Legacies from Legends in Public Relations II

A continuing compass for members of the Public Relations Student Society of America and all lifelong students of the profession
WISDOM WRITTEN AND SPOKEN

This Legacies series contains messages of challenge and experience from Living Legends who have received lifetime honors from the public relations profession.

This unique and ongoing project by the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations inspired sponsorship of three panel sessions at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 PRSSA National Conferences. The first two of these lively discussions based on student questions are posted on the Center’s Web site — www.plankcenter.ua.edu — for students and faculty, classes and meetings. The third session will be available on the Web site in early 2010.

2007 Legends Panel 2008 Legends Panel 2009 Legends Panel

E. Ronald Culp John W. (Jack) Felton Joe S. Epley
Ofield Dukes Steven J. Harris John Paluszek
Gary M. McCormick Thomas E. Hoog Isobel Parke
Judith Bogart Meredith Dr. Debra A. Miller Frank Wylie

Moderator: Dr. Bruce K. Berger

For educators, the Center sponsored a Legends Panel at the Public Relations Division meeting during the 2008 Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism/Mass Communication. Moderated by Dr. Susan Gonders, the panelists were:

E. Ronald Culp
Rich Jernstedt
John A. (Jack) Koten
CHAPTER II OF THE BEST

H.J. (Jerry) Dalton, Jr. .................................................. Pages 2-3

Joe S. Epley ................................................................. Pages 4-5

Steven J. Harris ............................................................ Pages 6-7

E. Bruce Harrison ......................................................... Pages 8-9

Michael L. Herman ...................................................... Pages 10-11

Jon C. Iwata ................................................................. Pages 12-13

Rhoda Weiss ............................................................... Pages 14-15

Donald K. Wright ........................................................ Pages 16-17

They join 34 honored colleagues whose messages were published in mid-2007 by the Plank Center.

Legacies I was a 40th Anniversary gift to PRSSA, and this Legacies II continues that caring counsel to the next generation of public relations.
Congratulations! You are about to enter the most interesting, challenging, frustrating, rewarding and satisfying profession. Here are hints to help you along. They helped me and many others I know.

- Work hard, master your job quickly: There is no substitute for hard work. “Come early and stay late.” Mastering every aspect of your job is critical. When you have done this, better jobs and more pay will quickly follow. Some PR functions are more fun and satisfying than others, but the versatile person learns how to do them all. Understand your organization’s business, and how its money flows. Always remember: your present job is the most important one you will ever have.

- Be a team player: PR is a team sport. You will often need support and help from others. Give them credit, and reciprocate the favor. Watch your ego. A sports team with individual stars is no match for one whose members play together supporting one another.

- Volunteer: Promotions come to those who volunteer for tough, more demanding jobs – proving they are capable of bigger things. Do the job no one else wants to do. Caution: Don’t overload yourself. Learn when (and how) to say “no.”

- Pay back: Guest speakers, mentors and advisors have helped you, and you will have many more during your career. You also need to be a mentor, guide and supporter. Become an active PRSA member. You’ll be amazed at how much you can learn as a PRSA volunteer.

Harry Jirou “Jerry” Dalton, Jr., APR, Fellow PRSA
Director of Public Affairs, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)

Began his PR career as an Air Force public information officer, with a degree in advertising, during the Korean War. Years later, following increasingly important assignments, appointed Air Force Director of Public Affairs and promoted to brigadier general, the first career PAO to hold this position and rank. After retiring in 1980, held senior level PR positions in several large companies and was a solo PR counsel for three years. Served as PRSA President in 1990, the founding PRSA Foundation President in 1991 and received PRSA’s Gold Anvil Award in 2007.

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations was established by the University of Alabama Board of Trustees in 2005. It is named in honor of Betsy Plank, a 1944 graduate of UA, a public relations leader and strong advocate for its education and students.

The Center’s mission is to help develop leadership values and skills in public relations education and practice. Led by a national Advisory Board of distinguished educators and practitioners, the Center seeks to achieve its mission by:

1. Advancing knowledge of leadership values and skills in the profession.
2. Supporting research, teaching, service and professional educational efforts that help develop responsible and trustworthy leaders.
3. Bridging the interests and vision of the practice and education.
4. Collaborating with other groups and associations to nurture the ethical and effective practice of public relations.

Its programs and initiatives include research; awards for graduate student research; video interviews of leading professionals; sponsorship of the annual PRSSA Ethics Advocacy Awards; scholarships; distinguished lectures; and Platform, an online magazine for public relations students.

Its Advisory Board of seasoned professionals also includes a position for the PRSSA President, who speaks for the next generation of public relations.

For more information, you are welcome to contact Dr. Karla Gower, Center Director, by e-mail: gower@apr.ua.edu.
CONTINUING LEGENDS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Since Legacies I was published, these distinguished professionals have received lifetime public relations honors.

The Arthur W. Page Society

Hall of Fame Award
2007  Steven J. Harris
2008  David R. Drobis
2009  Jon C. Iwata

Distinguished Service Award
2007  Donald K. Wright, Ph.D.
2008  James E. Grunig, Ph.D.
2009  E. Bruce Harrison

The Institute for Public Relations

Alexander Hamilton Medal
2007  Lawrence G. Foster
2008  Steven J. Harris
2009  Alvin Golin

Public Relations Society of America

Gold Anvil Award
2008  Joe S. Epley
2009  Michael L. Herman

The David Ferguson Award
2007  Harold Burson
2008  Ronald E. Rhody
2009  Rhoda Weiss

• Keep track: Start a list of contacts now, keep it current. Stay in touch with them as much as you can.

• Act honestly and ethically – always: Only you can build your reputation; only you can harm or destroy it.

• Take care of your people: When you become a supervisor, learn from your people and treat them as you want to be treated. Give thanks publicly; critique shortcomings quietly. A plaque on my wall says it all: “All of us are smarter than any of us!”

• Judge PR competitions: Seek opportunities to judge PR competitions. They are a fantastic source of fresh ideas.

• Stay current: Read your local newspaper and at least one national paper. Use PRSA’s excellent in-person and electronic seminars, especially the breakout sessions at conferences. Read the bios of the giants of the profession.

• Serve your community: Be a good citizen. Get involved in organizations that help others and improve your community. Pro bono work can be a good learning experience.

• Take time to smell the roses: Public relations is a demanding profession. Stay fit, and recharge your batteries often. Go fishing. Take a nap in a hammock, under a tree or at the beach. Go to a concert, visit an art gallery, museum or arboretum. Read for pleasure: fiction, history, biography, poetry.

Welcome to public relations. The day when you’ll be writing suggestions like these for new graduates is not far off, so be prepared. Good luck, and God-speed!
JOE S. EPLEY, APR, FELLOW PRSA
Founder and CEO (Ret.), Epley Associates/Public Relations

During 40 years as a successful PR consultant, served as president of PRSA, chair of the College of Fellows, and chair of the Counselors Academy. Founding member of the Worldcom Group, an international network of independent public relations firms; helped introduce public relations in Russia. Recipient of PRSA’s Gold Anvil award (2008), and member of the Defense Information School Hall of Fame, and the University of North Carolina’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication’s PR Hall of Fame (1991).

The computer and the Internet are among the greatest tools invented to enhance the practice of public relations. They provide untold research and communications capability. Yet, they are impersonal and can easily become an addiction. They are only tools.

To be successful, a public relations professional must strike the right balance between technology and real interpersonal communication.

In-person verbal communication is far more persuasive than e-mail. Conversations with eyeball-to-eyeball contact build far greater synergy and bonding relationships than any form of electronic communication. Effective understanding results when there is give-and-take between individuals who are engaging in verbal exchange rather than in either e-mail or cryptic cell phone text messaging.

A basic tenant of our profession is that a message is not complete until the receiver of the communiqué understands it the same as the sender. That is always the challenge.

Granted, many instances require only simple, straightforward mass messages. However, when you expect a positive reaction from a target audience, take care to ensure the messages will be accepted as intended.

A common sin of public relations professionals is to assume that others understand their messages. They make little effort to get into the heads of targeted audiences. Far too often, there is little, if any, effort made to determine how best to meet the needs of the receiver.

Another unfortunate reality is that each year a good number of internships and entry-level public relations jobs go to students who majored in disciplines other than public relations. Educators in our field should be more embarrassed than we are about this reality that would not exist if we were able to deliver an end-product of graduates that prospective employers could not do without.

Part of the problem is caused by universities that hire mainly practitioners without terminal degrees to do teaching that generally is focused on techniques. Equally to blame are institutions that only hire scholars, some with minimal experience in the practice, and emphasize theory in their teaching. The best programs provide an appropriate blend of both theory and practice. They also encourage research that focuses on information practitioners want or need, and have recently revised their curriculums to accommodate the reality that public relations is in the midst of a revolution that involves new audiences, new channels, new kinds of content and new measurements.

Although the road to that first, good public relations job currently contains hills, curves and potholes, none of these obstacles should be too difficult to overcome for the brightest, best and most hard-working public relations graduates.

we haven’t done a very good job of implementing quality control in public relations education. More than 35,000 students now study public relations at nearly 700 U.S. colleges and universities and many of them will never get a job in our field. Savvy public relations majors take steps to make certain they are the ones who do get hired.

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For many years I’ve told my students the most important public relations opportunity they will ever face could be convincing organizations to hire them for their first, entry-level jobs in our field. Equally significant might be convincing the organizations that it’s okay to hire them even though they majored in public relations.

Nobody could have any difficulty with the first suggestion. These are difficult times of a tight economy where opportunities are limited, jobs are few and organizations understandably must hire only the brightest and the best. Wise public relations students do things that will set themselves apart from their peers in much the same way that the best college athletes make themselves known to professional sports teams. Just as the best athletes usually attend colleges known for excellence in their sports, the best public relations students should seek out universities that are uniquely noted for excellence in public relations education.

Most of these best athletes spend countless hours practicing and preparing so they can perform better than their teammates, and the best public relations majors devote lots of time to activities that will set them apart from their peers including working on campus newspapers, being actively involved with PRSSA chapters, gaining internship experience and being part of their university’s on-campus public relations agency.

While the second suggestion above is strange and confusing it is also something that all public relations majors need to know about. Unfortunately, if the message is doing the desired job. Mostly it is because the practitioners crafting the message fail to understand the psyche of their audience.

As a child, I remember making disparaging remarks about a poor family with children wearing worn out clothes and having no toys. My mother overheard me and scolded my insensitivity by saying, “You can’t judge others until you walk in their shoes.” That lesson has been one of the guiding principles in my successful career.

There is no better way to understand fully an audience than to have an intimate feel of that audience, an intimacy that comes from being with them, not just having a quick walk-through where they work or reading a research report.

You should spend time with them. Eat with them. Play with them. Work with them. Be in their homes. Listen to them. Learn what motivates them. Understand their fears. Speak their language. ... you agree with them or not. This helps you develop messages and themes that they will more likely accept and embrace.

Never assume all people are educated alike or think alike. Many don’t have or effectively use computers. Far too many drop out of school before 12th grade. People come from different cultures, have varying values, and hold comprehension levels that may not be equal to yours.

In the end, communicating with masses is much easier than influencing behavior of a few. Being successful in reaching specific groups or individuals requires moving to their level with messages they can understand and embrace.

By walking in the shoes of others, messages become more credible, and you have taken an essential step in the right direction.
STEVEN J. HARRIS, APR, FELLOW PRSA
Vice President, Global Communications, General Motors

As I write this nearing the end of 2008, we are all experiencing the most amazing and most painful of times.

We have a presidential campaign that will either elect the first black President or first female Vice President. Our nation is divided right down the middle. American military men and women are stretched thin fighting and protecting around the globe. The U.S. housing industry has collapsed. Many of our biggest financial institutions have failed or needed government support. Major corporations, like my own General Motors, are struggling in an environment of too little liquidity and virtually no credit. And it’s not just the U.S.; economies around the globe have been deteriorating for some time as well. And to top everything off, Americans don’t trust the President, Congress or any elected official. They don’t trust corporations. They don’t trust the media. I’m not sure they trust anyone.

So is this a good time to be a PR person? Absolutely! It is because in an environment like the one I described above people are screaming for authenticity, transparency, the truth, leadership, sensitivity, explanations and context they can understand and the ability to keep things in perspective. And we, as communicators, can play and counsel all those things well.

Even though our PR industry is being rocked by things like the Internet and the power it gives to individuals, globalization, a more aggressive and opinionated traditional media and more, we still can make a difference embracing those attributes and qualities that have always led the way:

- Stay Ahead of the Curve. Be an avid reader, observer and adopter of trends and techniques in public relations, marketing and business. Understand and embrace diversity and multicultural communications.
- Secure Mentors and Become One. Access mentors through PRSA, business groups and by volunteering in the community and organization. Mentors also need “mentoring” in social media.
- Beware of Side Effects. With potential employers “googling” applicants, unflattering tweets, cutey email addresses and TMI lingering in cyberspace can damage reputations and careers.
- Welcome Everyone and Engage. As PRSA chair, I called hundreds of members, listening, learning and encouraging volunteerism, with most participating nationally for the first time. As SHSMD president, I distributed handwritten personal postcards to more than 1,000 participants at a conference. People remember those gestures.
- Sweat the Small Stuff. Without tactics and action, strategies stagnate. While leaders tout benefits of failure, my father – the king of common sense – worries about repercussions if doctors, for example, were taught it’s okay to make mistakes. Your parents, like mine, are typically much smarter than leadership gurus.
- Never Sit Near Anyone You Know. My life has been enriched and knowledge expanded from talking to strangers, boldly approaching newcomers and leaving the comfort of my friends.
- Follow Your Dreams. Turn the vision of the visionaries into the realities of the realists. While giving up your dreams may make you wake up cranky, balance them with what is possible and sustainable.
- Never Fear Change. Courageous leaders excite, engage and rally followers toward a brighter future; don’t allow squeaky wheels to squelch good decisions; and encourage experimentation and innovation.

At my Ph.D. graduation, we were reminded of Antioch’s 1836 commencement when college president Horace Mann said: “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” Together, let’s use our communications leadership to further humanity and make a difference.

Rhoda Weiss
Rhoda Weiss, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA
International Consultant, Speaker, and Author

Served as PRSA national chair; CEO and president of American Hospital Association’s Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development and Women in Health Administration; Kellogg Foundation Fellow. Received PRSA Health Academy Lifetime Achievement and Educators Academy Ferguson awards; AHA Society Individual Award of Excellence; PRSA-LA Outstanding Professional and WHA Woman of the Year.

On day one of my first communications position, the health system CEO asked me to describe my work. “I’m a public relations professional,” was my reply. “No,” he said, “you’re a health executive specializing in public relations.”

Public relations is about leadership – moving, motivating and ensuring organizations exceed objectives through proven, progressive and planned communications. We are challenged to seek meaningful dialogue among audiences with less time to focus on messages. As speed to market increases, need to build brand reputation quickens, reach of communications accelerates, information outlets proliferate and public craving of authenticity prevails, public relations leaders are maximizing messages on numerous platforms to impact attitudes, behaviors and decision-making.

We have a fundamental sense of responsibility for bettering our communities and the world because of our ability to communicate strategically. We have the opportunity to engage, interact and help lead every aspect of an organization. We use our skills as communicators and strategic thinkers and our role as the corporate conscience to take companies places they have never been. Knowing how critical we are to business success, here’s advice for the journey.

• Personal integrity
• Building trust inside and outside our own organizations
• Using good judgment, trusting your gut and having the courage to speak up
• Willingness to take risks and learn from them, both good and bad
• Openness to all kinds of ideas and people. There is rarely only one right answer. Many approaches can and do work
• A sense of timing and an understanding that time itself is precious
• Ability to step outside yourself and your organization and feel how the wide variety of stakeholders we all deal with today are feeling and how they will react to what you are saying and, more importantly, what you are doing
• Never taking shortcuts that betray your personal beliefs and ethics
• Being a collaborator. Two minds or more are always better than one. Success can be shared with many
• Creativity, but only with great execution, always wins
• An understanding and appreciation for the entire enterprise and an awareness that communications is not the business
• Adaptability and a thirst to keep learning what is new, what others are doing and taking the time to expose yourself to as many points of view as possible
• Treating people equally, with dignity and respect, and letting them be themselves and giving them autonomy

And one final point. I’ve spent almost all my career ~ 42 plus years ~ in one industry, the auto industry. Certainly that won’t be the norm for most communications graduates today.

But what has driven me, motivated me, given me joy and pride is that I’ve gotten to work for companies that I truly cared about and that I thought made a positive contribution to America. And equally important, I got to work with talented people that I respected and enjoyed being with. Focus on those two things – what you work on and who you work on it with, and I promise you that you will find satisfaction and joy in what you do.
Did your parents tell you to work hard and make good grades so you’ll get a good job? A whole lot of years ago, my dad told me that. And he put the fear of failing in me.

The day I turned 16, he told me I had a job in the local cotton mill. “If you want to go to college,” he said to me as I looked at him with a dropped jaw (what?...me?...manual labor?), “you need to know what hard work is like and you need to earn some money.”

I was a full-time mill-hand for three summers and part-time every afternoon after school except during basketball season. The manual labor didn’t kill me, I made enough money to pay first-year tuition, and I went off to Tuscaloosa to get a degree.

My parents came to my graduation. They glowed when I got a little recognition as Sigma Delta Chi journalism honors graduate (mostly for editing the Crimson-White, which was part of my fear-driven “working hard” process), and Dad shook my hand. “I knew you could do it,” he said, adding that he didn’t expect to see me working in the mill that summer.

No way. I was off to the big leagues. My senior year at Alabama, I had gone to New York to see my classmate Gay Talese. I met him at his little, third-shift shared desk at the New York Times where he was writing obits – and I thought: this is it! I would be a newspaper reporter on a major paper and write books...
When I graduated from San Jose State University in 1984 and started a career in public relations, there were more than 52,000 newspaper reporters in the United States alone. There were zero bloggers...no tweets...and not a single Facebook friend.

Today, there are a few thousand fewer U.S. journalists for PR pros to spar with (46,700 at last count). But there are also 112 million blogs, a million tweets a day, and more than 300 million people socializing on Facebook.

Clearly, the ways in which people on planet Earth communicate – and who is doing the communicating – have changed, in fundamental ways. And that is proving massively disruptive to the practice of public relations.

Which is exactly why this is such an exciting time to start your career. You are entering this profession amidst historic change, and that is by far the best time to learn, to innovate and to make a lasting mark.

Think about how the world has changed. Industries, systems, economies and societies have become truly global. Organizations, institutions and communities all must manage myriad stakeholder relationships – with individuals and groups who are far more knowledgeable, independent and empowered than ever before. The tools and media of communication have proliferated – and their cost has dropped near to zero. And at the same time, all actors on this and make money. But of course, it was his – Gay Talese’s – “it.” I had to find or stumble upon my own.

After a short run as a reporter, an Alabama congressman hired me as his press secretary. I was in a big league, in Washington, and, without having planned on it, in public relations. What can I tell you I’ve learned in the years since, besides the fact that your parents are right! You do need to work hard!

You’ve got lots of options. Along with other Chief Communications Officers in the Plank Center series, I recommend the corporate career. But your college education, grasp of PR principles, talent (ability to write), and attitude (essentially, to be of service) can be put to work in every profession from medicine to education, from real estate to pro sports, from business to NGOs. You are the specialist who is the generalist. Communications expertise is highly transportable. That’s heartening in hard times.

You need to create stakeholders. Wherever you go, you need to know in every program, every initiative, every competitive challenge or crisis, who counts the most in shaping your odds to win. Arthur W. Page said a company needs public permission to succeed. Okay, but not everybody’s permission. Zero in with this question: Whose opinion/action will CRITICALLY hurt or help our mission, campaign or recovery from a problem? Learn to discern, engage with and sustain those critical stakeholders, and you’ll be linked to the mind of the CEO and ahead of 85 percent of the folks around you.

Don’t speak. Well, not first anyway. Take time to engage the brain. Study symptoms, connect the dots, analyze options, ask a lot of questions and use the power of the first draft...of the plan...of the message. Jot this down: L-I-I: listen, incubate, initiate. Be the one who listens long and speaks short.

Build your support. I define effective public relations management as the ongoing process of using communication strategies to help create and sustain stakeholders in the company’s mission. Sustain the right stakeholders. That’s the key to your organization’s success. And, if you think about it, that’s also precisely the key to your personal success.
Consolidation of companies and globalization of industries now require us to be multi-functional, multi-lingual and multi-cultural.

Public relations practitioners in a global marketplace are expected to have, at the very least, a working knowledge and understanding of the marketplace. In addition, they must be able to recognize and manage the cultural and societal pressures that often lead to international incidents and misunderstandings.

The problem isn’t simply one of communication and understanding. It’s about having the courage to constantly take an introspective look at ourselves and our profession. It’s about having the fortitude, when times and circumstances demand, to change the basic design of who and what we are, as well as how and why we do things.

What does this mean to emerging professionals? It means that to succeed you must:

• Take the responsibility to educate yourself and broaden your knowledge beyond communication and public relations and, more importantly, beyond your personal, geographic and cultural boundaries.
• Develop the ability to be a strategic long-term thinker and not just a tactician and message deliverer.
• Be on the forefront of predicting, utilizing and integrating technology, without letting it control you at the expense of thinking, planning and the face-to-face human factors upon which your success depends.
• Become a leader who is confident, knowledgeable, respectful and unafraid to listen, to learn and to lead by example.

This is one of the most exciting and meaningful times in history to be in our profession. Our previous leaders built a solid foundation. But it is you, “generation next,” who must become leaders for those who follow after. It is a huge responsibility that I am confident, certain special individuals among you will embrace and own. Oh, how I envy the things you will see and create!