

PREDICTION: ENVIRONMENT WILL BE BACK  
AS MAJOR TESTING GROUND FOR BUSINESSES  
& PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS ALIKE

Several indicators point to its resurgence. In U.S. renewal of Clean Air Act is expected to bring industry requests for lower standards. Internationally, struggle of Third World nations for economic survival will combine with emergency energy initiatives to threaten what many respected studies call a perilously poised environmental disaster. Pres-elect Reagan's nomination for Interior Sec'y of a lawyer who made his career battling environmental groups will start the fight when Senate confirmation comes around.

Practitioners who believe environmental damage is not a real issue must deal with the Global 2000 Report by State Dep't & Council on Environmental Quality. Based on no change in current policy, study is not prediction but actual projection. It uses term environment to include definition of Brandt Commission on International Development: "An equal danger (to war) might be chaos -- as a result of mass hunger, economic disaster, environmental catastrophes & terrorism." Glaring disparity in personal income is also a factor. Report sees difficulties affecting N. America from (1) population growth, (2) income gap, (3) doubling of food prices, (4) loss of croplands, (5) conversion of forest lands, (6) extinguishing of 20% of genetic species of earth, (7) severe water shortage.

1980 polls indicate Americans are not ready to sacrifice the environment, despite economic uncertainties. U. of Chicago's Nat'l Opin Res Ctr found 50% feel "too little" is being spent on environmental problems, only 15% think "too much." A Roper & Cantril poll found 73% agree "an endangered species must be protected, even at the expense of commercial activity." (A booklet, Public Opinion on Environmental Issues, summarizes Roper & Cantril's study, compares other polls over the past decade. Available from Council on Environmental Quality, 722 Jackson Place, D.C. 20006. Global 2000 Report from same source.)

Roper & Cantril confirm '77 findings by ORC and a '78 survey by Harris that there is no sign yet of the backlash predicted once costs of environmental protection became known. Environmentalism is not a fad, concludes the study.

Social costs -- once an arcane term -- are now better understood. Those desirous of weakening regs will have to deal with this topic. Nat'l Wildlife Federation's Thomas Kimball told UPI last week: "While industries complain that they cannot afford to comply with clear air regulations, they fail to mention how much consumers have to pay to repair air pollution damage." CEQ study found \$16 billion spent complying with clean air standards, but \$21 billion saved in health & property repair expenditures. Here we go again.

MILTON FAIRMAN:  
A MAN NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

He was 1951 pres of PRSA, a founder & molder of Foundation for PR Res & Educ, longtime editor of Public Relations Journal, and for 30 yrs dpr, later vp, of The Borden Company, where he organized the public relations office in 1937. He died Dec. 15 leaving no relatives. But this pathfinding professional will long be remembered by his peers. In the 1973 Foundation Lecture "The Practice of Public Relations," Fairman foresaw the present situation and its challenge: "America today is a badly shaken society; there are few indications of a return to stability. Tremors that now unsettle the political structure will eventually undermine the foundations of all institutions. These shock waves, already felt in business & education, originate in the ideas, beliefs, enthusiasms and biases of people and can be countered only by reestablishing in the public mind the worth of each institution. And this counter-activity evokes public relations, which must do its work in an ambiance of mounting scepticism of all information, whatever its source."

Vol.24 No.1  
January 5, 1981

PERHAPS THE QUESTION FOR 1981:  
DOES IT MATTER WHETHER PUBLIC RELATIONS IS A PROFESSION  
OR JUST AN ENTERPRISING, USEFUL WAY OF MAKING A LIVING?

Here's the scene as a new year opens. Public relations has been adopted by every sector & section. Business & gov't are no longer the only ones wise enough to employ its techniques. Its philosophy has filtered down to the broad general public, with people demanding to be informed and have a voice in decisions that affect them. Colleges around the world teach the subject. Publications & research expand the body of knowledge almost daily (you should see our mail). And the scope of the field is broadening rapidly, far beyond the staple of media placements & preparation of communication materials.

On the other hand, the term itself is still pejorative -- in the minds of some. Unfortunately, among these are practitioners and their bosses who choose confusing euphemisms for titles & departmental designations. Internecine arguments over accreditation, licensing, membership in professional societies & continuing education show signs of dealing with the issues -- but muckraking publications & disgruntled individuals sometimes prefer to turn this positive discussion into dissension & divisiveness. And many practitioners say they care little whether or not the field is considered a profession.

It Does Matter  
In Our View prr believes that it matters a great deal, and may be the most important topic the field will have to deal with this year. Here's our rationale:

1. What persons think of themselves determines how others perceive them. As psychologist Tom Tutko told PRSA's Institute last summer, (a) we create our own images and (b) how we see ourselves shapes our actions.
2. To argue that professional status is unimportant defies the basic theory of public relations itself: that opinions & reputations do influence behavior and therefore must be constantly, positively cultivated.
3. PR's organizational problems, such as non-professionals sometimes getting the top jobs, or reporting to lower officers, are illuminated by comparing how lawyers, accountants, engineers & other recognized professions fare in similar circumstances.

A JOB FOR OUR EDUCATORS

Law schools have a dictum for empowering & equipping their graduates to deal with any situation. They educate every law student as if he or she were going to be chief justice of the supreme court. In contrast, the complaint is often heard that public relations curricula in most universities is tilted more toward vocational training than toward professional education. Many dep'ts aren't even titled public relations.

The vp-pr of a huge financial services company told prr recently why his dep't usually comes off second best to legal. (He's not a professional, by the way, so is objective.) Lawyers, even the most junior, have the self-confidence of their profession, he finds. They realize the respect paid their calling. This comes out in policy showdowns.

PR Qualifies As A Profession

What is a profession? Edward L. Bernays defines it as "An art applied to a science in a way that places the public interest above pecuniary gain." After a century of practice, public relations has the art. Its foundation in the behavioral & administrative sciences, among others, gives it a sound body of scientific knowledge. Merely to practice in the field is in the public interest, because the 2-way information flow & public participation which this makes possible is the essential element of democratic society. While wage scales are good, those motivated primarily by money have far more lucrative fields to choose from.

More cogently, public relations qualifies as a true profession because it is an inescapable fact of life that every human must confront. Whether we like it or not, everyone has reputations & relationships -- from day of birth. We may ignore this fact, at our peril. But it is part of life. Therefore public relations as a philosophy & technology is useful to everyman. It belongs not to its practitioners, or their clients & employers, but to the people.

This is the ultimate test of a profession. It is why law, medicine, clergy, teaching, engineering & architecture are recognized as such -- because every person in human society must deal with orderly behavior, health, theology, learning & physical technology. This is why public relations' sub-systems of advertising & marketing cannot on their own be considered professions. People can -- and even today many do -- live their whole lives without needing or seeing an ad, for instance. These are not endemic human experiences ... but public relationships are inescapable.

Tom Jefferson Is On Our Side

The argument is sometimes made that it's mainly a practitioner's performance that counts. "Do your job well and colleagues & management will respect & trust you." That's fine within your organization. (Everyone, in whatever post, has to do that anyway.) But how about outside the organization? When new people come onto staff? When you want to change jobs? Then it could mean a great deal that public relations is accorded professional recognition.

CODES MAKE THE POINT

PRSA's Code of Professional Standards, first adopted 27 yrs ago, states that members "base their professional principles on the fundamental value and dignity of the individual, holding that the free exercise of human rights, especially freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press, is essential to the practice of public relations.

"In serving the interests of clients and employers, we dedicate ourselves to the goals of better communication, understanding and cooperation among the diverse individuals, groups and institutions of society.

"We pledge: to conduct ourselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public; to improve our individual competence and advance the knowledge and proficiency of the profession through continuing research and education."

IPRA's Code of Athens, adopted in '65, pledges members to abide by the United Nations Charter's expression of "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person."

So this is not an idle question. It is not intellectualizing. It is an eminently practical application of public relations knowledge to the field itself. And high

time: if practitioners can stop the infighting, agree on terminology & a definition, then reach consensus on ways to apply their own strategies to their own field, public relations can attain recognition & respect for what it truly is -- a universal, socially valuable, ennobling philosophy of life. It postulates that (a) individuals are important, (b) mankind is educable & capable of great progress, and (c) everyone should be able to participate in relevant decisions. Thomas Jefferson said it well: If there is a millenium, this is probably the way to get there. He called this method the free, democratic society. Jefferson also first used the phrase public relations. In his Seventh Address to the Congress in 1807, he crossed out the words "state of thought" and substituted "public relations." With such a patron, the field should aim high -- and build its self-confidence by acting like, and thinking of itself as, a profession.

PREDICTION: YOU'LL BE USING WORD PROCESSING BY END OF YEAR OR BE BADLY OUTDATED; HOW ONE MEDIUM-SIZED OFFICE MADE THE SWITCH

Regardless of the size of your office, word processing can increase cost efficiency, in the experience of Jay DeBow, chrm, & Robert Way, exec vp,

DeBowSpencerWood (NYC). Firm employs 8 professionals, administrative staff of 7. Chose Wang Model 25 with 3 terminals & a printer. Cost to lease is \$1400 per month. Good secretary in NYC is \$1250 to \$1667 per month. Cheaper systems, or fewer terminals, are available. Many report lower investments with Radio Shack or Apple systems.

DeBowSpencerWood claims these results from gearing up last year:

1. Increases productivity. AE Suzanne Hayat says she formerly used a secretary to "type draft after draft," now eliminates that step completely by correcting work right on the VDT.
2. Elevates staff jobs. Secretaries do more important work than typing all day, become administrative ass'ts to professionals, which increases output & quality.
3. Eliminates printing, substitutes personal letters. Once copy is set, plug in names & addresses and "let it run all night" producing typewritten originals.
4. Handles variety of work. Not just writing but time sheets, billing, recordkeeping. This reduces need for clerical help.
5. Saves clients money -- or reduces budget -- because machine time is charged as production cost at lower rate than secretarial.
6. Provides information retrieval. Subscription to many databanks is available.
7. Transmits hard copy. Installing dataphone makes this possible, in seconds.
8. Improves work styles. Poor typists, who prefer scrawling on yellow pads, find less fear of mistakes because of instant correcting on VDT. One AE says this "stimulates my creative writing," is certainly much faster.

Firm reports standing room only at terminals, will add more this year. Word processing is flexible, can add work stations or printers any time. DeBow "strongly recommends" it for consideration by other firms.