

Chapter 17:

PR LEGENDS

Pat often wrote his own take on public relations' legendary professionals. When he could, however, he sought input from the legends themselves. Here are those who graced the pages of pr reporter, from Pat's perspective or theirs:

Kerryn King
Chester Burger
Harold Burson
Ed Block
Herb Schmertz
Edward Bernays
Phil Lesly
Chet Burger
Scott Cutlip

(Note: Pat *never* considered himself a legend. He always considered himself a learner who shared what he was learning. He saw his "educators" as not only these legends but also those of you he met every day in his travels.)

"Practitioners are societal technicians with the skills to bring about accommodation between opposing parties."

– Edward L. Bernays

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KERRY KING RETIRES FROM TEXACO, JOINS MANNING, SELVAGE & LEE; REFLECTS ON 43 YEARS OF PRACTICE

Retiring today as senior vice president at Texaco, he reflects for pr readers on the profession he has followed since 1939:

- **What public relations is:** “Most elements of presentday society are in confrontation. Public relations professionals are the peacemakers.”
- **The major threat:** “Today’s CEO wants to deal with a single executive who can handle public, civic, consumer and governmental affairs. In the past 15 years, our province has been challenged by other disciplines: sociologists, lawyers, planners and so-called public policy experts. More and more they are being chosen to take over the reins for activities that have, until now, been handled by public relations practitioners.”
- **Why lawyers are effective:** “Their training creates disciplines in thinking and thought progression; they approach situations logically and present their “case” in disciplined, convincing terms.”
- **What practitioners can do:** “We need to devote a lot of attention to **where** public relations is going ... being enlarged from the old communicator/corporate image PR Parasol to the Oversized Public Affairs Bumbershoot. We must evolve from the neophyte stages of being basic tools of communications to the high professional level of issue-oriented experts who can help influence – not manipulate – public policy as it affects our client or company.”
- **The future of pr:** “The future is super ... there’s no question in my mind about it. Yes, society’s elements **are** in confrontation. And that makes news. We’re moving toward a resurgence of patriotism and nationalism. We’re going to have greater competition, lessened affluence, greater unrest and contention. These are conditions under which the broad-scale practice of public relations will thrive and grow. Conflict is good for our business ... and I think we’re going to have a lot of it.”

Retirement for the practitioner credited with being the highest placed in corporate management (and earning the largest salary) means only a change of environment. Nov. 15 King joins Manning, Selvage & Lee (NYC) as senior consultant. He says half his time will be devoted to MS&L, half to his own firm, King/Associates, and a third to skiing, fishing and sailing – totally a typical 32-hour day.

Vol.28 No.8
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RELINQUISHING MANAGEMENT OF HIS FIRM AFTER TWO DECADES,
CHESTER BURGER EXPLODES THREE DANGEROUS MYTHS

On his firm's 20th anniversary, Chet Burger is relinquishing his management responsibilities to do full-time consulting. "It's a gift to myself," he explains. From this vantage, the highly respected public relations leader looks at the state of the practice from his perspective as counsel to senior management:

Execs Want Aid From PR

Senior managements thirst for help. It simply is untrue that they don't want to change wrong ways or correct unacceptable practices. You don't keep a corporation in business unless you can change and adapt as necessary.

Every company, and many entire industries, rise & fall because of external forces -- regulations, tax policies, public opinion. A corporation can have fine products, competitive pricing, high quality, and yet be attacked by outside forces.

Senior management needs help in dealing with these outside forces. Public relations professionals need to offer such help. They must be qualified to do so; there is no "public relations mystique."

PR Is More Than Publicity,
Speechwriting, Et Al

I don't think there's anything wrong with being an expert publicist or a fine speechwriter or a fine anything else. Those skills are indispensable for a public relations professional. It's just that they're not enough. If you perform such tasks well, you are making a vital contribution to your company. But why are you any more valuable than

the data processing specialist or the bookkeeper or the office manager? All of them are essential, but their work doesn't need the attention of the CEO.

Pros Must Be Generalists,
Multicultural Business People

They should know their companies thoroughly. "Hands-on" experience is the best. And they should know their competitors almost as well as they know themselves. They should understand & observe the formation of public opinion. They should have personal contacts & friends in the black & Hispanic communities, because ours is not an all-white society. And they should understand differing cultural backgrounds that affect the nation's life.

Public relations professionals, if they are to be able to offer competent counsel, should be conversant with other aspects of life: 1) culture & the arts (why are there so many tasteless productions & communications?), 2) history (how did we get to this point?), 3) religion (the values of New York Yuppies aren't necessarily shared by the rest of the country).

Certainly, they should know the media, that is, individuals employed by the media, if they themselves haven't worked for the media at one time or another. There is such a thing as "a journalist's mindset." I don't see how you can understand or deal with public opinion unless you understand those who influence it directly.

I'm suggesting breadth of interest. Most people in our society (or any other) lack it. Most people's interests are narrowly circumscribed. This includes corporate managers as well as public relations professionals. Broad interests are necessary if we're to help management deal with the larger society.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS, AN ANCIENT ART, INCREASES IN STATURE: FIRST AMENDMENT IS PROFESSION'S CHARTER AND LICENSE

By Harold Burson, Chairman, Burson-Marsteller (NYC)

Public relations isn't a modern art at all. It's an ancient art with ancient roots. The history of the human race, to a large extent, is the history of one group of people trying to persuade another about the rightness of their beliefs and acts.

The term public relations wasn't part of Thomas Jefferson's vocabulary when he penned his remarkable document. But to the extent he attempted to influence the opinions of others, he was engaged in the practice of public relations.

The Constitution of the United States was born in ferment and signed only after a considerable amount of persuasive public relations activity helped clear the air.

It's not surprising that the First Amendment to a Constitution that owes so much to public relations contains a safeguard for its practice. It says all individuals have the express right to speak their mind, give vent to their feelings, explain their actions – to communicate freely and try to influence the opinion of others.

AS OUR INSTITUTIONS CHANGE PR PRACTICE GROWS

When I entered public relations in the wake of World War II, business ranked high in the public opinion polls. After all, the Great Depression had ended and the business community was credited with making the United States the "Arsenal of Democracy."

Business naturally wanted to preserve its good name, and it hired public relations people to do just that. But our goals were limited and our approaches were less sophisticated than today.

We hired people who knew how to write news releases and articles that editors would publish. We were more concerned with the "how" of communication than the "why" or "wherefore." We insisted that our people know how to write well. We still do. But now we look for other qualities, too.

That's because the social climate has changed. Corporations that had been riding high for two decades suddenly became public targets once again. They were accused of being too big, too irresponsible, too indifferent.

What caused this turnabout? The Vietnam War. Out of that war, which split our society apart, emerged a Pandora's Box of other issues: environmental protection, minority employment and civil rights, women's liberation, consumer rights, to name a few.

Issues, which once grew slowly like turtles, now proliferated like rabbits. And the onus fell largely on corporations. No matter where the root cause, they were expected to correct the abuses – at once.

Television contributed to the pressure. Compared with print, television is graphic and immediate.

The assassination of President Kennedy. The student uprising at Kent State. The soldier dying in the elephant grass of Vietnam. The bus boycott in Montgomery, the march in Selma and the brutal dogs and fire hoses of a Birmingham sheriff.

Those weren't remote occurrences. They were disturbing events that took place in the sanctity of the American living room. And they

pricked the conscience of the American people, the children even more so than their elders.

The business community responded. By the late 60s, corporations were more concerned about **what** they were going to say than **how** they were going to say it. As a result, the public relations function took on added weight and responsibility.

Business leaders began to recognize an underlying tenet of good communication – words are merely words and they can be purely cosmetic if they aren't backed by convictions, action and policies.

With that realization, another public relations shift occurred. Organizations began to place more emphasis on “**what shall we do**” than “**what shall we say**.” What the organization decided to **do** dictated what it **said**.

This was a radical shift in perception. After all, corporate leaders had traditionally viewed the corporation as a business entity, not as a social entity. Now they were facing up to their social obligations, too.

PUBLIC RELATIONS' FOUR IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS

1. Sensor of social change. The public relations professional perceives those rumblings at the heart of society that augur good or ill for the organization and helps management prepare for the onslaught and impact of those issues.

To succeed, he or she must possess a sensitive antenna and excellent analytical skills. That's because every issue starts in a small way. Some melt away, some snowball.

Women's liberation is an example of the issue that would not go away. The genesis of Women's Lib was implicit in Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*. But it didn't get too much attention at first in the board rooms of male-dominated corporations.

Neither did Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. It was either ignored or ridiculed by the

management of some of our larger chemical companies. Indeed, some mounted communications campaigns to discredit the environmental notions expressed in *Silent Spring*.

2. Corporate conscience. Henry David Thoreau wrote: “It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience.” Those are powerful words and ones that the public relations professional should always bear in mind. These qualities are – or should be – basic to the job description of public relations officers.

3. Communicator. Many people think communications is the main public relations role. Most likely, they think that way because they spent a lot of time mastering communications skills and very little time honing their social judgments. **Communications is not the one main role; it is one of four important roles.**

4. Corporate monitor – making corporate policies and programs match public expectations. The spirit of the ombudsman should pervade the public relations person's job. Of course this isn't possible unless the chief executive understands its necessity and supports it to the hilt. And this is perhaps the best reason for the senior public relations officer to report to the highest level of management, the Chief Executive Officer. Access is essential.

Interestingly, a number of newspapers around the country have experimented with this idea. They have appointed a respected reporter to serve as an ombudsman who calls public attention to lapses in journalistic ethics and responsibilities.

Do corporations have less public responsibility than newspapers? I tend to doubt it. Corporations don't need to go “public” with their mistakes but they do need to have them audited and aired in a healthy manner. And the public relations professional is the logical person to take a major role in this process.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS PROS ARE COUNSELORS, NOT JUST TACTICAL COMMUNICATORS; NOT KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE LET OTHERS TAKE OVER POLICY MAKING REFLECTS ED BLOCK, RETIRING FROM AT&T, ON HIS YEARS OF LEADERSHIP

He wonders: "As society becomes dependent on advancing technologies, public relations people are going to have one devil of a time keeping ourselves and those we represent **human**. Can we absorb and employ the virtues of high tech yet continue to talk together? As we flourish from our remarkable technology, can we continue to deal with employees, customers, stakeholders, CEOs, colleagues, person to person? More disquieting, need we guard against becoming disinterested in doing so?"

THE FOUNDERS WERE CONSULTANTS

codified and rationalized the techniques."

1. "Bernays, Sonnenberg, Page, Hill, Lee, Dudley thought of themselves fundamentally **as counselors, policy consultants**. That's what legitimized the function. And in the process they
2. After WWII – when the economy had come out of a depression and the great American dream was being realized through economic progress and the success of business – public relations grew into a large industry. But most of the jobs **concentrated on tactical communications**, the nuts and bolts. That's what we became good at, and to the extent that education followed the field, that's what was taught."
3. "Then **the equilibrium was disrupted** – political upheaval, attacks on institutions, inflation, OPEC oil embargo, beginning of global competition, government intervention in non-economic kinds of regulations, trend toward deregulation. The old rules were out; business was turned on its head."

"More of us have to retake the counseling position that Page, Hill, Sonnenberg left for us. It's where the big needs are. Arthur Page defined the function as counseling. About communications, he said, 'Somebody's got to do it so you might as well put it in the public relations department.' He saw them as related but separate functions."

"If you want to be a counselor, you've got to look up from the nuts and bolts of the job. You can't forget them, but all those tasks are part of the larger corporate governance. You cannot be an advisor to the CEO, you cannot be influential in an industry consortium, if you don't understand the business and industry you're in."

"After the breakup of AT&T, I was astonished to discover how many highly paid people in our own department didn't understand the business and therefore didn't really understand its new public relations needs. They were press experts or employee relations experts or media relations experts doing tasks for something called the Bell Telephone System. When the System was no more, they were lost."

4. “But we had become so good at our tactical communications, which assumed equilibrium, that we continued doing the nuts and bolts job. **We weren’t up to the challenge.** A vacuum was created and enlarged by the fact that during the decades of equilibrium, we had taught management the value of public relations. So others moved into the counseling function” to fill that vacuum

GET BETTER AT FRAMING ISSUES

Take the tax reform of last year. “Proponents framed the issue as ‘fairness.’ The business community argued ‘economic viability’ and such stirring words as that. And it never got a coherent counter argument each industry argued its own perspective. Business advocacy is so egocentric, and the rhetoric we use is so much the vernacular of the industry, that nobody hears us.”

AT&T LESSONS

“It used to be axiomatic that if you make a good product or give good service, treat employees and shareowners fairly, treat customers courteously, if you’re a responsible corporate citizen, then you’re golden. In the last 10 years that hasn’t appeared to be true. AT&T, while there was no public demand or outcry for the breakup, got beat up and out-manuevered. **The constituencies we thought we had simply weren’t there, didn’t get involved.** It’s a picture that has happened to other companies – but not in such a draconian fashion.”

MAJOR CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED

1. “**Employees’ commitment** is not entirely to their job, they have other options.”
 2. “**Employees began to be looked at as an expense** rather than an asset.”
 3. “Individual investors don’t make up the investor community anymore. It’s made up of large institutions, security analysts, etc, **to whom a corporation is a chunk of asset** – here today, gone tomorrow.”
 4. “In the old days of the plant community, **community relations meant more** than it does today. Corporations in large urban centers have to do community relations, but it’s not viewed in a proprietary way as it once was.”
 5. “There’s much **more hassling with government** authorities. Modern government is a passing parade of individuals and individual agendas. Business has to learn better how to deal with that.”
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MOBIL'S SOON-TO-RETIRE HERB SCHMERTZ SHARES HIS VIEWS INCLUDING HIS RATIONALE FOR TACTICS THAT WERE USUALLY CONTROVERSIAL

The title of his book *Goodbye to the Low Profile* perhaps best summarizes the legacy of the labor lawyer turned chief public relations officer. As Mobil's feisty spokesman and strategist, he made his mark by speaking out against media coverage he felt unfairly maligned the oil companies. He also mushroomed business support of the arts with munificence to PBS – which became known as Petroleum Broadcasting Corporation as a result – for highly praised quality programs.

After news stories accused them of purposely causing the shortage that drove prices up in the 70s, Schmertz fought back with paid ad-editorials stating the oil company point of view – an ongoing program still visible in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times and other opinion-leading publications. His confrontational style included getting tough with opponents and editors. At one point he terminated relations with the Wall Street Journal.

In a conversation with pr reporter, here's what he had to say about his 22 year tenure and his views on pr's future challenges (challenges he will share as an independent consultant as of May 1):

- **On the confrontational stance he advocated:** “It has gained Mobil a certain amount of respect as a company that is not afraid to answer back, and as a company that has an intellectual base for its activities. We set out to gain respect and understanding rather than to simply have a happy, lovely image.”
- **On the paid editorials Mobil has used since 1970:** “We created a whole structure here at Mobil that involved speaking out in an intellectual, but straight-forward and tough way, on important public policy issues – not only energy, but the economics of the country, trade, etc.”
- **On key challenges for pr:** Re-emergence of government regulations, trade protectionism, instability of our economy in terms of the deficit, foreign competition, etc. In noting the common economic theme of these challenges, “I don't see anything incompatible with the public relations person understanding economics. . .pr people ought to know the difference between profits and profitability, between return on equity and return on capital.”
- **General word of advice:** “PR people have to view all this as being a participant in a democratic system of government in which each institution and each individual should play a role in the marketplace of ideas. That's the way the American people decide issues. You can't run and hide, or your views won't be in the mix when decisions are made.”

“I think my background in political campaigns has had a lot to do with what I've done at Mobil. I characterize what I do here as 'managing an on-going political campaign' in which there's never a final election, but it's a campaign of issues.”

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BERNAYS' INNOVATIONS: THE TOOL KIT HE LEFT US ALL

What can today's practitioners learn from a legend – and his 80 years of experimentation? From your editor's personal experience with him, and his voluminous writings, these are some of the salient lessons:

1. **Use opinion leaders.** In his campaigns, they were the target – with society or key publics reached through them. One tactic he loved was to have clients or their employees and supporters write personal letters to biographees in *Who's Who* on behalf of some idea or cause.
2. **Persistence pays.** His decades-long effort to secure licensure of practitioners shows this tactic in a current setting. When Eddie gave a speech, you knew after a while the exact words he'd use to push this concept. But he was **getting through to the majority** – who hadn't heard the idea or his particular appeal on its behalf – and reminding the rest no matter how many times they'd heard it.

Such consistency usually worked. Evidence: most of his obits called him “the father of public relations,” a term *he* reiterated for years though *historians* say it is debatable.

3. **Public relations is a behavioral science**, going far beyond the *process* of communicating. His objectives were behavioral – to get families using bar soap, designers to use the color green or clothing manufacturers to use velvet material (to cite three famous cases). By starting from that point, he was able to design activities that remained focused on the real objectives.

He said practitioners were “societal technicians with the skills to bring about accommodations between opposing parties.”

4. **Make news, not news releases.** While a master at using the media for his client's purposes, he did it in a way that **also gave the media something – real news**. It's an oblique strategy: Create the event that symbolizes what you're trying to get across, let that lead to the result you want. The product he was promoting or behavior he was attempting to motivate often was never mentioned. It flowed naturally as a result.

This, of course, made media willing to cover and opinion leaders willing to participate – since it was not an obvious commercial pitch.

5. **Campaigns must be systematized.** Shoot-from-the-hip creative ideas or hoping to be able to take advantage of opportunities as they come along is an amateur approach, he argued. Rather, there is a disciplined process to be used – which he called “the engineering of consent.” (See t&t 12/18/78)
6. **Always begin with research.** So many of his solutions arose directly from research findings, which he studied assiduously to decipher the specific item in the data that would be the key.

Another type of research he relied on was use of other professions' body of knowledge. He used psychologists, political scientists, physicians, economists and other experts to learn precisely what might be causing, or would resolve, a situation.

Today, such experts aren't even used as speakers at professional conferences! An indication of how far ahead ELB was...or how far behind we, his successors, are.

7. **The ultimate ethical test:** be ready to alter *your* thinking or behavior to get in sync with your publics. Then you can motivate their thinking or behavior. Don't try to cram your viewpoint down their throats with hard sell campaigns – which only “stiffen the resistance.”

ELB's 3 RULES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **Don't stiffen the resistance.** If you start right out with an “I know best” or unlistening approach, no one will even listen to your ideas. A corollary: there's always some skepticism, doubt or opposition to any proposal.
2. **Ask for a willing suspension of disbelief.** To be sure they're willing to consider your ideas, use phrases or techniques that allow even skeptics to suspend their doubts and hear you out. Examples: self denigration (I'm not the most brilliant interpreter of this, but it could be that...) or simply “You won't believe this, but....”
3. **Emphasize the benefits statement.** Once you have earned the audience's attention, concentrate on telling them what's in it for them.

A STUDY IN AUDACITY vs. CHUTZPAH

Perhaps above all else, ELB's life illustrates that audacity in innovating and boldly offering new ideas makes a counselor effective. Then chutzpah makes one controversial, which in turn sets clients' expectations and readies them for audacious ideas – a perfect psychological cycle. It seems few counselors have the backbone for either.

Special Insert in
Vol.38, No.11
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EDWARD L. BERNAYS DEAD AT 103: RETIREMENT AT LAST

“You cannot retire from public relations,” he told me 30 years ago when we were working together on a client project. “You are so totally enmeshed in society and what’s going on in the world that the only way to retire is to die.” ELB “retired” Thursday at his home in Cambridge, Mass.

His pioneering 80-year career made him the world’s best known practitioner – his legendary exploits aided by his energetic capability for soft-sell self-promotion. But he was such an endearing figure to most that he was quickly forgiven for what sometimes appeared to be a large ego. Most seemed to feel he had earned it.

LESSER KNOWN BERNAYSIA

- He was the intellectual drive behind many of the concepts that underlie scientific public relations. **But the relationships side of the Bernays practice was provided by his wife and professional partner, Doris.** He was, as has so often been noted, courtly. But he suffered fools and opinions that differed from his not at all gladly. She was the diplomat that brought the two views together and saved him from what could have appeared petulance.
- **Eddie had his detractors.** Early practitioners like John Hill and Carl Byoir disliked the man and often his methods. Some blamed his ego. Others said he took more credit than he deserved. There were hints of anti-Semitism. And one cannot overlook a perfectly natural envy or competitiveness, as Scott Cutlip shows in *The Unseen Power*, a history of early pr.

One incident illustrates this. When he moved to the Boston area, he asked New England’s leading counselor, Paul Newsome, to work with him on a major assignment. Paul called me to a secretive luncheon, to ask whether I thought it was a good idea to tie up with the controversial giant in our field. Then he asked me to also work on the project, almost as if he wanted someone to share the risk!

- A major reason was that **ELB was a lone wolf**, constitutionally unable to work with professional colleagues. As PRSA president in 1980, I asked him to co-chair a vital blue ribbon effort, to document where the field then stood, with Paul Newsome and Phil Lesly. When we talked about it, he was enthusiastic about the idea – until he heard others were involved.
- In the 60s, he wouldn’t fly, which limited his travel. His controversial position had kept him from joining the professional societies. Several of us talked him into joining PRSA; Otto Lerbinger, Frank LeBart, Fred Chapman, myself and others campaigned to get him the Gold Anvil; and later to be awarded a no-test APR (only he and Cutlip have that distinction – for obvious reasons). A few speaking engagements were arranged – and suddenly **he began to fly to speak everywhere in what became a whole new career.**
- NSPRA pres Ann Barkelew and executive director John Wherry asked for an introduction – and ELB became an ally and mentor of that organization, at his death still titular co-chair of its Foundation’s drive for funding a new HQ.

THE FAMOUS BIRTHDAY BASHES

Shortly after arriving in New England, ELB asked Newsome to chair a 75th birthday party at which his friends from NYC and other places could join him in his new home region. We all felt this was a farewell; after all, we said, he *is* 75. Then there was an 80th, 85th, 90th – and a crowded 100th birthday party with attendees from across the country! Many of us were sure there'd be a 105th. I had emceed the last two and carefully kept my file up-to-date for that purpose!

A PERSONAL MEMOIR

If not the “father of public relations,” Edward L. Bernays is one of its pioneers. *Life Magazine* listed him as one of the 100 most influential persons in the United States. He worked with many historical figures such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. And his clients included many Fortune 50 corporations.

I first met Edward about 35 years ago when he moved from New York to Cambridge, Mass. to live closer to his two daughters. His 7 Lowell St. address became a favorite meeting place for a wide circle of public relations practitioners and journalists as well as professors from political science, history and other social sciences. Until the very end, he was interested in and kept informed about major issues in the world and in the country. In his own backyard, his efforts saved a landmark row of Sycamore trees on Memorial Drive.

– Pat Jackson

PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

He was known as “US publicist number 1,” a distinction once given him by *Business Week*. But to me, his main contribution to public relations was his awareness that ultimately we deal with human behavior and social institutions. He once advised copy writers that “they were still preoccupied with using words instead of ideas.” Not surprisingly he titled his autobiography “*Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays*.”

Two ideas I often quote are: 1) “I find it easier to change the viewpoint of millions than one man’s”; and 2) “Age-old customs, I learned, could be broken down by a dramatic appeal, disseminated by the network of media.” Also to be remembered is his 9-point action pattern, which recognizes the value of research strategy as well as “selecting themes, symbols and appeals.”

His 103 years of life have spanned the birth and development of public relations into the well recognized and proliferating field it is today.

– Otto Lerbinger

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PHIL LESLY, "ONE OF THE GIANTS OF OUR FIELD," DEAD AT 78

He succumbed to leukemia Monday, April 28, at his winter home in Florida.

- "With the death of Philip Lesly, the public relations profession – I think that is what he would want our field called – loses one of its great thinkers and advocates. He took pride in being a 'public relations man.' He was offended when people referred to the 'pr field' without spelling out the words 'public relations.' Although he liked simple phrases to describe what public relations is, he defined its domain very broadly. Anyone knows that who has examined his impressive contribution to the field, *Lesly's Handbook of Public Relations & Communications*.

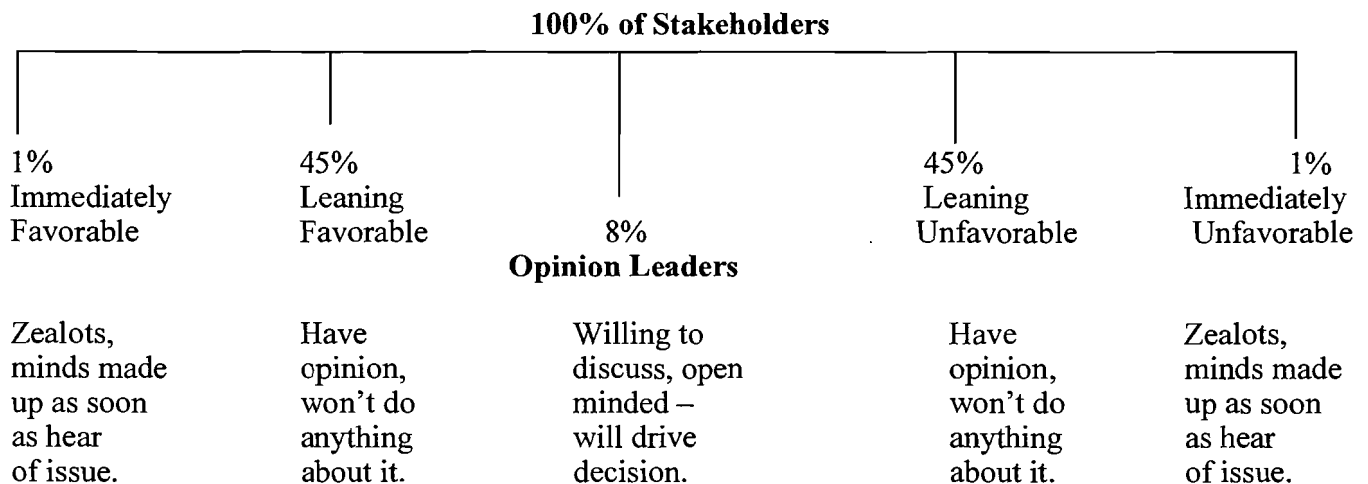
"We at pr reporter have been thankful for his rich – and sometimes controversial – thoughts in his bi-monthly managing the human climate. He had a way of putting current trends in perspective. For example, he recently advocated characterizing our stage of the economy as 'the intelligence age,' saying, 'information merely *feeds* judgment, imagination, creativity and disciplined thinking.'

"Philip Lesly went beyond information and knowledge to the final stage of attaining wisdom."
– **Otto Lerbinger**

LESLY'S PARADIGM

A major aid to practice, he developed this model using data on issues stored at National Opinion Research Center, Univ. of Chicago. It first appeared in pr a decade ago – and is as relevant today as then.

HOW PEOPLE TODAY TYPICALLY RESPOND TO ISSUES



OFTEN CONTROVERSIAL

18 years ago, Lesly's managing the human climate became a regular supplement to pr. The final one, ironically, appears at its usual time with this issue. While his clarity and thoughtful prose were constant, many did not always agree with what he wrote. As Lesly explained to pr (8/29/94):

"I don't think there's any purpose in adhering to conventional wisdom and entrenched platitudes. If you try to modulate what you say so no one is ever upset, you'll rarely say anything that your readers feel is worth paying to read. *Politically correct* advocates believe that the road to Utopia is by preventing anyone from having any critical thoughts about anyone or anything. But the truth always has to prevail in the end."

HIS CONTRIBUTION AS SEEN BY EMINENT PRACTITIONERS

- **"He was a sensitive, literate critic of standard practice – in one sense a rebel against conformity.** I knew him for 40 years. He always opted for higher and higher standards. He was in many ways almost a professional critic of some of the normal customs of our profession. He had great faith in the future of it. Believed we could always do better than we were doing.
- "His writing was 'superb.'** He also was a fundamental believer in the Bill of Rights, in the fact that the interests of the individual are at least as important, perhaps more important than the interests of the state. He was a great believer in individualism.
- "I worked with him during the growth of PRSA. We served on committees together – usually around the advancement of professionalism. He was impatient with the attention given to communications techniques – which seem so dominant in today's world. Despite his pessimism sometimes, he had an unbounded faith in the capacity of all of us to do better and serve a more useful place in the world." – **Howard Chase**
- **"Very few people can match Phil's lifetime contributions to the field.** He was certainly in recent years the principle theologian of public relations – the wiseman, the philosopher. That's what I treasure him for. He was thinking while the rest of us were pounding word processors. He will be missed. Nobody has written as wisely over a range of issues in the field as he has." – **Ed Block**
 - **"Phil Lesly was one of the giants of our field,** a stern and vocal critic of shoddy practice, a provocative champion of public relations at its principled best. Throughout his distinguished career, he challenged all of us. The profession will miss his courageous voice." – **Betsy Plank**
 - **"Phil Lesly was a man of ideas, integrity.** He always knew that the problem of public relations was what was being said rather than the mechanics of how it would be said. He adhered to his high principles all through his life." – **Chet Burger**
 - **"Phil Lesly was unique...a vigorous voice for the values of public relations,** one that was too often the lone dissenter worrying about our tendency to applaud mediocrity. He was a crusader against efforts to quantify a calling rooted in the unpredictable and best practiced with spontaneity and imagination.

“Astutely perceptive, Phil hated hypocrisy and pretense and had the temerity to say so. His observations on the human condition set an intellectual standard for public relations that we struggle even now to measure up to. A fierce individualist, a world class curmudgeon, he was one of our staunchest champions, although sometimes unappreciated such as the messenger is blamed for the message. We were richer for his being and poorer, now, for his loss.” – **John Budd**

BURGER: TRUST COMES FROM SPEAKING HONESTLY AND QUIETLY

PR programs sometimes aren't worth the effort or expense because they can't – and don't – persuade, particularly when trying to influence personal values, top-rung counselor Chet Burger told Institute for PR's annual meeting. **The big problem – gaining trust – isn't getting attention, he feels.**

“The daily news report is shaping public disgust and cynicism much faster than pr pros can build trust in the honor and integrity of our private and public institutions. You cannot build trust while reality is destroying it.”

WHY IT'S DIFFICULT TO BUILD TRUST

- **Opinions on issues are formed from the culture that surrounded people as they grew up.** Consensus doesn't exist on many major issues like abortion or foreign policy. Only reality events [what prr's Behavioral Model calls triggering events] – like war and personal job experiences – change basic opinions
- **People apply *past* experiences and beliefs to *today's* issues.** For example, many political and social ideas crystallize during college years. Many of today's media leaders and intellectuals were in college during Vietnam and Watergate. Is this the reason there's so much cynicism?
- **Reality limits what pr can accomplish.** Today's events are not only discrediting Pres. Clinton, Ken Starr and Henry Hyde – *but also every American institution*
- **Business messages are out-dated and lack credibility.** For example, annual chairman's letter promising a happy tomorrow when today's earnings are falling

FOUR WAYS TO GENERATE TRUST – BASIC, BUT OFTEN OVERLOOKED:

1. **Don't get angry -- be quiet and civil.** Anger may result in 30-second tv spots, but pr advocacy is effective and persuasive when messages are civil
 2. **Respond instantly** – important in the era of the Internet
 3. **Whole truth is better than half truth.** Honest admission of error is more acceptable than legalistic denial
 4. **Trust basic decency and moderation of fellow citizens,** even though public opinion swings back and forth.
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PERSONAL COMPETENCY AND GUTS WILL PREPARE THE FUTURE OF PR

Achieving a seat at management's table requires overcoming two impediments: 1) competency and 2) initiative ("read guts"), believes counselor & ex-AT&T pr head **Ed Block**. He offers "top-of-the-head" thoughts to pr. Screen yourself against these lists:

COMPETENCY - "clear thinking when it counts"

- Know how the organization (or your client) makes money
- Understand the core principles of what makes the organization tick
- Know the goals, objectives and policies of the organization
- Understand the soul of the organization, too
- Know the external trends, issues and constituencies that may, if unheeded or not understood, make it impossible to achieve the intended goals or objectives
- Be prepared to suggest alternatives – assuming there are alternatives that will deliver the desired results
- Lay out and obtain buy-in on a pr strategy or plan that will overcome potential road blocks

INITIATIVE – "being tuned in and turned on to opportunities and danger signs"

- Work behind the scenes letting others take the credit
- Count wins and losses by the number of times you focus your radar downward in the organization and, without being asked, bring your advice and your resources to assist a beleaguered functional manager or line executive in a collaborative effort to solve a business problem or achieve an objective
- If you get good results at least most of the time, your authority and your hunting license will be enlarged and you'll be welcomed at the table

"The ideas I've expressed have to do with defining the role of pr, establishing a higher order of expectations, modifying personal goals – all of which is easy at the level of pontificating but damned hard to institutionalize across such a broad landscape of jobs and careers that are called public relations."

BECOMING SOMETHING WE'VE NEVER BEEN BEFORE

"A key element is preparing the next generation of practitioners, researchers and academics for what is clearly emerging as a 'new' challenge to be

something we've never been before," **David Pincus** told pr:

- Former competencies and ways of thinking and solving problems will no longer be appropriate or sufficient
- Need wholesale changes in college curricula, *both in communication and business schools*, and on-the-job training efforts

- Dare we continue to produce would-be professionals grounded in fundamental communication skills – i.e., writers – with hardly any solid business knowledge, or

“The (professional) organizations that are supposed to represent the best interests of their members prefer to be guardians of the status quo rather than advocates for the future. Perhaps, more than any other change in our field, that needs to change,” notes Pincus, the only pr pro ever to head a university MBA program.

- Should we be developing business professionals with special knowledge and capabilities in the communication/human relations area?
- To what extent are we damaging our own cause with those at the tops of the organizations we seek to influence and who we need to succeed by continuing to label ourselves in narrow, limiting ways? If adapting to our target audiences – in message and language, particularly – is still a primary tenet of ‘good’ communication, then

either we’ve forgotten the principle or simply don’t practice what we preach.

RESEARCH ESSENTIAL TO MOVE BEYOND THE TACTICAL

writes a reader in the Midwest. “I am concerned that not enough attention is paid to producing materials that clearly explain to CEOs the possibilities for using research-oriented pr methods as a tool for measuring progress vis-à-vis strategic goals – as opposed to simply viewing pr as tactical only. Much as we need ‘pr about pr’ we need ‘research into research’ focusing on organizational impediments to structuring strategic pr based on research and evaluation, cross-tabbed by type of organization. Is it just about money? Or not?”

“Research is clearly the crucial stepping stone to planning and evaluating pr that makes a strategic difference – rather than serves tactical needs,”

“Government needs to be weaned off a dependency on mass media. Sadly, government execs will be the last leaders in America to forgo an attachment to the mass media as their primary means for communication,” notes this public sector worker.

SCOTT CUTLIP DIES AT 85: TEACHER, TEXTBOOK CO-AUTHOR, HISTORIAN OF PR, ONE OF THE GREAT INFLUENCES IN THE FIELD

Though known to most as the first half of “Cutlip & Center,” equally important are his achievements as a pioneer in pr education and – as Allen Center puts it – “the historian who traced the evolution of pr from its emergence in the Agrarian Decades to the end of the Industrial Era.” Both the C&C textbook, *Effective Public Relations*, now in its 8th edition, and Cutlip’s two works on pr history are basic to understanding the field. Brief highlights of an unparalleled career – which he described to Glen Broom (San Diego State) shortly before his death as “more than I ever expected to accomplish”:

- **Fundraising was the immediate precursor of modern pr**, Cutlip’s studies found. When pioneering charities in cities like Cincinnati, NY and Chicago began dealing with social problems in the late 19th C., they had to mobilize public support, publicize their activities to donors and gain the trust of those they hoped to aid. This necessitated trained staff focusing on these activities. Which explains why the first pr professional organization was The National Publicity Council for Health & Welfare Services. Among his seminal books is *Fundraising in the United States*, which was in keeping with his “insistence pr be used to make society better,” as Don Wright (U South Alabama) puts it
- **Began as a practitioner for a government agency** – dpr, WVa State Road Commission, 1941-2 – prior to WWII service in Army Air Corps public information and counterintelligence (both good training for pr education). Worked as a newspaper reporter and editor before going to college (Syracuse) and grad school (Wisconsin). Both his degrees are in “political science and journalism” – which helps explain his wide-ranging views of pr. Though he was famous in pr, he taught outstanding journalism courses throughout his career – as his obits by newspaper editors who were former students attest
- **Became dean at University of Georgia after 28 years at University of Wisconsin**, where he introduced pr into the curriculum in 1946 – one of, if not the, first continuing pr courses. The “Georgia mafia” pr faculty he built as dean has rarely been equaled, including Don Wright and Frank Kalupa (U Texas – Austin). In Madison he began collecting historical pr archives, which he donated to the state historical society – along with \$500,000 of royalties from his textbook
- **Co-chaired the original Commission on PR Education** (with the late practitioner Carroll Bateman) that wrote the first curriculum for pr sequences – still the basis, though enhanced by two later Commissions. Betsy Plank, a Commission member, recalls the group brainstorming for two or three days under Scott’s lead – with no precedents to guide them – until a curriculum emerged
- **He traced the history of the field** in two landmark volumes: *PR History from 17th to 20th Century: The Antecedents* and *The Unseen Power* covering the first half of the 20th C. He told pr three years ago that he didn’t feel competent to bring the work to the present and so had agreed with Harold Burson that he would tell that story. Burson is working on the book currently
- **Always stayed close to pr practice**, as press secretary for a gubernatorial candidate, assistant to University of Wisconsin president to reorganize pr department and direct Centennial promotion, consultant to many organizations

A symbol of his position: Cutlip is one of two persons ever granted honorary accreditation by PRSA – the other being Ed Bernays. He received the inaugural Outstanding Educator Award from PRSA and has earned almost every other award in the field including the Gold Anvil, Arthur W. Page Society Hall of Fame et al

A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF A CRUSTY FRIEND

Scott Cutlip was often described as crusty. I came to believe he enjoyed playing this role. As his student at University of Wisconsin, Bill Adams (Florida International University) writes in a memorial to be published in *Tactics*, “He referred to the field as a ‘calling,’ much as one would the priesthood. If he thought you’d committed a transgression against ‘the calling,’ he would let you know.” I felt the impact of this trait whenever Scott and I were on the same program or he attended a talk of mine. Invariably, he’d rise during the Q&A and announce, “My role is to keep Jackson on the straight and narrow...” and then he’d quibble about a point – usually my insistence that influencing behavior was pr’s only justification. His journalistic side would bring on a friendly plea that awareness through publicity was sometimes all you could achieve.

About five years ago I was helping Morgan & Myers celebrate an anniversary by conducting a seminar for its clients and friends in an auditorium at Marquette University. About halfway through, in walked Scott with his son George. As the cliché expresses it, my heart sank. He would now have a chance to demolish my entire behavioral strategy – the topic of the seminar. True to form, when I finished, Scott rose to speak. “I want you all to know,” he said, “that what you have heard here is the way pr should be practiced.” Though we corresponded and talked on the phone, this welcome valedictory was, sadly, the last time I saw him.

– Pat Jackson