

IS COMMUNICATIONS WHAT THE FIELD IS ALL ABOUT?

"The challenge today is to convince the top managers of all enterprises that their most important role is outside of the organization among those external publics who will, inevitably, decide the fate of the organization. This means skillful technicians must run the enterprise while the people at the top set the course.

"The public relations field needs its share of skilled technicians. But the public relations people who lead the way will be strong generalists. They will have the guts and ability to successfully counsel management on the issues, problems & opportunities that human relationships can affect. That is where the most critical action is."

-- Marshall Doswell, vp
corp comms, Springs Mills,
(Fort Mill, S.C.)

"Communications involves professionalism in technique but does not necessarily suggest involvement in what is communicated, whether or not it should in fact be communicated nor how. On the other hand, those who counsel and can't, when necessary, perform the communications role with similar professionalism -- and this might include non-journalistic public affairs oriented practitioners -- tend to become theoreticians. It takes an unusual blend of both -- e.g. the intellectualism to analyze & extrapolate and the pragmatism to produce (or perform)."

-- John Budd, vp pr,
Emhart (Hartford)

"The purpose of public relations is communication. The overriding objective is the advancement of the organization which employs it through the most skilled and effective use of group communications. Therefore, public relations as an instrument of management must be intimately incorporated into the highest exercise of

corporate or institutional decision-making, policy development & communications practice."

-- Gordon Davis, consultant
(Roscommon, Michigan)

"Too often, public relations is approached as if people were all intellect; as if right actions coupled with factual information were enough. This approach will not suffice in a world where millions are crying out for meaning & compassion. We have to learn how to touch the heart and lift the spirit.

"We will see more of what I call macro public relations -- that deals with broad, sweeping issues, too large for any one company or even one industry to handle. Public relations people will have to serve as the catalysts for coalitions of organizations or segments of society in these situations.

"We must also quit creating artificial chasms between public relations and management. We are management."

-- Joe Awad, gen'l dir pr
Reynolds Aluminum
(Richmond, Va.)

"Most corporate public relations officers agree that public relations has changed significantly in the past five years -- away from traditional media relations and towards involvement in the public policy process, issue management, advocacy communications & corporate policy problems. With this in mind, the new public relations professionalism has the opportunity to contribute something more substantive than communications and less contentious than mere advocacy."

-- Marshall Lewis,
dir corp comms
Union Carbide (NYC)

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TAKING STOCK: 80s OFFER ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS
BUT CHANGE WILL BE CONTINUOUS AND UNSETTLING TO SOME

Where is public relations really heading in these changing times? Quick glance over decade of 70s spotlights the trends: 1) increased respect & position of higher authority in many organizations, particularly businesses; 2) adoption of programs & use of professionals by all types of organizations, from local school boards to churches to activist groups; 3) geographic spread of practitioners on to Main St. everywhere, with counseling firms in every state & province; 4) popularity of formal public relations education, with courses offered by over 300 U.S. colleges (and the first sequence established in Canada in '77); 5) expansion of technical skills to encompass trend forecasting, "issues management" training.

Symbolic of the new posture of the field is adoption of pr programs by each of the Big 8 accounting firms; and retention of counsel by many law firms, even some doctors. That every organization requires counsel in the court of public opinion is becoming a truism. Illustrative of the changing nature of the pr function: separate surveys by prr & PRSA found that over a third of practitioners do not perform any publicity or media relations tasks (including their supervision).

ARE THE BIG CONSULTING FIRMS
STILL THE BELLWETHERS?

Once, anyone wondering where the field was heading would simply look at the major counseling firms.

Leading consultants are the showcase of every service profession, be it law, engineering, architecture. One change in the 70s was loss of monopoly on such leadership by the big pr firms. They are now rivaled by cracker-jack corporate dep'ts & outstanding independent counselors. Practitioners in other kinds of orgs or gov't are not so often seen as leaders of the profession -- yet -- but are coming on strong.

If a leader is defined as one who influences others -- either practitioners or clients/employers -- it is clear as the 80s begin that few individuals accorded this stature are resident in large firms. Who are the presentday strategists & philosophers? Ed Bernays, Phil Lesly, Howard Chase, Jim Fox are counselors -- but independents. Carroll Bateman, Betsy Plank, Bob Fegley, Kerry King, Frank Wylie are leaders -- but corporate practitioners.

PERSPECTIVE

It was the late, respected Tommy Ross who once stated in an interview with Fortune magazine that, "Unless you are willing to resign an account or a job over a matter of principle, it is no use to call yourself a member of the world's newest profession ... for you are already a member of the world's oldest."

-- J. Handley Wright,
accepting the Gold Anvil

Scott Cutlip, Ken Smith, Otto Lerbinger and their fellow educators are rising influencers, with the real power of new knowledge. Nonprofit, health care, education, gov't have developed their own leaders -- like Carl Spitzer, Lew Riggs, Mike Radock, Ralph Frede, Jerry Dalton, Dave Brown, to name a few. prr's '78 sociometric survey -- first ever conducted for public relations -- listed Harold Burson, Dick Cheney, Bill Durbin & George Hammond from large firms among top 17 practitioners in respect of their peers.

ISSUE NOW LINK TO AD AGENCIES;
WHAT IS EFFECT ON OVERALL FIELD?

Purchase of major firms by ad agencies raises question whether linkage will blunt the drive to professional status for public relations.

Ironically, prr's Annual Survey for past two years reveals counselors are most concerned with field's standing. They view attainment of professional stature as way to overcome credibility problems caused by denigrations from media, public figures.

One result of ad-pr mergers is to strengthen the move toward "total communications." Principally a phenomenon of business, it links pr to marketing & sales promotion as well as advertising. Even before acquisitions, most larger firms were viewed as service providers (of publicity & promotion) with counsel they were asked to give mainly in sales area.

Longtime exec of a major firm told prr why that organization has been emphasizing publicity with less interest in counseling & issues. "Its size created such an overhead nut that volume activity rather than quality counseling became paramount."

A study of large companies last spring by Research Strategies Corp. found they rated firms highly on traditional tasks, less favorably on new wave assignments. By 2 to 1 respondents felt funds more wisely invested in the internal staff than in use of firms. "They are falling behind the parade," one commented.

An example of the split personality firms develop as change engulfs them is Harshe-Rotman & Druck. Echoing traditionalist views, chmn Morris Rotman says "Press relations remain terribly important; it's still the heart of the pr business." Meanwhile his partner Kal Druck created the career track approach and is responsible for PRSA's new professional development matrix.

Hill and Knowlton's approach is enlightening. Not only is it the world's largest firm, H & K has been an advocate of sophisticated new techniques. For '80 it plans to strengthen its "newest services": 1) public issues/public policy group; 2) expanded organizational communications function; 3) new proxy solicitation & shareholder analysis section; 4) Group Attitudes Corp., its research subsidiary; 5) helping select candidates for corporate boards of directors. But H & K told prr it has also "greatly increased our marketing services, especially in collateral materials."

"Public relations problems used to arise from the marketplace or the organization itself. Public relations problems now arise also from the intellectual community, government, activists, intervenors, the people who file the lawsuits and seek the injunctions. As a result, the questions for both executives and public relations specialists are changing. Obviously, then, the answers, too, may not be the same."

-- James Fox, counselor (NYC)

WILL ADVERTISING SPOIL PUBLIC RELATIONS? SOME VIEWPOINTS

Pro

"Unfortunately, yes. Since advertising budgets are usually far larger than public relations budgets, the best talent in a firm providing both services must gravitate toward advertising.

"Corporations increasingly realize that public relations is the broad function. Communication is one part of public relations, and advertising is one part of communication."

"A public relations firm can best support its clients' management goals when it is objective, independent of any other discipline, and credible with the media and all of its publics."

-- Loet Velmans, pres.,
Hill & Knowlton (NYC)

"Where a client retains you for both advertising and public relations, problems always develop. An account executive managing a \$20 million account almost inevitably feels and demonstrates frustration at the fact his contacts are with the client's marketing officer while public relations -- at a fraction of the fee or profit -- deals with senior corporate executives.

"Secondly, when an agency pitches for a major account under fiercely competitive conditions, it is quite understandable that the president may feel prompted to 'throw in' public relations as an additional inducement.

"Try as hard as it may, the advertising profession is a tool of the marketing function -- not a systems approach to more effective participation in the broad public policy process."

-- Howard Chase, counselor
& ed., drawing on his
experience as founder of
a firm owned by a major
agency.

Con

"The great debate between advertising and PR people is nonsense. I have been a PR practitioner for 14 years and an advertising agency executive for 6 years. The two fields are not oil & water.

"PR people snobbishly view advertising people as 'mechanics' who work in one small area of the communication process. They fail to acknowledge the massive impact advertising has on our controlled, free-enterprise economy.

"Advertising people view PR people as holier-than-thou nuisances because they (ad people) fail to recognize the importance of PR in directing the conscience of business & government in our economy.

"If PR people want to be professionals, they ought to go after a serious licensing process."

-- George Arnold, pres.,
Keress, Chapman, Bua &
Norsworthy (Dallas)

"You suggest that 'advertising is strictly a business.' But in the same issue, Herb Schmertz of Mobil is quoted as saying that successful PR now requires that you know as much about business as line managers do. Schmertz is 100% correct.

"Our clients hire us for our philosophy as much as for our expertise & capabilities -- we approach every assignment, corporate, institutional or product, as a marketing problem that needs a marketing solution. Our creativity is in helping to achieve client bottom line (business) goals through well-conceived PR strategies and programs.

"To suggest that the achievement of business goals, or the knowledge of business, lessens PR professionalism is ludicrous. This is not an ivory tower profession; we are held accountable for our programs and our results."

-- Mark Rutman, pres.,
Grey & Davis (NYC)