career,” Hoyt says. “I don’t know if I recommend that everyone marry someone in his or her career, but it has been an extremely important part of bolstering who I am and what I do for a living.”

[Advice for the Future]
Throughout his career, Hoyt has witnessed many young professionals succeed and fail. When asked what is the greatest challenge facing these emerging professionals, Hoyt replied, “They are afraid to fail. A good publicist is someone who can look a crush in the eye and accept the rejection of being turned down for a date face-to-face versus over their Facebook page. It is someone who can pick up the phone and call a reporter versus sending a text message or an e-mail.” In his response, Hoyt continually referred to the social networking phenomenon and other online technologies and how it has negatively impacted the relationship-building process for many new professionals. “College grads are socially awkward when it comes to the development of relationships with the media. They are afraid to have direct conversations with press, and it is evident in their pitching skills. They become more reliant on being a good writer, a lover of the ‘email pitch’ or someone with good organizational skills,” he said. “But at the end of the day, we are in the relationship business. And picking up the phone or meeting a reporter in person and learning about their needs and interests...developing real relationships with media, is...
the best pathway to free ink."

Hoyt knows that to achieve success in the public relations industry, it takes long hours and a great deal of teamwork. His advice for those looking to enter the public relations field: “Be prepared to eat Ramen noodles for two to three years. The money gets better eventually.”

M. Austin James
Bachelor of Arts, Fine Arts
Hometown: Madison, Alabama
Hockey players and speechwriters don’t have much in common, but Thomas “Tucker” McNeil didn’t always plan on being a speechwriter. Growing up, he wanted to be a hockey player.

McNeil, who is the current director of leadership communications for the MeadWestvaco Corporation, landed in public relations when the interests he’d pursued as a kid and through college met with opportunity. When the chance to be a speechwriter came along, McNeil said he found himself interested because he always enjoyed writing, communication, rhetoric and debate. McNeil’s first job in public relations was the press secretary for former South Carolina Congressman Mark Sanford.

For McNeil, one of the most rewarding aspects of this job is the opportunity to work closely with high-level executives. Everyday, he has the chance to engage smart and interesting people in a truly unique role that’s different from working for them in any other capacity.

“In working with someone who is going to deliver a speech, the goal of the speechwriter is to help develop their thoughts and then capture their voice through your writing,” he said. “Ultimately, you want to be able to write something as if they were writing it themselves.”

Being able to get inside an executive’s head and better understand their thought process isn’t the only reason McNeil enjoys being a speechwriter.

“I think that speechwriting is enjoyable because you get to learn a lot by helping somebody to be successful in a slightly different way than usual,” McNeil said. “So when an audience responds to a great
speech or an organization clearly understands an important message, it’s pretty rewarding to have helped achieve those goals.”

On the flipside, the opportunity to write speeches for high-level executives can often become complicated as others try to get involved in the process. The speechwriting process can be frustrating when a number of people throughout the organization want to influence the script. And even the person the speech is being written for can make the process difficult if they don’t know what they want to say, or insist on a certain approach.

“You often have to put aside your own pride and authorship in order to write whatever they want,” McNeil said, “but it’s also important to be able to push back a little bit and give advice when you think that there’s something that doesn’t sound good, a point they need to make, or a theme they need to hit in order to connect with the audience.”

[**Gaining Instant Feedback**]

One of the most important professional learning experiences for McNeil has been attending speeches to see how they are being delivered and how the audience reacts. While individuals in other professions may have to wait days or months to see the results of their work, the feedback is almost instant for McNeil.

As McNeil points out, a speechwriter may think that his or her work sounds great when working on it in the office or even listening to it being practiced. However, it’s ultimately the audience’s opinion that counts.

“It is so important to hear and see how each line resonates in a room: Were people falling asleep? Were they on the edge of their seats? What were people murmuring about afterward? What got boos? What got applause? What got neither?”

McNeil likens this relationship between the audience and the person giving the speech to another type of profession.

“I’ve always thought of it as being like a comedian. They write jokes but don’t know how good they are until they get in front of an audience, and then they know right away how many people are laughing or not,” McNeil said. “It’s a huge learning experience to get out there and hear your own work.”

For McNeil, his career tipping point came when he wrote a speech for Christie Whitman – former governor of New Jersey and head of the Environmental Protection Agency for the Bush Administration – to deliver at a Holocaust remembrance ceremony. He was young and recently on
staff, he said. Although McNeil thinks the task of writing about such an emotional topic was an easy one for a speechwriter, he still remembers people talking about how much Whitman loved the speech and asking about the kid who wrote it.

“I think that was when not only did I gain her confidence, but other people saw that I had gained her confidence,” McNeil said. “It was a huge boost. It was my first crack at speechwriting, and it kind of evolved from there.”

Another speech McNeil considers to be important to his career is one he wrote for Tom Ridge, Secretary of Homeland Security, for Veteran’s Day. This speech was particularly challenging because Ridge is a veteran who was injured in Vietnam. McNeil confessed that writing a Veteran’s Day speech for an injured veteran was tough because he doesn’t know more about the topic than the person he was writing for.

In addition to the speeches he wrote for Whitman and Ridge, another accomplishment for McNeil was helping his current boss at MeadWestvaco Corporation prepare to introduce the President of the United States at an event for the National Association of Manufacturers. It was one of his first assignments at a new job, but he had a good grasp of the President’s preferences from similar introductions he’d written in previous positions in government.

“I sold everyone on the fact that this was sort of a ‘trust me on this one – I’ve done it before’ kind of thing,” McNeil said. The short introduction was a hit, and his boss told everyone how great the introduction went over. From that point on, McNeil suspected he had gained enough trust to exercise his judgment in any situation. As a speechwriter, McNeil said that one of his goals is to capture the trust of whoever he is writing for.

McNeil considers these three speeches to be among his greatest accomplishments.

Fun Facts:

- Favorite travel destination: Switzerland
- Best PR advice received: Always know your audience
- Favorite food: Macaroni & cheese
- Dream job as a kid: To be a hockey player
- Favorite music: Classic rock & the Dave Matthews Band
because they represented occasions when he showed others they could rely on him. For him, each of these three speeches represents a moment when something changed, and the people he was working for latched onto his writing and began to really put their trust or respect in him.

Although McNeil has enjoyed many successes in his professional life, he can also recall a situation in which he didn’t succeed to the extent he had hoped to, but learned an important lesson in the process. When he worked as a speechwriter at the Justice Department, he was never able to gain the trust and respect of his peers, he said. “I don’t think I did something specific to fail, but I do think I learned an important lesson,” McNeil said. “I performed well in my job, which my colleagues and superiors appreciated. But I never reached the next level of success where everyone really trusts and respects you.”

McNeil believes the many lawyers at the Justice Department would have respected him more if he had earned a law degree. Although he realizes that he couldn’t have given them that, he does think he could have been better at trying to learn more about the legal issues and legal writing style they wanted him to adopt.

“If I’d wanted to be more successful in that job,” McNeil said, “I probably should have taken a few steps back and met them on their territory, and then tried to build them toward my way as opposed to just never taking those steps to their side.”

[Key Skills & Personal Qualities]

For McNeil, the three professional skills and personal qualities that have contributed the most to his success in public relations are writing skills, interpersonal skills and being a generalist. McNeil claims he is not necessarily the best pure writer in his profession, or even the best writer on his staff. He credits much of his success as a speechwriter to writing quickly and efficiently, executing on direction, and meeting deadlines.

Equally important are interpersonal skills and being able to successfully interact with a variety of people. For McNeil, this particular set of skills is crucial to gaining the trust and respect of the people he’s writing for. Not only does he have to be able to interact with the people who will be delivering speeches, he also has to be able to converse with the people from whom he’s gathering information.

“A speechwriter has to be able to interact and communicate with everyone from the senior-level executives to the line workers and subject matter experts,”

“They have to create speeches that last forever. That’s pretty inspiring to me.”
McNeil said. “I want each of them to feel like I understand what’s going on in their business, or what’s going on in their area and with their teams.”

Equally important to writing and people skills, McNeil believes that being a generalist and knowing about a wide range of topics is important for speechwriters and anyone in public relations. He thinks it’s important to know a little about a lot and be able to quickly process and understand information.

Outside of professional skills and personal qualities, McNeil considers a good liberal arts education to be important to succeeding in public relations. It especially helps with being a generalist. Being well-read, a good writer and good communicator come only through education. Although people might not be able to remember every Greek myth or statistics equation, McNeil said, a good education is important because it teaches you to learn, research and be a quick study. These skills are invaluable to anyone in public relations.

Treating Others with Respect

At the core of his professional practice, McNeil considers one of his most important personal values to be treating everyone with respect. Whether it’s a CEO or a factory manager, McNeil thinks it’s important to have the same approach and to understand that everyone has something they can teach him.

“I can’t do my job without learning from the people who make it happen,” McNeil said.

He said that part of his job and any job in public relations is to be curious and learn everything about the organization and its operations. This cooperative learning can’t be achieved without treating everyone with respect.

However, he is also quick to point out that public relations people sometimes fail to engage in this type of behavior because they feel threatened by people in the organization who don’t respect or appreciate their work. As a result, PR professionals often try to prove their expertise rather than understand where others are coming from. McNeil said it’s important to be open to what everyone in the organization has to teach him. He sees this process as something he needs to do his job better.

Although McNeil considers himself relatively young in his career and wasn’t sure that he had the exposure to name someone who represented an excellent leader in public relations, he said his role model and greatest career mentor in the profession was the boss who hired him for his...
first speechwriting job. McNeil said this man took a risk by hiring him as an inexperienced junior speechwriter, and then developed his skills and taught him just about everything he knows about their craft.

As for his greatest source of professional inspiration, McNeil considers everyone who has written speeches for a U.S. president to have reached the pinnacle of the profession. Among his favorite presidential speechwriters are Ted Sorenson who wrote for John F. Kennedy, Peggy Noonan who wrote for Ronald Reagan and Michael Gerson who wrote for George W. Bush.

“I can’t do my job without learning from the people who make it happen.”

P r e s i d e n t i a l speechwriters – and no matter which party or President they represent – get the opportunity to write about the most pressing issues of our time, whether that is times of crisis or times of triumph,” McNeil said. “They have to create speeches that last forever. That’s pretty inspiring to me.”

[Reaching the Summit]

In addition to the everyday work he does for MeadWestvaco Corporation, McNeil volunteers for local sports organizations and participates in community events sponsored by his company. He also enjoys tennis, golf, squash, hiking and travel.

After graduating from the University of Virginia where he received his bachelor’s degree in American government, McNeil decided to go backpacking around the world. The capstone of the trip was a two-week round trip hike to the base camp at Mt. Everest.

“I always wanted to go to Mt. Everest and was an avid reader of all the books about the mountain,” said McNeil. “The hike to base camp is not particularly technical or difficult – it’s just long and straight up hill at a very high altitude.”

More recently, McNeil and a group of his friends decided to climb Mt. Rainier to celebrate their thirtieth birthdays. McNeil said he’s always been interested in hiking and outdoors and has always wanted to “summit something.” One of the reasons the group chose Mt. Rainier is because it’s considered the toughest and greatest summit in the lower 48 states.

“I wanted to turn around on a number of occasions, but we all made it to the top and back,” McNeil said. “We had great weather, great views from the summit, and it was a very remarkable sense of accomplishment.”
How did a young man from India, who grew up in Dubai and earned degrees in chemical engineering and technology management, end up a director in the public relations field with only six years of experience in this type of work? He would say it’s serendipity. Pure serendipity. Along with a little luck and a lot of passion.

Upon completion of his graduate degree, Mohan found himself in need of a job right in the middle of a major economic recession. So, what did he do? The smart thing, of course. He looked for a career across all industries and all functions. Mohan knew this was not the time to be closed-minded, and his gamble paid off—big time. Fleishman-Hillard, one of the world’s largest public relations agencies, hired Mohan for a six-week internship at their Kansas City office. The agency hoped it would be a good fit based on his graduate research in the public understanding and acceptance of plant-made pharmaceuticals, an emerging field of biotechnology. Within three weeks, Fleishman-Hillard realized they were right and hired Mohan as a full-time employee.

That was in 2002. Within five years, Mohan went from being an intern in a field where he had no background, to the director of public policy and communications for an important division of the sixth largest biotech company in the world—all before his thirtieth birthday. He has come a long way from his days at a phonathon center, where he was first employed. While he may be a chemical engineer by training, his almost unheard of rise in the public relations industry proves that he is meant for a career in communications. Sreejit Mohan knows more than a thing or two about
truly excellent public relations leadership.

[A Tipping Point]
So, what was the catalyst to Mohan’s expedited climb up the ladder? His boss at Fleishman-Hillard left. “I joined Fleishman in 2002 and had a great supervisor who was an extremely important influence in my first year there. She helped me understand the agency, helped me understand my areas that I worked on, and helped coach and ease me into the agency life,” Mohan said. With only one year at Fleishman, and in the PR industry, management felt comfortable enough to let him take on a lot of his former boss’ work. This initial kick start set the pace for Mohan’s career.

While fate would have it that Mohan was in the right job at the right time to get this great opportunity, fate did not do all the work. Mohan proved himself capable. When asked what personal skills contributed to his success, Mohan spoke mostly of crucial and often under-appreciated intangibles. Some of these included heart, drive, openness to feedback and curiosity. He stressed that curiosity to know everything about the business of PR, and just as importantly, the client’s business, will make you a better practitioner a thousand times over.

Mohan added that having a service mentality has been important to his success as well. “You really want to do the best thing for your client, and you’re going to get it done, come what may. Going the extra mile always helps,” he said. In fact, Mohan said that the best advice he ever received was to provide the best service you can to your clients, and everything else will follow. However, he takes this hard work service mentality one step further. “My philosophical viewpoint on PR is that it’s not just about helping clients tell their story, it’s also about helping clients do the right thing. It’s about counseling people on doing what’s best for the business, in a way that helps a variety of the stakeholders,” he said. As for professional skills, Mohan views good written and verbal communication skills as implicit to not only success in the field, but also existence in the field. “That’s the price of entry into the PR world,” he said.

When asked what personal values are at the core of his professional practice, Mohan’s voice perked up. This is something he’s passionate about. “First and foremost, respect for individuals, whether they’re your teammates, your clients, or your boss. You have to respect each other, and value people’s opinions.” Mohan
credits his parents for so solidly instilling this value. When you have mutual respect with people, you’ll naturally have good relationships, which is what PR is all about.

Mohan said that a particular mentor of his always said if you have a great relationship and a bad program you can still keep the client. However, if you have a bad relationship and a great program you can lose the client, because this is a relationship business. In fact, Mohan views the relationships he has built as one of the major highlights of his career. However, just as quickly, he added that work is an integral part of his life. He enjoys making a meaningful contribution. “My dad always said work is worship. So, being passionate about it only makes you successful. It rewards you in ways that are more than financial.”

While his mantra may be that work is worship, Mohan learned from one of his mentors how to balance work with personal life. Learning from the people around him is a recurring theme in his life as well. In fact, his mantra should state that you learn something from everyone. “When I left Fleishman, I told them that what I really take with me is the fact that when I look around, I see that I’ve learned from each and every one of them,” he said.

Mohan’s time at Fleishman also provided some of his most powerful learning experiences. Early on he was exposed to a couple pieces of feedback that were extremely grounding. It made him confront his areas of weakness, as well as build upon his strengths. “It helped ground me in terms of what life looked like in the PR world and how you can set your expectations in that way,” he said. Mohan uses his insight into the value of feedback in his job today. It helps people grow as professionals. It helps employees become better at their jobs.

He was also exposed to high profile projects, while working with some seasoned practitioners and in an environment of radical change. It’s hard to beat that experience. At the time, Fleishman’s Kansas
City office was experiencing a lot of leadership change, employee turnover, team and structural changes, and Mohan was a newcomer to the industry and to the agency right in the middle of it all. Learning to handle work in an environment of such uncertainty proved to be an invaluable learning experience. Mohan recalls a mentor telling him that he would remember that learning experience for the rest of his life -- and he has. “I see the things that were done then, and I still reflect on that. I implement the things that I learned from that experience.”

“Provide the best service you can to your clients and everything else will follow.”

[Life at Bayer]

After handling three accounts for Bayer Healthcare at Fleishman-Hillard, Mohan was recruited by the pharmaceutical giant to work in-house for their hematology and cardiology business unit. Then, with less than a year under his belt at Bayer, he was promoted to director for all of the company’s West Coast biotechnology operations. He currently leads a team of six, and provides the entire spectrum of communications services for a large team of internal stakeholders ranging from early stage discovery to manufacturing, sales, marketing and business development, spread over four sites in Berkeley, Richmond, Emeryville and Seattle.

If work is worship for this now San Francisco resident, what is it about Mohan’s job that makes him drive to excel? First, he loves the service component -- helping people solve communication problems. At Bayer, Mohan supports communications for a product that treats a rare bleeding disorder called hemophilia. This work brings him in contact with the patients who have this condition and who benefit from the treatment that Bayer manufactures. “The fact that what we make, makes a difference in people’s lives; that the product that we send out goes into the veins of thousands of patients and they lead normal, productive lives because of that, is a huge, rewarding feeling,” he said. For the same reason, Mohan enjoys volunteering at patient events. It’s a great way for him to put a face to his work. Mohan also enjoys PR work because it allows him to tap into all his different faculties. “It’s one of those few professions where I get to use both my skills and my knowledge almost entirely, whether it’s my understanding of business, my understanding of technology, my writing skills, my verbal communication skills, diplomacy skills, or my curiosity.”

However, where there’s an up, there’s a down. Mohan also noted some of the more challenging aspects of the PR industry, including the uncertainty of the work. When dealing with multiple stakeholders, the job can become complex. He never
knows what a day will bring. “Today, as an example, I’m dealing with news that I woke up with at 5 o’clock in the morning by my colleague in Germany, and the rest of my day has been dealing with that. It’s a constant shuffling of priorities. No day is the same. Every day is different. That comes with a lot of excitement and a lot of anguish as well.”

[The New Face of Public Relations]

As for Mohan’s take on issues and opportunities facing the profession, he noted social media first. It’s clear that the world’s way of receiving news has shifted from the model of news coming from an objective third party, such as newspapers, to news coming from individuals. “Now anyone can disseminate the news,” he said. “Anyone can have an impact. Let’s say if I’m a consumer of a certain product and I know something about a company, I can be the disseminator of that news using my own blog, hypothetically. The advent of social media is really a game changing event for the profession. I think it’s revolutionary.” Naturally, the next question is how do we deal with this revolution? Mohan says to watch social media very, very closely and take advantage of it if you can. He added that it impacts some industries more than others. While his work at Bayer has not been intensely impacted at this point, he knows that if you are in an industry where it can make a lot of difference, then you must be a pioneer in it.

Measurement and accountability in public relations are other crucial issues. PR’s effectiveness is hard to quantify. “It is a tough task to show your value to stakeholders for the work that you do,” Mohan said. It’s easy to show the news coverage a press release received, but how can you show its effects on your stakeholders? Mohan has a few suggestions. First he thinks the profession needs to take some lessons from other fields, such as marketing and advertising, on ways in which they evaluate and measure success. “We’ve got to get more sophisticated and use technology and collective intellect to solve this problem.” His second suggestion is that practitioners must have educated discussions with their clients about objectives, what the expectations should be, and what you can promise. “Accountability is becoming more and more of an issue. It’s a constant war for budget; you’ve got to be able to say this is what I’m spending it on, and this is the value I bring.”

Next, Mohan talked about our completely networked world, and how the 24/7 news cycle that comes with it makes the PR practitioner’s job last 24/7 as
well. PR leaders, especially in global companies, must keep up with the entire world -- a daunting task. Mohan says that practitioners must be able to provide quality solutions given the pace at which things are going. “Ten years back you may have had hours or even a whole day to think through a decision. Now you have maybe 30 minutes or less. You also probably used to have everybody sitting next to you to make that decision. Now, you work in a virtual organization. My boss is three hours away. Her boss is six hours away. My clients are anywhere among Europe, Asia and the U.S.” So, how does Mohan deal with life at a globally aligned company? Preparedness. He believes in anticipating possible issues, planning properly, and educating internal stakeholders so that they will know what needs to be done and not panic in any situation. “Some people will tell you there’s no point planning in PR because things change all the time and priorities change. I would argue that to some extent, yes, but you should have a fairly robust plan in place and, of course, some room for flexibility.”

Mohan also believes in the power of people. He thinks that hiring the best people is paramount to success, and by hiring dependable people, you can ensure they will share the workload as well as be able to jump in during times of need. He mentioned that it’s getting harder and harder to find people who understand all the nuances of PR within industries, such as healthcare or energy. Envisioning a solution, this University of Missouri-Rolla grad would like to see public relations programs at different universities offer specialization in certain industries. He also thinks it’s important for journalism departments to offer the same thing. This would allow for a more educated discussion between PR practitioners and journalists. By doing this, the industry would have a pipeline of people who come in with an understanding of it. In keeping up with Mohan’s service mentality, he is even interested in stepping up for some local volunteer work at universities to help future practitioners better understand the biotech, pharmaceutical and engineering industries. “It’s really important for everyone to understand the discipline of PR but it’s equally important for them to understand certain sectors.”

“A Page from his Book” 

So, how can we be great leaders in public relations, too? That’s the real question. Mohan says that when looking back at all his role models, he can identify three common characteristics among

“...It’s not what you say, but it’s what you do and how you go about doing it that eventually wins the day.”
them—great understanding, great credibility and great relationships. An excellent PR leader must understand everything. The business, the stakeholders, the relationships, the dynamics, the system—everything. “You cannot be a successful communicator if you don’t understand everything. Believe me, when I say you’ve got to understand everything. And that’s also the fun part of the job. You get to know every part of the business in an intimate way.”

Having great credibility with clients, stakeholders and fellow employees is also crucial to successful leadership. Mohan recounted that all of his role models within the profession have possessed great credibility. “They have a seat at the table. They’ve earned that seat at the table because the way in which they’ve operated.” Without credibility behind your name, your work will not be taken seriously, and without credibility, your work will most likely not be as good as it can be.

Finally, Mohan hit on the importance of great relationships, and with that comes strong diplomatic skills. He explained that in PR you’re constantly juggling internal and external stakeholders who have their own agendas to worry about. “You need strong relationships, and you need diplomatic abilities to weather through those situations,” Mohan said. After highlighting these three crucial elements that he sees in his mentors, Mohan added his own personal touch on the question. In keeping with his work is worship stance, he said, “also, any leader in any profession needs to be completely and utterly passionate about what they do because otherwise it’s not going to translate into their work.”

And, what’s the good news in all this? Mohan believes that leaders are not just born, that given they go into the right work, they can be created. So, there’s still hope for the rest of us.

“No day is the same. Everyday is different. That comes with a lot of excitement and a lot of anguish as well.”

Breeanna C. Beckham
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Birmingham, Alabama
Leading by example, remaining grounded in the practice and synthesizing information. According to Nick Ragone, these are the three essential qualities for any leader in public relations. And with experience in law, politics and media, he knows what it takes to be a leader in the field.

Despite this rich, diverse background, Ragone said he always wanted to work in PR. For this reason, after graduating from Georgetown Law, he chose to begin his career by working as a press secretary on a political campaign. He then transitioned to the PR agency world, where working in almost every aspect of the profession gave him valuable experience. At this point, having found a love for media, he chose to make it his focus.

At first glance, you might not expect someone with these credentials to suggest that networking on Facebook is a job-related task. Nor might you expect him to include PerezHilton.com alongside TheStreet.com and Forbes.com on his list of favorite Web sites. This familiarity with new media, however, exemplifies how Ragone applies his leadership principles. As a senior vice president and director of client development in Ketchum’s New York office, he sets the tone for the more than dozen members of his group and others by exhibiting the leadership values he espouses.

[Leading by Example]

When discussing leadership styles, Ragone mentioned several times the importance of leading by example.

“You can’t ask somebody to do something you can’t do, or aren’t willing to do, yourself,”
he said. “It’s easy to give orders to people, but it’s really hard to give orders and then be side-by-side with them doing the same thing.”

To make sure he does this, Ragone is very intentional in how he interacts with his media group. Whether it’s allowing them to sit in on a phone call, helping them understand how to strengthen a pitch or showing them why one was unsuccessful, he actively looks for ways to impart the wisdom he has gained from experience.

When asked, he said the nature of PR, and especially media relations, makes this leadership style so critically important. Since the skills involved with pitching stories and working with journalists are often intangibles -- things that are difficult to master without experience -- it becomes even more important for leaders to share what they have learned. Furthermore, if those who look up to them don’t receive this feedback, it can be difficult for the leader to establish credibility.

“Media relations specialists respect other really good media relations specialists. And, if they feel or sense that you’ve lost your skill, or you’ve lost something on your fastball, or if you’re not willing to throw it anymore, you can’t lead,” he said.

Not only does Ragone find this principle fundamentally important in leadership, he also considers the mentoring opportunity it affords to be one of the best things about his job.

“There’s a lot of innate talent that goes into media relations. There’s also a lot of stuff you need to learn. I get the most satisfaction out of mentoring people to do it the right way—to learn and see them grow,” he said.

“[Remaining Grounded in Practice] Building on the idea of leading by example, remaining grounded in practice is another characteristic Ragone finds essential to good leadership. With it, he underscores the importance of leaders throughout an organization, from account team directors to the CEO, continuing to counsel clients.

“I think the biggest problem we have in our industry is that people are in positions of leadership who are no longer doing the type of work they did 10 or 15 years ago. So, they lose touch with a little bit of their profession,” Ragone said. “Once you get removed from it, you don’t really know what the current landscape is, whether it’s how to use Facebook to pitch PR or the impact of YouTube on viral marketing. Whatever it might be, if you’re not still immersed in it...
you can’t be a leader."
Facebook and YouTube are both powerful examples of this because they comprise part of the new media. According to Ragone, these technological developments have not only changed what public relations does, they have changed the practice itself. He noted that their arrival has facilitated the use of “disruptive media,” where brands can develop their own content and spread it online, engaging audiences on their terms and not those of the company. If PR counselors are uncomfortable or incapable of incorporating disruptive strategies in campaigns, they will have a difficult time leading innovative, successful initiatives for their clients.

On the other hand, those leaders who remain grounded in practice not only stay informed of current trends, but they can also share wisdom more easily with their colleagues. According to Ragone, this flow of information between leaders and followers is two-way. Good leaders facilitate a bottom-up flow of information through their organization to keep them apprised of changing technologies. As wisdom gained from their experience then flows back down, the firm benefits from being able to successfully evolve and continually offer superior client services.

While applying this principle of leadership presents a challenge, it’s one that Ragone readily accepts, even as he moves up the leadership ranks. In fact, his bio in PR Week’s “Top 40 Under 40” describes how he uses instant messaging to keep in contact with over 300 journalists. Doing this allows him to quickly match their information needs with the activities of Ketchum’s clients. In addition, he also uses Facebook as a vehicle to connect with the media. While not necessarily beneficial for sending out traditional news releases, he noted that the site can be a powerful vehicle for making “interesting, creative pitches.”

“The advantage of pitching from Facebook is that you can reach reporters in a more
informal way. You can learn more about their interests, whereabouts and deadlines by reading their updates," he said.

Not only is remaining grounded in practice an important characteristic of his leadership style, it is also a benchmark he uses to identify other great leaders in the field. When asked to name individuals who should be described in this way, he quickly mentioned Ray Kotcher, Ketchum’s CEO; Rob Flaherty, a senior partner at Ketchum; and Elliot Sloane, one of his mentors and founder of Sloane PR. As the interview progressed, it became clear why he mentioned each of these men. Again and again he emphasized their ability to move up in their organizations, yet still remain current with changes in the practice areas where they counsel. For Ragone, this combination of wisdom, experience and continued practice is a key element of leadership.

In fact, this element is so important that he said it distinguishes leaders in his profession from those in other disciplines.

“If you’re the CEO of a Fortune 500 company and you make widgets, you’re not going to be expected to be on the assembly line,” he said. “But, in PR we all do the same thing: we counsel clients or we do media relations. I don’t care how senior or junior you are, you can still do it.”

[Synthesizing Information] In addition to leading by example and remaining grounded in practice, Ragone finds the ability to synthesize and interpret information to be another key component of leadership. While he said that communication skills are important for any leader, their integral position in the practice of PR makes them particularly vital in this field.

“[PR leaders] tend to be people who have an expansive view of the world...they love information. They love to acquire knowledge. They are able to tell simple narratives from complex fact patterns,” he said. “That’s probably important in any type of leader, but in this industry, since that’s what we do, it’s absolutely critical.”

From his comments on the subject, synthesizing information can take many shapes. One could do it by reading The Wall Street Journal, but reading blogs may be equally important. Regardless of the information’s source, Ragone emphasizes knowing how to use it.

“A lot of what we do is see trends. Whether it’s for our corporate clients or for a particular brand, it’s identifying and understanding the trend so that you know how to position your client. Synthesizing, absorbing and connecting the dots on information are critical,” he said.
In addition to gathering information, Ragone also pointed out that leaders must understand their clients’ businesses. Ragone finds this characteristic to be so important because executing communications effectively on behalf of clients is much more difficult without understanding their operating environments. Assessing available information on them, understanding how it relates to their businesses and suggesting strategic actions are all essential parts of counseling them. This, in turn, is an integral part of public relations.

“If [clients] don’t respect you as a counselor, you’re in trouble,” Ragone said.

Understanding a client’s work is also important because of the changing role of executive leadership. “What makes a good CEO today is dramatically different than what it was 15 years ago,” he said. “Back then you focused on your numbers – how is the bottom line – and that was about it...Today, if you’re the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, you have to treat and interact with each constituency with the same amount of respect and importance...You’ve got to view your job more as a global politician than just a numbers cruncher.”

Keeping this in mind, along with recognizing that large corporations may need to manage upwards of 20 to 30 key constituencies at once, Ragone said this is a “golden age” for PR. Unlike marketing, which he said is becoming increasingly fractured, PR is especially suited to address the needs of various groups across geographic lines.

As someone who considers counseling to be among the best parts of his job, this love of gathering and interpreting information should come as no surprise. In fact, Ragone even does it for fun, having compiled and expounded on information in two books: “Presidents’ Most Wanted: The Top 10 Book of Extraordinary Executives, Colorful Campaigns and White House Oddities” and “The Everything American Government Book: From the Constitution to Present-Day Elections, All You Need to Understand Our Democratic System.”

Ragone’s background in law and experience with both corporate and media work afford him a broad perspective from which to counsel clients. His regular reading list, which includes The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, BusinessWeek, Fortune and Forbes, only expands this further.
Beyond the three crucial characteristics discussed above, Ragone offered two more insights into leadership.

First, he noted the importance of an engaging personality. Whether working with clients or the media, he emphasized that you must understand their businesses and show them you care.

“You need to really enjoy the people and their work, and you need to understand. That’s something you can’t fake either,” he said. “It’s critical.”

Second, Ragone discussed how situational characteristics impact leadership style. To him, different situations and different organizations will require different approaches. The common thread, though, is that leaders should work hard and inspire people. In the end, they should be able to communicate their vision and the information pertinent to achieving it, especially since PR is a human capital business.

To do this, he highlighted the importance of personal values like directness, honesty and integrity. By incorporating these values into professional practice, the clear flow of information between leader and follower becomes much easier.

“If you’re anything less than direct, honest and transparent, you’re not going to survive,” he said.

Ragone also said transparency was a major area where PR leaders should focus to continually increase the credibility of the industry.

“We should be counseling [our clients] that transparency matters, that transparency is important to corporate America…that it should infuse your business model,” he said.

Doing so involves more than just telling clients transparency is important. In reality, it involves leading them to more transparent actions. This could include helping them value the voice of all constituencies, even those like bloggers in the new media. It might also involve convincing them that corporate social responsibility is not just check writing, but rather a premise that shapes the way an organization does business.

[Pitching…in PR & Baseball]

Overall, Ragone emphasized the importance of experience in shaping leaders in PR, especially those who work with the media. He didn’t identify any one source for the leadership qualities he finds important, attributing them instead to trial-by-error lessons learned throughout his career. He did thank Ketchum, though, for its role in their development, noting that the agency has given him the freedom
to try new things and continually refine his leadership skills.

For those just beginning to work in PR, this attribution makes the value of small lessons learned day-to-day seem more important. While they could get overlooked when looking for major factors that shape one's style, Ragone's emphasis on them helps solidify their value. Perhaps the leadership characteristics he mentioned will even aid others in appreciating how small experiences can impact one's overall understanding of what it takes to lead.

When asked why he chose to attribute his leadership development in this way, he responded with a baseball analogy.

"[Media relations] is weird because you're sort of like a baseball closer...some days you have good days and some days you don't, but you can't lose your confidence and your can't pull back," he said. "As a leader...you need to be with your people in the trenches all the time. It's just the way it is...It's intuitive."

Perhaps ending on a baseball analogy is fitting for someone whose dream job as a child was to play shortstop for the New York Mets. In the end, Ragone's experiences haven't led him to a career at Shea Stadium. However, if success in media relations is akin to clinching a baseball game, his experience and leadership style have prepared him well to play the role of closer.
Romina Rosado, managing director and senior vice president of global marketing for The NewsMarket, has overall responsibility for managing the company’s European sales operations and its global marketing strategy. The NewsMarket assists in the management, marketing and distribution of various companies’ news videos to traditional media outlets, bloggers, consumers and investors in their niche market.

Currently, the NewsMarket assists over 13,000 media outlets in 193 countries, and its client roster includes: Adidas, Google, General Motors, Nokia, Pfizer and Volvo Cars. The NewsMarket also handles personal high-profile clients such as George Clooney in his fight to promote his humanitarian visits to Darfur.

Rosado’s personal experience ranges from marketing to public relations in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and the U.S. Her resume boasts work for governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Democratic National Committee, the European Central Bank, UNICEF, the U.S. Department of State and the World Bank. Currently, she speaks four languages -- English, Spanish, French and German -- and is learning two more.

Colleagues have described Rosado as an innovative, creative and energetic leader with experience in strategic planning, sales management, marketing and operations. She is also well traveled and knowledgeable of different cultures. Her international assignments include: a stint with CIA Medianetwork in Spain, where she provided media planning and international business development services, and a position at a broadcast consultancy in the United States.
UK, Bulletin International, now a part of Ogilvy PR.

Working with The NewsMarket since its beginnings, Rosado was heading the client services team within a year of arriving in New York. During her eight years with The NewsMarket, the business has grown substantially. By age 29, Rosado was leading a multi-million dollar group; by 30, she was promoted to managing director and was responsible for 50 percent of the company’s revenues, and she currently has input into product and service development.

Though her accomplishments are substantial, Rosado remains grounded. “Some people are self confident by nature, but I’m not one of them,” she said. “I think that when you start a job there comes a point when you wake up and say, ‘I’m really good at this, I can do it.’ Then you start believing in yourself more, and that builds your confidence and makes you a better professional at the end of the day.”

Keeping your finger on the pulse is a theme that resonates throughout every aspect of Rosado’s life. From work to social life and everything in between, staying current is a priority for her. “I am a total news junkie and have been known to cancel social plans if there was a big news story that day of which I needed to be informed,” she said.

This characteristic isn’t different for public relations leaders versus those in other fields. “I think that staying current and up-to-date on what’s happening is just one that is particularly necessary when you do work in PR.” Rosado currently lives in New York and London, but was born in Hamburg, Germany to parents whom she credits for giving her this passion for being informed. “I’ve always been very interested in news, my parents are as well. I think that is another reason that I did end up in PR. I think that there are skills that you either do

[Leadership Characteristics]

The first of these characteristics is the importance of understanding and staying current with the new technologies and information that is being released 24/7. “You need to stay on top of things, you need to know more than your clients, you need to keep your finger on the pulse,” Rosado said. “The environment is changing so fast, and you have to be one step ahead all of the time.”

“I think that treating people like you would like to be treated is very important.”
have or don’t have, and if you work in PR you better have it, and you had better be passionate about information outside of your job as well.”

Rosado places a strong emphasis on being interested and passionate about news. Both being informed and informing others is something that a public relations professional must enjoy doing to stay current in this field, according to Rosado. “I think that you need to read a lot and write a lot and enjoy both activities,” said Rosado.

According to Rosado, simply staying on top of things from all types of media has allowed her to connect with issues and events and understand when something is a story and when it is not. This knowledge has a real bottom line in her current position: staying abreast of current information has helped to increase her business by 500 percent.

[The Value of Integrity]

The second leadership characteristic that Rosado emphasizes is having integrity and treating people the way that one would want to be treated. “As soon as you start managing people, you come to a point where you have to talk to people working directly under you and say that their performance is either great or is not great, and sometimes that is a difficult conversation to have,” she said. “I think that treating people like you would like to be treated is important because that’s when it truly comes into play.” One example of integrity at work is when she had a client who had miscommunicated their wishes for a particular campaign. “I think you need to think about the end and be very honest with the client, even if it’s tough and your first instinct is to not speak to the client or tell them later. I think that integrity is extremely important.”

In helping to build The NewsMarket Europe branch, Rosado said that she learned that, by showing her integrity in the small things, it helped people to trust her and know that she would not compromise.
them for short-term success. The achievement of which she is most proud was built with this foundation of trust and integrity between her and her team. In 2006, Rosado was sent by The NewsMarket to London to head up the personnel in Europe, manage working efforts in Europe and build the current team. The European branch of The NewsMarket’s billings increased by 134 percent in the time that she has been there. She has helped to unify the team’s effort by uniting the team and bringing in and hiring new people, even as she increased the team’s excitement about how the company was growing and what it was doing.

“I am a total news junkie.”

[Leading by Example]

The third leadership characteristic that Rosado believes has been important in allowing her to be successful and grow is her willingness to never ask anyone else on her team to do a task that she would not do herself. “I think that it’s crucial...I think that it motivates people who you need, it leads to group cohesion and people feeling like we’re in this together. And when the situation is negative, I think that it makes your team work ten times harder than they would normally because they know that your in it with them,” she said.

In 2006, George Clooney came to The NewsMarket with an idea to promote his humanitarian visits to Darfur in an effort to raise awareness of the current atrocities. Rosado was given the campaign assignment on short notice, and the project was not going to be released to the media until the campaign was to be launched.

Rosado was placed in charge of the client and therefore all of the personnel working on the campaign reported to her. The urgency of the Clooney campaign required long hours of operation to be completed on time. “It was a ton of work,” she said. “I would usually leave the office at 11 a.m. or so and get back the next morning at 7 a.m., simply because there was so much to do. Even though there were many more people who could contribute, you know, I think it showed people that I was taking it as seriously as anyone else, and that I wouldn’t ask anything of anyone else that I wasn’t willing to do myself.” Through leading by example, Rosado has shown that hard work and a passion for her job has benefited both her and her company.

[Hard Work & Flexibility]

According to Rosado, hard work and flexibility are two characteristics that are crucial to success in any professional field, but being willing to adapt to meet the needs of one’s corporation or current client is an integral part of the public relations profession. “I think that you need to be adaptable and flexible, and I think that you
need to be able to speak to leaders and receptionists and designers and be able to adapt your language accordingly,” said Rosado. In a field that requires building relationships with every type of person in an attempt to see a corporation through the eyes of the public, this attribute is a necessity. Rosado is in the business of positioning corporations in the eyes of the public through videos and other visual forms. This ability to see a company through the eyes of the public is grounded in constant adaptation.

Having a hard-working mentality is also a characteristic that Rosado attributes to her parents. This characteristic comes from both one’s passion for their job, as well as the way in which they have been taught to work. Appreciating hard work and the benefits that it brings is a learned trait according to Rosado. Rosado learned to appreciate hard work from her father, who gave her the opportunity to have a better education and thus better life opportunities through his hard work. “Through my father’s hard work, I was able to get a better education than he had ever had the opportunity to, as well as the many opportunities which I had to travel which gave me a passion to see and change the world,” said Rosado.

“I think that being successful is also a function of how much you like what you do,” said Rosado. According to Rosado, hard work and a passion for what one does aid in the overall success of any professional. “At the end of the day, how passionate you are about what you do and the industry that you are in will give you an advantage if what you are doing is truly something that you are passionate about,” said Rosado.

[What Rosado has Learned]

“At the end of the day, how passionate you are about what you do and the industry that you are in will give you an advantage.”

“I think that the most powerful learning experiences have always been the things that haven’t worked out well,” said Rosado. “At the time I didn’t see, but in hindsight I think that’s when you learn the most.” According to Rosado, she has been very lucky to have teachers who have not just taught her to do, but to think in life. Rosado has had leaders in her life who during times of failures, have built her up and taught her to learn from these shortcomings rather than to teach her to fear these moments in her life. “I think that failures are key learning experiences. I definitely think that you learn more from failure than you do from success,” said Rosado.

According to Rosado, learning to reflect and analyze in the middle of difficult situations
has been a characteristic that has helped further her career and her corporation. “Learning to think for yourself is one of the most important skills to have beyond what you have been taught in your books and papers,” said Rosado. “Being able to think and connect information, and being able to translate that communication to other people, is what public relations is all about.”

Richard A. Rush Jr.
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Earning his seat at the table at a very young age, Kash Shaikh, who is “definitely not a morning person,” has been described by a colleague as the “brightest young star within Proctor and Gamble’s (P&G) external relations (ER) organization.” He was promoted to manager faster than anyone in the ER group’s history (a feat that required two promotions in four years), and he believes that the best advice ever given to him on public relations came from Anthony Rose of P&G who told him to, “focus on the outcome not the activity.”

Shaikh proved true to his self description of “being determined” when he was quoted as saying, “I ruptured both of my Achilles tendons playing competitive basketball and now have nylon strands in their place... I like to think that, as told in Greek mythology, the world took a shot at finding my weak spot to slow me down, and then realized it’s not going to be that easy.”

Managing a public relations budget of nearly $10 million, this innovative thinker has worked on a number of P&G’s biggest brands, including Old Spice, Olay, Tide, and Downy. He has lead the development of PR programs for some of P&G’s largest product launches, including Olay Definity and Moisturinse and Old Spice Red Zone. Shaikh is also the public relations lead on the company’s largest initiative of 2007-08 -- the consolidation of the entire lineup of liquid laundry detergents. He explained how environmental sustainability is a primary focus for P&G, so they are changing the liquid detergent and the packaging. “We have actually shrunk them in half so they now use less water, less packaging and allow for less fuel and transportation costs; it
is a huge move for the industry, and the largest project that P&G is doing globally this year.” The project itself will benefit the environment with 44 percent less packaging, 45 percent less water and five million gallons less diesel fuel because there will be 60,000 fewer trucks on the road.

Given these responsibilities and accomplishments, perhaps the most impressive thing is Shaikh’s passion about his job, the enhancement of his field and the welfare of others around him. As he began talking about some of the programs with which he has been able to work, it became obvious that one reason for his success is the personal character traits that he considers important, and the emphasis that resonates from the business culture at P&G.

Public relations began for Shaikh at the University of Texas. After initially wanting to work in journalism because of his passion for writing, he found himself wanting to make a difference and desiring to be an active part of his college campus. He soon became involved with the student government, became a founder and vice-president of the student event center and also founded a service fraternity. These experiences helped him begin to understand the power of creating and shaping messages, a function of public relations that other fields didn’t offer. “The work and the activities that I did on campus ignited that flame for me,” he said. “Once I got involved, it really opened my eyes to the possibilities of leading and shaping strategic thinking for a company.”

Shaikh’s personal values are summed up in three words-- honesty, integrity and commitment. He explained that when you are the guardian of your company’s reputation, sometimes you have to step in and push back, saying things that other business partners don’t want to hear. There also has to be a focus on winning. “It’s a personal value, and I think that it’s important in the business world.” But he wants to make sure that everyone understands that he does not speak of winning at all costs; it’s winning within the ethical parameters and values that your company sets. “I don’t believe in being in it just to play, you have to want to win it, but you want to win it the right way.”

In fact, the values of P&G were one of the main reasons that he applied for a job. “I took a look at their values, mission statement and principles, and P&G’s lined up with mine, and that’s why I am here today.” He attributes these values to his
mother. Being the vice-president of a male-dominated engineering firm, his mother has been a tireless, inspirational leader not only at her place of work, but also at home. “Nothing has imprinted me more than watching her sacrifice and witnessing her will to succeed.”

[By Serving]

One of the values that Shaikh and P&G see as important is the ever present need to help others and to be involved in the betterment of the lives of people and the world. P&G, with offices or plants in 90 countries, makes it a major part of its external public relations strategy to provide care to those in need. Shaikh works with and leads many of these programs. As he explained, the Tide ‘Load’s of Hope’ program - a marquee sustainability campaign for P&G - was one of the more rewarding programs with which he has been able to work.

The Tide brand had a meaningful presence in New Orleans within four weeks after hurricane Katrina hit, and has been there since. “We actually created the “Loads of Hope truck, a huge mobile Laundromat, and washed over 20,000 loads of laundry for people who had been affected by the hurricane. We found that when disaster strikes, people turn to their basic human needs of food, water and shelter, and the thing they need most after that is clean clothes.” P&G and the Tide brand have remained in New Orleans, helping to raise money and re-build homes. Some of the program’s milestones include rebuilding homes, lighting up Jackson Square for the holidays for the first time after Katrina, and hosting concerts with celebrity partners such as John Legend, Ellen Degeneres and Taye Diggs. Shaikh said they recently extended the program to San Diego as well, after the wild fires, to try to do their part to help affected residents get back on their feet.

[By Learning]

Shaikh also experienced an important tipping point in
his career. On an assignment with P&G where he managed the North America skincare external relations, he gained a lot of experience by having the responsibility for leading such a large operation. He also recognized that being surrounded by quality mentors and managers has helped his career progress quickly, as well as his on-the-job training in terms of team leadership skills and brand management. “Honestly, in this industry, I think if the bulk of our learning is coming from books, we're going to have a tough ride. Great PR comes from a powerful blend of instinct, experience, strategy, and measurement – all things you learn and cultivate ‘on the job’,” he said.

While there are many individuals who he acknowledges as excellent leaders in PR today, Shaikh names Charlotte Otto of P&G as one of the most powerful people in PR and a great manager of teams. “I think that she leads by example. She’s been a collaborative and inspirational leader, and she has set the tone for us.” He recognizes the work that Otto has done for the industry in terms of elevating the importance of public relations and reinforcing the importance of measurement.

According to Shaikh, the number one issue facing PR leaders today is measurement. About five to ten years ago, he said, the issue was getting a seat at the table, being sure that you were included in all of the conversations and making sure that PR was hailed as a function in any company or corporation. “Now, I think we are there at the table, and we have been there for a while, but in order to make sure that we stay at the table- even lead the discussion at times- we have to quantify and measure our work.” Improving measurement will increase credibility for the PR profession. “We are trying to elevate the profession from not only managing the media and preventing crises to really shaping the external environment and leading business building programs,” he said.

If public relations leaders are going to overcome the issues facing the field and increase the profession's credibility, Shaikh encourages them to practice certain qualities or attributes on a daily basis. “They need to understand their business, be passionate about what they do and be able to collaborate well.” Practitioners also need to know the focus of their company and its goals and strategic plans so that they can be passionate and inspire others with whom they work. “The mark of a great leader is the ability to get the most out of yourself, your people, and your resources.”
Winning it Right

[By Planning]
When asked about the three qualities that have contributed the most to his success, Shaikh named the ability to envision, focus and remain “in touch” by listening well and connecting with people. “Envisioning is sometimes the hardest thing for new professionals in the field to do because it takes strong business understanding, strategic thinking and a firm grasp of where you want to go, and the different milestones that you need to have along the way to get there.”

To help focus and prioritize, Shaikh said he asks himself, “What are the one (or two) thing(s) that I want to be remembered for this year? I like to focus on achieving one or two big wins that, at the end of the year, I can say ‘That was special, that was something that I developed, grew and shared with my team’.” As for the quality of being in touch, he said this also means being self-aware and realizing your strengths and your weaknesses and doing all that you can to improve them.

To enhance his own performance, Shaikh makes a daily habit of, “Thinking about what I could’ve done, should’ve done, or would’ve done -digesting it all... and then never think about those things again.”

When asked about his accomplishments, Shaikh highlighted having the opportunity to help people while helping his company as the most significant. He recounted doing a lot of work with the Olay brand to educate women on the benefits of sunscreen use and the reality of skin cancer, which is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths among young women. “Any time that we can do cause-related or charitable work,” he said, “it helps educate, motivate, and inspire us as much as the people we serve. And, in the process, it helps make consumers more loyal to our brand. That’s the most powerful thing that we can do, because then it becomes a lot bigger than selling detergent or lotion; it becomes about building authentic relationships with real people. That is the most important part of the work that I have been able to do.”

Shaikh is excited about the profession. “In the future, ‘trust’ is going to become even more of a critical part of how the world does business, and PR is going to play a lead role in building that trust. Our industry offers such a diversity of people, challenges, and experiences that are tough to match in other fields. I’ve been blessed to be able to travel the world, meet amazing people, and do some good things...thinking about what I could’ve done, should’ve done, or would’ve done, -digesting it all... and then never think about those things again.”
along the way, I’ve been able to teach and to learn, and I’ve never felt bored on the job.” For Shaikh, success in the PR field requires an intricate balance of passion, intuition, and experience.

[Slam Dunk]
What’s his best advice to new professionals in the field on being successful? “Be focused, figure out the one thing that you really want to be remembered for in your first year, and go after it. Don’t be afraid to take risks, but be accountable for your actions and decisions. And remember that the best leaders demand more than the status-quo, and aren’t afraid to change the game.”

Rachael R. Smallwood
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Stacy Simpson’s resume highlights employment in many organizations and agencies, even the business giant IBM. Now a vice president of InterActiveCorp (IAC), a Fortune 500 most admired company for 2007 and 2008, she continuously develops skills to promote her company as a front runner in the technological world. How did she move from her first job as the assistant to the director of public affairs at a national non-profit health policy organization to the world of IAC? Simple. She’s a natural leader, always learning about her environment and herself.

Simpson believes that PR leaders are different from leaders in any other field. Other professions are able to specialize in their industry, such as accounting. However, leaders in the communication and public relations fields are expected to not only be specialists in all areas they represent, such as banks or accounting firms, but they are also expected to generalize information and represent the company for which they work.

According to Simpson, each day generates new opportunities and challenges alike, and both create learning experiences. PR leaders must be updated on current issues about their company and constantly consume new information about all aspects of the business world. “You have to be able to communicate what you are seeing and what you are hearing in the outside world, and then apply it to what is happening in your company, communicating that to management and other appropriate people,” Simpson said. “We are in a unique position as observers, a position where we see what is going on in the industry and the company. Leaders
can translate that information into action and into strategy.”

Simpson recalled one of her biggest accomplishments early in her career while working for Stratus Radio Strategies, a radio PR firm. She coordinated all radio for the March to Conquer Cancer, a fundraiser taking place on the mall in Washington, D.C. Thousands of people participated, including celebrities and politicians, who donated their time, resources, and themselves to make the event a success. Radio stations were broadcasting live from the event, and they succeeded in raising money, awareness and even influencing political policy. “This event was one of the first in my career that I realized not only did I do something that excited me professionally, but I made a difference.”

[Simpson’s Three Strengths]

Simpson focuses on three strengths she has found in herself: a natural curiosity, solution-driven thinking, and a fascination with news. In her own words, this natural curiosity causes her to rarely hear a statement that does not spark at least five questions in her head. An inherent drive, thoughts run through Simpson’s mind like “this is interesting, but here are my next 10 questions.” Leaders must take available information and develop it into something more. Like the other qualities, her constant consumption of media is significant to her career.

Perfection is critical in this field, but what about when things are not perfect. How does a VP like Simpson handle mistakes? After 12 years in the field, she admitted they happen. “There is no flawless execution,” she said. “I have always learned something from every success just as much as every failure. If you don’t always take something away, then you are destined to do the same thing, over, and over again until it ultimately quits working altogether.” Always learning in her own job, she admits times exist when she could have made a good story or announcement better, or even just presented information from a different angle. She reviews all articles placed and notes if a better person could have answered a particular question, or if a different approach could have been taken. It is a continuous learning experience.

[Marrying Education & Instincts]

Simpson said the definition of excellent leadership is two-dimensional. First, a person has to excel at what they do. They have to learn to marry education and their instincts so that they understand the role of PR in all aspects. Thinking of all possible angles for the story and constantly creating questions and answers will help prepare
for all possibilities. She commented, “The first thing that helps with leadership is that you never forget those things that you learn. You build on your education over and over again, and you must take every opportunity to further build on the skills that you had before.”

Excellent leadership also involves the idea of accepting the notion that you in some way are leading the company, whether in the lime light or behind the scenes. “We are in a very interesting position in that we are always managing up, or pointing out weaknesses or inherit problems or opportunities to senior leadership,” Simpson said. “You must communicate things that can often be uncomfortable for someone who is extremely senior. You also have to be okay with, and skilled at, telling people what they may not want to hear. And you have to tell them in a way that is productive and that gets the best possible end result.”

What can a successful professional like Simpson offer her competition, peers, and those seeking employment? She provided snippets of advice during the interview, weaving together personal stories, definitions and advice.

[Do Things that Excite You]

“I’ve tried as many things in life as possible – press advance work for the White House, bungee jumping, on air TV reporting, bagging groceries, acting, bicycling hundreds of miles, dancing for the Queen of England, serving food to the homeless, temping, and even bartending,” Simpson said. “Having a vast range of experiences to pull from allows you to approach every project and opportunity with knowledge, empathy, and the desire to learn.”

With her varied experiences, Simpson thrives on excitement. That was one of the reasons she took the job with IAC, which offered the opportunity to work closely with a leader in his own right of the business and media world, Barry Diller. Throughout Diller’s career, he has successfully applied experiences from
“We are in a unique position where we are observers. We are in a position to observe what is going on in the industry and the company. The people that are really good at what they do can translate that information into action items and into strategy.”

[Learn About Yourself]

Simpson encourages those in the field to find opportunities in everything, because true learning comes from experiences. Whether it is a first job, or one that someone has been in for several years, the learning opportunities never cease. “Each day should be treated like an interview for the next employment opening,” Simpson said. “Everything should be an opportunity for something bigger. Every single moment of every single day is a learning opportunity whether that is communicating in the office by answering the phone or actively taking notes in a meeting.” Simpson also pointed out that attentive individuals find their talents. She recommends looking to find strengths in the work you do, identify the things you naturally excel at and learn what differentiates you. Discover what you can bring to the table, and emphasize and continually develop those things in your work.

Simpson recalled a situation earlier in her career where she had to confidently
defend a position in front of several top executives. Discussion revolved around a good business decision for the company; however, she knew that would not be a popular public decision. She had to assertively prove why the company had to find a different way to shape the situation, or better yet, a different way to perform the task altogether. She knew that the company could not proceed in the way that they were discussing, and she provided impromptu examples for support. In her eyes, “We are doing ourselves a huge disservice if we view ourselves, and allow others to view us, as just the person that writes the press release and sends it out. We are in a unique position that we see much of what goes on across a company, and across an industry. We need to take advantage of that and use that to advise our companies, our business leaders, and our peers.”

[Develop Your Communication Skills]
According to Simpson, a leader must have excellent verbal communication skills, excellent written skills, and the ability to put puzzle pieces together. She emphasized that these three skills are crucial to public relations, and more generally the field of communication. Effective written and oral skills can improve the success of the company. One needs the ability to think strategically, see current events in the world, the community and the company, and “connect the dots.” By looking at trends around the globe, a person can see opportunities for advancement outside the walls of the company.

[Occasionally, Feel as Though You are Being Thrown into the Deep End]
Simpson has been there. She has had “deep-end” experiences, which are instances that seem impossible or challenging but create the most powerful learning experiences, when you think you can do it, but you are not quite sure. Simpson described one such experience, which involved her career jump from service PR to IBM. Her experience to that point involved a mix of cause or issue-driven PR, health policy, adolescent sexual health issues, international family planning and governmental issues with both non-profit and agency PR. When she took the job at IBM, she took a jump into the deep end. Though unsure if she could develop talent in technology communication, she took the challenge; she is still swimming with success.

“I would never do anything that I can’t at the end of the day feel good about.”
[Keep Your Integrity]

During times of crisis, a PR leader can be faced with moral and ethical issues. Simpson recommends that leaders must keep their integrity. “I will not do something that I don’t believe in. I won’t work for a company that I don’t believe in. I won’t say something to a reporter that I fundamentally don’t believe in or that is not true. If I have to make a bad situation better, I look for things in this situation that truly make it better. I would never do anything that I can’t at the end of the day feel good about.” Simpson believes integrity is key to leadership. She emphasized the importance of integrity on the job, and throughout your entire life.

[Evolve]

The ability to adapt is critical to becoming a better leader in PR. According to Simpson, the PR profession is changing dramatically, and one must be able to evolve and adapt with it. With new types of media such as blogs, virtual reality, and social networks, the face of media is changing completely. Simpson suggests, in the near future, the industry will need to take these new forms of media and truly understand them.

She and others influential in the communication world continue to stand by the print forms of media like the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and the wire services such as Reuters and the Associated Press. However, she recognized the growing importance of these innovative forms of media vehicles, and commented that soon the different media lines will blur, thus changing the way media is handled. Three contributing factors to this change include the 24-hour news cycle, the evolving roles of reporters, and, most importantly, use of the Internet, one of the biggest changes that Simpson has seen in her 12 years of experience. “In our technological world, people are just as likely to get news from Perez Hilton as from CNN.”

She noted that at the beginning of her career, not everyone had a computer at their desk, and a website could be sustained by companies with a simple homepage. Now, people expect immediacy in their answers. Using search engines like ask.com or google, they receive immediate gratification on a topic of interest. The Internet also connects people worldwide today. “Rules that existed with ‘tried and true’ PR don’t apply in the interactive world.”
[Think About Your Audience, All of Your Audiences]

PR professionals generally have two major audiences: their executives in the company, and the media. These two audiences must be considered at all times for information, and yet different ideas should be delivered to them individually. “When pitching a major campaign or strategy to your CEO or senior leadership,” Simpson said, “never walk into a meeting without doing your best to secure the likely outcome in advance. Know who will be involved in making the decision and build your allies and supporters by selling them on your idea before the meeting so you have the support you need around the table when you’re giving your big pitch.”

However, when thinking about the media, the pitch needs to change. It is more important to “keep it simple. If you can’t explain it, they can’t write about it,” Simpson said. Again, though the company and the media are two of your most important audiences, they are not the only factors in decisions. Others include consumers, community officials, suppliers, stakeholders one must work with or represent, and so forth.

Given Stacy Simpson’s achievements, it seems likely that she has learned from and followed her own advice for success in the profession.
If you could hand pick your child’s little league coach, or even your own coach as a child, who would it have been? A famous baseball player, or even a parent? But what are the specific characteristics of a great coach? It’s often the unrelenting encouragement that person offers, or his or her fairness, or his or her tremendous athletic ability, or a combination of these attributes, plus more.

Meet David Warschawski: dream little league coach.

[Head in the Game]

When Warschawski speaks, there is no hesitation, few pauses. He lays out a play, and efficiently runs it. There is subtlety in his inspiration; one wants to be a player on his team without really understanding why initially. But the reason is simple. He is passionate and knowledgeable without being overbearing, and he’s a person who believes in giving everyone a chance to participate.

While Warschawski has dabbled in coaching varsity sports, he’s primarily made a name for himself in the world of public relations and marketing. His high school basketball team was, most probably, as winning as his successful entrepreneurial effort, the Baltimore-based public relations, marketing and branding firm, warschawski. The characteristics that make Warschawski a good coach are, likely, the same traits that make him a successful and powerful leader in the field of public relations: encouraging impeccable work, valuing creativity and supporting mentorship.

 Appropriately, Warschawski admits his involvement in sports has provided a sense of inspiration and a place from which...
he’s derived his experience, motivation and leadership skills. While it is not the only source of these things, his experiences in athletics have, however, played an important role in developing such attributes. “Sports teach you how to push yourself, have mental and physical toughness and go the extra mile,” he explained.

For Warschawski, he believes being active in sports early on in life, specifically his participation in team sports, such as basketball and soccer, provided him with the opportunity to develop certain leadership skills. Sports naturally allowed him to learn to effectively function in a group, to enjoy competition, and to embrace challenges. More importantly, his experiences taught him how to emerge as a leader within a group.

“Being very actively involved in sports was a great way to come to know what it means to lead.”

“Being very actively involved in sports was a great way to come to know what it means to lead.”

He believes excellent leadership requires someone who is goal-oriented and driven. Such a person not only has a vision, but also invites people to share in that idea, to become an integral part of that vision by collaborating to achieve a shared goal. According to Warschawski, leading requires educating people along the way about one’s plans and how to go about realizing them.

Working as a cohesive group can be vital to the success of a project, but having an effective leader is essential to Warschawski. After being asked a fairly complicated question about how his personal leadership skills may have affected different professional situations, he simply and directly responded, “I would answer that in a very different way.” Warschawski responds in this manner frequently. He often resolves complicated questions with simple, poignant answers. The bottom line seems to be: “How many times has something really worthwhile been accomplished when there wasn’t good leadership?”

Warschawski has been ranked the number one small agency in the country by PR News and the Holmes Report for the last two years and has won more than 190 industry awards for its work in the last
nine years. Warschawski knows his agency wouldn’t have accomplished these impressive milestones without excellent leadership throughout his organization, at all levels.

[The Rookie]

So how does someone, who as a kid growing up in Baltimore and dreaming of playing for the Baltimore Orioles, become a front-runner in the public relations field? With the nurturing of his parents, Warschawski developed certain leadership skills, including curiosity and perseverance, which he believes facilitated his success.

His father, who worked as an achievement consultant to top-level business managers, heavily influenced not only Warschawski’s personal life, but also his professional career. “His approach to business, the consultative role that he takes, and the ideologies that I grew up with, have had a tremendous impact on the way I conduct business,” he said concerning his father.

Such support continued once he left home. Warschawski entered the profession as a young rookie starting out in New York City with The Dilenschneider Group. He genuinely feels the mentorship he received there from the late Robert Stone allowed him the opportunity to grow and learn in the profession. He spoke respectfully about Stone’s trust in his ability; “He really took me under his wing and taught me a lot of the nuances of the profession, allowed me to be involved in the type of work that probably, at the age I was doing it, most people would never have had the exposure to.”

He moved on to work for Edelman in New York, which, at that time, was the number one New York-based agency.

[Playing for Keeps]

Despite the rich professional experiences in his early career, Warschawski thought he could do more in his work. In fact, “doing more” could be understood as his mantra, both then, and now.
With that outlook, he set out to start his own company in 1996. He thought he had built a solid foundation with his previous work experiences, and he felt he could branch out on his own.

“I can do this, and do this well, and do it differently, and I’d really like to give it a go,” he stated regarding his entrepreneurial effort.

Doing it differently is also a key concept on which Warschawski bases his work ethic. He highly values setting the bar high, and soaring above it. Such an ideal is something he found somewhat lacking in previous work environments. He missed not only doing a great job, but doing an outstanding job. He wanted to do work in his own way, to produce work of which he could be especially proud.

He felt that he could potentially be even more impressive to clients through his work: “That was one of the main reasons I wanted to start my own agency, because I wanted clients to go, ‘Wow! They really went the extra mile. Wow, they really thought of everything. Wow, they’re really on my team. They really want to get this right’.”

But going above and beyond was only one reason he decided to start his own firm. He also just wanted to get back to business, another principle he felt other companies had lost sight of in his past experiences. When a client seeks his services, he knows he isn’t being contracted to, as he put it, “do PR for PR’s sake.” He knows his firm’s efforts are used in the hopes of producing a verifiable business result. In consulting a client, he attempts to understand the company’s business goals for using his agency’s services. He advises clients regarding the possibility of public relations and marketing in helping to achieve the desired outcome, as well as how to execute plans to achieve the best result possible.

Warschawski takes pride in his company’s positive culture, another factor he feels some corporations overlook. “I wanted to be in a place where having a good time, having a sharing work environment where there’s fun, love, good energy, sort of a thrilling and caring workplace, didn’t mean that you weren’t doing great work. But rather that it supported doing outstanding work.”

The Holmes Report has recognized warschawski as one of the top 20 boutique agencies to work for in the country. The company has received the award for the past six years, which Warschawski proudly mentioned in conversation. What he neglected to mention, however, are any...
of the brands on warschawski’s impressive client list, including: Black & Decker, Adidas, Gore-Tex, Under Armour, DeWalt, the country of Norway, The Athlete’s Foot and Century 21. To him, it seems, working for high-profile companies isn’t what his work is about; it’s about offering the best services he can possibly provide to those companies.

“We are going to help the company create the most powerful brand, we’re going to help them clarify what that brand is, we’re going to help them determine who the best target audience is, and we’re going to help create marketing programs that by their very nature, have such powerful PR attributes built into it, that they almost sell themselves,” said Warschawski.

“I can do this, and do this well, and do it differently, and I’d really like to give it a go.”

[A Winning Game]

While offering the best services is something warschawski succeeds in doing, Warschawski also hopes to provide those services in a fresh way. In a competitive market, he promises his clients that his services will help an organization to stand out.

While he believes leadership in public relations is very similar to leadership in other fields, he does think that public relations leaders need to be somewhat more creative. People are more likely to be inspired by new innovations, as opposed to repetition. Leaders have to provide their organizations with unique ideas in order to garner support, and, in turn, be influential.

“Other places, once you know something, or you know how to do it, you can keep doing it well. But in our industry, what’s been done before, if you keep doing that, it’s not successful,” Warschawski said.

Being unique is something Warschawski does well. He holds no specific formula to any question asked. He does not come up with the answers you expect or hope for; he has a unique perspective. He does not offer necessarily simple solutions, but tried and true solutions, often with an unexpected spin. He knows it works, because he’s doing it, and doing it well.

[Practice Makes Perfect]

If Warschawski had to prove his coaching abilities in only one way, it would be by his enduring support for mentorship in the areas of public relations and marketing. He feels a major issue the profession faces as a whole is attracting the best and brightest students. Students often foster a misconception of what the field involves, he explained, and therefore, don’t choose the profession.

And often, he feels, when they do choose to undergo educational training in the
field, especially concerning advanced degrees, practical lessons are not learned. Business knowledge, excellent communication abilities and research skills are frequently lacking among college graduates—three fundamental skills vital to their success. “For the most, I think getting in with a good firm, once you learn those fundamentals, is more important than getting an advanced degree. You can learn more on the job from good mentors and role models,” Warschawski said.

When students do come into the profession, he whole-heartedly believes in taking the time to guide and teach them, to involve them in real processes of the job. At warschawski, an intern is not an intern; he or she is a participant in the administrative associate program, and these employees are hardly benchwarmers.

“We take time to walk them through high-level decisions, how they are made, why they are made, how does this work, why do we do it this way as opposed to another way. We allow them to be actively involved in that process,” Warschawski said. He believes this is the best way to really learn about the profession. By mentoring young minds, professionals can learn early on how to be the best advocates of the practice.

[At the Top of his Game]
The Administrative Associate program is just one way in which Warschawski puts plays into action. He practices what he preaches. He values learning, so he stays on top of trends in the field. He values commitment to leadership, to fully accepting the responsibility it entails, so he is committed professionally and personally. His personal values are heavily intertwined with his professional values, which resonate in his company’s culture.

Because of his desire to excel, he cites few outright fumbles in his career. He only hopes to build on things he has done, to improve his best work, and to do things in a new and different way. He is constantly working towards creating the next homerun, touchdown or goal. Odds are, he and his agency will score frequently and that everyone involved in the process wins.

Emily L. Thibaut
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Donaldsonville, Louisiana
All the allures of Alabama native Bari Watson’s beauty, grace and charm seem to have come directly from her Southern roots to extend their influences on her personal philosophies and triumphs in the field of public relations. Her genuine care for people and commanding confidence enables Watson to cultivate relationships within Belmont University, where she serves as director of athletic marketing and external affairs.

Growing up as the oldest daughter of a schoolteacher who recently retired after 37 years of teaching second grade, Watson’s natural inclination towards hard work seems to be a direct lineage from her mother. Her various awards recognizing her achievements, ranging from public speaking to her extensive involvement volunteering on behalf of children with special needs, solidify her image as a caring, passionate person and professional.

Perhaps it is her genuine personality or her excitement in completing a job or task, but through the years, Watson has acquired various mentors whom have trusted her with their insight in all matters of life. Mentors who have counseled and guided Watson do so because she can be trusted to use their advice in a way to enhance the professional and personal lives of others. As someone who seeks to serve beyond herself and her job title, it is assured Watson will assist others as others have assisted her.

When considering the crucial aspects of leadership in Watson’s career, one would identify the passion which permeates every aspect of her career and private life. An extension of this trait, her outgoing personality, enables her to acquire, foster
Mentoring Maven

and maintain authentic relationships. A passion for people and her profession makes her an excellent candidate to be a participant in the process of mentoring, as it can be expected that her individual advancement in leadership will subsequently promote the profession. Since public relations is about establishing and developing relationships, passion exuded in the practices of professionals such as Watson serves to augment the credibility of the profession as a whole.

“When you are really interested in people, and you care about them, it shows. People trust you. Relationships are real. It helps tremendously when you are responsible for the PR for an organization. But, you can’t fake it. For me, I feel blessed to have built the relationships I have,” said Watson.

[Early Guidance]

After earning a bachelor’s degree in communications studies in 2000 from the University of Alabama, she worked for a year with Premier Marketing in Tuscaloosa, Alabama as program coordinator for the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame. During this time, Watson met and developed a friendship with Dr. Mary Starke Harper, who served as a special adviser on mental health and aging to Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George Bush. The humanitarian efforts and advocacy work of this fellow Alabamian have received national and international recognition, and although she was not in the field of public relations, Dr. Mary Starke Harper served to influence Watson’s personal and professional life.

Having put herself through school in nursing during the time of Segregation and against the wishes of her father, Harper went on to earn three college degrees and became one of the most highly regarded people in the healthcare industry. Initially becoming a mentor who advised Watson on everything from her resume to potential jobs, their relationship deepened beyond its professional beginnings until Watson began to regard Harper as a grandmother.

“I would say the life that she lived, the person that she was, and her success as a woman communicating internationally on behalf of the United States, served in so many ways to be a great role model to me.”

Prior to her death nearly two years ago, the two spent holidays together and spoke nearly every day. Harper’s emphasis on integrity and the importance of taking chances continues to be reflected in all
matters of Watson’s life.

Describing their relationship as “one of the greatest blessings of my life,” Watson described Harper as being a sort of life coach whose advice on choosing jobs enabled her to successfully place herself in what she feels in hindsight to be the best place she could be professionally, at just the right time.

Watson continues to serve the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame by sitting on its advisory board and making trips to participate in its meetings. Through continued involvement, she is able to ensure Harper’s legacy continues to benefit the healthcare industry. As evident in this example, mentoring creates a cycle that allows for visions and professional practices to be maintained, developed and enhanced.

[An Opportunity]

After returning to the University of Alabama to attain a masters degree in advertising and public relations in 2002, Watson found herself unsure as to where to take her next professional step, but was fortunate to be directed by her professor, Dr. Bruce Berger, in deciding on a path for her career. With his guidance, the two decided that her skills and personality type would be best used in nonprofits. This jumping point led Watson to begin her career in the town of Livingston, Alabama with a job at the University of West Alabama. “U-DUB” as called by its students, would provide an opportunity for her to develop her skills and deepen her understanding of the nonprofit field. Something she could not have anticipated was the success she would find employing Dr. Harper’s advice to be aggressive and to take chances in the professional world.

Upon applying for a fundraising position as director of development, Watson met with the University’s president, Dr. Richard Holland. Two weeks after being hired, Dr. Holland met with Watson and gave her both an opportunity and a challenge. Knowing her interest resided
in advertising and public relations, he informed her that the University of West Alabama had not developed a concrete communication plan, but he was willing to allow her to do some initial research to possibly create such a campaign.

Discovering that a recent name change had caused much confusion about the university among its potential publics, Watson developed an integrated marketing plan to address this and other issues. When implemented, it resulted in a significant enrollment increase and an annual marketing budget of $300,000. When regarding the huge chance taken by Dr. Holland, she said, “I feel his vision, and his proactive approach to trust a young individual allowed something great to happen ...I think that was an example of positive leadership in dealing with a situation."

In this moment of leadership, Dr. Holland created an opportunity for Watson to exert her own abilities as a leader, and she described this moment as her tipping point. When describing this career milestone, she speaks in honor and awe of the numerous thank-you notes received from alumni and others members of the communities with allegiances to the school. These individuals were thrilled that commercials, billboards, radio spots and print advertisements were incorporated in cities throughout the southeast. She said, “I’m sitting here thinking, I’m doing my job. This, in my mind, was what was supposed to happen.”

She recalls hearing about a bus full of students returning from an athletic event that passed a billboard advertising their university, and the bus erupted in cheers of pride in celebration of their school’s recognition. As she became a part of the community in an effort to thoroughly do her job by immersing herself in its culture and becoming invested in its people, Livingston became a home to her. Regarding her contributions to the university, she said, “It makes you feel really good when you think something you have done is going to continue to flourish and grow after you’re gone. I felt really wonderful to have been able to do that in my first real job.”

[A New Challenge]

After three years working with the University of West Alabama, Watson moved to Nashville in 2005 after taking a marketing job at Belmont University in its athletics department. Responsible for corporate relations and sponsorships, she was able to increase the previous

“If I can ever be any type of mentor or help someone else in their career or personally, I am happy to do that.”
annual average of $30,000 received from corporate sponsorships to about $130,000 in a year. Having captured the attention of her athletic director as a result of her success, she expressed the need for a more aggressive communication plan for Belmont athletics. With a team of eleven to assist her efforts, she was then put in charge of all external affairs, including managing media relations, marketing, promotions, special events, the ticket office, and the development and corporate operations.

Just as in years past, Watson was able to use guidance from her mentors, and she was grateful that her college professor, Berger, reviewed her integrated marketing plan she developed as part of the campaign she planned to implement for Belmont. She says, “I hold him in such high-esteem in that what he has been for me in my career is someone that has been a great sounding board. I don’t know if everyone who goes through higher education really finds someone who will be invested in their life and career and help them years and years down the road. I went through the graduate program six years ago, and still … call Berger to be my sounding board.”

The results of a relationship between a mentor and the one being mentored can have little or great effects, but this primarily depends on the ability of those being advised to implement the wisdom passed down in their careers or lives, as well as to pass it on to others in an effort to establish a sort of continuum. Establishing this progression in her own life, Watson said, “I am just a young woman in Nashville, Tennessee, but if I can ever be any type of mentor or help someone else in their career or personally, I am happy to do that.”

Another dimension or factor that has served to enhance Watson’s talents resulted from her experience in higher education, which she feels further polished the skills she developed in her undergraduate studies and enhanced her ability to lead a public relations effort. In particular, public speaking is one area which she said has been “another real key to my success...When you know your product, and you can stand before publics and deliver powerful messages, it is helpful.” This skill, paired with her enthusiasm, plays a direct role in what she describes as the most gratifying aspect of her job.

“What I find really rewarding is that I truly believe in the product... So what I get to do...is I get to champion the story...When I meet with a potential sponsor, I feel really confident about being able..."
to communicate that through everything from mass media buys to speeches.”

[Paying it Forward]
Her current work at Belmont University is performed with the same enthusiasm and pride as felt during her days at University of West Alabama. Holding on to the principle that her belief in the character of the universities she has been a part of has contributed to her success as well as her involvement in community associations (such as being a Kiwanis member, Nashville Emerging Leader and member of the Nashville Sports Council), it is reasonable to assume Watson is an emerging leader with great achievements to come.

“For me, I feel blessed to have built the relationships I have, and I honestly don’t always feel like this is work. To me, the relationship building aspect of PR is a lot of fun and extremely rewarding!”

If leadership is the ability to guide, and mentoring is supporting the progress of another’s efforts to succeed, Watson’s profile lends credence to the strong link between the two, and the influence the pair can have on success. As evident in this case, continuing this practice could serve to further enhance the public relations profession.

“I think I am someone with aspirations to continue to learn and grow, to be mentored, as well as mentor others,” Watson said.

Bessie H. Lapeyrouse
Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations
Hometown: Mobile, Alabama
It’s fast-paced. It’s energetic. It’s all about making things matter to people. Rebecca Winter is a woman with a drive to be one of the great storytellers, and in doing so, she wants to make things matter. It is those two passions that have inspired her throughout an outstanding 11-year career in communications.

Most students begin college without a clue as to what career they want to pursue, but Winter was different. She said she was “always truly very passionate about communications.” At Kansas State University, Winter double majored in public relations and speech. She was also actively involved in journalism and the forensics team.

Her enthusiasm for public relations and communications followed her from college and throughout her career with companies such as IBM, Whirlpool Corporation and JCPenney. “I’ve had a very exciting career, and I think it’s only going to continue here at JCPenney; I have great passion for what I do,” she said.

Being passionate about public relations also requires certain skills to do her job effectively, she said. These include “writing, communication, and making things matter to people is typically the way I like to refer to my value proposition.”

With hard work and determination, she has been able to achieve her goal. How does she do it? “I set the goal, even subliminally sometimes, and work to achieve it,” she said.

[Learning New Things]

“I think that if there were a profile on me it would highlight that I love to learn new things,” Winter said. She knows it’s
important to love what you do. However, it takes more than just passion. Possessing adequate knowledge is necessary, and she is certainly thirsty for knowledge. “What gets me up in the morning everyday is, I’m a learner.” She even considers learning new things to be a personal hobby.

Winter pointed out that she is never completely satisfied with her level of knowledge because she knows there is so much to learn. That’s why Winter loves working in teams, because it gives her an opportunity to learn from others.

“I think one of the most rewarding parts of my job is continually learning something new.” Her advice to young professionals coming into the industry is to find mentors. Many professionals have the knowledge, and Winter suggests that people should listen and allow themselves to learn from them. She still emails former executives and managers for advice and guidance when she needs it. “If you are open to it, I think the sky is the limit. And people can do great things if they just take the advice people give them,” she said.

Being open and possessing knowledge, but striving for more, allows Winter the means to make things matter to others.

[Making Things Matter]
With so much information available today, it can be difficult to make your message stand out. “You’re not going to be a great PR person if you’re not somebody who can effectively communicate,” Winter said. “Great PR people are people that really understand the business and know how to make it relevant to others.”

Public relations professionals must also convince internal audiences—executives and other co-workers—of a message’s importance and allow them to understand its purpose within the business. The best way to do this, Winter said, is “to just bring them along on the process.” Include them from the beginning, allowing them to understand from first-hand experience and participate throughout the process. This also makes it relevant and personal to them.

“I also think it is important that PR and communications professionals know the business,” Winter said. “I think they should have a strong business background because it comes down to credibility at the end of the day. If you don’t have something compelling and interesting to bring to the table, how are you ever going to make it matter to them?”

For Winter, it wasn’t until she received her MBA from Notre Dame that she realized the importance of having a background
in business. In the professional world, she was able to acknowledge its importance and discover how much more effective she could be with this new insight into the business world.

While it is important to be relevant internally, it is also important that you make your message matter to your target audience.

“I think any time your target audience can understand and be aware of your story,” Winter said, “they are more likely to accept the message. They’ve got to understand it before they can internalize it and change something in their world. In a sense that’s the impact that communications has.”

According to Winter, it takes “focus and the ability to make things matter, especially with so much information these days. It’s so easy to get bogged down in the pages of text. PR and communications professionals have the responsibility to pull out what really matters and to make it clear in a way that’s meaningful and relevant.”

When asked what aspect of the job she enjoyed most, Winter referred to the process of creating stories and making them meaningful.

“There are times when we get nuggets of things that aren’t quite stories yet. The part I love is when I get a couple of people together and say, ‘okay, so we’ve got this puzzle, and how do we bring this thing together? How do we make this compelling?’ That’s the part that I find fun. How do you take three different nuggets that are completely separate and bring them all together in a way that’s meaningful and relevant to the media, and tell a really compelling story?”

[Leading the Team]

Teams are another critical factor in success, according to Winter. “I like to work with people, with teams. I think PR allows you to do that.” Winter enjoys working in a team environment because she knows everyone has something to bring to the table.
When working in teams, fulfilling your role as a leader is essential to one’s success. “I would love to say that I’ve always succeeded, but to be honest, the times that I didn’t succeed allowed for my most significant growth.”

So what does Winter take from that? Becoming a leader and working in teams is about learning as you go. Not everyone is born a natural leader. So it’s important to learn from our mistakes and use them as stepping-stones to success.

It can be difficult to transition into a leadership role because it entails different responsibilities and meeting different expectations. “Leading people is a different skill than just doing the work yourself,” Winter said. She referred to an instance in her career where she was called into her manager’s office and he told her that she wouldn’t be receiving the promotion she was expecting. He said that she was one of the best media relations professionals he’d seen, but if she was going to be a leader, she needed to change some things. Although she was disappointed, she took it as an opportunity. “It was a gift. When people give you constructive feedback like that, it’s a gift, and if you can recognize it for what it is – an opportunity – then you can work to improve it,” Winter said. “The best learnings in my opinion, although not the most fun at the time, really do come from the tough learnings.”

Winter felt she was able to learn a lot from Carolina Mata, one of her previous managers and leadership mentors. She worked for her on three different occasions and felt that she was good role model.

“She helped make you better than you thought you could be, and that’s one of the things I really take with me. How do I create an environment that enables everyone I work with be better than they ever thought they could be?” she said.

Being a leader is about being able to manage a team and to lead them to success. Many professionals have difficulties making the transition into a leadership role because their role changes and so does their responsibility.

“When you become a manager, there’s a shift that needs to happen,” Winter said. “You need to learn to take a back seat and engage and enable your team to succeed instead of being out front all the time. That’s a difficult transition to make.”

While making the transition, Winter asked herself, “How do I remove barriers and obstacles for my team, and give them more space than any of us believe they can handle, so that they can reach their potential?”

In addition, leaders must recognize
certain actions that need to be taken to effectively lead a team. “It’s checking your ego and your pride at the door, which isn’t always easy. It’s admitting when you know something, and it’s admitting when you don’t. On my team, there are people that work for me that are smarter than me on some things. My job as a leader isn’t to know all the answers -- it’s to figure out where my strengths are, where my team’s strengths are and constantly leverage them in the best interest of the company.”

In the end, then, according to Winter, leadership is about living up to responsibility. “It’s tough asking the right questions, it’s tough to push back, it’s tough to be the person that has to have the really candid conversations, but as leaders that’s our job. That’s our responsibility to the company, to our teams and to ourselves.”

“I love this whole idea of engaging and inspiring others, so I think some of the most rewarding parts of my job are working with a team,” she said.

“Respect among team members is also essential. When I say respect, I mean everyone has something unique that they bring to the table, and my job is to figure out what that is,” Winter said. I think the best leaders do a good job of figuring out how to take all the unique skills -- the pieces of the puzzle -- and assembling them to put the best team together.”

Being a member of a team and a leader are both about working together and allowing each individual’s personal attributes to shine. “The things I take the most pride in now have to do with what we do as a team; It’s about helping to bring everyone along. I work on a fantastic team right now, and I learn something new every day. I think we all bring something new and unique to the table.”

When asked if there were any defining moments in her career that helped to mold her as a professional or as a leader, Winter said, “I don’t think it’s a big moment, I think it’s the every-day moments that matter most.”

JCPenney’s brand positioning is “Every Day Matters,” which Winter says is perfect in terms of describing her own philosophy. “I think I’m a perfect example of our brand positioning. To me, it’s those little, everyday moments in life and in your professional life that make it worthwhile. Working with great people that you enjoy being around and that you learn from everyday is what matters.”

To help enhance her everyday performance, Winter
Every Day Matters

Elizabeth W. Toups
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The stories of these 20 outstanding public relations professionals were analyzed and coded by the editorial team. We wanted to know if these successful young leaders shared common values or beliefs, or if there were recurring themes or patterns in their stories regarding work experiences, professional skills, leadership development activities or other areas.

Though the professionals are diverse in many respects, we identified three themes shared in their experiences: 1) leading by example, 2) keeping public relations current and 3) learning from mentors.

In addition, many of the 20 professionals expressed similar perceptions about six individual characteristics they view as crucial to excellent leaders in the field: creativity, integrity, passion, motivation, fundamental skills and diverse backgrounds. Those characteristics, along with the three-shared themes, resonate with the findings from the online survey. These, too, were seen as central to excellence in public relations leadership.
Some of those interviewed mentioned the significance of being a great example or role model for others, and many described how leading by example strengthened their relationships with their employees, colleagues and supervisors. Addressing the criteria of a good role model or leader, most interviewees mentioned the magnitude of leading in various ways.

Some identified leading by example as a key characteristic of an effective leader. Romina Rosado of The NewsMarket explained, “I think that you cannot be an effective leader if you do not lead by example.” She indicated that colleagues and peers would never be able to trust you, if you don’t practice what you preach. “I think that it motivates people and makes them work ten times harder than they would normally work because they know that you’re in it with them,” said Rosado.

Other public relations professionals elaborated on this trait by describing their personal experiences with mentors and role models, and the example they set for others around them. Andy Hilton of ITT Corporation described how his role models possess the core set of values needed to be an excellent leader and exemplify them to others through their work efforts. “Steve Loranger… leads with his personal set of values and brings them to work everyday,” said Hilton. “[Loranger] is extremely intelligent and has been very successful at ITT, which you have to attribute partly to his ability to surround himself with
a team that can move ITT to that next level in every aspect.” Loranger is an example of the proper way to lead because he is able to take his ideals into consideration, show others how to put these principles into practice, and guide the organization to the same unified goal.

Other professionals used leading by example to explain the differences they feel are present between leadership in public relations in comparison to other fields. They felt that for a person to be taken seriously as a public relations practitioner, they must illustrate to others how they possess the characteristics of a leader through their actions, rather than their words. Nick Ragone of Ketchum, said, “You can’t ask somebody to do something you haven’t or can’t do yourself. Too often you see that. It’s easy to give orders to people, but it’s really hard to give orders and then be side-by-side with them doing the same thing.”

One commonality found in the interviews was that, for an individual to be an excellent leader in the public relations field, he or she must set an example for everyone. Most interviewed agreed that possessing key characteristics of a leader is worthless if they don’t show their talents through action.

Perhaps, for new professionals to become excellent leaders in public relations, excellent examples of leadership must visible to them. They are able to find a set of role models of excellent leadership and pattern their professional decisions and actions while taking into consideration the example their mentors have set.
Another theme found in the interviews is the importance of mentors. Many of those interviewed have been fortunate to work with excellent leaders throughout their careers. When defining excellent leadership, Tucker McNeil of MeadWestvaco Corporation said, “Being good mentors is a good characteristic of PR leaders.” These mentors and role models have helped to shape and mold many of the interviewees into the professionals and individuals they are today. The mentors cited in the interviews ranged from parents to professors to professionals.

Parents are important mentors and role models because they instill values and behaviors in their children early in life. David Warschawski of warschawski mentioned his parents as role models and his father in particular as a professional mentor. While speaking of his father Warschawski said, “His approach to thinking, his approach to business, the consultative role that he takes, and the ideologies that I grew up with, have had a tremendous impact on the way I conduct business.” Many of the public relations professionals interviewed noted their parents as important role models.

Another source of inspiration for the interviewees were teachers and professors. They were found to serve as important mentors because of their encouragement to continually learn, which fostered a desire within their students to strive for success. Fred Bateman of The Bateman Group referenced his faculty advisor, Marilyn Matelski. “I will never forget [her]. She was the one who...suggested that I try public relations firms,” he
said. Matelski’s wise advice led Bateman to public relations, where he presently runs his own company. Those who discussed teachers or professors serving as mentors felt the encouraging words, advice and interest received as students has helped them throughout their career.

Professional mentors also were mentioned frequently, and many, like Liliana Esposito of Mercury Public Affairs, expressed the importance of finding great mentors early in their careers. “Carrie Rowland Liaskos was my first boss at Burson-Marsteller, and she set a great example for me to follow throughout my career. She…spent a lot of time and energy on mentoring junior people like me…teaching, rather than telling.”

Mentors provide important guidance for a person’s professional development, and also help to develop and enhance the key qualities that help professionals become leaders in the field.

[Keeping Public Relations Relevant]

As in any communication-related field, public relations practitioners must remain competitive by staying abreast of the latest trends and issues. As mentioned by Jeff Beringer of GolinHarris, the major issue facing our industry is “figuring out what our role is, and how we maintain a lead seat at the table…the key issue is how do we maintain our relevance?” Evaluating his success, Beringer said, “One of the ways that I’ve been able to get ahead in this industry is to try a lot of new things and expose myself to different pieces of the PR puzzle.”
When reviewing the stories of the 20 professionals, it is evident that each one understands the importance of maintaining his or her edge by embracing one fundamental: evolution. With the increased prevalence of new media and other advancements in the industry, those currently succeeding in public relations do so by continually sharpening their skills and talents by understanding the trends affecting the field.

“I think that if you work in PR, you’re in a privileged position to see how news is generated and to see how companies communicate and how the public reacts to it,” said Romina Rosado. “It’s a great variety, and right now is an incredibly interesting time because the landscape that we all work in is changing so rapidly, and I think that the role of PR itself is expanding.”

Rosado’s excitement is understandable as public relations attempts to embrace new forms of communication and social media. Shonali Burke, associate of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, addressed the impact of social media and the global aspect of communication. “Social media and blogs and things... they may or may not adhere to the same sort of rules of the game that a traditional media outlet would,” she said. “And so I think... a lot of those types of things have changed. I think certainly the global aspect of communications is only going to become, or continue to become, a huge influence over how we do things... on how we do business.”

Remaining relevant by staying current is something professionals will need to embrace in the present, as well as the future to continue to advance alongside the industry.
When addressing the future growth and development of the profession, Andy Hilton said, “I wish I had the crystal ball, but I think it’s on the same path that we’re on now. The development of public relations is going to continue to grow, and the significance of what we do is going to be better measured... A whole extra crop of challenges that we don’t know about today will emerge, and we’ll have to figure out how to deal with them, too.”

**Characteristics of Leaders:**

**[Creativity]**

Some of the professionals attributed their success to creativity, and they cited this individual characteristic as a factor that sets public relations apart from other fields. For some, creativity plays an important role in problem solving, developing solutions and managing creative people. Creativity is also necessary to gain attention, keep attention and effectively deliver a message in a way that will “stick” with the audience.

Sreejit Mohan of Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals said that being creative and quick with solutions is an important quality for public relations professionals. In many instances, public relations professionals have to use creativity to seek answers and formulate solutions to be able to effectively reach a public in a timely manner. “It is an ideas business,” Mohan said. “Even if you’re looking at it from an insider’s standpoint, you’re constantly being asked for solutions.”
Howard Clabo of FedEx Corporation believes that a “healthy amount of creativity” is important to achieving success in public relations. However, Clabo also views creativity in another way. He believes that being able to manage creative people is an important aspect to leadership in public relations. “I think there are a different set of skills that one needs to manage creative people because you need to understand the creative process,” Clabo said.

According to Clabo, sometimes it comes down to maintaining a strategy and balancing it with the creativity. Although this may also be the case with other professions, Clabo said it is certainly a skill set required in public relations.

Even the professionals who didn’t cite creativity as an important factor in their success, like Jeff Beringer, noted that it’s an important characteristic to public relations, in general. He said that creativity is one of the attributes that make leadership in public relations different from leadership in other fields.

“I think creativity is a big piece of it,” Beringer said. “On the communications side, it’s a science, but it’s also an art form. I think creativity and trying new things is important, and having that quality of being willing to taking chances and trying new things to take you outside of your comfort zone is really important in our business.”

For public relations practitioners, creativity plays an important role in day-to-day tasks. Whether creativity is used for problem solving, developing solutions, managing creative people or other applications, this characteristic sets public relations apart from other fields, according to the professionals here.
One of the questions asked in the interviews was, “What personal values are at the core of your professional practice?” While answers to many questions varied, 15 of the 20 practitioners mentioned honesty and integrity as one of the most important personal values that they use in their professional practice.

A public relations practitioner’s job is to effectively communicate accurate information to an organization or company’s internal and external publics in order to maintain and build its image. Honesty and integrity should be utilized in the communications industry to accurately share information, do the right thing and establish an ethical image of an organization or company.

In respect to professional honesty, transparency in all work matters is imperative in the field of public relations. Transparent practices benefit the image of the public relations field, which is sometimes viewed as deceptive or manipulative. Kash Shaikh of Proctor and Gamble said, “Honesty, integrity, commitment. I think all of those are important, especially in our field; you have to be the face of the company… It’s not about winning at all costs, it’s winning within the ethical parameters and values that your company set.” Jeff Beringer said, “Focusing on ethics and transparency are really important foundational values in PR.”

While many of the profiled professionals noted the necessity of being transparent, they also mentioned the importance of applying integrity to their personal work efforts. Nick Ragone said, “I think directness, honesty and
In order to have integrity in work, one must know their own ethical parameters, in addition to those of their organization or company. Knowing what constitutes ethical behavior is important since the public relations practitioner is considered by many to be the face of an organization or company.

When discussing the personal values at the core of her professional practice, Stacy Simpson of InterActiveCorp candidly expressed honesty in her professional practices.

“I always do things I believe in...You have to be proud of the work you do, the people you work with, and the company that you represent,” said Simpson.

Integrity and honesty are key values that have an important presence in today’s workplace, and leading with integrity and honesty has led to the success of the 20 professionals interviewed.

[Passion]

A public relations practitioner’s capacity for working to serve his or her publics with passion entails embracing a genuine enthusiasm for both people and the profession. Directly affecting all matters from team synergy to client relations, passion and the enormity of its effects on professional practices were discussed by a considerable number of the emerging leaders in their interviews.

Perseverance in building and maintaining relationships, as well as developing and
enhancing an image, is achieved strategically by using passion as a form of purpose. Passion is a drive that serves leaders to unite their workers with a common purpose, as well as creating a sort of mental momentum for the individual professional. Found to be a part of the varying philosophies of each profile, one can find differing components of passion in each professional’s personal work ethics.

Because public relations professionals are inundated with information from varying media outlets, in addition to their individual and organizational responsibilities, it seems passion could be easily displaced. Passion, which is fundamental to the public relations field, was best described by Shannelle Armstrong of McDonald’s Corporation. She said, “You know, when you look at all your ‘P’s’ of marketing, the ‘P’ you sometimes forget is your people. You often need that ‘P’ in there for people and that other ‘P’ for passion.”

Those having an authentic passion when executing their duties, no matter the situation, distinguish themselves from the rest. As the emerging leaders identified in this book, exhibiting passion in a professional capacity serves to differentiate individuals from other competition. Whether it is a business, nonprofit organization or a single person, each public desires to be served by a person who cares. Considering the service-oriented approach needed in public relations, passion is required in the desire to help others.

When evaluating public relations and his personal leadership qualities, Fred Bateman said, “I get very invested in my clients, and I think that showing
that passion is the best sort of leadership attribute that I can demonstrate to my employees. You have to have a passion...because you have to love the business, and you have to be passionate about it."

Speaking with conviction regarding her wholehearted approach to her work, it is clear Bari Watson of Belmont University also utilizes passion in her career. She said, “You can ask anybody who knows me, and they will tell you that I love my job. It is more than a job to me. I am personally invested in Belmont and Belmont athletics…I think the first key to my success is that I love the field I work in, and I choose to work for places where I can believe in the product.”

As indicated here, passion is somewhat contagious in that one’s excitement about something will typically rub off on a fellow worker, potential client and others, and this type of relationship forged between passion and public relations creates a form of momentum. When public relations efforts are done in combination with passion, practitioners are fulfilling our duties to the profession by persuading with enthusiasm.

[Motivation]

In public relations, practitioners attempt to persuade publics to engage in a specific behavior by motivating them through persuasive means. Many of the professionals interviewed credited this type of influence, and the ability to implement it, as being essential to leadership within the industry. Their varying experiences regarding motivation emphasize its professional significance with individual and team experiences alike.
For Chris Finnegan of Discovery Communications, his tipping point was preceded by a mediocre evaluation at his first job at age 22 in which he was forced to assess his commitment to continue working in the public relations industry. This moment caused Finnegan to develop what he describes as “a chip on his shoulder,” which served as an incentive and a need to prove his capabilities.

“I think it’s really important to have something that motivates you in your career,” Finnegan said. “Find the moment that you really remember, the thing that drives you. That little chip on my shoulder…ended up being a pretty good motivator.”

Other professionals experienced the benefits of motivation’s positive effects on team collaboration and in colleagues collectively working together in their efforts. For instance, Megan Frank of Allianz Global Relations described the most rewarding aspect of her job as being a part of a cohesive team.

“To me, it’s been rewarding to work in a company that is really…in this growth phase, and everybody is so motivated and excited about working together and continuing to grow,” she said.

Applying it to a broader scope, Rebecca Winter of the JCPenney Company said, “A good leader in public relations recognizes the importance of teamwork and can bring out the best in a group. I love the whole idea of engaging and inspiring others…Part of leadership involves assessing skill and talent in others. You have to understand people. Whether it’s your target audience or your employee, you need to understand what motivates them.”
Motivation is an expected dimension of public relations because it is an integral part of a professional’s ability to persuade. However, the interviews underscored its profound role in affecting internal professional publics. Organizations, as well as leaders who integrate motivation into their professional practices, reap the benefits, both internally and externally, as it is an advantage to all publics.

[Fundamental Skills]

A number of the emerging leaders discussed the importance of possessing certain fundamental skills that are considered necessities in public relations. The ability to communicate is a valuable and essential aspect of public relations, whether it occurs in verbal or written form.

A consensus among those profiled was the importance of writing skills. Sreejit Mohan said, “That’s sort of the price of entry into the PR world. You’ve got to have good writing skills.” David Warschawski also emphasized the importance of writing ability when he said, “You need to be able to write, not only fundamentally well, you need to be able to write in different formats… but most importantly, to write well in a persuasive manner.”

Warschawski also talked about understanding the need for effective communication when attempting to persuade one’s publics. “You have to understand the psychology of communication. How does it really work? How do you move people to action? How do you need to address, interact, talk with certain audiences so that you get them, or
Another fundamental skill is public speaking and the ability to articulate one’s thoughts. In his interview, Howard Clabo said, “The ability of a company to not only articulate its products to its customers, but also to articulate or motivate its employees to deliver on the promise of the brand, has become an incredibly important part of how businesses are going to be successful.”

Public relations practitioners are constantly talking to people and making decisions; therefore, the ability to articulate ideas and communicate clearly is of the utmost importance to leaders in the field. Excellent verbal communication keeps an organization in tune with its objectives and guides strategic development.

The ability to actively listen was also noted as an essential skill. Public relations leaders must listen to their employees, the media and their publics so that they can understand different viewpoints. The majority of the professionals interviewed mentioned education as the way to develop and enhance these basic skills, with a liberal arts background seen to contribute the most.

[Diverse Backgrounds]

The professionals interviewed have different viewpoints on public relations and what constitutes excellence in the field. However, they do have one experience in common: They each “landed” in public relations for very different reasons, and most didn’t set out to work in this field. Their education and journey to
their current positions reflect this diversity of backgrounds.

An interest in communications, public relations or writing was the most common reasons why each professional was drawn to the field. Many began working in public relations when these interests met opportunity.

For Robert Christie of Dow Jones & Company, it happened more by accident than design. Christie went to Mansfield University on a football scholarship, but after blowing out his shoulder while weightlifting, his athletic career ended. Because of his interest in sports, he began working in the sports information department as a reporter for the school newspaper.

Through a professor who was on the Emmy Awards committee, Christie had the opportunity to work in the public relations department for the Sports Emmy Awards. While there, Christie met a man who had been the head of public relations at Westhouse Broadcasting. This chance encounter led to his first job in public relations. “I learned a lot, and I’m here today because I went to work at the Sports Emmy Awards,” Christie said.

Other professionals, like Megan Frank, have similar stories. Frank took an internship with Rubinstein Public Relations after spending a semester studying abroad in Italy. Although she knew little about public relations, the internship worked out well for her. According to Frank, ending up in public relations was a sort of “fluke.”

“I had no idea what public relations was,” Frank said. “I went to a liberal arts college, so we didn’t have PR as a major or communications as a major, so I sort of blindly took
Brian Hoyt of Orbitz was on a completely different career path before he began working in public relations. While attending law school, Hoyt realized that he didn’t want to be a lawyer. He started his career doing campaign work and volunteered to work with numerous political campaigns at Boston College. Hoyt’s first experience in public relations was an internship in Washington D.C. with the public affairs firm, Powell Tate.

As evidenced by Frank, Christie, Hoyt and other professionals in this book, there are numerous pathways to public relations. For most of the professionals, that path was not a straight one, and their diverse backgrounds are a reminder of that.

While there are many facets of diversity in the individuals profiled in this book, each difference in these emerging leaders serves to make this book and the profession more well-rounded. Differing ethnicities, genders, educational backgrounds and experiences enrich the overall book, even as they make each profile unique.