Ethics in PR Education

February 23, 2011
Today’s Panelists

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Today’s Topics

- Overview of ethics research and implications
- Teaching PR ethics
- Young professionals’ perspective on ethics
- Senior executives’ perspective on ethics
- Questions and discussion
Importance of Ethics

• Issues Management
  Defining situations, researching issues, recommending options

• Crisis Management
  Accountability, ethical analyses of responsibility

• Corporate Reputation
  Trust-building, consistency
Role of Reputation

• 61% of respondents say more attention is being paid to reputation management from the C-suite over the past year
  (P.R. Week Corporate Survey 2010, October, prweekus.com, page 33)

• Reputation & relationship are intertwined

• Relationship factors: Trust, control-mutuality, commitment and satisfaction
Advise on Ethics?

• “In order for P. R. to be at its most effective, it simply has to report up to the CEO” - Gil Schwartz, CBS

• Who else would consider ethics, anyway?

• Best position to know the values of stakeholders and publics around the organization (needs research)

• Researchers find that most US practitioners use a deontological approach to ethics (principle based)
Advise on Ethics?

• “I advise on ethics all the time, they just do not call it that”
• “We are the keepers of the corporate reputation. Naturally, that involves ethics”
• “We can assume that what benefits us benefits others. Ethics has something to do with mutual responsibility, and is a part of everything we do”
How to Learn It?

• I teach from a business ethics perspective because it helps public relations students understand the world of business

• Outstanding text for practical application of ethics:

• Covers utilitarianism, virtue, deontology, globalism, social media, finance, marketing and advertising, etc
How to Apply It?

• Ethical knowledge greatly improves chances of membership in dominant coalition

• Research on ways to gain dominant coalition membership, including practical application:

• Research on Autonomy necessary for ethical advising:
Developing the Course

What do public relations *professionals* need to know/understand about ethics?

• Professional standards
• Professional obligations to society
• Professional role as organizational advisor/representative
• How to evaluate and resolve ethical dilemmas - and justify decisions
• Implications of ethical and unethical conduct
Discussion Topics

• Why public relations ethics—and the teaching of public relations ethics—matters
• Understanding ethics: Definitions, theories, principles
• Professional roles and responsibilities
• Professional standards of practice and codes of conduct
• Responsible advocacy: Balancing public and private interests
Discussion Topics

• Perceptions of deception: Truth, trust and transparency
• Ethics in practice: Making ethical decisions
• Public relations’ role in institutional ethics and corporate social responsibility
• Public relations ethics in global society
• Ethics and legal regulation in public relations
Teaching Techniques

- Open discussion
- Case simulations/decision-making exercises
- Socratic dialogue
- Case analyses
- Current events
- Lecture
Keys to Success

• Create a “protected” environment
• Require participation
• Encourage debate
• Stimulate discussion with current events, case simulations and team work
• Raise more questions than provide answers
• Invite reflection
View from a Young Professional

• Ethical Dilemmas in the Field
  – Sponsor example
  – Events
  – Time entry
View from Students

Questions asked of students:

1. Have you taken a course or participated in group activities (i.e. PRSSA) focusing on ethics in public relations?
   a) If so, what educational tools or approach did you find most helpful? What was not helpful? Examples could include real life case studies, hypothetical case studies, professional speakers, etc.
   b) If not, how would you prefer to learn more about ethics in PR?

2. What concerns do you have about your ethical preparation as you enter the professional industry? Is there anything you would like to see addressed in your collegiate curriculum?

3. What is the most important lesson you’ve learned about professional ethics?
View from Students

Learning about ethics:

• Most students have taken (or soon will) a course on PR ethics
• Examples trump theory. Professional speakers and case studies—both real and hypothetical—are overwhelmingly preferred over lectures
• Students’ main fear: saying no to management
• We’re in good hands. Students value honesty and transparency
From a Corporate Perspective, why Teach Ethics?

• Staggering decline in trust of corporations, business executives and other institutions
• Stakeholder empowerment as a result of the Internet
• Global transparency: there are no longer any secrets
Are Companies Offering Ethics Training?

• Some are, many are not
• Focus tends to be on compliance rather than values
• Crisis situations raise the priority
Case Study Candidates

- Madoff Financial
- Enron/Arthur Andersen
- Stanford Financial
- WorldCom
- ImClone/Martha Stewart OmniMedia
- HealthSouth
- Tyco
- Bernard Madoff
- Ken Lay/Jeff Skilling/Andy Fastow
- Allen Stanford
- Bernie Ebbers
- Martha Stewart/Sam Waksal
- Richard Scrushy
- Dennis Kozlowski/Scott Sullivan
Public Relations’ Examples

• **Ketchum:**
  – Paid Armstrong Williams, a commentator for CNN and others, to promote “No Child Left Behind Act” in commentaries on his own program and others for the Department of Education

• **Fleishman Hillard:**
  – Accused of over billing city of Los Angeles for work never performed; head of L.A. office convicted of fraud
  – San Francisco employees vilified for representing themselves as employees of F-H’s largest client to the media

• **Edelman:**
  – Fake bloggers supporting Wal-Mart revealed as Edelman employees
Ethical Issues facing the profession

- **Governance:** Can we believe the companies we buy from, work for and invest in are being led in a fair and ethical way?
- **Transparency:** When advocating a position, is it clear to the audience who is sponsoring the advocacy?
- **Credibility:** How believable are our spokespersons, our trade associations and coalitions, and the leadership of our organizations and clients?
- **Business Conduct:** Are we conducting the public relations business in an honest and professional manner for our organizations and clients?
Potential role-playing scenarios:

• **Scenario 1:** You’re planning a new communications campaign to launch a new pain medication. You secure a spot on the Today show for your chief paid spokesperson, a retired NFL Hall of Fame quarterback. During the interview, Matt Lauer plans to talk about the player’s colorful career. You advise your spokesperson to be sure and mention how well his knees are doing since he started taking your client’s product. Do you further advise him to be sure and mention that he is being paid to promote the product, or do you tell him to only mention it if Matt asks about compensation?

• **Scenario 2:** You work at an agency which is under serious pressure to improve margins. Your boss comes by to review your hours. “Look,” she says, “We want to play by the rules, but surely you’ve got some additional work you can do on behalf of your largest client. It would really help us out if you had a few more hours this month, so why don’t you give it some thought and see what you can come up with. Okay?”

• **Scenario 3:** You work for a corporation and you’ve been asked to prepare an employee presentation dealing with the movement of jobs to Mexico. In giving you the assignment, your boss says: “We know we’re going to shut down this factory, but we need a little time. If we announce this too soon, we’ll lose the big tax incentive we got three years ago. Just make sure the presentation is worded so that we have plenty of “wiggle room” down the road.”
Questions?

• Please submit your questions via the Q/A function on Live Meeting or ask them over the conference line.

- To ask questions via Live Meeting:
  1. Click on the Q&A button (top left-hand toolbar on screen)
  2. Type your question in the “Type a question for the presenter” field and hit “Ask”
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The audio portion of this webcast and slides will be posted to the Plank Center Web site at: plankcenter.ua.edu
Thank You!