



PR Professionalism

by Patrick Jackson, APR

Public relations practitioners have been talking about professionalism, in one way or another, for at least half a century.

First came the underlying question: Can public relations be a true profession? The answer to that one is hardly debatable any longer. To qualify as a profession — rather than a vocation — the field of endeavor must be endemic to the human condition. Lawyers are professionals because the need for government by law rather than by the mob affects every person. Doctors are professionals because everyone needs mental and physical health. Teachers are professionals because education is part of all our lives throughout our lives. And so on.

The definition of profession also shows why public relations qualifies: "A profession is an art applied to science in which the public interest takes precedence over personal gain."

While there are people in every profession who believe the last part, it is a truism that to practice public relations, or for an organization to have good public relationships, enlightened self-interest must prevail. That is, practitioners and organizations prosper by being in touch with the public interest.

Patrick Jackson, APR, is an internationally known public relations counselor. He is senior counselor for Jackson, Jackson & Wagner, New Hampshire. Jackson is also editor of pr reporter, a highly respected national public affairs newsletter. In 1980, he was president of PRSA. Jackson is an advocate of scientific approach to counseling where the precepts of behavioral science are followed.

Certainly the ever-growing body of knowledge makes it clear public relations is a science as well as an art. So, the field qualifies as a profession according to the standard definition.

Interestingly, neither advertising nor marketing qualify as a profession. They are vocations and can be nothing more — for the reason that society can get along without them perfectly well — and in many parts of the world, and for long, long periods of history, we have done so nicely. This is not the case with public relations. As soon as there was Eve as well as Adam, there were relationships, reputations, communication problems and all the other areas of public relationships. That is why we say public relations is endemic to human life, and therefore a profession to improve relationships is a value to mankind. This is particularly so in a mass, over organized, over communicated society like ours.

FPPRA has been a leader by offering two levels of accreditation.

But as every practitioner will recognize, there is a problem in all this. **We** may know we can qualify as a profession, but does the rest of the world know this? The resounding answer is no. What is needed, then, are strategic methods of demonstrating our professionalism.

The first one, obviously, is that each of us learn the body of knowledge, ascribe to the code of ethics, and in all we are and do exemplify the true behavior of true professionals. We're not quite there yet. But organizations like FPPRA are working mightily to bring us there.

Many programs have been advanced to help us demonstrate professionalism:

- Eddie Bernays and others have pushed licensing.
- PRSA discussed mandatory accreditation in 1980.

• The Canadian Public Relations Society has voted to make it mandatory in 1990.

• The Calgary unit of CPRS got a law through the Alberta legislature for registration. This differs from licensing in that the use of the term public relations will be controlled.

• The National School Public Relations Association demands re-accreditation every 5 years.

• The Academy of Hospital Public Relations, now merged with PRSA, offers Fellow status.

• The American Society for Hospital Marketing and Public Relations has a 3 step progression that ends with Fellowship.

• FPPRA has been a leader by offering two levels of accreditation.

• PRSA's Counselors Academy is studying the idea of certifying public relations firms.

The great majority of practitioners, and all the organizations, agree that professional development and training activities are key. Some are now proposing to retain membership in a professional society one must earn so many CEUs, or formal academic credits, or give speeches, write monographs, or otherwise serve the growth of the field. To formalize the universal discussion now underway on these topics, PRSA president Tony Franco has put the resources of that organization behind a Task Force on Demonstrating Professionalism. He has asked the writer and Ann Barkelew, APR, vice president-public relations, Dayton Hudson Corporation to Co-chair. FPPRA's Bill Fenton, APRP, APR, is a member of the taskforce.

The immediate focus is a symposium to be held September 5-7 at a resort hotel near Chicago's O'Hare airport. Attendees will spend two days learning about, discussing, and perhaps debating the pros and cons of each of the above proposals — plus any others that are brought forward.

(Continued on next page)

PR Professionalism

(Continued from page 6)

This is the start of the debate, not an attempt to take action. However, Franco and the co-chairs expect that several calls for action may result. Principally these will involve studies, requests for cooperative activities among the several professional societies and similar preludes to deciding on which course of action, if any, will demonstrate professionalism.

Pink papers are being prepared giving pros, cons and background of each topic. If you would like copies, write Bill Fenton at Bill Fenton Associates, Liberty Square - Suite 205, 1137 New Bartow Hwy., Lakeland, FL 33801.

Try Chunking Your Sentences

(Borrowed from July 1986 Communications Briefings)

People who have trouble writing clear sentences often fail to break up their sentences into readable units that form a logical chain.

How readers read: They process ideas in chunks, small units of meaning often separated by punctuation.

The problem: Readers have trouble with sentences that contain too large a chunk, too many chunks or chunks that don't relate properly.

Example of poor chunking:
"There have been no flu deaths from even the most virulent types of the disease for the past 10 years in the county."

Diagnosis: The sentence is hard to follow because the chunks follow each other in a random way.

Treatment: Isolate the chunks so you can identify them:

- there have been no flu deaths
- from even the most virulent types of the disease
- for the past 10 years
- in the county.

The cure: Place the chunks in a logical sequence and add punctuation marks: "For the past 10 years, there have been no flu deaths in the county — not even from the most virulent types of the disease."

Source: *To the Point*; by A.M. Tibbetts; Scott, Foresman and Company; Glenview, IL 60025.

How to Make Things Happen

(Borrowed from July 1986 Communications Briefings)

What are the steps that transform a manager into a leader?

How can you take charge of a group or organization and lead it to success?

How can you create an environment that makes people enjoy hard work?

These and other vital management questions are answered in Philip Crosby's latest book, *Running Things: The Art of Making Things Happen*. Crosby, chairman of a management consulting firm, is a pro's pro. His advice is solid and his suggestions are clear-cut.

An underlying current running throughout the 254-page hardcover: Organizations must manage people — not the process, the projects, the money and the facility.

"If people are managed, developed and led," Crosby says, "all these other things take care of themselves." He suggests that executives and supervisors place a sign on their desks that reads, "I am in the people business."

Unfortunately, he notes, organizations are not truly people-oriented — even though they claim to be.

Crosby suggests that executives establish the following priorities by asking key questions:

- **Orientation:** What are we all about?
 - **Systems:** What do we do around here?
 - **Communication:** How do we know what is what?
 - **Development:** How do we get better?
 - **Appreciation:** How am I doing?
- The book is easy to read and hard to put down once you start reading. It's packed with examples, anecdotes and case studies. Crosby covers, among other things, how to increase productivity, reduce turnover, deal with creative people, save time, run committees and cut down on paper work.

Here's a sampling of ideas and suggestions from the 11 chapters:

- **Everyone should** have a title. People outside the company can relate to titles — and they make people inside the company feel better.

• **"Do not let** creative people feel that they can dream up a good idea and then dump it on somebody else to explain and implement. A creative idea is not in place until it can be accomplished in detail by untrained people."

• **Managers fail** to receive appreciation. "All they hear about is any lack of progress . . . Often this is why people change jobs. As one old boss of mine used to say to subordinates, 'If you need a lot of love, business is the wrong place to be.' It ain't necessarily necessary for it to be that way."

• **"One of the** requirements for being a successful leader is making time to sit and read and just learn more about the task."

Source: *Running Things: The Art of Making Things Happen*, by Philip B. Crosby, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 — \$18.95.