



# TO GET CLOUT, GET RESULTS

*A PR pro tells what you really need to win friends and influence people—off campus and on*

BY KARLA TAYLOR

**F**or consultant Pat Jackson, public relations clout comes down to results—not press releases, not glossy publications, and certainly not big stacks of news clips.

Jackson, senior counsel with the public relations firm Jackson Jackson and Wagner, has developed his forceful views over 40 years of work on changing and reinforcing attitudes on social and organizational issues. In addition to teaching, writing, and lecturing, he's the editor of the newsletters PR Reporter and Channels. He was named one of the three most respected public relations practitioners in polls in 1982 and 1986.

Jackson, who lives in New Hampshire, offered his opinions on how to get the results so vital to getting clout during an interview in Washington, DC.

**CURRENTS:** How can a public relations professional get clout on campus?

**JACKSON:** By generating the behavior the campus needs—because behavior is really the only thing that matters in public relations.

After all, it's wonderful if everybody loves Siwash University, but I don't care how many people love it unless that love is reflected in behavior—in enrollment, in sup-

port, in donations. That's the kind of hard-nosed public relations thinking that every institution should be heading toward these days.

**How widespread is the sort of behavior-oriented thinking you're talking about?**

I think this is a fair statement: All that most college public relations offices really are is one-way publicity units. And that's silly. That's like driving around in a Model T Ford when we have faster, more efficient, more comfortable cars to ride in. It's time that colleges and universities took a real look at that.

In some places public relations is already changing, of course. You could summarize the change as going from process, the technician viewpoint, to outcome, what we're held accountable for. There's a big difference. Process is, "Well, we did the newsletter again this month." Outcome is, "Based on that newsletter, X number of people actually did this or that."

Now, this kind of rigor is coming to everything. These days in our college courses, we expect professors to be able to turn out students who know things and can apply them. We want the faculty to use the process of their teaching in the classroom to produce a learning outcome.

In public relations we've been using the process of doing publications and news releases to kind of throw infor-

Karla Taylor is editor-in-chief of CURRENTS.

#### Which is harder: PR or brain surgery?

No contest, Pat Jackson said during the interview published below. His reasoning: "PR people have to deal with more variables than any other professionals. That's because if there are 40,000 people in your campus public, there are 40,000 variables. A brain surgeon may operate on 40,000 people, but every time he cuts into the cranium, it's the same. Sure he'll find different diseases, but the pieces are all in the same place. Try to find an issue where

the pieces don't change from day to day. What's more, in PR you need to know psychology, sociology, anthropology, management theory, communication theory—the list goes on and on. That's why PR is undoubtedly one of the most difficult fields there is. And yet somehow administrators say, 'Oh, if you taught English or you have a Ph.D. you can certainly do public relations. There's nothing to that! Anybody can do it!' And that is idiocy."

**T**oo many people in PR are not rigorous, managerial people. They're technicians. They know how to do a job; just as the janitor sweeps, they write.

Shown at right, PR consultant Pat Jackson



mation out there. But we haven't been held accountable for the outcome.

I think that these days when the public relations people or fund raisers come in and say, "We had this wonderful reception" or "We got this wonderful story," a good college president should say, "Great, so what?"

Those are the words we ought to empower college administrators with: "So what? What will that do for us, either now or in the near future?"

**So before your president can truly develop confidence in you, you need to be able to prove that you're getting results in one area or the other.**

Exactly. We have a specific list of things that we know public relations can accomplish. And your president ought to know that list and say, "What are you getting done?"

#### What's on the list?

The first thing public relations can handle is the basic business of awareness—publicity, promotion.

The second is internal motivation—improving employee, staff, and faculty morale, that kind of thing.

The third is to anticipate issues: what's coming down the pike that we can deal with now. This includes being able to look at other campuses and think, for example, "Animal rightsers are giving trouble at the university in the next town. Are we vulnerable? Could it happen here?"

The fourth is the flip side of issue anticipation: opportunity discovery. Because public relations people have one

foot inside the institution and one foot outside, they can see opportunities in both the internal and external worlds. Say there's a toxic chemical leak coming down the river and we have professors who know how to stop it. Or our professors have discovered some new process that could have a big payoff for the public. Public relations people need to have their eyes and ears open to opportunity. Of course, they need a receptive administration or faculty who want opportunities, but you can only lead a horse to water.

#### Next?

The fifth thing is removing executive isolation. Administrators sometimes just do not pay attention. I'm not knocking administrators. It's tough being the university president or provost or vice president—all that paper pushing, all the meetings. But administrators do get isolated. And part of the job of public relations is to force them to keep in touch, to shove what's happening under their noses. That's critical and has a real payoff.

The sixth thing public relations people can do is to be change agents. Even though change is now everywhere, getting people to change is tough. And that's why you need to understand behavior. Public relations researchers have got a whole body of knowledge on change techniques—how you get people to change, how you smooth the way, how you deal with catharsis in those who don't want to change but are forced to.

Another thing that we can do is handle crises—when, despite our best work, we didn't anticipate an issue or we just couldn't duck it. We in public relations are the ones who can deal with the crisis and probably the only ones who can keep our publics somewhat in sync with us even though they're hearing negative things about us.

Also, we at universities sometimes lose sight of our social responsibility. Like the corporation or anybody else, we have to contribute to the health and welfare of our community. Again, who should be constantly reminding the university of that? Public relations.

Finally, managing the institution for success is only half the job of management today. The other half is influencing public policy so that it doesn't tie our hands while we're trying to manage for success. Who helps an institution manage public policy? Public relations.

So there's a list of things we in public relations can do. And these accomplishments require rigor and targeting, not soft fuzzies.

#### They're results-oriented.

Yes. They demand outcomes, not process. They require research, strategic thinking, the ability to truly counsel managers and boards, to educate people across the campus that hey, they're part of our relationships too. Because nothing's going to happen if you don't get at least most of your people singing from the same songbook.

**I notice that on this list, promoting the college is only one small element. Yet many presidents—and**

#### CASE's role in bringing rigor to PR.

Pat Jackson also has strong feelings about what CASE can do to make PR more results-oriented. "CASE has been far too much a ball player, just going along with the way things are," he said. "Using tact and persuasion, CASE could be a lot more proactive. The Public Relations Society of America has codified the body of knowledge and the relevant research findings that PR people need to know. CASE could use the portion of this material that's relevant to high-

er education and show university administrators where it's valuable. Between PRSA, CASE, and the rest of us, we can come up with a sense of what the real job of PR is. At the same time, when holding conferences, CASE shouldn't just teach people how to write news releases. It should teach how public relationships work or teach the theories of motivation so people will know how to motivate behavior. CASE should teach the real bottom-line end product, not just this process stuff."

#### PR people—think the PR office gets clout from a scrapbook bulging with newspaper clippings. What is the relative value for colleges and universities of seeking media coverage?

The value they place on the media is hugely overrated. Many university PR officers are operating on a model that scholars in these same universities have disproven.

The value of the news media today is really twofold.

First, if you have something truly new that most people don't know about, the news media are an efficient way of reaching lots of people. And second, if you know there are people out there with an existing opinion that you want to reinforce, the news media are an efficient way.

Max McCombs, who's now the dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Texas-Austin, did what is probably the classic report about the agenda-setting power of the news media. He found that if you've got something new that you want people to talk about, then the news media are fine. Notice right away that there's a risk, because you don't know which side people are going to come down on and you may reinforce the ones who *oppose* your ideas. But at least you're going to stimulate debate.

McCombs went on to say that the news media tell us only what to *think about*. But most universities act as if they believe the media tell us what to *think*, which tells me that they have never done valid impact studies.

Now, my firm does impact studies all the time for our clients. We've been doing them for years. And let me tell you, we rarely use the media, because they cannot do the job most of the time.

#### If what you say is true, then why do so many people believe that media relations is the be-all and end-all of public relations?

Probably the reason was best stated by W. Phillips Davidson, whose research told of something called the third-person effect. He found that managers of institutions tend to do two things: first, keep up with the media, because they want to know what's going on; and second, hang out with like-minded people.

So when the president of Siwash has something in the paper, he goes downtown and sees similar managerial types and they say, "Oh, I saw your stuff in the paper." And he says, "Oh my God, everybody saw it."

What he means is, *his* group saw it.

Now, university after university goes on publicity campaigns to bring in students even though it's been proven a hundred times that spending that same energy and money in a focused fashion is more effective. You learn where your best feeder areas are and work through them with the help of credible individuals there.

But presidents and boards want their names and pictures in the paper. They like it because their friends say, "He's doing great things."

That's a major barrier to change. But we have to stop and think: Why do we run this public relations office? To help the president get his next job? Or to help the university?

#### Some people say that this is precisely why they're pressed to get the university's name in the news—because the president wants to be in the papers.

Exactly. But there's ethics involved here, and I think college public relations people need to stand up for their ethics.

The other barrier to change is that far too many people in college public relations simply are not managerial personnel, not rigorous people. They're writers or technicians. They know how to do a job; just as the janitor sweeps, they write. They send out press releases, they do publications, and sure, under the right circumstances, those may be helpful.

But I have never seen a college—and this is my personal experience over 30 years—I've never seen one where I couldn't have cut the publicity and the publications in half and been more effective.

#### What do you recommend instead?

A two-part system. We know this works based on scholarly research and on case studies done over time.

First, you should find out who the people you need to reach are and target them with your own materials. This will put the issues in question on people's agendas. The news media may sometimes be part of this effort, but it's better if you have your own list of who the most important people are and your own media—direct mail, newsletters, that sort of thing—to reach them.

Second, if you want these targeted people to make a decision—to give money, to help persuade a student to enroll—you'll have the most success through personal reinforcement, through peer group interaction.

We already do this in fund raising, where we start out with mailings and maybe some publicity about our campaign. Then what happens? Bam! We arrange for someone to call potential donors up, to go see them. That is the same model we need for dealing with issues, recruitment, and so on.

So a university needs to target its publics and, within each public, identify the opinion leaders it needs to work on. Then, frankly, much of the time the university can forget the rest of the public. Because decisions get made when opinion leaders go out and reinforce the positive ideas, combat the negative ideas, and bring their own objective credibility to bear. This is a simple concept that's been around since the mid-1930s.

#### You mention the importance of communicating through your own media, yet you just said that most colleges could cut their publications programs in half and do just as well.

That's because much of what colleges publish—newsletters and so forth—is done wrong.

Here's today's reality, and there's a kind of proof of it in the direct mail you get at home. Notice all the stuff that's now printed on the outside of direct mail envelopes. The senders know that you have to communicate your message

#### Quotability quotient.

Former Press Secretary Larry Speakes' admission that he attributed fabricated remarks to President Reagan raises serious questions about the limits of quotation, says an article by Bruce Boston in the June *Editorial Eye* newsletter. As Boston sees it, "good" quotes accurately reflect what a person said but can be corrected for grammar or cut for space. "Bad" quotes clearly misrepresent the facts or the speaker's intention. "Fuzzy" quotes are those seem-

ingly harmless, made-up statements that can reasonably be attributed to a speaker. But, Boston says, these quotes can trap the quoter, the quoted, and the audience in an uncomfortable space between truth and deceit. To make sure you're always ethical when quoting, Boston suggests you get approval for all quotations—even the most routine ones—from the speaker.

to people while they're taking it out of the mailbox and throwing it into the wastebasket.

But most colleges and universities still act as if people had lots of time, were poorly informed, and were going to read what's available.

To have a chance of being looked at, a newsletter has to be easily read and graphically attractive, with headlines that grab you. Then the articles have to tell the story clearly. That way there's less possibility that the audience can miss the message.

**Let's talk about a big factor in your two-step process to getting results. You mentioned the importance of targeting the people who are most important or most likely to respond to the university. How do you target? Let's say you haven't done a thing in this area. How would you start?**

There's only one way to do it: through research. It's funny. Often these research institutions—that's what all universities are, partly, research institutions—do absolutely no research on their public relationships. They just throw the message out there and assume it'll land and somebody will respond. It's ridiculous.

#### What sort of research should you do?

It doesn't have to be fancy, costly academic research. Finding out who the opinion leaders are can be relatively simple. The easiest way is what's called a sociometric survey. You ask a sampling of people, "If somebody in your family was choosing a college"—or rating colleges or going to give money to only one college—"who are the two or three people whom you feel are knowledgeable about this? Whose opinion would you trust?" You collect all those names and pretty soon you know who those people are.

For colleges these people you'll ask are often already part of the college family, maybe alumni. It's easy to find out who are your alumni's opinion leaders. And those opinion leaders are the ones who then can turn on others to increase the number of spokespersons out there for your institution.

**So a college's opinion leaders would probably be alumni who were prominent or well known in a particular class.**

Maybe, maybe not. Being prominent and well known doesn't mean you're an opinion leader. It may only mean you've made everybody else in the class jealous of you.

**How can you tell the difference between someone prominent and an opinion leader?**

There are five characteristics of opinion leaders. First, they obviously have to have a following. Second, they are usually positive people, the type who say, "We'll find a way."

Third, opinion leaders are activists. When they find a way, they say, "Let's do it." Fourth, they obviously have to

have an interest, a concern, in the subject, in the institution. And fifth, they not only have to have a following, but they also have to really get around. Whether the following comes to them or they go to the following, they have to have contact with others.

When you talk about it in the abstract this may sound difficult. But it's really pretty easy to find out who the opinion leaders are.

**In a way, you'd think colleges would have it easier than most to find opinion leaders, since the primary group to choose from consists of alumni whose names and addresses they already have.**

Sure. But colleges can go far beyond that. Let's assume you have a good education school. Your opinion leaders will then be in the educational community. They're people who may have no relationship with your university but who may be willing to become part of it.

I think there's a lot to be said for working on leaders in the area you're interested in and for getting lots of people involved. They don't just have to be alumni. In fact, frankly, a lot of colleges choose the wrong alumni. We choose those that are really willing, really anxious. Often—and any alumni director could tell you this—those same people turn off everybody else. They're too gung-ho or they're a little odd or they obviously have only this one great interest in life.

Alumni are easy, but we in public relations need to go beyond that, to be far more rigorous the way other disciplines are rigorous. It's not that difficult to be rigorous, and when you are, you start getting better results, doing a better job for your institution and for education. And that's what it's all about.

**Do you think that public relations practitioners, especially on campus, are becoming more results-oriented in their outlook and thus more likely to get clout?**

Let me put it this way. I think that the cutting edge is there now in college public relations. Just from my experience over the past five or six years, I can name a couple of dozen people heading programs that are really concerned about this and really moving. And if I can name two dozen, there must be hundreds.

But it's up to us in public relations to get on that cutting edge, to get those results. It's not the college presidents' fault when it doesn't work. I know the typical public relations person says, "I've tried to tell them." Well, then, that is a failure in our counseling skills. It's our fault because we're the professionals, the ones the presidents look to for help. We just have to find those magic examples or words or research or whatever that will persuade them that we know what to do.

If we don't make the sale, if we don't convince the ones we're supposed to be counseling that we can get results, it's not their fault that they didn't buy. It's our fault because we didn't sell. **case**