LEGACIES FROM LEGENDS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
MESSAGES FROM THE HEROES OF OUR PROFESSION
LEGACIES FROM LEGENDS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Produced by
The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations

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"I believe that sound public relations comprises policies and deeds as well as words; that it should deal in truth rather than deception; and that it should seek to clarify the issues of our times rather than to confuse them."

J. Carroll Bateman, APR
“Creed For Public Relations”
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This edition of *Legacies From Legends in Public Relations* celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Public relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) with personal messages for students that were written by more than 40 “living legends.” These women and men have been honored by their colleagues for leadership in the development of the public relations profession.

Their comments here capture observations from experience and useful directions for future practice. In sum, they become a unique legacy for students.

**PRSSA: BEGINNINGS AND GROWTH**

In November 1967, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) responded to the hopes of eager students and relentless advocates by establishing PRSSA. The following year, PRSA chartered 14 colleges and universities as “alpha” PRSSA chapters.

Leading champions for the student organization were Jon Riffel, vice president of Southern Pacific Gas Company; Dr. F. H. “Chris” Teahan, PRSA vice president-education; and J. Carroll Bateman, president of the Insurance Information Institute and 1967 PRSA president. Like most of their colleagues at the time, none of these “founding fathers” had formal study in public relations. However, they recognized that education is the sine qua non of a profession and an imperative for assuring progress and respect for a rapidly evolving field.

During the years that followed, PRSSA became a powerful incentive for academe to develop these studies. Schools wishing to be chartered for student chapters must now offer at least five courses in public relations. PRSSA supplements the academic experience through conferences, publications, a web site, opportunities for service and awards, global connections and—most important—strong support and counsel from dedicated advisors and other professionals, especially those who sponsor student internships.

Today, more than 350 schools have chapters with more than 10,000 student members. Many of the PRSSA alumni now populate the practice and have become mentors and leaders in the profession.
In June 2007, the Plank Center, with direction from Betsy Plank, began work to recognize PRSSA’s milestone year of 2007-08. We asked legendary professional honorees to write brief personal messages of counsel, wisdom and experience for publication as a gift to students.

These honorees are professionals who have received one or more lifetime honors from three major public relations organizations: The Arthur W. Page Society’s Hall of Fame and Distinguished Service Awards; the Institute for Public Relations’ Alexander Hamilton Medal; and PRSA’s Gold Anvil Award and its Educators Academy Ferguson Award.

Thirty-four of those honorees answered that first call—a remarkable response and reflection of caring for students. The success of that first edition prompted this edition as an ongoing and unique project that captures messages and insights.

To continue Betsy’s legacy, those receiving the same honors in the future will be invited to write their messages for posting on the Center’s website (plankcenter.ua.edu), thus ensuring a growing treasure of insights.

It’s a proud roster of respected leaders whose work has strengthened public relations practice and education. We hope this book informs and inspires those who will shape the next generation of public relations.

Karla K. Gower, Ph.D.
Director, The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
2017
I’ve dealt with crises of various types during my career. Each was gut-wrenching and, I believed, would damage my advancement prospects. But I can see now that these challenges allowed me to learn new things and develop new skills. And each turned out to be a step to something better.

Early in my career, the company I had dedicated more than a third of my life to was acquired and I lost my job. We had been building a controversial nuclear power plant and ended up filing for bankruptcy. It was quite a jolt and with a wife, three kids and a new mortgage, it was a pretty scary time. But I found that I had a lot of supporters, even among our company’s staunchest opponents. And all of the trials I faced turned out to be experience merit badges that helped differentiate me from other job seekers. I was able to build on those experiences and move on to successively bigger and more exciting roles. Here are a few lessons learned along the way.

Don’t shy away from challenges; run to them, even scary ones.

Although the initial impulse may be to jump ship when trouble strikes, you may be missing a chance to distinguish yourself and gain valuable experience. And the person who puts their hand up when times are tough is the one who will stand out.

Keep your focus, do the best job you can and always maintain a professional and respectful demeanor.

Different sides of people can emerge during a crisis. Don’t get frantic; don’t be a screamer (never been a fan of screamers). Keep cool and do your best thinking.
Take the long view.

No matter how bad a situation gets, it will pass. The way you handle it will probably be remembered longer than the situation itself. You’ll be judged on the work you did and how you conducted yourself.

Don’t default to the standard way of doing things.

Don’t do something just because that’s the way the organization has always done it. Try to be creative and take a different perspective. Different perspectives are valuable in a crisis.

Build and maintain constructive relationships—internally and externally, throughout your career.

Working effectively requires good relationships, and you can’t build them overnight. It takes time and work and it’s not a one-way street. The key to relationship building is what you bring to the relationship, not what you take from it. How can you be helpful? How can you take a problem off someone’s plate? How can you help someone avoid a problem in the first place? These are things that build the trusted relationships that get you the benefit of the doubt when you’re in crisis or a positive referral when you’re up for a new position.

There is one other lesson that overarches all of these: be persistent. Never give up on your message or your goal. The noise will eventually fade but you will succeed if you’re persistent.

Don’t shy from challenges, run to them, even scary ones.
We are a society of wonderful followers who need cheerleaders, direction, inspiration, motivation, thoughtful callers of the question with an orientation to action...we need leaders. In 2002 and again in 2007, I asked a cross section of recognized leaders across the country their thoughts about the characteristics of excellent leaders, the key challenges leaders face today and why leadership is important. These CEOs, heads of non-profits, media chiefs and public relations leaders agreed that leadership then and now requires vision and goals, authenticity, ethics, curiosity, passion, a sense of humor, lots of positive energy and masterful people and communications skills.

All agreed that leadership is a responsibility, not power, prestige or a job title. It’s about WHO you have to be, not WHAT you have to do.

The new focus this year is “authenticity:” being real vs. always being right. You see the same desire for authenticity in the popularity of today’s reality shows. And now, being “real” has emerged as a top criterion for candidates for national office.

My surveyed leaders identified six areas of key challenges:

- Cutting through the static to get the message out, leaders need to be bold, fearless and clear in message.
- Managing the competing elements of ego vs. ethics in an often times unethical world means leaders must read the context in which they are asked to lead correctly, do their jobs ethically and accept the risk of losing their leadership roles if what they champion is unacceptable.
- Uniting a universe of followers behind a mission or set of goals means finding common ground in a society that is encouraged to divide.
- Recognizing the absence of national examples and a culture that glorifies financial success may dilute what leaders can do.
Too much short-term thinking in business makes it harder to keep business focused on the long haul.

Stakeholders want value-driven behavior, credibility and sustainability in today’s leaders, not just superstars. People crave authentic leadership, defined vision, integrity, effectiveness, compassion and courage.

How important is leadership today?

Those I surveyed in 2007 said there is a growing hunger for leaders who can tip the scales in the right direction, creating accountability for behavior and results. They said people are “thirsty for positive direction, for someone to believe in.” Many used phrases like “nothing happens without leaders,” and “leaders help us find ways to seek a common good.”

A dynamic young CEO said, “Leaders are not born. They are the product of hard work and determination in pursuit of a dream or passion.”

How can you become a leader?

• Set goals, have a vision, know your values. Ask yourself three questions: Who am I as a person? What do I want to be? How do I get there and make sure I stay there? Write it down. Use it as your personal guideline.
• Don’t wait to be asked, speak up. Get involved in something and stretch your leadership wings.
• Look for opportunities to develop your people skills.
• Find some role models. Spend time around leaders you admire and learn from them.
• Be open to new thoughts, ideas, opportunities. Keep growing.

I believe the best leaders—the best professionals—work hard at what they do and never forget how to do. They are involved in their communities, adding balance to their lives and enhancing their knowledge about the places they live and work. When you are involved, you belong. Where you are involved, you grow.

Remember Linus’ advice to Lucy in Charlie Brown: “There’s no heavier burden than a great potential.”

LEADERSHIP IS A RESPONSIBILITY, NOT POWER, PRESTIGE OR A JOB TITLE.
There are two basic building blocks for a successful career in public relations. You don’t discover them in a classroom. You discover them through experience over time, hopefully with help from mentors or role models. That was my good fortune.

The two building blocks are brains and guts.

If this strikes you as too glib to be a useful nugget of knowledge, just think about it.

Brains are your software, the stuff you’ll need to intimately understand the business of your employer or client, the ability to think clearly, often under pressure, often without useful guidance from your boss and, most important from day one, your source of creativity and passion to demonstrate superb craftsmanship as a writer.

Guts are your hardware, a willingness to tactfully stick to your guns when you’ve thought through an issue or problem, understand what’s at stake and exhibit confidence that you know what needs to be done or said when others do not or won’t stick their necks out. You won’t prevail every time, but you’ll build a reputation for always being fully invested in your responsibilities.

Over a long career I’ve heard these simple rules expressed in different words by other successful executives:

Edward M. Block*
Fellow PRSA
Senior Vice President, Public Relations (ret), AT&T

Led public relations, employee information and advertising programs at AT&T for 12 years. Established the AT&T charitable foundation. Helped develop the initiative that led AT&T to establish the MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour on PBS. Recipient of the PRSA Gold Anvil Award (1997), the Arthur W. Page Hall of Fame Award (1993) and the Alexander Hamilton Medal of the Institute for Public Relations (2003).
• Bosses don’t want to know how smart you are, they want timely, responsive solutions to the issues they confront.
• Bosses want solutions, not problems. They’ve got enough of the latter.
• Timid sycophants are useless.
• If you screw up, be the first one to tell the boss what happened and what you intend to do about it.

What this advice adds up to is that leadership and success begin with brains and guts. These characteristics and how to employ them emerge over time as opportunities come your way to demonstrate them. Not likely on your first day on a new job, but certainly beginning, at least in small ways, with your first job.

A wise friend once told me that the very best business schools cannot teach a CEO how to be an effective CEO. They must learn on the job. The same holds true for men and women who pursue careers in public relations. A good school can help you master the tools and techniques of effective public relations, but it’s on the job that you master the art of public relations management.

So, be patient, seek out and pay attention to role models, learn the business of your business and, as your career advances, learn how to become the “go to” person when business problems threaten management goals. In the business world, communications is overhead. Problem-solving is value added. PR possesses unique assets to help management recognize, understand and solve problems.

LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS BEGIN WITH BRAINS AND GUTS.

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*Legend is deceased.*
Throughout my career I’ve felt the most fun and fulfilling part of being a public relations practitioner is acting as the link between a problem and a solution. Because we are in the unique and advantageous position of being in communication with all departments and aspects of an organization, we know when a problem occurs—and where to find the solution. Not only does that help the organization, it proves the value of public relations.

Whether we’re the in-house counsel or an outside consultant, to do a good job in public relations, we must understand not only WHAT the organization is all about, but WHO does what, WHEN it gets done, WHERE it is done and WHY (Sound familiar?). We need to be among the most knowledgeable employees in the organization—and it pays.

I remember my first weeks on a new job in a hospital—my first experience in healthcare. I made appointments to meet with and interview every department head. It took a long time, but I needed to know how things worked, how people worked together and who did what. It paid off almost immediately.

As I was interviewing one manager, he kept telling me his frustration at not being able to achieve his goals and what was holding him back. I paged through my notes, sure I had heard something that would help. Within a few minutes, I was able to share with him some relevant information I had gleaned in another department a few days earlier. He and the other department head met shortly thereafter and worked out a solution that was advantageous to everyone. Word spread quickly that the source of their solution was in the public relations department!
With the nature of personal communication changing daily and mass communication taking on a new meaning with every new invention, some people are wringing their hands and bemoaning the fact that public relations is so different now. Perhaps the way in which we communicate electronically is changing, but human contact is still a basic need. People still make up their minds about how they’ll vote, what they’ll buy and where they’ll spend their free time by talking to other people. We can help provide those linkages.

The same kind of linking can go a long way when we get involved in volunteer activities or represent our organizations in the community. The more we know, the more we can help solve problems and link resources to each other. In addition to making us feel good, it’s a wonderful way to get to know interesting people, to widen our networks and to demonstrate that public relations is a lot more than publicity!

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Do you want a job or a career in public relations? Easy question? But they are not equivalents. The symptoms may seem the same, but the roots differ significantly. Both require diligence, patience, writing skills, media relationships and, simply, hard work.

The dictionary defines a “job” as *part of the routine of one’s occupation*. A “career” is *intellectual action*. If that’s too esoteric, let me simply say that building a career hinges on curiosity…one word, WHY. Why am I doing this…now…can’t it be done better, faster?

- A JOB makes it hard to get up in the morning and takes a while to get started.
- A CAREER propels you out of the bed and into high gear.
- A JOB is defined by hours, days, weeks.
- A CAREER is seamless…you often don’t know what time it is…sometimes even forget the day of the week.
- In a JOB you look forward to holidays, weekends.
- In a CAREER these are interruptions.
- In a JOB you often watch things happen.
- In a CAREER you make things happen.

I’m sure you get it.

So, now, clutching your parchment validation as a certified public relations practitioner, you can’t wait to get into strategic planning, mission statements applying the principles of behavior modifications, sorting out cognitive dissonance, etc. Your academic credentials are excellent, and you are snapped up by a PR agency (I’ll get into the corporate milieu later). You might even get an honorific title: “associate assistant account executive.” Assignment: promote Absolut.
vodka, or a new line of candles, a skin care treatment, a new line of laundromats, a fancy hot
dog—or you may be shifted over to be a blogging feeder.

What’s this nonsense? Four years of study to be a publicist? Ye’ Gods! Well, friends, that is how it
begins. I, the youngest—and cheapest—staffer to join the prestigious Carl Byoir & Associates,
tackled in my first 4-5 years thermostats, door locks, a new bible, rivets, greeting cards and
electronic watches. Know what? I enjoyed it. (I should mention that in those days we were full
time on an account, so there was an awful lot of open time to fill usefully.)

I learned to write fast, to know to whom I was writing, to do research, to get to know reporters
in person, to build relationships. A humble beginning? Yes. I never took anything for granted;
conventional wisdom was an anathema to me. You’ll hear your colleagues pontificate wildly.
Listen, but don’t absorb. You are, titles et al. notwithstanding, a probationer . . . a novitiate. Have
patience . . . as you get increasingly difficult assignments—and you do more than is expected—
the real principles of public relations embedded in your DNA emerge.

DO MORE THAN ASKED FOR . . . MORE THAN EXPECTED. IT WILL ULTIMATELY
BE RECOGNIZED, AND YOU WILL MOVE SLIGHTLY UPWARDS.

But, you will learn the business, the traditions, the culture and
the idiosyncrasies of the players. This is a pervasive weakness
of agency life; there’s never enough time—or legitimate
charging hours—to gain these invaluable insights.

Should you choose the corporate route, you’ll be low on the communications food chain . . .
probably assigned to employee relations and all the mystic wonders of e-mails, iPods, blackberries
and webcastings. Promotions come about as fast as a melting glacier. Turfs are clearly defined
and impenetrable. Your boss is probably responsible for the market share of his product line. He
wants free publicity, period! Don’t try to tell him or her all you know.

Do more than asked for . . . more than expected. It will ultimately be recognized, and you will
move slightly upwards. But, you will learn the business, the traditions, the culture and the
idosyncrasies of the players. This is a pervasive weakness of agency life; there’s never enough
time—or legitimate charging hours—to gain these invaluable insights.

*Legend is deceased.
Arthur W. Page, while serving AT&T as its first vice president for public relations, said: “A company’s reputation is chiefly dependent on what it does, and in a lesser degree on what it says, and the lesser degree becomes very small indeed if what it says and what it does do not jibe.”

Yes, communications is essential. But, communications constitutes the last part of professional public relations, not the first. Hard reality will always overcome communications programs, good publicity or even skillful propaganda.

Reality should be the rock on which any public relations campaign stands. Customers know. The word gets around when products don’t deliver promised results. Employees know when they are treated unfairly. Voters know when the candidates misrepresent, exaggerate or lie to them. Citizens recognize when public officials serve selfish, partisan interests instead of the general public.

But it isn’t as simple as that. Folks don’t discover things right away. Sometimes, they’ll endure two or three bad experiences in a restaurant before they decide not to return. Or they’ll endure years of abuse from a boss before they decide their company just isn’t a good place to work. Sometimes voters enthuse over a politician’s rhetoric for years before they recognize she or he is a fraud.

It’s part of the human experience that people (just like you and me) don’t like to admit they’ve been wrong, or they’ve made a mistake or misjudged a product, a public figure.
or a policy. So they see (usually unconsciously) some excuse to rationalize their error and to change their judgment. That’s why public opinion changes slowly. That’s why even the most effective public relations campaigns show results very slowly. We communicate almost instantaneously these days, but public opinion changes very slowly.

The skilled professional tries to discover reality before worrying about what to communicate. They want to know objectively what actions deserve public approval and which do not. And then they try to persuade management to change and correct those policies that may irritate the public, the customers and the community. Only when the policy serves the public interest can good communications make a difference.

Experience has taught me that the most difficult problem in life (and not limited to professional public relations) is “telling truth to power.” It is not easy to tell the boss they are wrong. Integrity requires it. But how to tell the truth to power is an art not quickly learned. No one, and especially not clients and executives, like to be told they have erred. How to tell truth to power requires sensitivity, tact and perhaps humility, too. But learning how will provide the difference between success or failure in your career.

Those are among the most important lessons life has taught me.

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“Chester Burger”

*Legend is deceased.*
The question most often asked me by students and recent graduates is along the lines of, “Mr. Burson, what is your best advice for us as we start our careers in public relations? What are the three or four things you think will count most as we pursue a career in public relations?” This is what I tell them:

Networking is the most important activity you can undertake, starting now. Approach it in terms of building a support infrastructure you can tap into as your career and your life go forward. But never think that networking is simply a matter of knowing people. To be effective, it takes an underlying relationship—shared experiences—and you’ve got to work at it. Just one example of the payoff: When I ask newly recruited employees how they happened to come on to Burson-Marsteller, no less than half say, “I knew someone who knew someone.” You get the point!

Working as a member of an organization—a team—is an essential in most careers, especially business. My successor as B-M CEO, Jim Dowling, put it this way: “We prize the individual; we celebrate the team.” It is essential that you earn the trust of those around you: not only your boss, but also your peers and, equally important, the people who work for you. My late partner, Bill Marsteller, maintained that, “Your direct reports are the ones who really ‘nominate’ you for promotion to higher responsibility.” At Burson-Marsteller, more than half of all involuntary separations of professional employees are due to an employee’s inability to work with his/her teammates—to “fit in” as a member of the organization.
Never cease working to become a better writer and a more effective speaker. One of the rarest commodities in public relations today is competent writers. My observation is that the newly-hired staffer who demonstrates a strong writing ability soon becomes one of the office’s most billable employees. There is always a need for good writing, and word spreads fast.

Develop as broad a knowledge base as possible. In public relations, all kinds of problems arise. And as consultants, they do so in all aspects of social, political and economic endeavors. Strive never to be caught tongue-tied because of a total lack of knowledge even on a subject remote to your daily existence. The old fashioned way of doing this has been by reading—traditionally, newspapers, magazines, books and, of course, television and radio. The new way is the Internet, about which most of you are far more au courant than I. The best advice my father ever gave me was, “Try always to be in the know.”

I offer good wishes to all recent graduates seeking careers in public relations. Even after so many years, I well remember my early years and the numerous individuals who contributed to whatever success has been heaped upon me. I could never have done it alone—and I believe, many years from now, you will feel as I do.

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Over the past 35 years, I have determined that the best public relations efforts are those that blend both common sense and experience in observing how people receive and react to new information. There is no precise road map to success, but I hope the following points will be helpful as you make your own journey within this challenging and exciting profession.

10 tips I wish someone had told me earlier in my career:

- Learn all the tasks in public relations, not just the “glamour” jobs. A broad background in the basics of the profession will allow you to find the areas you love, yet will make you a more valuable employee and colleague. From this broad base, you can focus on a specialty. As your career progresses, master a second area and maybe a third, which offers a fallback. In time you will have the breadth to tackle an upper-level generalist/leadership role.
- Good writing and editing are PR’s essential tools. Both require disciplined thought, rigorous attention to rule and detail and, of course, creativity. In the perpetual argument of speed vs. accuracy, the latter wins hands down. Who wants to be first—but wrong?
- Listen before you act. Action without thorough understanding is a “speed vs. accuracy” trap that can get you in trouble. Take the time to listen and process.
- Get connected/stay connected. Networking is a career-long necessity and pleasure that can start right now. Contacts I made in the 1970s are friends, colleagues and clients today. You simply cannot know too many people.

RON CULP
Instructor and Professional Director, PRAD Graduate Program, DePaul University

• Be interested and interesting. You can develop the personality skills needed to be a great networker by showing active interest in others, and by stretching to broaden who you are. A tremendously rewarding way to increase engagement is giving back through non-profit opportunities in the community.

• You’re always in the middle—so get comfortable. We’re the peanut butter in every sandwich, whether it’s between the client and the media, your client contact and her boss or even between the client and our own business department. Don’t fulminate … facilitate.

• Collaboration wins. . . Gone are the days of the individual with all the answers. Client needs today are simply too varied, complex and urgent to rely on one view of the right solution. . . But trust your gut. Don’t hesitate to offer the outside view if the direction of the collaboration seems wrong.

• Be flexible . . . We are living in a global economy that is increasingly interconnected and mutually dependent. Working with others requires flexibility unprecedented in any time . . . But hold to your values. The business community doesn’t function properly without honesty and integrity at the core.

• Learn how to “tell truth to power.” One of the most important and most difficult jobs we face is delivering information to clients, bosses or colleagues who don’t necessarily want to hear what we have to say. The art is presenting in a way that doesn’t necessarily provoke but gets the message across. It’s a life skill, too—practice with a significant other or close friends.

• Champion diversity. Nearly 40 percent of those living in the United States are minorities. Because our job is to communicate effectively with broad and inclusive audiences, we need diversity at the table. It’s right, and it’s smart.

Observe others, work hard and be patient. The rewards can be significant!

"BE INTERESTED AND INTERESTING.

You can develop the personality skills needed to be a great networker by showing active interest in others, and by stretching to broaden who you are. A tremendously rewarding way to increase engagement is giving back through non-profit opportunities in the community."
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 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.

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.
• Keep track: Start a rolodex 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 Godspeed!

“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.”
President John Fitzgerald Kennedy said, “The new frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises—it is a set of challenges.” The English historian Arnold J. Toynbee traced the development of ancient civilization to his theory of challenge-and-response, which demonstrated how men generally made a more positive response to adversity than to “easy” conditions.

Challenges have proven to be steps on my ladder of success. The circumstances of my parents being sharecroppers on a farm in rural Alabama where I was born became an early challenge of walking miles to a one-room schoolhouse with bare educational resources. Then there was the challenge of moving to Detroit at the age of nine and living in a rigidly segregated city.

In high school, there was the haunting challenge of not having a vision beyond the long, dark shadows of Detroit’s ghetto. Upon graduation, with a very “soft” high school education, I took the entrance exam to attend Wayne State University, flunking it not only once, but twice.

While attending Wayne State at night as a non-matriculated student, I qualified for a job at Sears, Roebuck & Company. That job was in the maintenance department, as a porter, because Sears, like other retail stores then, had a “social policy” of only hiring people of color for maintenance jobs. Negroes were not hired as stock boys, elevator operators or even to change tires at the service station. So, this was a challenge about one’s self-worth at a time when Negroes were treated as second-class citizens.

The Korean conflict and its mandatory military draft rescued me from Sears, and I found myself on the front lines of a war. In Korea I became introspective about my direction in life, and I developed a vision to return to America to become a journalist.
After discharge from the Army, I returned to Detroit and entered Wayne State University as a journalism major. For four years, I accepted the challenge of working hard in preparation for a career to be a journalist. Just before graduation, my advisor called me into his office and said, “Ofield, I have found jobs for your six classmates at the Detroit Times, News and Free Press.” Then he paused and said, “But I don’t have any contacts at Jet or Ebony Magazine.” Again, I faced the challenge of the times—daily newspapers in Detroit didn’t hire people of color, not even as copy boys or delivery truck drivers.

An essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson on self reliance provided a psychological buffer for me. Emerson wrote that the genius of Beethoven, Mozart and Plato was that unfaltering faith in their ability to deal with adverse challenges and then move on to excel. This essay highlights a challenge we all face: faith in our ability to meet and deal with adversities in life and not break stride to achieve our goals.

When I opened my firm in Washington, D.C., I got up every morning with a passion to be excellent, a determination to preserve my sense of integrity, a commitment to practice the Golden Rule of treating others with dignity and kindness and not allowing anything to disrupt my inner peace.

And these are the challenges common to us all: Seeking to be excellent, maintaining our integrity because your reputation is like a whistle and its echo, practicing positive interpersonal relations in a highly multicultural America and following the sage advice of the late Dr. Richard Carlson in his book, “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff.”

There were many other challenges in operating my own public relations firm in the communications capital of the world. One hot July day I received a surprising call informing me that I had been named the winner of the 2001 Public Relations Society of America’s coveted Gold Anvil Award! I said a prayer of thanksgiving, took a deep breath and said to myself, “The challenges, as tough as they have been, have brought me to this mountaintop experience in public relations.”

*Legend is deceased.*
The celebration of the Public Relations Student Society of America comes at a most appropriate time in our world. Currently underway is the greatest expansion of the public relations field that has ever occurred. It is rare if a company does not have a public relations department and director. There are more public relations firms in the U.S. than at any other time in history.

There’s also an expansion into markets throughout this country and worldwide to meet the needs of mid-sized companies, which may or may not have a public relations director and/or department.

Larger public relations firms are representing clients in the U.S., Europe, Asia and other regions of the world, providing traditional public relations services as well as diversifying into such related fields as medical, consumer, financial, government relations and corporate reputation. The expansion of public relations keeps pace with the dynamic economic growth in the U.S. and globally.

Pursuing further growth of their business, many public relations firms build additional assignments from ongoing clients. This makes good sense because they work from a base of good service, which provides a strong opportunity to move into global markets and/or to add programs in practice areas not presently covered by the ongoing program.

For public relations firms of all sizes, it’s essential to maintain a continuing new business effort. As I advise our own people, we have to be aggressive in seeking further growth of assignments.

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**DANIEL J. EDELMAN**

APR, Fellow PRSA

Founder and Chairman, Edelman, Inc.

Worked as a newspaper reporter, radio news writer for CBS Television and public relations director for the Toni division of Gillette. Started his firm in Chicago in 1952. Edelman is today the largest privately held, independent firm with 48 worldwide offices. Recipient of PRSA’s Gold Anvil (1999), Inside PR’s Lifetime Achievement Award (1998) and posthumously awarded the Plank Center’s Milestones in Mentoring Legacy Honor (2010). Named to the Arthur W. Page Society’s Hall of Fame (1997) and received the first-ever Outstanding Achievement Award from the China International PR Association.
No matter how strong a contribution we’re making in a current program, it’s up to us to capitalize on this good work by providing additional services to existing clients.

Opportunities for PRSSA alumni are greater than ever and will enable them to make significant service contributions while earning solid financial returns.

I salute you and look forward to your future accomplishments.

*Daniel J. Edelman*
*APr, Fellow PrSA*
*Founder and Chairman, Edelman, Inc.*

**THERE IS UNDERWAY CURRENTLY THE GREATEST EXPANSION OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS FIELD THAN HAS EVER OCCURRED PREVIOUSLY.**

It is rare if a company does not have a public relations department and director. There are more public relations firms in the U.S. than at any other time in history.

*Legend is deceased.*
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 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. Appreciate their opinions, whether 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 the behavior of a few. Being successful in reaching specific groups or individuals require 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.

“TO BE SUCCESSFUL, A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL MUST STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND REAL INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.”
A reporter asked my boss Harry Wells: “As a mechanical engineer, how did you get to be the President and then Chairman of the Board of a big Fortune 500 company like McCormick Spice?”

Harry smiled, shrugged his shoulders and said: “I simply tried to do every job they gave me, better than anyone had ever done it before, and one day they asked me to be President.”

That “be the best” attitude is a formula for success in public relations or any career. Learning how to ask the right questions also is critical for success in public relations. I don’t mean just asking the typical journalism questions of Who? What? How? When? Where? Why? I mean other questions specific for public relations, such as:

- How might we do... whatever we need to do?
- What do we need to know?
- What if... something goes wrong?
- Is it the right thing to do?
- Will what we do make a difference?
- And always the final question: Did I do my best?

The “how might we?” question brings more creativity and imagination than asking “what can we do?” According to psychologists, the word “can” limits discussion while “might” opens limitless possibilities.

“Might” led us to ask if we could make the annual report for McCormick Spice Company smell like a spice. It took us three years to find a way, but when we did we had the first annual report
that really smelled! The wide publicity we received helped the investment community understand which of several companies named McCormick we were. Some 30 years later, investment firms and reporters still have contests trying to guess which spice the report will smell like each year.

“What do we need to know?” is a basic research question. What data on this subject is already available, and what new research do we need before we attempt this project?

Asking “what if” prompts consideration of what do we do if it rains out an outdoor event? What if the honored speaker or guest doesn’t arrive or get there on time? “What if” is one of the backup questions smart planners always ask.

“Is what we are doing the right thing to do?” is a question about ethics. It involves not doing bad things for good reasons, or doing good things for bad reasons. It asks if what you plan to do is appropriate, fair, legal and uses good moral judgment.

The “make a difference” question tests if a project or event will serve a useful purpose, fill a special need or benefit the buyer or the community.

The last question “Did I/we do our best?” asks how our performance measured up against our stated objectives and professional standards.

Using these basic questions can help ensure success in public relations.

What will the future be? No one knows. However, we do know it will be filled with many unexpected changes. What won’t change in public relations? These values:

- The value of telling the truth. Truth is always wise and in style.
- The need for creativity and imagination; both are always in demand.
- Persistence—keep on trying new things.
- Ethics—it builds trust and keeps good reputations.
- Stewardship—maintaining good relationships is critical.
- A keen sense if humor because from my experience in the business of public relations, you never know what’s gonna’ happen next!

"That ‘be the best’ attitude is a formula for success in public relations or any career."

THAT ‘BE THE BEST’ ATTITUDE IS A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS OR ANY CAREER.

*Legend is deceased.
Ours is an era of rapid scientific discovery, technological advancement, healthcare and educational improvement and business growth—and yet the pace of change will never be slower. This also makes it an extraordinary time to be a public relations professional.

PR professionals are being asked to be more and play bigger roles in their organizations than ever before. It is not enough to be a good communicator or writer, or be adept at organizing events and campaigns or designing clever websites. The complexities of our world require PR professionals to think deeply, act quickly, ask the right questions and solve problems.

In many ways I was made for this world. My mother grew up in an orphanage in a South Carolina mill town and my father was one of nine children in Spanish Harlem with parents who had come to the States from Cuba and Puerto Rico. Before I entered college, we lived in four states, and I attended nine different schools. Those moves, along with a foot in two cultures, forced me to become more adaptable—to see change as positive, seize opportunity in the face of challenge, and become an acute student of the world.

It also helped that the Jesuits at Georgetown University, where I was a scholarship student, prompted us to ask good questions rather than accept the status quo. That orientation would serve me well on Capitol Hill—and through a long career in public relations.

While working at State Farm, these formative experiences helped me to prompt a program that led to market share gains and an enhanced reputation for the company. The day after the U.S. Senate voted to defeat comprehensive immigration reform in June 2007, State Farm CEO Ed Rust and I attended a lunch at the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO). The featured speaker, U.S. Senator Mel Martinez, came to Florida at the age
of 15 from his native Cuba to live with foster parents. He was hurt and impassioned by the failed vote, and brought the audience to its feet. Ed Rust turned to me and asked, “Is there something we can do?”

I remembered as a child that those who served as citizenship sponsors for my grandfather were treated as a part of our extended family. Wouldn’t it be great, I thought, if State Farm agents could be valued similarly?

This led us to launch a fully integrated effort that went well beyond the traditional role of a COO. We established a partnership with NALEO’s citizenship efforts, and we enlisted State Farm agents operating in Latino barrios (and later in Asian neighborhoods) into a program where they could serve the role of “sponsor” for future citizens and use their offices for English-language training and tutoring for the U.S. citizenship civics exam. We improved State Farm’s reputation within these communities and agents participating in the program increase their business. Overall State Farm’s share of the U.S. Latino market increased significantly.

In short, we strengthened our business and made a positive mark on the world. Being a public relations professional requires you to understand not only yourself, but also the values of other people and cultures—and to to be a problem solver. Today the world is more complex—but if we apply ourselves well, our roles can be more interesting and urgent than ever.

“BEING A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL REQUIRES YOU TO UNDERSTAND NOT ONLY YOURSELF, BUT ALSO THE VALUES OF OTHER PEOPLE AND CULTURES—AND TO BE A PROBLEM SOLVER.”
Learn to write with clarity and persuasion, and get to know the business you are serving, the problems and the opportunities. Spend time developing your “good judgment;” it might be your shining quality.

Don’t be reluctant to become the “loyal opposition” and take an opposite stand if you feel it serves the public interest. Good judgment will tell you when the time is right to do this.

Your goal should be to raise the level of public communications by making truth, integrity and responsibility the standards that may not be compromised.

As communicators you are cast in the role of protecting and enhancing your company’s reputation. More than anyone else in the company, this is your responsibility.

Tell the truth. Never lie to the press. But remember, you are not obligated to tell everything you know about a given situation.

Some say ethics cannot be taught. But certainly your ethical conduct can be honed as you become involved in complex situations. Don’t compromise your ethics. It is who you are.

Every failure to communicate effectively and ethically carries with it a lesson that we must learn and apply, especially in the business world, and especially in today’s contentious business climate.

Public relations is a fascinating business with a unique personality. It is rarely dull. Don’t be dull.
If you are fortunate enough to work for a CEO, offer him or her friendship and understanding along with your best skills. It is lonely at the top.

Formal learning does not end with the college degree. Experience is the great teacher for the long term.

When you are sitting around the boardroom table with colleagues from other disciplines, remember that your input will likely be different, as it should be, based on your training and your experience. Express yourself thoughtfully. Strive to be a problem solver.

Enjoy your work. It will reflect in your attitude and your performance.

YOUR GOAL SHOULD BE TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS BY MAKING TRUTH, INTEGRITY AND RESPONSIBILITY THE STANDARDS THAT MAY NOT BE COMPROMISED.

As communicators you are cast in the role of protecting and enhancing your company’s reputation. More than anyone else in the company, this is your responsibility.

"Lawrence G. Foster*
APr, Fellow PrSA
Corporate Vice President, Public Relations (ret) Johnson & Johnson

*Legend is deceased."
I began my business life almost 50 years ago when I joined a small public relations firm in Chicago, coming from my first job in the promotion department of MGM Pictures. About a year later, I made a phone call that proved to be a turning point in my life.

In 1957, I made a cold call to a man named Ray Kroc, who had a handful of the old red and white McDonald’s around the Chicago area. None of us ever dreamed they would grow to over 30,000 restaurants in over 100 countries around the world. Earlier this year they celebrated their 50th anniversary with much fanfare.

Their community involvement was part of their culture from the very beginning—and still is today, even with their huge advertising budget. I coined the term “Trust Bank” for all the community involvement—which helped them build “deposits” of goodwill in case they might need it for a “withdrawal”—when a crisis or sensitive issue arose.

Back then, there were no color TVs, no mobile telephones, no fax and, of course, no e-mail—let alone blogs. The quartz watch I’m wearing has more computing power than existed in the entire world.

There is a problem, however, with a high-tech, low-touch culture. Too many of us are becoming increasingly reliant on impersonal communication. People are much more willing to use e-mail than to set up face-to-face meetings or even talk on the phone.

We live in a “transparent” society now. Anyone with an Internet connection and an opinion can influence perceptions. Also, people and companies can’t “get away” with unethical or
questionable actions—with the watchdogs in government, media and consumer groups that are active today.

Whenever I have the chance, I reiterate my own twist on the old adage: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Actually, it’s my most unfavorable saying. I’ve always said, “Fix it before it breaks.”

We should all have the courage to change things before we have to. Sometimes familiarity can breed contempt. I think JFK (Kennedy, that is, not Kerry) said it: “The time to fix a roof is when the sun is shining.” Nothing could be truer.

I reiterate my own twist on the old adage: ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Actually, it’s my most unfavorable saying. I’ve always said,

‘FIX IT BEFORE IT BREAKS.’

Whenever I meet with young people in our office, they usually ask a couple of questions that help me evaluate what I’ve done over the years. There are two questions they always ask: “What have you done that you’re most proud of?” And, “What do you regret not doing?” I like the last question because it’s something I can still do something about and perhaps help them. So we come back to my tried and true tag line: “Fix it before it breaks.” It really boils down to “going with your gut feeling.” The same thing can happen when I’ve been talked out of a good idea when I know it makes sense. We’ve had some of our greater successes when we “stuck to our guns” when the nay-sayers tried to play it safe.

In any business or in life, you must take risks...learn to love it. If you play “not to lose” rather than “to win,” you’ll never be a success.

Albert Einstein once said: “Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.”

*Legend is deceased.*
I have been in the business of public relations for more than 40 years, and I still learn something new every day. That is one of the things I love about our profession. But along the way, I learned some particularly important lessons that have shaped my philosophy of leadership. One of the most valuable of those lessons is the importance of having a vision, and then backing it up with a deep personal commitment—and great people.

After becoming CEO of Fleishman-Hillard in 1974, I began to develop my dreams and aspirations into a vision for our agency. That vision had its basis in a strong, personal commitment to build our company into a firm with the best people, the best reputation, the best clients and one that offered the best communications service on a worldwide basis. That has been our vision for more than 30 years, and it remains our vision today. But, of course, having that vision and making it reality were two very different things.

At the time, Fleishman-Hillard had a single office, so growing a worldwide business was a pretty daunting task. But we planned it carefully; we were guided by our vision, and we worked on it one step at a time...hiring one key person...gaining one additional client...and opening one office at a time: Kansas City in 1977, New York in 1980, Los Angeles in 1982, Washington, D.C. in 1985. Then, two years later, we opened London and Paris offices, beginning our expansion into the international arena.

Those were exciting times. But they were risky times, as well. I was traveling 250,000 miles a year while personally handling our three largest clients. At the same time, we were explaining to our bankers (who absolutely had no idea what we did for a living) why we should open new offices when some of our existing offices had yet to turn a profit. It was tough. My CFO and I
personally mortgaged our homes and everything else we owned in order to meet our twice-a-month payroll.

It was a high-risk strategy, but it worked. Our new offices gradually developed a solid client base and began to contribute to our overall operations. Today, of course, we are a world leader. But it was that vision of what we felt Fleishman-Hillard could become that sustained us through that period.

You notice I say “we” and “us” as I discuss our firm’s struggles and our success. The real key to that success, then and now, was that we had the good fortune to find and bring on board truly outstanding people.

That is something I remind myself of every day: You can have all the vision and commitment in the world, but you will not get far without good people. Choose your team carefully. Share your vision with them. Work with them, develop them and they will bring your vision to life.

“You can have all the vision and commitment in the world, but you will not get far without good people.”

Choose your team carefully. Share your vision with them. Work with them, develop them and they will bring your vision to life.
I believe that education in public relations and mastery of the ever-enlarging body of research-based knowledge in our discipline are the most important characteristics of today’s best public relations professionals. Public relations began as a trade in which anyone could claim expertise. The result was an undefined and misunderstood practice in which few practitioners took either ethics or the effectiveness of what they did seriously. Leaders such as Edward Bernays, Arthur Page, Earl Newsom, Scott Cutlip, Betsy Plank and Patrick Jackson changed public relations practice to base it on social scientific theories as well as knowledge from the humanities. Academic scholars in public relations now have conducted enough high-quality research to make it both a respected profession as well as a respected academic discipline.

Based on this research, I have come to understand public relations as a strategic management function that uses communication to cultivate relationships with publics that have a stake in the behavior of the organization—either because they benefit from or are harmed by the consequences of that behavior. Public relations has value to an organization because it provides publics with whom it develops relationships a voice in management decisions that affect them. If public relations provides publics a voice in strategic decision-making, management is more likely to make socially responsible decisions. Responsible organizational behaviors, in a reciprocal manner, improve the quality of relationships with publics.

Quality relationships have both financial and nonfinancial value because they reduce the costs of regulation, legislation and litigation; reduce the risk of implementing decisions; and sometimes increase revenue. They also have the secondary effects of improving the reputation
of an organization (what members of a public think about it) and reducing negative publicity because there are fewer bad behaviors for journalists to write about. The only way to “manage a reputation” is through managing the organizational behaviors that are reflected in that reputation.

If public relations is a process of cultivating relationships with publics, then the values of the profession should reflect a worldview that is likely to produce good relationships. I believe that the primary value of public relations is a simple one—a value I learned in the rural Midwest—that is embraced by most religions of the world, and whose absence has produced wars and civil unrest throughout human history. That value is concern for others as well as ourselves. It is reflected in what I have called the symmetrical model of public relations, which suggests that public relations should strive to balance the interests of publics with the interests of the organization.

I believe that the primary value of public relations is a simple one—a value I learned in the rural Midwest—that is embraced by most religions of the world, and whose absence has produced wars and civil unrest throughout human history. THAT VALUE IS CONCERN FOR OTHERS AS WELL AS OURSELVES.

Research also shows that organizations that interact with their publics responsibly are also the most successful. In addition, symmetrical public relations helps society at large by improving parts of the web of relationships that makes up society. The symmetrical value of concern for others as well as ourselves also makes public relations a profession. A profession, by definition, is concerned with the greater good as much or more than self-interest.

The challenge for the next generation of public relations professionals—those of you who now are members of PRSSA—is to practice public relations in this responsible way, explain its values to organizations and people in general and, as a result, gain respect for this most important profession throughout the world.

James E. Grunig
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. Many 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:

- Personal integrity
- Building trust inside and outside our own organizations
• Using good judgement, 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, most importantly, what you are doing
• Never taking shortcuts that can betray your personal beliefs and ethics
• Being a collaborator. Two minds or more are always better than one. Success can be shared by many
• Creativity, but only with a 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 gives 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.

Steven J. Harris
Vice President, Global Communications, General Motors

“TWO MINDS OR MORE ARE ALWAYS BETTER THAN ONE.”
Success can be shared by many.
I'm almost impossible for me to realize that I have been privileged to practice public relations for nearly a half century. Working in the profession has always been a joy. I have seen public relations evolve to become an integral part of every business and organization.

In college I knew a lot about the history of Western art, and I could analyze the structure of a well-made play and discuss the philosophy of socialism, communism and democracy. But I didn't have the slightest idea of what public relations was. Only after I was drafted into the Army and assigned to the Army Information School did I learn that this thing we called public information in the military was called public relations in civilian life.

I'd like to share some little wisdoms that I have picked up along the way that may be helpful to you.

- Don't be greedy. Don't accept the job that pays the most. Choose the one that will offer you the best opportunity to learn, stretch and grow. Good things come to those who wait.
- Always rely on straight talk. Be obsessively clear and concise. Waste the jargon and the bull.
- Go the extra mile. Quality service is at a premium today in all business. Especially ours.
- Don't have public relations tunnel vision. Your client will rely on you if he thinks of you as a business advisor and not a vendor. Strive to become an advice giver, not an order taker.
- Be a great team player. Teamwork works. The joy of the business is working with many talented people and being a member of a winning team.
• Remember the nice touches. Money talks and perks work—but little things still mean a lot to the people who are most important to you. I still keep some handwritten notes that I received from my first boss 40 years ago. E-mail is convenient, but a personal note, a book or a lunch with the boss are forever.

• Keep up or drop out. The practice changes faster than the speed of light. Change is the law of life, and the internet has changed the ball game forever.

• Take the business seriously. But don’t take yourself too seriously. Nobody likes a know-it-all. Public relations isn’t brain surgery or rocket science. Don’t be too disappointed if your pronouncements are neither little noted, nor long remembered.

• Give credit where credit is due. Somebody else may have a better idea. That somebody may be the somebody you work for, or who works for you.

• Keep your sense of humor and have some fun. In the business and in life. Take time to go to a ball game. Visit a museum. Attend a concert. Take in a play. You and your work will be the better for it.

When I concluded 14 years of teaching grad students at Northwestern University, here is what I told my last class:

“Truth is what we are all about. Not hype. Not spin. But truth. If public relations is to retain its position as the credible source, we must not blur the line between information and propaganda, between advocacy and salesmanship. The old description of public relations as ‘the conscience of the corporation’ is more relevant than ever in today’s complex society. The highest calling of PR is to keep our organization on straight paths, to counsel the powers-that-be not just to say the right thing but to do the right thing. In the future, our job will be even more vital. We will be often called upon to assume the role of gatekeeper that has traditionally been played by the media. Our greatest value to our organizations, the media and our stakeholders must always be to separate information from misinformation and disinformation, and tell it like it is.”

Thomas L. Harris
Did your parents tell you to work hard and make good grades so you’ll get a good job? My dad did me a great favor. 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.”

The manual labor didn’t kill me. I made enough money to pay first-year tuition, and I went off to Tuscaloosa with all kinds of incentive to get out and get a degree.

My parents came to my Bama 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: “I don’t spect I’ll see you working in the mill this 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 some major paper and write books 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 newspaper 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 long run since, besides the fact that your parents are right, you do need to work hard?

You’ve got lots of options. Along other chief communications officers in The Plank Center series, I recommend the corporate career. But your college education, grasp of PR principles, talent
(like a lot of my peers, I put writing at the top) 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 NGO. 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 #1 power of the PR person: 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. Consider my definition of effective public relations management. It’s the ongoing process of knowing, creating and sustaining the stakeholders needed for your organization’s success. And if you think about it, that’s precisely the key to your personal success.

“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.
When I began my career in public relations, life was simpler. We considered ourselves “communicators” and we worked through three media: newspapers, television and radio. And we mostly communicated with people in the United States.

There were three television networks, two news wire services and hundreds of daily newspapers. To reach them you used the wire services, mailed press releases or held press conferences. You interacted with your media friends on a face-to-face basis. You knew most of them personally, and they knew you.

That is not the world of today’s graduates.

The media landscape now is as varied as the technology that drives it. The profession itself has grown and become more sophisticated. It is now a blend of social, business and hard sciences. To succeed requires proficiencies in world history, geography, philosophy, psychology, sociology, statistics and scientific research and maybe even comparative religions.

It also requires us to be knowledgeable about those who have come before in the profession; their successes, their mistakes, their beliefs and their vision. Most importantly, it requires a working knowledge of the way businesses, organizations, cultures and individuals think, make decisions and adapt to or control the environments and changes that face them.

I believe that to survive as a profession, we must become more than “communicators” of messages for our organizations, delivery mechanisms and press relations or brand publicity mavens. We must, in fact, become “change managers!” We must be recognized as the individuals within the organization that recognize, identify, prioritize and help navigate the constant changes, internal and external, that every organization faces from its inception.

Consolidation of companies and globalization of industries now requires us to acquire and hone global sensitivity. We must be multi-functional, multi-lingual and multicultural or at least culturally sensitive, because our brothers and sisters in the profession around the world definitely already are.
Public relations consultants and practitioners tasked with counseling and communicating in a global marketplace are expected to have, at the very least, a working knowledge and capability to understand and explain 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, as well as those that provide roadblocks to understanding.

The problem isn’t simply one of communication and understanding. It is more than saying it right and/or even having “right” on your side. 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 the things we do.

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

- Take the personal responsibility to educate yourself and broaden your knowledge base beyond communication and public relations courses 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. You must be a battle planner and strategist, not a spear carrier and message deliverer.
- Be on the forefront of predicting, utilizing and integrating technology to its fullest, without letting it control you at the expense of thinking, planning and the face-to-face human factors upon which your success and the long-term success of the profession depends.
- Become a leader who is confident in your abilities, knowledgeable in your profession, respectful of those around you and unafraid to listen, learn and lead by example.

This is one of the most exciting and meaningful times in history to be in our profession. The leaders who have come before built a solid foundation. Learn from them; build on their contributions! For it is you, “generation next,” who must become leaders for those who follow after. It is a huge responsibility. But it is one that, I am confident, certain special individuals among you will embrace and own. Oh, how I envy the things you will see and create!

"YOU MUST BE A BATTLE PLANNER AND STRATEGIST, NOT A SPEAR CARRIER AND MESSAGE DELIVERER."
The leaders of tomorrow’s communications profession will have to help their clients and colleagues deal with tougher and tougher problems: ethical, legal, financial and social issues that go to the heart of corporate behavior and civic reputation. To earn trust, public relations executives must live up to the highest ideals of integrity and the most rigorous standard of truth-telling, living up to values epitomized by our profession’s pioneers—people like John Hill and Harold Burson.

Whether they work in agencies or “in-house” in corporate communications roles, practitioners should focus on providing strategic counsel based on solid research, a thorough understanding of corporate operations and public-spirited strategies. Offering candid counsel based on what really counts—a nuanced understanding of what the marketplace wants and substantive knowledge of what our society needs—is the surest way to win, and retain, public confidence.

Most important, the leaders of our profession must shun the dangerous “spin cycle” that has corrupted civic dialogue. “Spin” debases the entire process of communications as it seeks to divert public attention from fundamental challenges by resorting to quick-fix, skim-the-surface tactics that are intended to confuse people rather than clarify issues.

As long as public debate remains trapped in a shallow culture of spin, our profession will fail to gain the respect it deserves. Worse, the reliance on spin will feed the public’s cynicism, leading people to distrust everything they hear, as they recoil from messages which they recognize are crafted to delude them.

The culture of spin is destructive to our clients, the organizations we serve and our profession. A debased dialogue is not good for corporate credibility, and it undermines clients’ abilities to
achieve their goals. It’s not good for consumers, who can’t tell where reliable information stops and spin begins. And it’s not good for our own long-term interests, because allowing public distrust to fester diminishes our credibility.

Tomorrow’s leaders, recognizing that the spin cycle is broken, should insist that the entire culture of spin be discarded.

Fending off substantive challenges to serious corporate concerns will always require candid communications that reflect a transparent and civic-minded corporate culture. Organizations win and retain public trust when they are values-driven organizations, with a humane corporate culture that is profit-oriented yet people-focused. We should remind our clients that the bedrock of corporate behavior should be the highest ethical values—a sense of high standards about how companies should treat their customers, shareholders and employees.

Communicators have an important role to play in meeting this challenge. They, perhaps more than anyone else in the corporate structure, should expunge the term “spin” from their lexicon. They should ensure that the highest value of all—allegiance to the truth—remains the central factor in corporate behavior.

Communicators are in a position to counsel CEOs and executives to elevate their vision. We can help them strengthen their corporate reputations—as well as do some good for society—by encouraging them to match their words with their deeds. We can exhort them, in the words of one great corporate leader, Michael Capellas, to “do the right thing, because it’s the right thing to do.” And in helping clients recognize that they must fulfill broad-minded civic responsibilities, we can live up to our own ambition to elevate public trust in our profession.

The future leaders of our profession must reaffirm our role as counselors of corporate behavior, keepers of corporate reputation and guardians of corporate integrity. It’s a tall order, and it requires the highest professional standards. But I feel confident that our next generation of leaders will be up to the task.

OFFERING CANDID COUNSEL BASED ON WHAT REALLY COUNTS—A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE MARKETPLACE WANTS AND SUBSTANTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT OUR SOCIETY NEEDS—IS THE SUREST WAY TO WIN, AND RETAIN, PUBLIC CONFIDENCE.
When I look back on my 50-year career in public relations, starting when we still used carbon paper, mimeo machines and the U.S. mail, I am particularly gratified to note the progress made by women in the field. I well remember my first luncheon as a member of PRSA’s New York Chapter attended by about 200 people—only 10 of whom were women. What a different picture we see today.

In the late sixties, when my sister and I decided to make an offer for the firm Dudley-Anderson-Yutzy, at the time numbering about 100 on staff, we invited several men from the firm to join us. All but two turned us down, inferring they didn’t wish to work for women, and took off with their clients. We took the risk anyway and went ahead, consolidated our resources, introduced salary parity for men and women and focused our business on consumer products, especially food and beverages.

In those days, we were frequently invited to make presentations to various prospective corporate clients as the token agency headed by women. We always responded, although suspecting we didn’t have a prayer of being elected. As we broadened our scope of operations, a breakthrough finally came when we won the business of a sizable Midwestern city. During our orientation visit, a member of the Chamber of Commerce told us, “We never thought we’d hire an agency headed by women…but we’re glad we did.”

Several years later, after quadrupling the business, we sold the firm to a top advertising agency, with the promise we would continue to run the business. Lesson learned: After a few years, the situation changes completely. I departed, then entering the most satisfying phase of my public relations experience. With two partners I started a new firm, which has evolved into a highly successful independent company. We hired and trained young practitioners, some of whom
now own the firm. Among the points emphasized: Do your homework, keep your eye on the target, never stop learning, be straightforward, don’t over promise and follow through. As a result, the business has grown in the very best way possible—through referrals.

In the early days, many in our field looked down on efforts to promote products as simply “publicity,” not worthy of the term public relations. As marketers discovered what a difference a well-conceived campaign could make, more of their dollars were committed to PR. Also, as the voice of the consumer became stronger and communications infinitely more diverse and direct, detailed information and explanations are demanded and expected. Now management cannot afford to overlook the public relations function.

My own public relations training came on the job at a time when there were few resources other than willing mentors to guide a young person. Basically, what I learned is that common sense, good judgment, curiosity, integrity and follow-through, plus mastery of basic skills, will take one a long way. Of these, I would single out integrity as being a key factor, especially today when there is such lack of trust in government, business, the media and institutions once thought to be infallible. Students today are fortunate to have experienced professors and a range of courses and resources to guide them in this field.

What makes public relations a worthy profession? I found it to be always challenging, never dull and often fun. It’s solving problems, negotiating sensitive situations, fostering understanding and nurturing trust. It’s a continuing opportunity to learn something new, broaden one’s perspective and be a catalyst for change. The field has gained a great deal of respect, a respect that can only be maintained by strict adherence to excellent and ethical performance.

Barbara Hunter

“Among the points emphasized: do your homework, keep your eye on the target, never stop learning, be straightforward, don’t over promise and follow through.”
I'm often asked, if I could travel back in time, what advice I would have for my 20 year old self. I could offer myself lots of sage wisdom based on a decades of experience. Yet I would be far more intrigued to learn what advice my younger self would have for me today.

What would she think about how I turned out? Did I become the person she wanted me to become? Did I hold onto the values that shaped her and stand up for them? Did I keep an open mind and embrace new people and experiences as she had hoped? Would she be proud of me?

If I know the answers to those questions—and I believe I do—it is because I still share the same sense of purpose with my 20-year-old self.

What do I mean by that?

In communications, we talk a lot about the importance of purpose-driven companies. A purpose defines the why of a company. How it does business. The decisions it makes and their context in the marketplace and society. Purpose-driven companies make more than money: They make the world a better place.

If being purpose-driven can do that for a company, what could being purpose-driven do for you? Is it possible to explore and understand your purpose and build a purpose-driven career that will be both fulfilling and contribute to the success of your company and your colleagues?

I believe that you not only can do that, but that a purpose-driven career is the only one worth
having. It should be an extension of who you are today, and who you want to become in the future—the person who will look back and ask, “How did I do?” Wherever you choose to apply what you have learned so far, and what you will continue to learn throughout your career, should align with your personal values.

I believe following a purpose-driven career is indispensable for those who would work in marketing communications. The profession is central to the development of a brand’s purpose, and communicators are at the nexus of the conversations that matter. This has given us a powerful seat at the leadership table that can make us a company’s most important agent of change. Using our skills to shape the organization’s culture and guide its actions can in turn affect the society we all share.

If that sounds heady, remember this: If we are the closest thing an organization has to a conscience, then a strong sense of ethics must be at the core of our purpose.

As you develop your purpose-driven career, it is also of great importance that you step out of your comfort zone. Do it early, often, and with the same vigor you devote to your career. When you take time out to learn new skills, serve on a board, volunteer, or travel and experience other cultures, you will develop the perspective you need to understand, refine and eventually fulfill your purpose.

**STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE.**

Do it early, often and with the same vigor you devote to your career. When you take time out to learn new skills, serve on a board, volunteer, or travel and experience other cultures, you will develop the perspective you need to understand, refine and eventually fulfill your purpose.

Finally, while you may already have a strong sense of purpose, don’t rest easy. Think about who you are today and who you want to become. What is the legacy you want to leave for yourself, your children, and the world they will inhabit? Always strive to become that person, and in two or three decades, you will be able to look back confidently at your 20-year-old self and know that she would be proud of you.
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 global stage—businesses, governments, nonprofits and individual—are faced with unprecedented demands for trust and authenticity.

Given that reality, what it means to be a PR professional now is profoundly different from when I started 25 years ago. We used to shape our organizations’ messaging. We used to
control the channels of communication. We used to segment audiences and direct different communications to each.

Today, none of those definitions of our work apply. The simple truth is: We are no longer in control. And that’s a good thing, because it both requires and frees us to do different work—work that is far more substantial and meaningful.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Character is the tree, reputation is the shadow.” I love that idea. And I believe it perfectly describes what our profession must become. Those of you who figure out that our work isn’t just about changing perceptions of the organization, but rather about defining its true character and helping its people live up to that—you will be building this new profession.

In many ways, the slate is blank, and you have the chance to fill it. That’s why this is a great time to be a practitioner in public relations—but only if we apply the tools and tactics that served us well in the past—while developing new ones—to a very different world, for a very different kind of profession, led by a very different kind of professional. I am confident that we will find our way. And you have the opportunity to lead us there.

"THE SLATE IS BLANK, AND YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO FILL IT."
You are stepping out on the world stage at an amazing time. But it’s a complicated time. We are undergoing a revolution in human communication. In fact, it is a revolution in the human experience.

Amidst this all-encompassing change, in this era of open architecture and extreme and instantaneous choice, how will you realize your potential? And contribute?

How will you compel the world to step back? Take notice?

How are you going to continue to build upon your communications studies? Master the art and science of communication, develop your voice and make a difference in the world?

As communicators we need to do everything we have always done—but with greater skill, with greater speed and on a greater scale.

Ideas remain at the heart of what we do. It is our narratives that empower us.

One needs to be a master story teller. We can move an individual, whole organizations, whole communities to share a way of seeing the world. That’s an awesome power and responsibility and now, more than ever, it must be handled with care.

One needs to see all 360 degrees of the media universe. All the new platforms that are out there, as well as analog.

You also must have a working knowledge of media systems in countries around the world because it’s about understanding the world-wide conversation and being a part of it.

It’s also about keeping an ear to the ground. Listening for what’s coming.
There are powerful new tools to help us do that. Big listening tools that allow us to quantify immense amounts of information and understand conversations in real time. To help us drive the relevance of the stories we tell, in real time.

The new PR practitioner also must be visual. Able to conceive an infographic as readily as a tweet. A video as readily as a byline. Not only being able to write an idea—but portray it in images.

And this is still very much a business. One must understand the world of business and what keeps it spinning.

And finally, one needs to be bold. To light up a room sometimes you need to stand up and take a risk. We need to support the most adventurous young thinkers among us. Those who bring a richness of perspective. Those of diverse backgrounds, experiences, cultures, religions, languages.

There is one more thing. Something of supreme importance. Character counts. It’s about integrity.

In this constantly morphing landscape, a strong sense of integrity must be the core value of the work.

We are in a high-speed, high-stakes dialogue and the essential values in which we have always grounded our work are more important than ever. This is the clear path to continued, sustainable success for our great profession.

So as you consider this moment, as you work to define the future of communications and your place in it, make this commitment: Do it the right way for yourself, your generation, our profession and the commonweal.

We look to you.

“IDEAS REMAIN AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO.
It is our narratives that empower us.”
So you want to make a difference! There’s no reason why you can’t. The opportunities are enormous—and increasing daily. They range from helping community groups to influencing behavior worldwide. The greatest opportunities are for those who seek a mission, not a job. They will have a career that is always challenging, never dull and constantly changing—a recipe for an exciting and rewarding life. Are you ready for such a challenge? Do you have a passion to succeed?

A good place to start is mastering the many communication tools available today—both written and verbal. As media proliferate, the demand for original thinking and material grows in quantity and value. Knowing a subject and having something creative to say is essential. (Many can describe problems; few can offer realistic solutions.) Seeing something from a different perspective and providing a fresh viewpoint that others understand distinguishes a person as exceptional. It’s not necessary to be a genius—just enthusiastic.

There are many good role models.

Modern persuasive communications can be traced to the 1760s when Sam Adams and a small group of inflamed revolutionaries initiated a wave of public discontent that ultimately led to the American colonies independence. They were aided in 1776 by the writings of Thomas Paine in his persuasive *Common Sense*, which further incited a dissatisfied public to revolt against the establishment. In the inspiring Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson eloquently set forth the precepts of individual freedom and democracy. The Federalist papers authors—James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay—laid the groundwork for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution in 1789. Never underestimate the power of an aroused minority.
Opinion forming communication continues to play an important role in shaping the course of history. There are:

- More communication tools than ever (thanks to the ubiquitous internet);
- More people seeking knowledge (informed and uninformed);
- More leaders (of all kinds) who understand the capabilities and value of persuasive communications.

But as Arthur Page, founder of corporate public relations, declared, “Prove it with action.” Public perceptions are determined 90 percent by what is done, 10 percent by what is said. Individual success depends first and foremost on developing a reputation for being truthful, accurate and dependable. The CEO of one of America’s largest technology companies told me the best advice he ever received came from an uncle who advised, “Never lie. You’re not smart enough. Liars never overcome their negative reputation.” Follow your moral compass. Do the right thing. Always.

The CEO of a global company for whom people clamor to work recommended, “Treat others with respect. Don’t check your personal values at the door.” For those interested in long-term success, the golden rule never fails.

Success also depends on looking at the perimeter 360 degrees around you (or the organization). As Scottish poet Robert Burns implored, “O wad some Power the giftie gie us to see oursels as ithers see us!” Know what your boss’s boss (at any level) thinks. Good research eliminates surprises. Advertising guru David Ogilvy explained, “Too often research is used like a drunkard uses a lamppost: for support, not illumination.” Learn from failures (unavoidable unless you never try something new).

Those who are articulate and persuasive can make a difference—and have a rewarding life in the process. But in the end nothing will change if you don’t have energy, passion and enjoy making things happen.

SEEING SOMETHING FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE AND PROVIDING A FRESH VIEWPOINT THAT OTHERS UNDERSTAND DISTINGUISHES A PERSON AS EXCEPTIONAL.

It’s not necessary to be a genius—just enthusiastic.

*Legend is deceased.*
When I started APCO Worldwide 30 years ago, I had little more than a vision and the courage to pursue it. Nothing quite like APCO had ever really existed before, and starting a business from scratch is always challenging regardless. Over the years, APCO grew from one small Washington, D.C., office to a global company with more than 30 offices, more than 700 employees and representing more than 40 nationalities in major cities across Europe, North America, Middle East and Asia. In most of these markets we grew organically, and my guiding philosophy has always been to look for the smartest people in each market we entered.

Confucius, one of China’s notable thinkers and philosophers, famously said that true wisdom is knowing what you don’t know. I took this on as my guiding principle and throughout my career tried to surround myself with clever people with diverse skill sets and experience... always listening and learning from those around me.

One of the most important lessons I’ve learned along the way is the necessity to challenge convention; to look ahead and never settle for the expected. It’s a guiding principle for me personally and the foundation of our firm. Challenging convention isn’t merely choosing a different path than your competitors. It is rooted in the strategic counsel of smart colleagues, the wisdom of knowing what is possible and the experience of having been there before. It can also mean taking the unconventional path, which is often unforged, to get to an even greater destination or result.

With experience, we become more comfortable with who we are and what we’ve accomplished. My generation has learned a lot and through our successes and failures. And by being more collegial and candid with the next generation, we can encourage them to make
the best choices for themselves, and in the end, produce the greatest generation of leaders the world has seen.

Providing and receiving counsel doesn’t have to be a formal process, and it doesn’t have to happen in regularly scheduled times or with formal conversations. One simple piece of advice is to listen more and talk less. Any opportunity you have to engage with others in your field is an opportunity to build a knowledge base from which to grow. Wisdom, like experience, is gained over time.

Alan Kay, one of America’s foremost computer scientists and brilliant minds, coined the phrase, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

And so we must all meet the challenges constantly posed by the globalizing and changing markets and opportunities by refining our message and sharpening our focus. Challenge yourselves to think smarter, be more creative and never be afraid to seek the counsel of everyone on your journey; from the newest intern to those who have reached the highest levels of success in your field. Good ideas come from anywhere, in any setting. Never be afraid to ask for guidance.

The ladder of success will not be straight, and the path will never be linear. Mistakes will be made and opportunities will be lost, but the wisdom attained and experience gained will help navigate with confidence and clarity the road ahead.

WISDOM, LIKE EXPERIENCE, IS GAINED OVER TIME.
The most polished skills, strategies and tactics are not enough to carry you from the role of practitioner to that of a trusted counselor. A solid knowledge of your corporation’s—or your client’s—business, good judgment born of experience and a broad understanding of public opinion and trends will bring authority to your advice. But you’ll never know how central integrity is until you’ve been through a few crises. And that may be too late (Virtually all reputation crises end up being tests of character and integrity).

Our business is crammed with pressures to subtly shade the truth—whether to tell powerful executives what they want to hear...or to deny that we live in a transparent society and agree that potentially damaging facts can remain hidden...or to hype a brand until the marketing bears little resemblance to its real capabilities. Avoiding the details of complicated financial transactions...managing phony grassroots support groups...starting rumors on web sites...paid word of mouth...it’s easy to just “go along.” Then, when big trouble hits (sooner or later it always does) and it’s time to tell the truth, tell it fast and take accountability for what went wrong. There’s no time to build credibility and trust with customers, the media—or your client.

Whoever you are counseling, when things get tough it will become critical that you have a history of consistently telling him or her the truth. What does it take to build that kind of close, trusting relationship?

- Learn the client’s business. Really. What’s the actual source of its success? What is the essence of the brand? What are the unspoken rules that drive the culture? Who are your allies on the business team? How relevant is your input?
- Listen deeply to all kinds of audiences—through all kinds of media—so you bring a convincing, uniquely “outside” perspective to the table. Then add big-picture analysis that helps put business decisions into a sound context.
• Leave your personal agenda, fancy models and formula solutions at home. Bring options that can lead to better and workable solutions for the challenge at hand.
• Don’t be intimidated. Always remember our job is to help the client do the right thing, not just communicate what he’s doing. And that takes guts, especially early in the game. You may be the only one in the room who isn’t ready to go with the flow. But don’t our jobs train us to question facile or backward-looking assumptions...to bring to the table voices that reflect the world the way it is, not the way we wish it were? Aren’t our skills all about engaging productively with people who don’t agree with us? Aren’t we all about establishing credibility through dialogue and engagement? When it comes to issues of reputation, you may not be expected to be tough at the time...but you’re always expected to have been tough in hindsight!
• Finally, invest emotionally. It’s a lot easier to be heard when people feel you care whether they win or lose.

In short, the path to becoming a respected counselor is to be competent, be open to new ideas, be honest and, above all, be true to yourself.

“ALWAYS REMEMBER OUR JOB IS TO HELP THE CLIENT DO THE RIGHT THING, NOT JUST COMMUNICATE WHAT HE’S DOING.

And that takes guts, especially early in the game. You may be the only one in the room who isn’t ready to go with the flow.”

*Legend is deceased.*
My parents taught me that real success in life comes from finding what you love and giving your whole self to it. Start your career by running to something. Pick the path that makes your heart sing, and then play on your strengths and backfill your weaknesses.

Here are some principles I use to lead my life and lead Gagen MacDonald:

Be where you need to be, and only you really know where that is.

There’s so much hand-wringing over worrying about what other people think. If you’re clear, they’ll be clear, and they’ll get behind you. Because when you put your intent out into the universe, the universe conspires to make it happen.

I studied Russian, tutored math and science, had jobs in communication, HR and marine transportation. For the last 19 years, I’ve run a management consulting firm, and I’d be hard pressed to say which of those experiences best prepared me. Life isn’t additive; it’s cumulative.

The most powerful story you’ll ever tell is the one you tell yourself.

Make it powerful. What we focus on manifests itself in every decision we make, so affirm the positive. Never tell yourself that you can’t, or that it’s too difficult. Neuroscience has taught us that we each have the power to rewire our brain. Rewire your lights to be set on bright!

What you seek to know is more important than what you think you know.

Wisdom is knowing what you don’t know, and being curious enough to welcome those who
may know more. We need to be story-tellers, data analysts, synthesizers and leaders. When you
don’t know how to do something, it’s exactly what you should run toward to learn everything
you can.

There is no “right answer,” so the real power is in asking the right questions. There are the things
we think, and the things we know. Opportunity lies in knowing the difference.

“There is no ‘right answer,’ so the real power is in asking the right questions.
There are the things we think and the things we know.
Opportunity lies in knowing the difference.”

When in doubt, do the loving thing.

To love yourself, you need to be a loving person. Everything else is just a distraction that comes
from fear or self-doubt. It takes courage to love and to be loved. Love isn’t just a noun, it’s a verb.

If you’re looking for inspiration, read Mother Teresa’s poem, “Do it Anyway.” If you’re not looking
for inspiration, do it anyway.

Ground everything in gratitude.

There’s been an amazing amount of research on happiness. It all points to the same thing.
Happiness doesn’t come from one’s circumstances, but from how one chooses to view them. My
brother taught me an amazing insight. Simply reframing something from “I have to do this” to “I
get to do this,” changes everything. Try it right now by saying to yourself “I get to…”

Lucky you!
remember vividly a time several years ago, when I was in a leadership training program for FedEx executives. We were out in Logan, Utah at a mountain retreat, exploring both the majestic mountains and the inner peaks and valleys of our personal leadership styles. As part of a high ropes course we had to ascend a telephone poll, climb on to a swiveling metal disc screwed to the top of the pole, stand upright and then leap to a trapeze bar a few feet away. It was called the “pucker” pole for fairly obvious reasons. I managed to get to the top, make it on the disc, steady myself and make the leap to the trapeze. I wasn’t able to hang on to the bar, but thankfully I was on a belaying line and was safely lowered to the ground. It was a hair-raising experience, back when I still had enough hair to raise.

In the end, it didn’t matter whether or not you were able to hold on to the trapeze; most of the participants did not. What mattered was your willingness to take the leap. It is a lesson that has stayed with me through the years. I have taken many leaps, some much scarier than the pucker pole, and I couldn’t always depend on someone holding the belaying line to keep me from falling. But each time I learned something about the challenge and about myself.

Each semester when I face a new group of students, I share with them a fact about myself that I feel they should know. On paper, I would not have qualified for any position that I have held in a career that now spans almost 40 years, including my current position as an Executive-in-Residence.

At each critical juncture in my career, when I have been offered an opportunity to take a risk, to try something new, to go beyond my comfort zone, I have done so. And to this day I have no regrets about any of these decisions, no matter how daunting, even foolhardy, they seemed at the time.
That is my advice to all who are preparing to enter the communications profession. Go beyond your fears. Take a chance. Make yourself uncomfortable. If you stay in a comfortable place your entire career, you will never know just how far you can go.

Don’t get me wrong. I’ve never attempted to fly a plane, or perform brain surgery, or play professional baseball. We all have limits, and I am keenly aware of my own. What I’m suggesting is to push the boundaries of your skills, your education, your preparation and your personality to try and reach your ultimate potential. If you never take a chance, you will never know just how far you can go.

When I talk to peers and colleagues in the communications profession, a common theme emerges: Most of us have not had a straight-line career. We have navigated a circuitous and sometimes illogical career path that has at times taken us in a direction that didn’t make sense. But in the end, we learned from each of these twists and turns and they added up to a diverse range of experiences that made us who we are, and helped us achieve things we never imagined were possible.

That is my challenge to you. Reach high and reach often, even when it seems more than a little scary. You may need a Band-Aid now and then, but in the long run, the scratches will lead to better stories and better careers.

“GO BEYOND YOUR FEARS. TAKE A CHANCE. MAKE YOURSELF UNCOMFORTABLE. If you stay in a comfortable place your entire career, you will never know just how far you can go.”
My perspectives of the field of public relations are rooted primarily in service to public corporations. Fundamental to success in serving the public interests of any organization is a dedication to understanding and applying the fundamental skills of communication as though the very existence of your organization depended upon it. Sounds so obvious that it is hardly worth saying, doesn’t it?

Before I go further, I ask you to consider this sage advice from Arthur W. Page, a great pioneer in public relations. He said, “All business in a democratic society begins with public permission and exists by public approval.” I recommend applying this fact in respect to the importance of communications in every facet of an organization. Think also of the implications to constituencies of organizations (e.g., employees, customers, shareowners and suppliers) whose management has the accountability for building and maintaining public trust. At the core of earning public trust is strong, consistent communications management from within. Those of us in this field must be prepared to supply the vision, leadership and professional ingredients to meet this challenge.

Today, implications of the term “public corporation” are more demanding than ever. Virtually every issue confronting corporate management is laced with public relations considerations. Responses to these issues, in most cases, involve global publics and, as a result, varied social, economic and cultural interpretations of your message. The complexities of ensuring that your public intentions are favorably received have grown exponentially as have the methods and speed of disseminating information. From my view, the skills of communication haven’t changed much over time. However, competing in the global marketplace poses challenges that were incomprehensible only a few years ago.
The world in which we trade and communicate has undergone immense change, but there remains a somewhat naïve attitude among management leaders about the significance of professional communications in the management structure. Are we publicity agents...reputation gurus...advertising specialists...crisis responders...or does our appropriate accountability span all of these as the organization's senior public policy official? Along with other senior members of the executive group, we must earn the position as solid, sensible, knowledgeable executives who participate fully at the inner circle of management. Since my retirement 10 years ago, I have witnessed numerous examples of public, private, government and non-profit organization catastrophes where assignment of public accountabilities was sadly lacking and, quite possibly, primarily responsible for those failures.

Of course, those with ambitions to practice public communications at the highest levels must prepare themselves. The fundamentals are critical to success in any field. Clear, concise and credible communications skills are essential personal attributes for leadership in public relations.

Understanding business principles is basic to participating in the organization's management process. Seeking and listening to mentors on any subject that's conceivably helpful in building steps to a successful career path is a sign of good judgment. Common sense and hard work are useful frostings on the cake.

"Seeking and listening to mentors on any subject that's conceivably helpful in building steps to a successful career path is a sign of good judgment."

COMMON SENSE AND HARD WORK ARE USEFUL FROSTINGS ON THE CAKE.

The future will undoubtedly provide unimaginable challenges and opportunities for public relations executives. The speed with which information moves is a double-edged sword. It will be your measure of success to accurately interpret the needs, timing and content for communications to the marketplace. Arthur W. Page's admonition to "manage for tomorrow" has never been more relevant.
One of the first things I ask every student who tells me they want to go into public relations is, “Do you have the personality for PR?” In this light, what does it take to be successful at public relations? Here’s my top 10 characteristics for success:

- **Be Creative.** In a competitive media marketplace, tried and true is the right way to go for crisis communication and investor relations. The practitioner who can see new opportunities and approaches will be the leader instead of the follower.

- **Be Curious.** Questioning how things work and why they’re done that way will serve you well. It helps to understand the inner workings to determine how to do it better, or how to deliver a stronger message that resonates with your objective.

- **Be Competitive.** Shy and retiring won’t get you into the best position to promote your client and brand. In business, there are limited opportunities to position yourself within the marketplace, and, unless you understand and are willing to compete, you’re missing out. If you aren’t providing the opportunities, marketing is more than happy to step up and deliver the message.

- **Be a Storyteller.** People remember the facts better and react more favorably to a story than to lists. The human element of any issue also is more compelling than the financial. Focus your public relations on the story, and, more often than not, you’ll find success.

- **Build a Network.** A public relations professional is only as good as his or her contacts—media, vendors and peers. Sitting in an office won’t get you where you need to be if you want to impact your business. Reach out, find a mentor and become a part of the community, the industry and the profession. Every person you meet provides unique experiences and additional expertise. Remember, too, that giving brings greater returns, so you should always be looking to help others before you can expect them to help you.
• **Be a Complete Communicator.** While it’s widely accepted that writing is an essential skill, don’t underestimate the value of being a good speaker and using visuals/pictures to convey your message. Use every tool in your toolkit to communicate.

• **Put Ethics First.** Protect your reputation, which is the biggest asset any professional has. Adhering to the highest ethical standards will have better returns on your career than any educational degree or client campaign. Without it, you may no longer be in business.

• **Look/Listen/Learn.** Much of what makes a successful practitioner is the ability to evaluate interactions and relationships to identify what’s not being said. Many times it’s who is not talking and why, or who is not interacting with whom and why, that makes the difference. To manage relationships and affect change, the biggest job is sometimes the research and background to explain how and why a problem has arisen. Otherwise, you run the risk of “misdiagnosing” the problem.

• **Avoid Ethnocentricity.** Viewing other cultures or interactions from the perspective of your own heritage limits the diversity of ideas and opinions that elevate our ability to better communicate and enhance change. Diversity is not about representation, but more about understanding how each of us filters and interprets based upon our own experiences and values. By attempting to limit judgment and allow for understanding alternative perceptions and preferences, a practitioner can better serve a company or client and communicate more effectively.

• **Embrace Change.** Become a change agent, supporting and understanding the challenges of change within an organization. Most people are uncomfortable with change, but our profession is based on helping people change actions, attitudes, opinions or beliefs. In this rapidly changing marketplace, the one leading the change will be the true public relations professional.

> **PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION, WHICH IS THE BIGGEST ASSET ANY PROFESSIONAL HAS.**

Adhering to the highest ethical standards will have better returns on your career than any educational degree or client campaign.

Without it, you may no longer be in business.

> [Signature]

Gary McCormick
APR, Fellow PrSA
Principal, GMc Communications
Two thousand six was a very good year. Becoming the first woman of color to win the coveted Gold Anvil Award was a defining moment for me personally and professionally. I have been fortunate to practice this craft for almost 30 years in a variety of organizations. I have educated and mentored practitioners, contributed to the body of knowledge and created a new discipline that helped practitioners become proficient in communicating with multicultural audiences.

What I’ve learned over the years is that this profession challenges each of us to be prepared to chance the unconventional; to be as comfortable with uncertainty as we are with change; to master the art of good storytelling; and to be trustworthy, passionate, forward-thinking visionaries.

I’ve also learned that success comes from knowing the answer to the question, “What is your deepest fear?” Author Marianne Williamson’s eloquent words serve as a mantra for all of us high-achievers who view the word “no” as an incentive to be more creative:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

I offer these words of wisdom to educate, energize and empower the next generation of public relations practitioners to be fearless. Those of us who have come before you have had to push open doors and envelopes, challenge the status quo, take calculated risks and continue to be outspoken advocates for this profession. We have savored the accolades, borne the criticism and given our time and talent to help create a profession that values itself and those who
practice it ethically. The following recommendations have inspired me and continue to keep me energized. Perhaps they’ll work for you as well.

- Every problem can be solved with effective public relations.
- Learn how money is made and spent in the world.
- Lead by example. You either stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.
- Learn how to separate being liked from being respected.
- Develop your own vision statement, develop a plan and work that plan.
- Become your own brand and let it guide you to personal success.
- Find your passion in this profession and then do what you enjoy throughout your career.
- Learn how to communicate directly and professionally.
- Stay abreast of the new technology.
- Become proficient at writing for non-captive audiences.
- Read, read and read some more. A well-read person is a great conversationalist.
- Make a commitment to lifelong learning today: You can’t change behavior if you don’t understand it.
- Not measuring is not an option. Numbers are our friends.
- Mentors are a necessity throughout one’s career. Develop relationships with colleagues at various stages in their careers. You’ll be surprised what you can learn from their mistakes and successes.
- Approach diversity as an opportunity, not a problem.
- Keep your own counsel, but never be afraid or ashamed to ask for help.
- Always give back to the profession by using your talent and experience to help others.
- Join a professional association such as PRSA and become involved.
- Don’t take yourself seriously—take your work seriously.
- If you have a sense of humor, great. If you don’t, find one quickly. You’ll need it if you want to survive in this profession.

Your career journey in public relations will be full of surprises. There will be great successes and perhaps a few failures. No matter what lies ahead, stand tall, hold your head up and don’t be afraid!

“LEARN HOW TO SEPARATE BEING LIKED FROM BEING RESPECTED.”
When I graduated from college, I was ready to tackle the world but with no clear idea of what was in store for me. It was probably just as well since it turned out to be quite a ride. During my career in public relations, I have worked for four global companies, 13 CEO’s and a major agency, plus my own family agency. I have traveled to most of the major countries in the world and worked on just about every kind of business situation you can imagine.

My advice for anyone contemplating a public relations career is to approach it with eyes and mind wide open, be accepting of change, never fear challenges and, along the way, try to enjoy every minute of what can be a highly satisfying career choice.

To achieve success in this highly competitive field—and in the world of corporate communications that means gaining a seat at the policy-making table of senior management—you have to develop skills that go well beyond the basic public relations capabilities that you will use as you climb the management ladder.

Your focus has to be on the business you are serving. That requires a deep understanding of the company, its cultures and its values. You also need to know the dynamics of the business, its strategies and goals and, above all, the expectation of the company’s leadership.

In addition, you have to be an ambassador to the larger world. Perhaps more than any other executive besides the CEO, the chief public relations officer must know what is going on inside and outside the organization and how the company’s plans and actions relate to its various publics. That is an increasingly tough job because in the 24/7 news world we live in today, and
the multiple information sources that are available to everyone, there are no secrets and no way to avoid public criticism if your actions don’t meet with public approval.

It is the chief public relations officer’s job to see that the perspective he or she has developed about the business and its publics is heard, understood and heeded by management. In other words, bring awareness and objectivity about what is happening in the world-at-large to the table and in doing so inject credible, usable information into the decision-making process. As you might expect, it’s not always a comfortable role to play. But if you have earned the respect of your peers and developed credibility in everything you do, you will more often than not be listened to.

MY ADVICE FOR ANYONE CONTEMPLATING A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAREER IS TO APPROACH IT WITH EYES AND MIND WIDE OPEN, BE ACCEPTING OF CHANGE, NEVER FEAR CHALLENGES AND, ALONG THE WAY, TRY TO ENJOY EVERY MINUTE OF WHAT CAN BE A HIGHLY SATISFYING CAREER CHOICE.

One of the most challenging aspects of today’s public relations job has been the development of the global marketplace. It has changed both the way that corporations do business and the way we must practice public relations. We now must interact with globally connected media and with different cultures that view the world from different perspectives. More than ever before, corporate PR professionals must be good social scientists as well as good social counselors. It’s a challenge we should all welcome. It’s what makes us better public relations professionals.
In the years since the establishment of PRSSA, the practice of public relations has certainly come of age, especially in terms of the acceptance of this critical skill set by well-managed companies and institutions. This is good news for anyone considering this challenging and rewarding career field.

Our profession has developed to the point where another significant advance should be considered through the identification and articulation of a set of shared values and responsibilities—a universal statement of beliefs (beyond a code of ethics)—that would help to define the true character of public relations for both those who seek our services, and for those who choose this professional career path.

What might be some shared values and responsibilities that our profession should own?

The first should probably be about the “publics” or audiences—both internal and external—with whom we communicate, and the importance we place on telling the truth. We need to say that we value audiences that are well informed about our organizations or clients, and not just partly informed. Transparency would be a good value to own.

A second core value would be about how we see our responsibilities to clients. We’re accused of using “spin,” of always putting our clients first and the best face on events. In reality, what we strive to be are honest advocates for the positions taken by our companies or clients and the objectives they seek to pursue. “Honest advocacy,” I believe, requires that we maintain the highest personal integrity and a position of independence and objectivity within our own organizations—the level of independence that allows us to counsel freely on the formation of organizational policy and then insist on organizational behavior that is consistent with the
public positions we have taken. It’s time to say this is what we value, and that we’re taking on this responsibility.

A third value would be around freedom of expression and the news media—traditional media and new media. After all, in the classic definition of public relations, we regard the media as gatekeepers—the third party—through which we seek to achieve credibility for the messages we direct at our audiences. Certainly we value and respect high journalistic standards such as fairness and balance. We should say so. But maybe we also need to say that we believe in freedom of expression and especially freedom of the press as the foundation of society.

A fourth core value relates to our own profession. We have a responsibility to advance understanding of the legitimacy of our function, what we value, the principles that guide our practice and the ethical standards we embrace. As well, we need to exhibit a personal commitment to the highest standards of individual character and integrity—standards that we expect from each other and anyone who seeks to take up this practice.

I believe the public relations profession has reached the stage in its development where it has the opportunity to set itself apart, to clarify its values, roles and responsibilities and to achieve a singular character that is both palpable and enduring.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ADVANCE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEGITIMACY OF OUR FUNCTION, WHAT WE VALUE, THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR PRACTICE AND THE ETHICAL STANDARDS WE EMBRACE.

As well, we need to exhibit a personal commitment to the highest standards of individual character and integrity—standards that we expect from each other and anyone who seeks to take up this practice.
A profession must have a basic, defining social purpose. Medicine has health. Law has order. And public relations has harmony. I heard that statement at a Public Relations Society of America conference many years ago, and it’s been at the root of many of my professional experiences since then—some of which I’ve participated in, others I’ve observed with great interest.

Now, some will say that harmony is a naïve or arrogant goal for our profession. To them, I say think again. Harmony, after all, comes in many sizes. In today’s vernacular it’s “scalable” (but in reverse). And it comes in many forms—joining marketer to customer, shareholder to company directors, management to employees, corporation to society and, yes, a nation to the global community.

If harmony, or something very much like it—mutual understanding, common interest, cooperation or a transaction—is our ultimate calling, we’re in an enviable position to help our organizations achieve it. Because effective public relations operates at the interface of the organization and society. That means gathering and interpreting ever-changing public expectations and demands, influencing policy and performance and articulating the organization’s decisions and offerings.

That may sound grandiose at the entry-level when you’re writing a new product release or staffing a special event. It’s not. Because even at that level and in those assignments, the task is to explore and develop common interests.

Furthermore, in public relations we have a powerful weapon in this task: language. Think about playwright Tom Stoppard’s profound observation about the potential impact of words: “Words
are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little…”

Nudge the world a little. How’s that for a life’s work? Nudge it toward what? Obviously, toward harmony that contributes to an improved quality of life and a higher standard of living. And make no mistake, every little “nudge” in that direction—a new product or service, public policy in the common interest or simply empathetic dialogue—can make an incremental contribution.

You will, of course, encounter cynics. Some will say “The world is going to hell in a hand basket.” The temptation is to despair; terrorism, regional wars, economic inequality, disease and the threat of ecological disaster all point in that direction.

“If harmony, or something very much like it—mutual understanding, common interest, cooperation or a transaction—is our ultimate calling, we’re in an enviable position to help our organizations achieve it.”

But the counter-argument is powerful. Author Robert Wright has given us perhaps the most thoughtful analysis of the long upward arrow of human history. He tells us that despite many setbacks, “It is hard, after pondering the full sweep of history, to resist the conclusion that—in some important ways, at least—the world now stands at its moral zenith to date.”

And Wright poses this seminal question: “Given the centrality of information technology…is it possible that we are passing through a true threshold, a change as basic as the transition from hunter-gatherer village to chiefdom, from chiefdom to ancient state?”

This may well be the world that my generation is leaving for you, public relations students. Clearly, today’s members of PRSSA will be practicing public relations in a very changed world in the decades ahead. If you’re to be successful in that ever-changing world, you must not shrink from such “big think” questions.

With such exciting prospects for our profession, I can’t help but wish I were starting all over again in public relations.

[Signature]
You, my fellow professionals, you are starting your career with a sound knowledge base and possess technical communications skills far surpassing mine. These are my thoughts for your consideration and, in some cases, action:

- Hold to the belief that public relations is an honorable profession essential to the democratic process. Ground yourself in the Code of Ethics, develop counseling skills and keep in touch with your professors about behavioral research you can use.
- Public relations is a behavioral science; success is measured on how well our strategy achieves its goals: to change, to maintain, to stop or to prevent certain actions.
- Our core mission is to build mutually satisfying relationships that create a bank of trust in both good and bad times. Know the paradigm for measuring trust.
- Public relations is both an expanding universe and a hybrid discipline. Thinking about a master’s degree in communications or business? Consider a minor in organizational development, social psychology or modern anthropology.
- You are expert in using the current technical communication tools. But iPhones are just tools; they will change. The heart of the profession is embedding your action plan in sound communications theory.
- The key to the leadership group is your ability to demonstrate a problem-solving approach helpful to managers in legal, financial, personnel, planning or production. But first listen to learn how they see their problems.
- Think carefully about the torrent of social media: Does it build personal relationships that equal the power of getting to know an individual over a cup of coffee? Maybe you can triple task, but solving problems strategically requires focused thought. My subconscious works well overnight when the chatter has subsided.
• The symbols of cultural history and the cadences of poetry are the keys to touching the human heart. These are the emotional triggers that influence the decisions we make.

• Know what’s going on in our global village. Read The Wall Street Journal, or The Economist or listen to NPR. No issue is an island: Solving it requires putting it in a larger environment of past, present and future.

• Find a way to talk quietly to those holding different views within or without your organization. When they know you understand their values, you may be surprised to find some common ground.

“PUBLIC RELATIONS IS A BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE; SUCCESS IS MEASURED ON HOW WELL OUR STRATEGY ACHIEVES ITS GOALS: TO CHANGE, TO MAINTAIN, TO STOP OR TO PREVENT CERTAIN ACTIONS.”

• It is commonplace to attribute institutional woes to “lack of communication.” Stakeholders may retort, “Your actions speak so loudly we cannot hear a word you’re saying.”

• I asked Senator George Mitchell—one of my heroes—how he managed to help the Sinn Fein and the Northern Irish leaders find common ground for peacemaking after centuries of bitter, bloody hostility. He said, “I did a lot of listening.” We know a great deal about getting out our message. How much do we understand about the art and the power of listening?

• Join PRSA; it’s a ready-made network. With your first paycheck start giving back by sending $25 to the PRSSA scholarship fund, c/o of the PRSA Foundation.
A career in public relations wasn’t part of my master plan. I started out in my “dream job” as a newspaper reporter. My transition from reporting to public relations was mostly accidental—I’d moved to a new city and the best offer I received was in public relations.

That job launched me on a lifelong profession that is always challenging, stimulating and, yes, fun. Public relations offers us the potential to make a positive difference—in our organizations, our community, our world.

While the practice of public relations has undergone significant change over the decades, the essence of what I love about this field remains the same. Public relations people focus on solutions—we see problems as opportunities to make things better.

As you prepare for a career in public relations today, you have unprecedented opportunities to do work that is strategic, creative and impactful. New technology and tools have helped us achieve results in ways previously unimagined. We communicate faster, reach bigger and more diverse audiences, and target those audiences better. We’ve become the controllers of our content and distributors of our messages. At the same time, developing an effective strategy, based on research and understanding, remains at the core of our craft. Trust is still essential to building relationships—in person and online. Social media may offer new ways to reach out, but as a new media format it succeeds or fails by the same standards as any other form of media—it must be transparent, it must offer unique information, and it must be responsive.

You are entering a truly global profession. Some of my most exciting assignments in recent years have involved working with clients in such cultures as India and China. I’ve learned that some basic tenets apply to effective communication around the world: You must know and understand your audiences, whether they’re in Mumbai or a Chicago suburb. People value
personal contact and they want specific, not generic, messages that address their needs. Authenticity and transparency are critical.

Be sure to take advantage of every international opportunity that presents itself, from study and work abroad to learning new languages. Learn the language of business, too—become familiar with sound business principles and practices so you provide greater value.

Approach each new project with a strategic point of view. Ask why, not how, and use that knowledge. The best professionals in our business begin with research and pay attention to what it tells them—even if it runs counter to their original ideas.

Finally, as you progress throughout your career, recognize the importance of cooperation and collaboration, and of giving back. The fact is, no one succeeds alone. We each owe others for what we accomplish, and we benefit from being part of a team that is stronger and smarter than its individual parts. We also have a responsibility to give back to our profession—through volunteer work, through mentoring and through showing our commitment to the ethical practice of public relations in our daily lives.

"Approach each new project with a strategic point of view. Ask why, not how, and use that knowledge. The best professionals in our business begin with research and pay attention to what it tells them—even if it runs counter to their original ideas."
Today’s aspiring public relations students and young professionals have a running start on their careers: formal study in the discipline and early commitment to the profession. Most have also had internships, mentoring by educators and practitioners, leadership experience and connections through PRSSA and multicultural and global perspectives.

Those opportunities weren’t there for most of my generation. We arrived from other studies, other occupations—primarily journalism. (This history/political science major had never heard of public relations!) The customary qualification: writing. The rest we learned by the seat of our pants or skirts—growing with the field as it evolved from one-way communication, publicity and event production to a management function charged with building reputation and relationships, dedicated to truth and listening; enlightened by research; disciplined by corporate objectives; increasingly challenged by societal issues.

So what lessons learned would have currency if I were starting all over again today? Among the many I remember and value:

- **Ethics and Integrity.** They are not simply a professional “code” to begin observing on the job. They are one’s here-and-now character and compass—in today’s classrooms, in daily relationships and behavior throughout a lifetime.
- **Mentoring.** In every corner of career and life, you’ll nurture and benefit from mentors. But also—begin now to become a mentor—upperclassmen to younger students, new alumni to classrooms and interns. From wherever you stand today, reach out a caring, responsible hand.
- **Knowing the Business.**—of clients/employers, for-profit and not-for-profit. How it works; its products or services; its objectives; its financials; its constituencies, competition and corporate culture.

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**Betsy Plank* APR, Fellow PRSA**
Principal, Betsy Plank Public Relations

• Computer Miracles. Their wonders and resources are tools for a professional’s command, not captivity. They never replace face-to-face encounters fundamental to public relations practice. At least not so long as volatile, stubborn and complex human beings are around!

• Community Service. Beyond the daily desk, volunteering hones leadership skills, develops new contacts and insights, helps solve community problems. It’s also good for the soul.

• Passion for Reading—newspapers and periodicals, of course. But also research, history, contemporary and classical literature. (And keep re-reading the essays of Emerson and E.B. White, Betsy!)

• Professional Organizations. They provide unique opportunities to continue learning, develop leadership skills, forge collegial connections and make significant contributions to the profession’s progress and promise.

• Public Relations. Practiced at its best, it is a proud, powerful and responsible profession, essential to a democratic society in which people make daily decisions in the workplace, the marketplace, the community and the voting booth. Besides, it’s populated by many of the brightest, most creative, caring “can-do” men and women of honor, heart and humor—curiously addicted to the rigors of problem solving. Traveling in that spirited company is a great adventure!

Amen, my young colleagues. Welcome aboard the journey!

IN EVERY CORNER OF CAREER AND LIFE, YOU’LL NURTURE AND BENEFIT FROM MENTORS.

But also—begin now to become a mentor—upperclassmen to younger students, new alumni to classrooms and interns. From wherever you stand today, reach out a caring, responsible hand.

*Legend is deceased.
When you close your eyes and imagine your live five years from now, what will you see? What sounds will surround you? What will you feel? These images can serve as your internal motivation as you begin to lay the foundation for a fulfilling life and career. As a public relations professional, you will be challenged daily to embrace or create a vision, to be a subject matter expert on a variety of topics and to have the relationships and resources necessary to deliver on the promise of your personal brand. This can appear daunting and for those unprepared for the challenges ahead, it can be overwhelming.

To create balance and focus, I encourage you to invest in my four C’s which will provide a template for building a successful life and career. I only ask that you invest 20 minutes a week in these four areas so that you can realize the benefits and have the life you desire.

Invest in Your Capabilities

As you begin to define your personal brand, consider what skills, abilities and behaviors align with your vision for yourself. Now is the perfect time to take a self-assessment survey to inform your plans for growth and development. Much like you would do for a PR strategy, perform your own personal SWOT analysis and create a plan to build on your strengths and close the gap on your challenges. Consider what resources you have in order to take advantage of the endless list of opportunities available to you. Eliminate the threats that can derail your success as you move toward your vision.

Certainly, pursuing a college degree fits nicely here and celebrating this achievement is in order. And more fitting is Alvin Toffler’s quote on embracing lifelong learning, “The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”
Invest in Your Career

Be engaged, get inspired! The internet and email allows you to network with the best in your field and industry. To begin a conversation, follow their accomplishments and reach out to them with something to say and a question to ask. Interview potential mentors and once you secure one, design the relationship to meet your needs. Join professional organizations that are relevant and that can assist in building your career.

Invest in Your Cabinet

As CEO of your brand, assemble a group of individuals to act as official advisors and to help you navigate personally and professionally. Meet regularly with them to share progress on your plan and elicit honest feedback. They can help you develop the emotional intelligence needed for success.

Invest in Your Community

Volunteering in your community, whether it is for the profession, in your neighborhood or for a national charity, connects you with humanity and reminds you of what is real and relevant. In addition, you can expand your network of friends and it can help advance your career as you develop new leadership and team-building skills. Few understand that volunteering can also help preserve your mental and physical health.

Connect with your passion for the profession you’ve chosen and think big! The rewards can be endless.

“Connect with your passion for the profession you’ve chosen and think big! The rewards can be endless.”
A good definition of public relations is “organized, ethical persuasion.” International public relations simply means you “do it someplace else.” By “someplace else,” I mean places where the audience or public is different from the persuader, where geographic, linguistic, historical, religious and other boundaries are crossed. In particular terms it means working in other societies, countries, ethnic pockets. International PR requires the persuader or PR person to have an extra skill set that includes linguistic ability, a knack for and desire to engage in cross-cultural persuasion.

In my own case, a deep interest in other people and cultures came in the form of a post card from my father, Charles Leo Reed. The dog-eared post card arrived at my boarding school in Leonardstown, Maryland from Lima, Peru, when I was in the sixth grade. Wow! That stamp was strange, the picture of the Andes exciting, and the fact that my father was there was amazing to this ten-year-old boy. My curiosity was stimulated, a feeling that exists to this day. I delved into geography and history and languages, determined to travel the world. Later I gained the opportunity to do so in the U.S. Army and in my PR career. I early decided to concentrate on international PR. What fun!

Working abroad means finding those avenues, media and programs that will be effective in persuading, for example, local employees to work hard and remain loyal; produce legislation and regulatory systems that are fair and compatible with good practice; potential tourists to visit particular places; and so on. The important concept to be learned is that people differ markedly from place to place in terms of their histories, religions, interests, values and so forth, and that to persuade such audiences one needs to have local help, a person of the local ethos.
The old slogan that the world is getting smaller no longer applies. It was spoken of the modern transportation making it possible for people to travel easily over long distances to visit formerly remote destinations. Today the world is getting bigger as greater numbers of discreet linguistic, ethnic and political groups establish separate, sometimes independent nations or entities. The membership in the United Nations, originally a few dozen nations, now has over 200 members. Persuading people in Tahiti is quite different from persuading Cape Verdians.

For future practitioners of the noble art of ethical persuasion there is a growing need and opportunity for young, well-educated, energetic university graduates with a solid foundation in liberal arts, languages, history, writing, media and, most importantly, with genuine interest in “other” people and what makes them tick. Come on in, the water’s fine, especially in Tahiti and Cape Verde!


THE IMPORTANT CONCEPT TO BE LEARNED IS THAT PEOPLE DIFFER MARKEDLY FROM PLACE TO PLACE IN TERMS OF THEIR HISTORIES, RELIGIONS, INTERESTS, VALUES AND SO FORTH, AND THAT TO PERSUADE SUCH AUDIENCES ONE NEEDS TO HAVE LOCAL HELP, A PERSON OF THE LOCAL ETHOS.

*Legend is deceased.*
I’ve always thought that the highest praise a person can be given is to be known by his peers as a “pro”—as someone who knows what to do, knows how to do it with exquisite skill and gets it done cleanly, under pressure and when it counts, without a lot of fanfare or arm waving. That’s what you in PRSSA, I hope, are on your way to becoming: professionals.

Don’t be put off by the game imagery. In a very real sense this is a game—one of the most difficult and demanding games imaginable. Its goal is to affect human behavior. It focuses on the most unpredictable and unmanageable of all subjects—the human mind and emotions. It relies for success on the most difficult of human activities—communications. It is a hard game. The stakes are high. There are winners and losers. It is exciting, challenging, demanding and, for people with the talent and drive to play it well, the best game in town.

If you’re reading this, I assume you’re one of them. If so, there are lessons from the recent past I hope you’ll keep in mind as you go about the play of the game.

Among the major lessons is that our responsibilities are broader than we once thought they were.

We’ve learned, I believe, that our organizations have a positive duty to inform. All those who are touched by our actions have a right to know what we’re doing and how it affects them. Our institutions and businesses have a responsibility to provide not just the disclosures required by law, but the clear and complete information people need to allow them to make informed decisions, in their own self interest, about our performance and our actions. Nothing less is acceptable in the world we operate in now.
But perhaps most importantly, we learned that Arthur Page was right. Page, an early AT&T executive who was a pioneer in our field, contended that, “All business in a democratic society begins with public permission and exists by public approval.” The successful corporation, he believed, had to operate in the public interest, manage for the long run and make customer satisfaction its primary goal. “The successful business must,” he said, “conduct itself in such a way that the public will give it sufficient freedom to serve effectively.”

All organizations exist and prosper only at the pleasure of the publics they serve. They earn the public’s support only by operating responsibly and acting fairly. Managements that are out raping and pillaging the countryside are going to be crucified and should be.

The way to avoid such a fate is to do the right thing... as the public defines the right thing. There is nothing really difficult involved: Provide quality products and services, sell them at fair prices, pay your people a reasonable wage and treat them with respect, don’t endanger human life or disregard the environment, pay your taxes, be honest, operate ethically. The only real impediments to such conduct are greed and arrogance. Don’t get trapped by them.

And do keep in mind one fundamentally important fact: Yours, as a public relations professional, is a singular responsibility.

What you do, when you do it right, makes a real difference. It makes a difference in what people know, think and feel. And consequently it makes a difference in how they act—on matters that affect not only the normal flow of daily life, but the quality of life in our society itself. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly, nor are your skills to be hired out in the service of interests at odds with the public weal.

Good luck.

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Doug Spong
APR, Fellow PRSA

Founder and president of Spong. Prior to creating Spong, Doug was the senior VP at Colle+McVoy. He has held key leadership positions with PRSA and the Council of Public Relations Firms. Doug has been awarded a number of the industry’s highest individual honors, including the PRSA Gold Anvil for lifetime achievement and the SABRE Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement from the Holmes Group among others.

As an incoming college freshman, I simply wanted to write for a living. By the time I graduated, I chose to make the news that others reported versus report the news that others made.

Fast forward 30-some years. It’s funny what you learn from experience in this profession. For the most part, experience is an asset. However, if there’s one bit of advice to offer, it’s this: Experience can be the enemy of change.

Experience can be a liability as you seek to identify, understand and apply the merits of change to your practice of PR.

Cable TV, satellite TV, fax machines, personal computers, the Internet and all channels social were invented since I earned my undergraduate degree in 1981. Think I could predict all this change? Not a chance. Past experience offered little-to-no guidance in navigating the evolving world and, specifically, the PR profession.

You don’t need to be a futurist or trends forecaster to reap the rewards of change. You need three things to succeed no matter what the future of PR and the broader world brings to your lap:

- **Courage** to set aside past experience and reinvent yourself from time to time. The fact is, the more you learn in life, the less you will understand. The fact is that employers and clients value expertise over experience. Don’t confuse the two. It’s one thing to accumulate experience over time. It’s another thing to develop the expertise to know what to do with that experience. Experience alone gets you only so far in your career.
Ideas are worth a fortune in the creative economy. Today, ideas are the currency accepted worldwide. Employers and clients alike are willing to pay more for PR practitioners who bring fresh thinking and innovative solutions rather than simply relying on “wash, rinse and repeat” ideas that we often refer to as best practices. Don’t get me wrong; it’s great to see what others are doing and who is raising the bar. But if your goal is to do as well as everyone else, you’re never going to have an original idea. You’re never going to innovate new ways of doing things. You’ll be ill prepared to reinvent your own skills and expertise to remain relevant in an ever-changing future.

Inspiration to make the world around you a better place. By having the courage to reinvent yourself and create ideas that solve problems and achieve organizational goals, you will inspire a better world around you in new and different ways. The future practice of PR increasingly requires tapping the emotional appeal found within the heart and soul of your target stakeholder. Real change in public opinion and, more importantly, behavior demands real commitment from diverse audiences. PR is about inspiring economic, social and political change more than simply informing audiences and seeking permission to conduct your business.

Since you’re going to spend the majority of your waking hours at work, you’d better choose your career wisely. I’m fortunate that I discovered the profession of PR where I can make news by bending pop culture, shaping public opinion and building a better world around me.

“Experience can be the enemy of change.”
One of the great things about public relations is that you are working at the interface... with everyone and everything that can substantially impact the outcome of an organization. Sometimes we are a contributor, and sometimes we are the director of the outcome... it's where we work and what we do. The Chicago Police have a slogan on their shoulder patches: “We serve and protect.” Well, ours should say, “We protect and produce.” In public relations it is all about the success of the enterprise, the ability of the organization to meet its goals, accomplish its plans and meet the measurements consistent with its mission.

It is vital you know how your organization works... to understand the financials... understand what determines success and where you can produce or protect. We are responsible, first, for our reputation, for the trust all the stakeholders put in our organization. Reputation is the ante; without watching over it, your ability to do more is in jeopardy. It has everything to do with how you see your job, your responsibility, your space and your ability to deliver on an ambitious view of your profession.

One of the major differences between the top people in public relations and those who feel they don’t get enough respect is personal and professional self-confidence. This is the “essence” of who we are, and we have to stake claim to our impact on the success of the enterprise. Standing at the interface is not without risk.

Not everyone is suited to be in public relations. Public relations has historically been taught beside journalism, as a communication development and dissemination job, one that
explained, positioned, convinced or frankly covered up an organization’s actions, good or bad. That was never the perfect model. The outcomes, the trust, even the successes are driven by behavior...more about how the organization is behaving than what it is saying.

ONE OF THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TOP PEOPLE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THOSE WHO FEEL THEY DON’T GET ENOUGH RESPECT IS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONFIDENCE.

This is the “essence” of who we are, and we have to stake claim to our impact on the success of the enterprise. Standing at the interface is not without risk.

Public relations is a very visible and sometimes controversial position. It is our job to “tell truth to power,” which is not always desired or accepted. But it is what we do...especially in this increasingly transparent world...and sometimes it requires you to put your job on the line. I can remember being asked by a CEO to communicate to customers and employees why we were arbitrarily shutting down some offices and not others. My answer was that “I was not good enough; the facts did not support the action.” The result was a more rational approach to office shutdowns. The idea is to focus on outcomes, not merely outputs: We need to keep our eye on the business side of the business.

While the profession is getting tougher, it can also be a lot more rewarding. There are no more secrets; the media is no longer the best path to acceptance; the shareholder is becoming more empowered, aggressive and intrusive; and brands are losing their power. Bottom line, whether we are working at the center of the storm, or on the fringes, we must have management’s confidence that not only do we understand the issues, but that we can be effective in influencing the ultimate outcome. Good business judgment, no matter how you acquire it, is fundamental to success in public relations.

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Kurt P. StoCker
Chairman, NYSE Individual Investors Advisory Board

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In the immediate post World War II years, as the young acting secretary of the provisional committee of the embryonic International Public Relations Association, I was privileged to learn directly from this comparatively small band, drawn from a number of different countries and cultures, what they believed were the social and moral values underpinning the work of the public relations specialist.

They were exercised as to the beneficial contribution which we could make to the Brave New World we all earnestly envisaged would emerge. To these modernist pioneers, public relations was not advertising, not press agentry, not publicity or propaganda and not promotion. Rather, it was a philosophy—an attitude of mind based upon the tenet that what people truly thought really mattered and should dictate the course of events.

To them—and indeed to me—to be accurately described as public relations, an activity has to contain three elements in almost equal quantities: truth, concern for the public or general interest and dialogue. And, whereas truth and concern for the public interest were variables determined by individual or corporate conscience, dialogue was not. It was either taking place, or it was not, and in any event was measurable.

In the opinion of this group, contact was essential to dialogue; information was the currency of contact; and controversy the price that had to be paid for the gain of trust and tolerance. They believed that true dialogue, coupled with effective communication, would help eliminate or alienate conflict between groups.
To them, the assertion that we were like lawyers, acting as either prosecutors or defenders depending on who commissioned our services first, was an untenable argument. What mattered when offering our services were the merits of the specific case, the worthiness of the cause, the record of the concern.

These were men who had experienced personally the horrors and miseries of war and witnessed the evils of unscrupulous propaganda. They recognized the manipulative methods of the spin-doctors well before the title was invented. They outlawed them and their practices, believing that we should dedicate our efforts to the presentation of a balanced picture of the institutions and organizations we represented as executives or counselors.

They did not envisage that the term, title and territory of professional public relations would be invaded and inhabited by marketers, publicists, propagandists and promoters.

By today’s standards, perhaps idealist? Yes. But, will history say they were wrong?

“RATHER, [PUBLIC RELATIONS] WAS A PHILOSOPHY—AN ATTITUDE OF MIND BASED UPON THE TENET THAT WHAT PEOPLE TRULY THOUGHT REALLY MATTERED AND SHOULD DICTATE THE COURSE OF EVENTS.”
As you prepare for a career in public relations you undoubtedly have a lot of questions. Will I find a job? Can I succeed? What kind of competition will I be facing? Is public relations really for me? The truth is, there are so many variables involved nobody can answer these questions with real clarity. Most of the answers are very specific to you.

Are you a joiner? Do you like working pro bono for community and charitable organizations? Do you have that vital something called drive? I can’t define drive for you. For me, it is never giving up. It wants to solve problems other people have only given lip service to. And most important of all, I believe drive is the will, ambition and desire to succeed.

You know, of course, you are contemplating a people career. Love and try to understand people with all their faults. Resist feeling you are in competition with the media on the other side of the communications business. Use technology, don’t let it use you. There’s nothing better than working on a person-to-person basis whenever possible.

Maybe it will be helpful if I told you about my career path. I wanted to be an electrical engineer, but that went down the drain when it was discovered I had no talent whatsoever for mechanical drawing, a prime requisite.

I did, however, feel comfortable writing, so I looked for a career in that direction. I did a lot of things many of you probably did or are doing in school. Worked on the high school and college newspapers. Worked part time as a sports columnist for a local weekly.

After graduation, I got a starting job on the local daily newspaper. What I learned about tight
writing, organization, collecting accurate facts and, most of all people, proved invaluable. I recommend newspaper training if you can get it.

After four years with the daily, I went on to editing a house publication for a national brewery. Then fate stepped in and provided entrée to my 30-year Prudential career. On the very day I was ready to accept an offer with an electronics company, a PR job at Prudential opened up.

Was it all wine and roses? Hardly. It took years before earning a PR manager position and years more before reaching vice presidential rank. Along the way there were many obstacles, and you will face many obstacles, too. It will take a lot of personal courage to overcome them.

Not all will agree with me, but I firmly believe you must be prepared to risk your job in pursuit of doing it right. It is easy to give in to the opinions of others, and many times difficult to fight for what you believe in. The best supervisors will be those who respect you for defending your positions.

“LOVE AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE WITH ALL THEIR FAULTS.

Resist feeling you are in competition with the media on the other side of the communications business. Use technology, don’t let it use you. There’s nothing better than working on a person-to-person basis whenever possible.”

If you are as fortunate as I, you will have discovered public relations has it all. It’s exciting, challenging and satisfying.

I wish all of you tremendous success.
What are the prerequisites for a successful career in public relations? Based on my decades of experience in the field, here is my list of five essentials.

**Curiosity.** As with journalists, you should be interested in the world in which we live. More than interested—fascinated. If you are narrow in your interests, your ability to communicate will be hindered. Wondering can be wonderful.

**Enthusiasm.** If you are dull and lackluster, you will not be able to communicate effectively with your employers, clients, the media or anyone else. Passion can be healthy, and it enhances creativity.

**Integrity.** Our work involves advocacy and compromise. But honesty still is paramount.

**Writing skills.** It’s regrettable that some college graduates are semi-literate. Grammar and spelling errors abound. Alliteration, similes, metaphors and figures of speech can add sparkle to a news release, speech and other writing.

**Education.** The art of persuasion is developed from psychology, anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. These subjects are as important as journalism and mass communication in your education.

I believe that my success has been achieved with a good dose of these qualities. I also have been helped by many people. Bill Ruder was my mentor when I worked at the Ruder Finn
public relations firm. I am privileged to have a wife who has been my biggest booster and most insightful critic. I am thankful to many others, of course.

I also am fortunate to be in good health. This year, I’ve been tied to my computer in the research and writing of my 24th book. The 10-hour workdays have been exhilarating rather than exhausting. So, I give thanks to my parents for my genetic endowment. I also thank Google, Wikipedia, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and other daily companions.

Incidentally, I have had many failures. The cliché is that one learns from failures. It’s true. And yes, I have had a few successes. My public relations firm, Richard Weiner, Inc., launched Cabbage Patch Kids, a campaign that has been praised in public relations and marketing textbooks. The strategy of parental responsibility in the “adoption” of the Kids was based on the counsel of psychologists whom we retained.

IF YOU ARE DULL AND LACKLUSTER, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR EMPLOYERS, CLIENTS, THE MEDIA OR ANYONE ELSE.

Passion can be healthy, and it enhances creativity.

Another client was Clairol. When I first started working for this company, our goal was to make hair coloring (it once was called hair dye) a commonly accepted cosmetic. We were successful. One of our notable campaigns was the promotion of hairdressers as artists.

During the last few years, a new medium has evolved into the most significant development in communications since the 15th century invention of movable type to print books. The new medium is the blog. More than 70 million blogs now exist. Some are personal diaries, but others are news and gossip sites that are instantly transmitted to many millions of people around the world. Blogs are the epitome of free speech and democracy.

The New York Times Magazine recently called me “the media maven.” The new media are one of the reasons that I am enthusiastic about the public relations field.

Richard Weiner

*Legend is deceased.
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.

- **Invest in Career Insurance and Lifelong Learning.** Instead of buying designer coffee and drinks, invest a percentage of your income into a “career” account. Use those funds to attend PRSA conferences, industry and executive sessions.
- **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, cutesy 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 are excited, engaged 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*

“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.
When I started my journey in the public relations field as a student, I confronted the same challenges that most pre-professionals encounter when it comes to securing the right foothold for long-term success.

Among them: an intense energy and passion for the profession burdened by the limitations of youth and inexperience; raw talent yearning for the right influences and mentors to help mold it; strong belief and hope in myself seeking both validation and objective doses of reality to help me know what I didn’t know.

Through that fledgling experience, several tenets that I latched onto served me well, continuing to this day:

- **Be proud of this profession and your role in it.** Public relations facilitates and directly orchestrates arguably one of the greatest cornerstones of the free enterprise system—the cyclical process of listening, speaking, relationship-building, trust-earning and call-to-action. Whether the context involves selling a product, a service or some of humanity’s highest ideals, our profession's impact constitutes the market-maker for success in practically any endeavor. That's a tall order and a high calling. Embrace it.

- **No one owes us a job.** At the end of the day—whether it's graduation day or just another day at the office—the relevancy-value factor of our work will be the only thing that potential employers and clients are willing to hang their hat on, specific to their investments in us. As such, the onus is on us to prove the case. Our own professional reputations—our personal brands—evolve to match both the...
monetary and intrinsic value that others perceive of us. Make the value you’re generating count. Your stock will rise... and the issue of job opportunity will take care of itself.

- **Work/life balance and work ethic are two different things.** As the adage goes, there is working hard, and then there’s working smart. Our chosen field requires a heavy daily dose of both. In this age of much conversation about work/life “balance,” as it were, the oft-times inconvenient fact is that there are choices that each person must make at all ages/stages of life, each with consequences, both desirable and less so. Key point: Don’t ever let a client, employer or yourself confuse your desire for a free flow of oxygen with your commitment to produce results while you are under someone’s employ. Achieving both simultaneously is very possible... that’s where “working smart” comes in, by both employer and employee.

- **Aspire to professionalism as a total package of style and substance.** How you dress, speak and graphically design your résumé may provide some of the style points that get your foot in the door, but it’s how you integrate substantive ethics, strategy, writing, creativity and diplomacy that will keep you in the room.

Our profession is blessed with some of the greatest young minds and talent of any field. The future of public relations shines brightly with the students and new professionals who are entering it. As Betsy Plank often said to us as students, “Godspeed to you and to all the potential your future holds!”

"NO ONE OWES US A JOB."

At the end of the day—whether it’s graduation day or just another day at the office—the relevancy-value factor of our work will be the only thing that potential employers and clients are willing to hang their hat on, specific to their investments in us."
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, 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.
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.

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.

— Donald K. Wright
The magic of public relations rests on the critical nature of the calling, the excitement of doing thorough and creative research on the probable and the possible and the excitement of planning and executing programs that demonstrate leadership and caring.

How does one accomplish all that? Without intellectual curiosity it would be impossible. Without delighting in the analysis of all the variables and subjects of “what if,” the real excitement would not invite the person to enjoy the ultimate challenges and the excitement of executing plans that impart success.

In public relations, the media are often the better teachers for they tell different stories every day, highlight the challenges which others face and the “what if” challenges public relations leaders must meet. Consider the daily “what if’s,” imagine how each of us would address a similar or more complicated problem or opportunity and then excitedly, creatively, considerately and effectively plan for success.

Public relations involves other fascinating challenges. Media relations are vital, and they’re measured not in whom you know, but who knows and trusts you. It requires the ability to win the trust of many people, in all echelons of responsibility and interest, not just the immediate boss or primary client. A broad spectrum of public trust is essential, and it must be won by constant integrity, demonstrated concern for others and superior communications skills.

A true practitioner must be a thoughtful futurist who recognizes, studies and enjoys the challenges of change. It is the future that matters. The past has come and gone, its errors and
successes relegated to history. While the past may impart a chronology of historic successes, they are now part of the past and substantially irrelevant to the challenges of today or tomorrow.

What was once a somewhat local practice now involves knowledge and thoughtful understanding of international interests, concerns and methodologies. The understanding of foreign history, customs and language are essentials. We who have been a rather separatist society, basking in our economic leadership, now must accept the reality that our lease as the ultimate superpower is about to expire. International politics now challenge our local concerns for priority of interest. We must become far more alert to, and understanding and appreciative of the mores of other civilizations: those which exist both at home and abroad.

Yes, you must write and communicate well. That is a given. The excellence of your skills is what will be appreciated. You should love to read, and delight in writing and speaking, and must realize your role as the interpreter of fact and definer and clarifier of complexity. She/he who explains best is the most likely to convince. Remember, your PR job is learning, planning, executing a thoughtfully planned program and explaining in an easily understood manner. Never forget, you are in the convincing business. Also, never forget that integrity is the first order of your day.

Planning includes dedication to the known, or immediate, and the potential of any opportunity or adversity. Having created the plan, a PR person must then sell the concept and win the support of others in management, as well as the client, media and public.

Public relations is certainly among the most fascinating of jobs. Your job is to anticipate the future and educate your bosses and clients on the dangers and opportunities of present and future. If you delight in thinking, considering, planning, convincing, executing and explaining, then you will enjoy public relations. It can be the greatest opportunity and most exciting job on earth.

Go for it!

A TRUE PRACTITIONER MUST BE A THOUGHTFUL FUTURIST WHO RECOGNIZES, STUDIES AND ENJOYS THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE.

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Frank Wylie

*Legend is deceased.*
INDIVIDUAL AWARDS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

The legends are practitioners and educators who have received major honors over the years from the Arthur W. Page Society, the Institute for Public Relations and the Public Relations Society of America.

THE ARTHUR W. PAGE SOCIETY

Founded in 1983, the Arthur W. Page Society is a professional association composed primarily of the chief communications officers of corporations with at least $2 billion in annual revenues and the CEOs of the world’s largest public relations agencies. The organization’s members also include academics from the nation’s leading business and communications schools. The Page Society is dedicated to strengthening the management policy role of chief public relations officers. The Page Society is upheld by management concepts, known as the Page Principles, which have been tested for more than half a century and have earned the support and respect of chief executive officers throughout the country.

HALL OF FAME AWARD

The Hall of Fame Award is the Arthur W. Page Society’s highest recognition, honoring men and women whose esteemed careers have taken them to the summit of the public relations field. Created in 1984, the annual award honors a leading senior level practitioner for career achievement and outstanding contributions to the profession. Inductees into the Hall of Fame have demonstrated a strong commitment to the Page Principles throughout their careers, thereby contributing to the important advancement of the role of the Chief Public Relations Officer.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The Distinguished Service Award was created by the Arthur W. Page Society to honor an individual whose contributions over the years have strengthened the role of public relations in our society. Successful candidates have served the profession by improving its overall value and effectiveness. The recipients of this award helped strengthen the role of public relations in our society by devoting themselves to services that help build and nurture the profession. Winners may have championed the merits of public relations; written articles and/or books; conducted opinion research; developed educational programs; and worked with students, professional groups and community groups.
THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Institute for Public Relations, first chartered in 1956 as the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, is an independent foundation dedicated to the science beneath the art of public relations. It exists to build and document research-based knowledge in the field of public relations, and to mainstream this knowledge into practice.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON MEDAL

Each year the Institute for Public Relations presents its highest award to someone who has made major contributions to the practice of public relations. The Alexander Hamilton Medal is given in recognition of the carefully planned strategies Hamilton used to gain the acceptance and the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. Many early leaders, including Thomas Jefferson, opposed a strong central government. Hamilton believed without centralized control the United States would never be united or become a great nation. Noted scholars have called Hamilton’s techniques of persuasion, his authorship of most of the 85 Federalist Papers and their carefully timed release, plus his compelling debates, “the finest use of public relations in history.” In that same spirit, the Alexander Hamilton medal honors the person whose exemplary efforts demonstrate the power of the effective use of public relations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Chartered in 1947, the Public Relations Society of America is the world’s largest organization for public relations professionals with nearly 32,000 professional and student members. PRSA is organized into more than 100 Chapters nationwide and 20 Professional Interest Sections and Affinity Groups, which represent business and industry, counseling firms, independent practitioners, military, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional services firms and nonprofit organizations. The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) has more than 350 Chapters at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

GOLD ANVIL AWARD

The Gold Anvil is the Society’s highest individual award. It is considered to be PRSA’s lifetime achievement award and is presented to a public relations practitioner and PRSA member whose accomplishments have made a major contribution to the profession.

THE FERGUSON AWARD

The PRSA Educators Academy presents the annual Ferguson Award to a practitioner who has given outstanding support to public relations education. The honor is named for a legendary champion of education and its students, the late David Ferguson, APR, Fellow PRSA, PRSA Past President.
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, who was a distinguished leader in public relations and advocate for its education and students.

As the leading international resource for students, professionals and educators, the Center develops and recognizes outstanding diverse public relations leaders, role models and mentors to advance ethical public relations in an evolving, global society. Led by a national advisory board of leading educators and practitioners, the Center works to achieve its mission by:

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

Student-Focused Programs & Initiatives

The Center uses a variety of approaches and activities to support its mission. These initiatives include:

- Milestones in Mentoring Gala, honoring those who lead by example, modeling the way through two-way communication and exemplary behaviors. Every year, this event is livestreamed.
- More than 35 research studies focused on leadership, mentorship and diversity and inclusion have been completed including the largest global study of public relations leaders.
- Webinars for professionals, educators and students, to help advance leadership values and skills. More than 10 webinars are online and on-demand, including our most popular—Getting a Job in PR.
• Video Interviews with PR Leaders for their views on leadership qualities, practices and experiences. More than 25 interviews have been conducted and uploaded to the Center’s website.

• Platform Magazine, an online magazine by students for students. Writing skills are important, and we encourage pitching your article or blog to Platform.

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