

Chapter 3:

THE PROFESSION

Pat believed the profession's vitality and stature would be determined by its body of knowledge. This knowledge base, he believed, made the difference between public relations being a craft or a profession. In this chapter we see Pat's unique take on what public relations should be and how it should operate in our society.

- “The objective of public relations is not to win over people. . .but to win people over.”
– Pat Jackson, 6/4/79
- “PR is a philosophy of interactive personal relationships that allows people to participate directly in decisions, big and small, that impact them.”
– Pat Jackson, 8/5/91

Vol.22 No.17
April 30, 1979

GETTING READY FOR THE 80s – NO. 1: PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS WILL BE ADVOCATES BUT NOT PARTISANS

In a recent strike at a university, about the only officials from the two sides who could talk to one another away from the bargaining table were public relations counsel for the unions and the school's dpr. Each sent the other advanced copies of all statements, publications or releases. They were in daily contact by telephone. And had lunch together to discuss means of minimizing damage to the institution's enrollment, fund raising and reputation. Each vigorously advocated his client's case to press and publics. But they tried to agree on factual and statistical information **so the debate could focus on the issues.**

The strike was bitter, as they are so often. In both camps were some who got angry about this "talking to the enemy." However, these people seemed to understand that their lawyers must talk and exchange briefs and filings.

In a similar situation, also involving a university, the public information office represented both sides. Professional and technical staff are unionized, so dpi represented the administration and a key staffer represented the strikers. Close cooperation they normally practice continued through the disruption – but from different offices. It was resumed as soon as strike ended.

As PRSA president Kerry King said recently: "We in public relations have skills which today's troubled world needs, badly. It is **we** who can effect reconciliation among disparate elements of society. It is **we** who can interpret the expectations of one group to another. It is **we** who can **fill the silence of hostility with a dialogue of trust.**" PRSA's touted Long Range Planning Committee report drew similar conclusion: "Public relations people have the role of always being in the middle."

Public relations practitioners have ability to solve problems for clients. This is our **social mandate.** It should be unrelated to our personal beliefs ... if we are to call ourselves professionals. Partisans sacrifice their objectivity, so are apt to give poor counsel and emotional representation. In the 80s we will learn to be strong advocates without being partisans.

Vol.22 No.22
June 4, 1979

GETTING READY FOR THE 80s – NO. 2: WE WILL AVOID THE VICTORY SYNDROME ... BECAUSE WINNING IS LOSING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

One frequently used word to describe public relations goals or campaigns is one of the most dangerous. The word is "winning." The danger is misstating the role of public relations in a pluralistic society.

Whenever there are winners, there are losers. By definition and human nature, losers have an emotional investment in turning the tables. Decisions worked out in adversary proceedings of "I win – you lose" are never finalized. The struggle can go on forever. The objective of public relations is not to win over people ... but to win people over.

We don't seek victories, but successes – and they are not the same. Edward L. Bernays says the essence of public relations is "adjustment." Professionals advise on ways to bring an organization to the highest point of mutual accommodation "with the publics on which it depends for viability" (t&t 12/18/78). If the organization is strident, arrogant or intent on "winning," adjustment is not possible. Any victories will be Pyrrhic: win today, lose tomorrow. Win the battle, lose the war.

Marshall Lewis, speaking from the corporate viewpoint, put it well in a perceptive talk to PRSA's Counselors Section:

If we can't voluntarily accommodate to expectations of more dependable products, or safer electricity, or more secure and rewarding employment, then government will be asked to impose an accommodation on us.

The adversary system – appropriate or inevitable as it may be in the legal tradition – may turn out in corporate affairs to be a zero-sum game in which paradoxically no one is likely to be a winner. One aspect of professionalism is to sense when the game is turning into zero-sum – when even the most appealing advocacy ads, talk-show appearances, and political action committees are not making one damn bit of difference in the tide of events. When the public and their elected representatives simply don't accept our definition of their self-interest, it may be that the time has come for us to modify our behavior and get on about our new business.

In *Only By Public Consent*, L.L.L. Golden describes several cases where the mightiest institutions of their day were brought to heel by the court of public opinion because their philosophy was one of "winning."

This is not to imply we can get everyone to agree – on anything. Most of the time there is a way to bring most of those involved to some level of consensus. If this doesn't get an organization everything it wanted, that is a sign adjustment is required. Compromise – taking what you can get now – has always been the mark of mature executives and politicians. Yet often organizations are slow to adopt this prudent approach. Think of the public issues today where institutions, even whole industries are being damaged – and the public harmed – because of intransigence.

On the world scene, re-entry of China is a factor for the 80s. Perhaps we can learn from them how to let opponents save face. This ancient art allows us to both reach decisions and keep marching along together. By contrast, adherence to the victory syndrome continually interrupts progress for childish fist fights.

Vol.22 No.33
August 27, 1979

GETTING READY FOR THE 80s – NO. 3: COUNSELOR - CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS WILL BE MORE PROFESSIONAL WITH EMPHASIS ON LOYALTY RATHER THAN ACCOUNT GRABBING

What is the extent of loyalty owed by professionals to clients? Usually the issue comes down to this: does a counseling firm have an obligation to advise a current client that it is carrying on **discussions** with a competitor? Or does conflict of interest begin only when the firm **signs up** the new client?

Unceremonious dumping of the original client – once supplanted by a more prestigious or higher paying replacement – does the field's reputation no good. Yet few firms say they tell clients of exploratory negotiations with others. PRSA's Code says:

Article 4: "A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those involved, given after a full disclosure of the facts; nor place himself or herself in a position where the member's interest is or may be in conflict with a duty to a client, or others, without a full disclosure of such interests to all involved."

Many counselors feel this wording is unworkable. Telling a client about talks with another could result in losing both, they say. Supporters think any other approach means "the robber is guilty only if he finds money in the till, but innocent otherwise."

Ad agency head Jerry Della Femina recently announced his firm will not negotiate with competitors of clients without their consent. "You can't demand loyalty from a client when you don't give it in return," he said. The trend today he characterized as "how much can I make from this account and how fast can I replace it with another. This disloyalty is making advertising dirty."

Contributing to free-for-all approach are clients' expectations during contract discussions. Full-fledged speculative programs may be demanded. Often firms give in to this unprofessional request. (Try asking a law firm to do it.) A Calgary firm's "two of three" rule offers a solution to this problem (see last week's issue). Unless a client is seeking absolutely identifiable services – like publications or publicity – speculative presentations are a poor indicator anyway. They reduce public relations to the level of cleaning supplies, nuts and bolts and other mass produced items with identical specifications. Organizations choosing firms this way reveal how little they understand contemporary public relations. Certainly it is not professional, in their eyes.

I am convinced research would show that sticking with one firm over time is more cost effective – and provides better results – than jumping from one "hot-shop" to another, or firing counsel in anger if they drop the ball. Time wasted indoctrinating new counsel usually takes longer than helping the present firm reassert its value.

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** and position of higher authority in many organizations, particularly businesses; 2) adoption of programs and 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 Street everywhere, with counseling firms in every state and 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 1977); 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 pr reporter and PRSA found that over a third of practitioners do not perform any publicity or media relations tasks (including their supervision).

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

ARE THE BIG CONSULTING FIRMS STILL THE BELLWETHERS?

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 crackerjack corporate departments and outstanding independent counselors**. Practitioners in other kinds of organizations or government are not so often seen as leaders of the profession – yet – but are coming on strong.

Once, anyone wondering where the field was heading would simply look at the major counseling firms. Leading consultants are the showcase of

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 present-day strategists and philosophers? Ed Bernays, Phil Lesly, Howard Chase, Jim Fox are counselors – but independents. Carroll Bateman, Betsy Plank, Bob Fegley, Kerryn King, Frank Wylie are leaders – but corporate practitioners. Scott Cutlip, Ken Smith, Otto Lerbinger and their fellow educators are rising influencers, with the real power of new knowledge. Nonprofit, healthcare, education, government have developed their own leaders – like Carl Spitzer, Lew Riggs, Mike Radock, Ralph Frede, Jerry Dalton, Dave Brown, to name a few. prr's 1978 sociometric survey – first ever

conducted for public relations – listed Harold Burson, Dick Cheney, Bill Durbin and 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, pr's Annual Survey for the 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 and sales promotion as well as advertising. Even before acquisitions, most larger firms were viewed as **service** providers (of publicity and promotion) with **counsel** they were asked to give mainly in sales area.

Longtime exec of a major firm told pr why that organization has been emphasizing publicity with less interest in counseling and 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 1980 it plans to strengthen its "newest services": 1) public issues/public policy group; 2) expanded organizational communications function; 3) new proxy solicitation and shareholder analysis section; 4) Group Attitudes Corp., its research subsidiary; 5) **helping select candidates for corporate boards of directors**. But H&K told pr 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, interveners, 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 and editor,
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 and 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 and 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 and line managers do. Schmertz is 100% correct.

“Our clients hire us for our philosophy as much as for our expertise and 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, lessons 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)

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 and opportunities that human relationships can affect. **That** is where the most critical action is.”

– Marshall Doswell, vp corp com’ns, Springs Mills, (Fort Mill, SC)

“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 and 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 that 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 decisionmaking, policy development and 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 and 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 toward involvement in the public policy process, issue management, advocacy communications and 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 com’ns, Union Carbide (NYC)

Vol.23 No.41
October 20, 1980

BENDIX FLAP FOCUSES ON WRONG ISSUE,
SHOWS WHY QUALIFICATIONS ARE NECESSARY FOR TOP PUBLIC RELATIONS JOB

We hope pr's questioning of her qualifications to become vp-pa did not help start the snowball that has now resulted in Mary Cunningham's resignation from Bendix. Month before the public controversy, our July 21 issue asked how any person with no experience in the increasingly professional, incredibly complicated field of public relations could effectively wield the top responsibility in a major organization. The Aug. 18 issue carried a sampling of letters received in response.

Facts available at the time disclosed nothing about her alleged special relationship with CEO William Agee. Then, 3 weeks ago, she was "promoted" again to vp-strategic planning -- or so the media labeled the move. No one explained why that job is superior to the public relations post as implied. Subsequent furor generated nationwide publicity openly discussing rumors Cunningham was named due to her closeness to the boss. But he & Bendix' board denied that. As a young woman appointed to a high corporate job, she had an opportunity to demonstrate the capability of young people & women. Her unfortunate resignation lends credence to the speculations.

Points for practitioners to consider: (1) Why in our supposedly enlightened era would media make such a fuss over this sexist theme? Wall Street Journal ran a series of gossip pieces verging on soap opera. So did wire services & others. In Bendix' home town, Detroit Free Press was still carrying major articles every day last week, including a long series by author Gail Sheehy. (2) The situation became unmanageable, or at least publicly so, when Agee told a company meeting he had promoted her on qualifications. Counterproductive effect was predictable. Saying "I am honest" only raises the thought you may not be; otherwise, why say it? Compare Nixon's "I'm no crook." If Agee had left the situation alone and let Cunningham prove herself on the job, would the gossip have either gone away or become harmless? Is going public always best? It appears jealous insiders stimulated an unwise public statement which has not helped Bendix, Agee or women professionals. Most ironically, what the CEO needed turned out to be experienced public relations advice!

-- Pat Jackson

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 and section. Business and government 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 and 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 and 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 and departmental designations. Internecine arguments over accreditation, licensing, membership in professional societies and continuing education show signs of dealing with the issues – but muckraking publications and disgruntled individuals sometimes prefer to turn this positive discussion into dissension and divisiveness. And many practitioners say they care little whether or not the field is considered a profession.

IT DOES MATTER IN OUR VIEW

pr 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:

A JOB FOR OUR EDUCATORS

Law schools have a dictum for empowering and 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 departments aren't even titled public relations.

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 and 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 and other recognized professions fare in similar circumstances.**

The vp-pr of a huge financial services company told pr recently why his department 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 and 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 two-way information flow and 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 and relationships – from the day of birth. We may ignore this fact, at our peril. But it is part of life. Therefore public relations as a philosophy and technology is useful to everyman. It belongs not to its practitioners, or their clients and employers, but to the people.

This is the ultimate test of a profession. It is why law, medicine, clergy, teaching, engineering and architecture are recognized as such – because every person in human society must deal with orderly behavior, health, theology, learning and physical technology. This is why public relations' sub-systems of advertising and 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 and management will respect and 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

CODES MAKE THE POINT

PRSA's Code of Professional Standards, first adopted 27 years 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 1965, 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."

you want to change jobs? Then it could mean a great deal that public relations is accorded professional recognition.

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 and a definition, then reach consensus on ways to apply their own strategies to their own field, public relations can attain recognition and 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 and capable of great progress, and (c) everyone should be able to participate in relevant decisions. Thomas Jefferson said it well: If there is a millennium, 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.

A PR REPORTER NEW YEAR'S INQUIRY ON PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT:

1) EIGHT WAYS PR CONTRIBUTES TO THE BOTTOM LINE: A LIST AIMED AT SHAPING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIELD

In its continuing effort to 1) be accountable, 2) contribute to organizational objectives, 3) be measured for effectiveness, the field of public relations has devoted itself in recent years to devising methods of evaluation. These range from counting clips to exasperating mathematical formulae. No method has proven useful enough to become widely accepted. The reason may be that there is a missing ingredient: a benchmark against which to measure. Before we can ask what public relations has accomplished, we must know what public relations can accomplish. Here is a list of provable ways pr can make or save money for every type of organization:

1. **Publicity and Promotion.** Paving the way for sales of products and services (or for fundraising or stock offerings) is a traditional activity of the field. It has such direct impact on the bottom line that some companies like IBM are considering sales quotas for product promotion personnel (pr 11/29/82).
2. **Internal Motivation.** Building morale, enhancing productivity and creating team spirit among employees, members, shareholders and other internal publics may have the most direct effect on the bottom line, since these folks are the organization. Such efforts reinforce marketing publicity, for example, because public relationships are in fact based on the interactions of all team members with numerous publics and countless individuals. Practitioner-researcher Bill Banach's studies suggest as much as 90% of a professional's time today can profitably be spent on internal publics (pr 8/2/82).
3. **No Surprises.** As the manager assigned to interpret the organization to its publics, then interpret these publics to the organization, no one is better placed to provide the all-important early warning system. A single surprise issue or unplanned-for social/political change can drain enough resources to put the organization in the red.
4. **New Opportunities.** Because they interact with more internal and external audiences than anyone in the organization, public relations pros have a conning tower from which to identify new markets, new products, new methods. Something as simple as learning during a research project or promotion campaign that an untapped ancillary market may exist – which happens all the time – can add unexpected sales volume, as one example.
5. **Protection of Present Position.** In our constantly changing society, issues will arise. While an organization is under attack, public relations is the only department that can keep things moving ahead despite the battle. Proctor & Gamble did not suffer declining sales, morale or stock values during the tampon debacle, for instance, because of expert public relations handling. Nothing the lawyers, accountants, production managers or other executives could do would have gained this benefit – because what was involved was public perception of the company's true values.
6. **Overcoming Executive Isolation.** Probably the biggest bottom line boost is a with-it management. In the sharp

competitive climate of 1983, it can make the difference between success and survival. An inescapable assignment of every practitioner is opening the eyes and ears of management to what's really happening.

7. **Change Agency.** Managing change is critical. Organizations must change regularly to stay competitive and efficient. But change is threatening, often resisted. Practitioners can use OD, QWL and other techniques to be change agents. Smooth

8. transition through a necessary change is a real dollar-saver.

9. **The Double Bottom Line.** Social responsibility is now understood to have a traceable effect on economic success for every type of organization. Philip Morris coined this phrase to explain the relationship (prr 3/22/82). The leading role in social accountancy is usually played by public relations staff.

2) PROJECT FOR 1983: GETTING PUBLIC RELATIONS TO MOVE BEYOND INFORMATION TRANSFER TO PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT; DO WE HAVE THE TECHNIQUES TO DEAL WITH THIS MOST POWERFUL FORCE?

"The first fundamental rule of Washington," says Treasury Secretary Donald Regan, is this — "perception is reality." He might have called it the fundamental rule of Anywhere. Perception is the most powerful force in human society. Everything humans do or think is based on it. It is the shaper of relationships. The interpretive screen of information. The spark of motivation. The basis of beliefs.

Perception is rational — rather than just logical — combining all our senses and capabilities: brains and logic, heart and emotion, gut and intuition. Fact is weak in comparison. It's often difficult or impossible to discern what "the facts" are. They are "logical," equated with "truth," by nature historical — something that occurred then and there. Perceptions are here and now.

There are numerous influences in forming a person's perceptions. A useable, simple paradigm of how perceptions are shaped will be needed. It will probably be something like this:

Influences in Shaping Perception

1. Attitudes: stored-up opinion
2. Information: current opinion molder
3. Social Force: opinion validator

Scholars will object as always that this is not strictly true or provable, but practitioners need a rule of thumb that is applicable to the great majority of cases. The real issue is whether we

Contrast between reality and perception is shown by a study that appeared last year in *Scientific American*. Researchers asked three groups to rank the risk factor among 30 potential sources of injury. Article presented these perceived risks with the actual deaths occurring from each source. Pesticides, for example, was ranked 9th by League of Women Voter members, college students gave it 4th place, business and professional persons ranked it 15th. In fact, pesticides was 28th. Each group felt it a greater risk than power mowers, surgery, alcoholic beverages, hunting and other factually greater risks.

Where did these misperceptions on the danger of pesticides originate? From some basic attitude about chemicals as dangerous in some corrosive way? From hearing inaccurate information? From an influential book like *Silent Spring*?

have the reliable studies and behavioral science theories on which to base a strategy of perception management.

3) WHY PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT? HOW MIGHT IT WORK?

Perception management begins in the faith public relations has mastered the skills of communicating information or positions through carefully structured messages and well-targeted media. The constant difficulty is to get publics to hear, accept, respond and act upon our messages. Focusing attention on the perceptions held by publics– which constitutes their understanding of the situation and thus readiness to act – may be a key. Perception management is therefore other-directed. It stresses the need to penetrate others' minds and hearts, not flood the scene with our communications. Its precepts are:

1. Facts are less important than opinions, no matter how erroneous or unproven those opinions may be.
2. Logic is less important than human nature.
3. Acceptance of people and the world as they are, not the way your client/employer would like them to be. . .true even if your client is a social reformer.
4. Tough adversary stances are generally to be avoided, since the perceptions they create are primarily negative; cooperation, friendliness and patience are the order of the day.
5. Opinion is less important than attitudes, and attitudes are less important than behavior; the ultimate test of public relationships is how people behave, not what they think or feel.

WHY PERCEPTION IS THE BASIS

“The act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or the mind; cognition; understanding.”

– Random House Dictionary

SOME TECHNIQUES THAT MIGHT BE APPLIED

Since the scope of influence on perceptions is so wide, a first principle in managing them is to undertake actions that will narrow this scope. For instance, toning down public expectations of an organization. Understatement becomes more effective than bragging.

Abuse lists provide a red-flag system to avoid venturing into those subject areas that will cause publics to react negatively. The technique stems from sociological theory: “Any change in the relationship between two groups is the result of an abuse on the part of one.” Abuses need not be real, of course; they may be perceived as abuses by a public when the organization doesn't see them that way at all. Write down 1) those historical abuses that have occurred between the organization and the particular public; 2) any current abuses; 3) future actions that might be seen as abusive, such as a cut in wages for employees. Listing abuses by publics creates a means of managing your actions and communications so they do not contribute to harmful perceptions, or rejuvenate old negatives.

Expectational research is more valuable than opinion surveys. This is true anyway since it appears people's expectations are more constant than their opinions. For perception management it provides a needed longer-term benchmark.

THREE SCHOOLS OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE AND A PROPOSAL FOR UNIFICATION

1. **Communication School**, or messenger class – a) emphasizes writing ability; b) concentrates on house publications, media placement; 3) stresses sales support and constituency communication.
2. **Victory School**, or warrior class – a) emphasizes adversary stance; b) concentrates on public attacks on opposing views or those who hold them via mass media including advertising, plus rallying supporters through targeted media; c) stresses “winning” by passing legislation, avoiding regulation, overcoming competition.
3. **Participation School**, or diplomat class – a) emphasizes accommodation and mutual understanding; b) concentrates on research and behavioral science to achieve dialogue and co-authorship of public and organizational policies; c) stresses strategy, gaining consent.

Needed is a unifying 4th school: **integrationists** who combine the best legitimate aspects of all three.

One way to get there would be to recognize that **management or clarification of perceptions** is the basal technique used by each school. To bridge the gap between “marketing pr” on the one hand and “issues management” on the other, the profession might concentrate on “perception management” – that bundle of theories, strategies and tactics common to all successful public relations practice, yet still very sparsely understood.

THIS INQUIRY IS NOT INTENDED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION

It aims to get practitioners to seek out a better, and uniform, way for public relations to approach its task – consistent with the realities of how humans think, learn and behave. To that extent it springs from a growing concern that too many practitioners are stuck on the information model – which assumes (incorrectly, in our view) that people given the “right” information will respond, and in a useful or helpful way. There is little if any evidence favoring this model in social science.

Why do we cling to it? Perhaps because it’s easier. Perhaps because texts and handbooks in the field do not cover topics like perception. According to their indexes, no current public relations text discusses perception – with one exception. Robert Reilly’s *Public Relations In Action* lists three “concepts for understanding human behavior,” which are 1) motivation, 2) perception, 3) learning. Of perception he states, “A large share of public relations problems are rooted in misperception.”

Ed Robinson’s seminal text, *Communications & Public Relations*, gave several pages to perception in 1966. In coming weeks, prr will explore the topic further, concentrating on examples and case studies. Readers’ contributions are solicited – and, as always, your opinions pro or con are welcomed.

Vol.26 No.29
August 1, 1983

A MODEST PROPOSAL: DROPPING USE OF THE WORD “AGENCY” TO DELINEATE PUBLIC RELATIONS *FIRMS* WILL BENEFIT EVERYONE IN THE PROFESSION

Positioning is now accepted as critical to marketing anything. Product or service differentiation is also important. Why, then, at a time when the profession of public relations is confused in many ways with the business of advertising, do practitioners allow themselves to be engulfed and captured by advertising’s terminology? Even PRSA and CPRS – who ought to carry the cudgels religiously – increasingly refer to public relations firms as “agencies.”

No experienced practitioner can doubt the power of semantics. This example of its workings among ourselves is disturbing. An “agency” embodies the idea of franchise, of vending another’s product (as ad agencies do time and space), of being paid on commission: advertising agencies, insurance agencies, employment agencies, talent agencies, food brokerage agencies, et al. Applied to public relations counseling or services, it is simply inaccurate.

But is this who we want to be grouped with anyway? Or do we want to share the terminology of professionals: law firms, architectural firms, engineering firms, management consulting firms.

Ad agencies by definition engage in one-way propagandistic communications. They are outside vendors, like printers, offering a valuable, highly skilled specialty. Their role in counseling clients on other aspects of operations is minimal, except in rare ad hoc cases. Public relations activities cannot be effective at such arm’s length; they are too inclusive, have such a strong ripple effect. Even at the level of publicity, there is a difference between placing a story with the Columbus Dispatch and running an ad there. The ad is canned; it can get into any medium in exactly the same form by a simple purchase. The reporter, however, will ask questions, may want to speak with the CEO, etc.

The bottom line is that **using “agency” clearly implies public relations is publicity**, getting “free space” to go along with the “paid space” of advertising. Worse, this suggests belief in the long-ago discredited “bullet theory”: send out a message and people will automatically be influenced by it. Professionals know it’s a bit more complicated than that.

Sticking to “firm” differentiates public relations from advertising. This helps even ad agencies and may stop their clients from asking that “some pr” be thrown into the deal. Ad agencies without professional public relations units will find it harder to claim, as most do now, that they offer “advertising **and** public relations.” The ad-agency-&-pr-firm-under-the-same-roof approach is better for everyone, including clients.

Ultimately, this subject boils down to realizing that **public relations has the capability to become a true profession in our society**, advertising does not. A profession must deal with something that is endemic and universal in human life like health, law, education, religion...or public relationships. Advertising is a highly creative, very useful technique, but life could (and has and in many locales of mankind does) go on without it. Public relations, in contrast, is always with us, an inescapable fact of

life. As soon as there was Eve as well as Adam (or whoever those first two were of whichever sex) there were relationships, reputations, group decisionmaking, interactive communication. Understanding and facilitating this fact to improve human society is the role of public relations. Why send out a misleading message by calling our firms “agencies?”

This month pr reporter begins its 26th year. The 1,200 issues which have appeared since September 1958, are a forceful testament to elemental changes in the field, which affect not only practitioners but the society they serve:

1. Public relations has moved steadily from publicity to policy as its driving force. Perhaps the best evidence is that the role of CEO itself is understood to be spokesperson, motivator, personification of the organization -- rather than dictatorial order-giver. This phenomenon was illuminated by pr research in the 70s which revealed CEOs are spending a great deal of time on public relations responsibilities.

2. Practice has expanded from applied communication theory to a much wider range of behavioral science. Several times each year we are able to report on significant new scholarship that is useful to daily practice, like recent work on the public communication campaign and its message-attitude-behavior relationship; how the perception of reality determines effectiveness; workforce participation; cognitive dissonance & the seatbelt campaign; first-ever-word-of-mouth study; image-search method to probe perceptions of org'ns.

3. Case studies indicate the objective is shifting from influencing opinion to motivating behavior. pr reports on the ERA struggle dramatically illustrated how an issue can hold large favorable majorities and still fail -- unless supporters translate their opinion to behavior.

4. Research, both quantitative & qualitative, both formal & informal, has become a major factor -- probably the factor. More space in our pages is devoted to studies & survey findings than any other category of news.

What this means is a scientifically oriented practitioner ... whose work is accountable ... & linked to organizational goals & the bottom line. Creativity is still immensely valuable, but more apt to arise from trained lateral thinking than sudden inspiration over a martini. Indeed, we received a study recently that purports the drink of public relations people is now white wine or mineral water, not martinis. That should silence any who doubt we are witnessing profound change.

Vol.28 No.16
April 22, 1985

REAL LESSON OF AT&T BREAKUP, BANK MONEY LAUNDERING & RELATED CASES
IS THAT PUBLIC RELATIONS SHOULD CHANGE ITS FOCUS

Last week, respected practitioners analyzed in these pages some reasons why AT&T's huge, highly professional, well-funded public relations function could not avert the breakup of that company. Their presentation was instructive -- but something was missing. Most telephone customers could have told us professionals what it is.

AT&T (as do most organizations today) construed public relations to mean primarily publications, annual reports, media publicity, videos & similar products. Basically these amount to communications from management to important publics, plus some feedback devices.

Yet in terms of outcome -- of meaningful goals & objectives, of the reason it exists -- public relations is not communications products but the relationships between the sales clerks, repair staff, phone answerers, supervisors & others who are the contact points between the organization & its publics. Folks who try to get a phone repaired, have an erroneous bill adjusted, seek an explanation of some policy (such as the amount of deposit required to have a phone installed) or get a straight answer about the latest rate filing know why there was no public opposition to dismembering AT&T. To them the monster deserved to be busted for its uncaring arrogance toward customers, gov't & others.

In her daily actions, Ma Bell had become the monolithic monopoly incarnate. Other rationalizations may have been used for the actual breakup, but

fueling it was a long-held sense of outrage at years of bad treatment by too many telephone company personnel.

This is where the rubber meets the road in public relations. PR is what an organization's members do...not grand official statements, CEO speeches & flashy annual reports. As Emerson warned, "What we do speaks so loudly no one can hear what we say."

Why were the excellent professionals at Bell not able (or not allowed) to deal with this bottom-line challenge? After all, it was the company's Arthur Page who formulated many basic practices of the field, including the ones discussed here. The purpose of such an inquiry cannot be to throw stones at AT&T's pr pros -- tho possibly at its management or policies. The only question is: What can practitioners learn from this case? Some thoughts:

1. Public relations should alter its focus from being a service unit to becoming a counseling, monitoring & service unit. Monitoring may be the most valuable. A report on Union Carbide's Indian tragedy notes that "organizations tend to economize on internal coordination & control when ever possible, whether it involves financial, environmental or other matters." A balance of power is required to be sure operational laxity doesn't lead to problems. As "conscience of the organization," pr is the logical choice.

(continued...)

2. Operations audits are more important than communication audits. Monitoring can be done in an organized, openly reported way to show what is actually happening. Banks accused of laundering drug money, manufacturers with leaking wastes or safety hazards need someone to watch out for the breakdowns -- at operational levels. PR should do it. They'll be called in to clean up the mess so have motivation.

3. PR should ask to be evaluated on relationships, not communications output. This means seeking the responsibility that goes along, principally the mandate to monitor the "behavior at the boundaries" where the organization meets its publics.

4. Training may be the highest skill level in pr. What is pr's role in training personnel to deal with customers? Training may be assigned to human resources. Operations execs may pose barriers. But in final analysis, it's the relationships that people are trained to build or maintain that spell success or failure. Therefore pr must be involved.

5. Corporate culture programs are essential -- & never-ending. They begin with orientation, follow with perpetual training & rituals like events & awards. The philosophy of relationships drives such programs, so pr has a responsibility.

6. Corporate culture begins with a value system that is shared by all

members of the organization. If you gave a test to employees, how many could state the company values? If you ask them to site slips in behavior from the stated values, could they give many examples?

7. RHIP policies (rank hath its privileges) are an indicator of trouble. Something as simple as allotted free parking for the boss when others must find and pay for a slot is a twice-daily reminder of how the outfit truly feels -- demonstrated behaviorally. Exec dining, restrooms & similar only make it worse. Either we are a team or we aren't. It is public relations' responsibility to question, attack & otherwise get rid of RHIP.

8. Hierarchical organizations by definition find it hard to build relationships. When a level 3 is prohibited from talking officially to a level 5, it may signify far more than just "going thru channels."

These cases remind us that building relationships, not communicating, is what counts. Relationships involve behavior, human interaction. Communication is words. Relationships are formed for an organization with its publics by every member of the organization who interacts with those publics. Communications come from the tower via the public relations dep't (or some euphemism there for). Only practitioners can effectively change the focus.

-- Pat Jackson

Vol.29 No.33
August 25, 1986

DECADE OF CHANGE PROVIDES VIEW OF UNSETTLING TRENDS

Last month marked the 10th anniversary of our editorship of the newsletter. A brief look at the changes in public relations within that decade may offer a vantage point for charting the coming one.

From Publicity To Policy This major strategic shift moved the function securely into top management. In the late 70s, pr's Annual Survey began picking up 2 trends: 1) increasing time spent by CEOs on relationships with key publics, 2) decline in the percentage of time devoted by practitioners to chasing the media. A contradictory trend was the all-hype, total-publicity approach of the hi-tech industry & consulting firms that specialize there. But the shakeout occurring as the industry matures suggests this was the familiar pre-adolescent phase booms go thru.

¶Landmark events like the breakup of AT&T and the resurgence of Chrysler indicate that management now has responsibility not just for profit/bottomline but also for public policy. This assures public relations a place in the boardroom.

The Challenge Of Professionalizing But instead of bringing joy, this emergence is giving the field heartburn. In the mid-70s, practitioners lamented "not being understood by the boss" or "not being involved in decisions." Today the complaint is that non-professionals are getting some top pr jobs. One clear trend has been -- and is -- the search by dedicated practitioners & the professional societies for uniformity in understanding & applying the body of knowledge. This is seen as a means of institutionalizing practice ala other professions. Two barriers are coming into sharper focus:

¶The communications cum journalism base of pre-professional education seems outdated (in contrast to the scholarly public relationship research starting to come from the professors who teach the old curriculum). Professional training may have to be relegated to graduate schools, as with other professions.

¶The questions being raised -- recently you hear them everywhere -- by the big ad-agency-owned firms. At base, the issue is whether a human relations profession can be practiced by large hierarchical organizations... whose first concern is contributing profits to their owners' next quarterly report to shareholders. Undoubtedly information/publicity/outbound communications can be effectively handled that way ...but, as stated earlier, the thrust of public relations is away from this emphasis. So the highly visible, well placed, hard driving big firms now seem counterintuitive. Perhaps the end product of the Hill & Knowlton-Gray-Strayton-Byoir megamerger will provide a solution -- or spotlight the problem.

From Process To Outcome

Whether carried out by trained pr professionals, non-professional interlopers, big publicly held firms or whomever, new tactics are in demand. Battling troublesome issues in public is passe. Anticipating them in order to avoid battles is the goal. This is illiciting a rapid increase in monitoring operations, where most pr issues arise. And in training, which is as integral to jobs today as the coffee break. Also in programs to let organizations speak with One Clear Voice. (In an era where loyalty is in decline, they are a real challenge.)

"10 years ago everyone was talking about "the management of change." Today this is even more vital -- and increasingly seen as an aspect of public relationships. But adding 2 pages to the newsletter or writing better will not do the job. Public relations is being asked to motivate behavior. That is the measurable bottomline of public relationships. Accomplishing it requires a uniform body of knowledge applied by a trained group of practitioners who know where they are heading.

-- Pat Jackson

AN INVESTIGATIVE CASE PROBLEM IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: CAN IT BE ACHIEVED FOR A GROUP SUCH AS A PROFESSION WHERE MEMBERS ARE DISPERSED WITHIN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS?

Can public relations develop a "corporate culture" to which its practitioners adhere even though they work inside employing organization that have their own cultures? Has this already happened? Do other professions have such overriding cultures? What are the advantages?

Are there potential disadvantages? One that comes to mind is analogous to academe, where professors are usually more loyal to their discipline than to the college at which they teach. For a profession this might be a distinct advantage – arming pr pros with mores, jargon and techniques that clearly set them apart. Adherence to the ethics and disciplines of a strong profession would be one way to show that pr brings something special to the table. Essentially, it is just such membership in an outside "club" that gives lawyers and CPAs their standing.

HOW MIGHT A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONALISM ARISE?

The field has learned much about the ingredients that go into a culture. Foremost are 1) heroes, 2) role models, 3) rituals, 4) stories, 5) training (the military unabashedly calls it indoctrination; for new members most organizations label it orientation).

Take them one at a time:

1. **Heroes pr has, many of them.** Ivy Lee, Arthur Page, Paul Garrett, Earl Newsom and many others were truly bigger than life. Even seamier predecessors of today's practice, whether P.T. Barnum or Ben Sonnenberg, offer lessons every practitioner should know. (Yes, in today's cynical world, heroes are usually dead. . .so their feet of clay are beyond the spotlight of a tv special or 20/20.)

Every once in a while, even in a pragmatic publication like prr, it doesn't hurt to look inward – to review the state of the practice of public relations. If ever there was a year that provided feedstock for such strategic reconnoitering, it was 1986. As it ended, there was ample evidence the profession is on practitioners' minds. Consider:

- **Ethics abuses**, not just the Deaver & Franco cases but the Boesky scandal, Iran-contra stonewalling, Thiokol-NASA o-ring tragedy, et al.
- **New interest in licensing, mandatory accreditation** and similar, culminating in PRSA's Symposium on Demonstrating Professionalism and CPRS' attempts to begin applying its innovative 5-year plan.
- **Acquisition of some of the last major independent pr firms** by ad agency-owned biggies, including H&K swallowing Byoir, Gray & Strayton; and Doremus adding Weiner & Porter Novelli.
- **Professional topics ranked highest** among current concerns of practitioners in prr's Annual Survey of the Profession (see prr 12/22/86).

2. **Role models are also numerous** and arguably most important. (For a list see Chapter 6, 1/5/87)
3. **Rituals are not yet universal – but are more firmly in place than may be realized.**
 - A. **Membership in a professional society** is not endemic but, on analysis, much higher than usually acknowledged. Assuming the US census figure (a self-selected universe) is high, postulate that the body of truly dedicated practitioners numbers 75,000 with fringers removed. Unduplicated membership in all pr organizations national, regional and local is by prr's reckoning about 40,000 or over 50% – not the 10-15% often cited.
 - B. **Accreditation** has so far been attained by about one-third of the members in PRSA and CPRS, smaller percentages in the other societies that offer it. But there is a new enthusiasm for taking the exam, reported by organization after organization. More important, key educators are almost all accredited. Doctoral degrees notwithstanding, they have sat for the test and condition students to do likewise as soon as they're eligible. There are no more eager candidates for accreditation than graduates of public relations sequences. As they will one day constitute the vast majority of practitioners, universal accreditation seems assured.
 - C. **Licensing** is still anathema to scores of practitioners. But support is growing – and adherents are both vocal and activist. Texas PR Association plans to file legislation in the upcoming session. That's right, Texas . . . home of rabid independence.
 - D. **A common definition** is missing. But the "description" promulgated under Joe Awad's initiative in 1982 has been widely accepted, including official endorsement by several societies. It is sufficient.

There may be no pr song, handshake or ring (thank heavens!). . .but rituals do bind us together, far more than we may be aware.
4. **Stories, instructive ones, funny ones, inspiring ones abound.** Who doesn't know what Sonnenberg told Ford about the Edsel – for a \$50,000 fee? Or how Bernays saved Schrafft's from serious loss of business when rumors of sanitation violations were spread? Such incidents are convincing – and show that public relations has a long and honorable history of developing its techniques.
5. **Training** (professional development in the pr argot) **is a growth industry**, as it must be in a field growing and changing so fast.

PRACTITIONERS ARE READY

Nearly half of current practitioners **are ready to go beyond voluntary accreditation** to demonstrate the professionalism of public relations. 42% of respondents to prr's 22nd Annual Survey prefer mandatory accreditation, periodic recertification or licensing. With 37% opting for voluntary accreditation, this reduces the number who feel no credentialing is necessary to 22%.

CHANGES IN FIELD MAKE INDIVIDUAL ROLE MODELING ESSENTIAL

1. **Vocation began as freelance function**, not integrated into organization – e.g. Edison and Westinghouse hiring press agents, The Publicity Bureau, Lee, Dudley, Bernays. Had problem-solving role.

2. **Started moving in-house** primarily in business – e.g. Arthur Page, Paul Garrett – and human welfare organizations – e.g. Social Work Publicity Bulletin of 1923 (now Channels) and Religious PR Council of 1929. Retained problem-solving orientation but moved steadily toward media relations.
3. As almost all organizations embraced the function, **publicity and promotion dominated** problem-solving. Counseling firms grew in number and location and, because of their breadth of experience, became the diffusers of new techniques – **the role models**.
4. Now the large firms are almost entirely subsidiaries of publicly-held ad agencies. Pressure to produce profits so parent companies can report good quarterly earnings may be moving them away from objective counseling role, into service marketing emphasis. Such firms cannot be role models for a **profession** – though individuals within them might.
5. Increasingly it has been the **single practitioner**, wherever employed, who has taken on role modeling responsibility. Whether it's Larry Foster and Tylenol, Jim Tolley and Iacocca, Frank Weaver and hospitals, Ron Rhody and corporate free speech. . .this is the source of major learning for the field today.

ACTION LIST: WHAT TO DO TO MAKE PR'S CULTURE A VIABLE TOOL FOR ALL

1. Write a book **compiling the pithy, elucidative stories** about the heroes and great events of the field.
2. Urge societies to which you belong to **adopt the uniform code of ethics**. A project coordinated by North American PR Council aims to put before clients and public a single, easily understood, promotable code.
3. **Be a role model**. Five traits of the ones named in our poll are that they a) share experience, good and bad, by writing and speaking, b) mentor students and young pros, c) stimulate debate on pr topics, d) promote the field to others, e) develop new techniques.
4. **Gain a reputation so you can represent public relations to your publics**. The sociometric studies show this is achieved by writing, speaking, lecturing, service in professional societies.

1. A universally shared professional culture for public relations practitioners is inches away. All that is needed is desire.

2. Academic and technical support are in place. Imperfect, yes, but once a culture is shaped and adopted it will in turn shape these support systems for the profession.

3. If practitioners will drop their diffidence and start taking charge of their field, public relations can emerge as perhaps the most useful profession of them all.

ON PR REPORTER'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY, SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE NEXT 30

Could public relations be having midlife crisis? Historically, the contrast with September 1958 – when Charles Prout started the newsletter – reveals a field that was emerging beyond its pioneers into nascent acceptance as a legitimate part of management. Today it is almost universally accepted – yet filled with insecurity.

Structurally, pr has been around long enough that the pioneering spirit, the quest for new applications and social usefulness, has given way to bureaucracy and protecting the flanks. There's abundant entrepreneurship – but its goal is mainly building careers or businesses, not the profession. Two re-energizers:

1. **Re-establish our social compact.** Stop bragging so much about our value to clients and employers, emphasize what we can do for society and the public. Consulting firms – the most visible portion of the practice – could switch the hype from who is biggest, new sales strategies and other self-congratulatory approaches. When recently have we heard a firm talk about advancing the field's usefulness instead of market share? We can be so consumed with competitiveness that we lose respect – including self-respect. There's more to life than dog-eat-dog. Besides, rebuild our social contract and the pie will be much larger for everyone.
2. **Launch a professionwide management awareness program**, by professional societies and by individual practitioners. Use a two-pronged theme:
 - a) Organizations need to think of the pr ramifications of all actions, just as they think of the financial impacts.
 - b) Public relations is forever – like janitorial services. Just as dust settles every day and must be cleaned up, so human relationships change and require constant attention.

PR AS POLICY INFLUENCER: SITTING AT DECISIONMAKING TABLE MEANS TAKING THE LEAD, AND THE RISK, OF SPEAKING TO THE ISSUES THAT REALLY MATTER; DO PRACTITIONERS PREFER SERVICE ROLE?

Whether or not 1991 proves to be the "R" year (recession), it will be tough on pr in other ways. One more time the question is being debated: are public relations professionals decisionmakers? A renewed split between the service and counseling roles is possible. In recent weeks various sources report:

- the head of one large pr firm feels pr's role is not in decisionmaking but in communicating decisions to persuade publics to go along with them;
- another large firm is starting to concentrate on clients where counseling is the major need, downplaying some once highly-touted service functions;
- while some promotion/publicity firms and departments are cutting staff, those specializing in issues are having banner times.

The service side, principally communication, will always be needed by organizations, but it can be performed by persons with less training and comparatively narrower experience than the counseling, or decisionmaking, role. It is a legitimate question, then, **whether practitioners want to aspire** to the uncertainties and turmoil of managerial leadership.

What is also clear is the **dire need** in most organizations for the pr philosophy and viewpoint. Decisions are made without it almost as a rule. Many boomerang – which public relations foresight could circumvent.

Failure of both the Challenger spacecraft and the Hubble telescope have been officially ascribed to poor internal communications cultures – closed systems where workers and managers didn't talk to one another. PR staff there apparently were publicists, not counselors or change agents. Then no amount of pr razzle dazzle could save them from the resultant actual – as well as public relations – disaster.

Vol.34 No.30
August 5, 1991

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Even at its best, advertising is one-way communication, thus tends to be a propagandistic, even manipulative **tool** – however entertaining and appealing. At its best, pr is a **philosophy** of interactive personal relationships that allows people to participate directly in decisions, big and small, that impact them. But publicity, promos and other one-way vehicles are simply substitutes for advertising – “free space” as marketers like to say. Marketing pr can avoid advertising’s fate by showing real enthusiasm for **participative, personalized programs**. [Ad agencies are now at work devising them (pr 8/13/90).] Very often this will mean convincing autocratic managers to learn new ways.

Vol.35 No.18
May 4, 1992

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS PROPOSES BLENDING PR WITH ADVERTISING AND DIRECT MARKETING: OPPORTUNITY FOR ONE CLEAR VOICE FOR USERS? OR DANGER OF DE-EMPHASIZING FIELD'S HIGHEST VALUE?

As publics become more resistant to messages, and traditional strategies like mass advertising are less effective, an old idea surfaces: link all marketing tools in integrated campaigns – “integrated marketing communications” (IMC). Wise practitioners have always done this – but ad agencies have often shunned the idea, for reasons of *income* (there’s more bucks in advertising) or *politics* (we’re in charge and “secondary” tactics like pr or promotions should keep out of our way).

Two universities have begun teaching pr, marketing and advertising as integrated disciplines (Colorado-Boulder and Northwestern – see [pr 3/25/91](#)). Now an AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) task force is examining possibilities for cooperation – and ending turfing – between practitioners and educators in the three disciplines. Key points:

1. **Move to personalized appeals**, away from mass messages, impacts pr on the publicity side and advertising’s traditional media base. Both also gain: pr in promotions and events; advertising in collaterals and direct mail. A merging is thus driven by the marketing environment.
2. **Onrush of database marketing** reduces time span for communication. Even nationally branded products now build computer lists of individual customers and nonusers, for 24-hour contact if sales slacken. “Talking” supermarkets and interactive tv bring this about as close as humanly possible to personal selling.
3. **Surveys** by Tom Duncan and Steve Everett at U Colorado and Don Schultz at Northwestern (with Bill Badger of Clarion Marketing & Communication) both find support for IMC due to a) disciplines working together better, b) greater consistency of message/appeal; c) One Clear Voice, d) increased impact, e) competitive advantage. Both also found barriers, such as a) against corporate culture, b) agency egos, c) lack of knowledge about more than one communication area.
4. Dan Edelman argues, in Northwestern’s *Journal of Corporate Public Relations*, that **pr has so many activities that are beyond marketing** (financial, employee, community, government relations + issues, pa, etc) – and which need “no involvement of the advertising agency.” For this reason, he questions IMC. IBM’s John Macfarlane counters with successful IMC work, which has gotten his company “dedicated to integrated marketing.”

PR is used in IMC discussions to mean primarily publicity and events – far from the full range of its value added. The move comes against this background: advertising used to get 70-80% of marketing mix dollars, now lucky to get 30% – with pr and direct marketing on the increase in budget allocation and effectiveness.

Clearly this is an unresolved issue. But one where the opportunities for new collaboration are unparalleled. As task force co-chair Doug Newsom (Texas Christian U) puts it: “None of us would

argue about the role of public relations being to drive policy in organizations; but there is a great deal of publicity and promotion that is structurally linked with marketing and advertising.”

Other pr representatives on the task force are Glen Broom, Clarke Caywood (co-chair), Jerry Dalton, Lauri Grunig, Tom Harris, Pat Jackson, Betsy Plank and Dennis Wilcox.

TITLES PORTRAY EVOLUTION OF THE FIELD

1. Originally, we were **public information officers**, with responsibility for what the title denotes.
2. Recognizing that one-way info transfer was insufficient, we became **public relations practitioners** to pursue the ideal of two-way dialogue. Some became **public affairs officers**. But little changed. Mass media and fending off adversaries as summarily as possible were still the objectives.
3. With the New American Revolution of the 60s, people demanded a voice in decisions that affected them. Open meeting/Right-to-know statutes and National Environmental Policy Act of 1974 wrote **public participation** – with its formal hearing cycles and mandated data sharing – into law. This led to jobs with the public participation title, principally in government.
4. As mandated participation formats became charades – basically a venue for zealots and cranks – and overcommunication and overbusyness pulled people away from working on even the issues they cared about, a new strategy became necessary. **Stakeholder involvement** proactively reaches out to involve the opinion leaders in key stakeholder groups. The difference between “public” and “stakeholder” is as profound here as the difference between “participation” and “involvement.”

Vol.39 No.29
July 22, 1996

STRATEGY NOW #2: PR IS FORCED TO CONFRONT DETERIORATING SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

20 years ago, when prr's current editors took over, Swiss consultant Jean Jacques Wyler asked the VII Public Relations World Congress (prr 7/19/76):

1. **"Where does public relations stand**, with the world shaken by political and economic crisis, big business under the critical gun, and social communications, as well as international understanding, more difficult?
2. **"It is generally thought we are essential to the purpose and functioning of modern society, but perhaps there is also thought we can be done without? Are we considered not good enough?** Have we attributed too much to the product, and too little to our organizations? Are our communication methods only one-way conveniences? Is dialogue lacking? Have our statements been ambiguous, or inaccurate? Are our standards on a level with the responsibilities we must assume? And, finally, are other people replacing us as specialized communicators, and are we close enough to the decisionmakers?"

These questions could have been asked this week. Though the profession has grown considerably since then, it has not successfully addressed such basic issues. Compare – 20 years ago:

- Manos Pavlidis, international counselor, called for **"a multi-disciplinary focus,"** saying, "corporations can no longer be content to simply explain their activities in terms of traditional income statements and balance sheets. They must begin to measure and communicate their activities in terms of social and political development goals."
- PR icon John Hill noted that **"the most visible and highly important tool of public relations – communications – is perceived by many as the whole of public relations.** Communications and publicity are also tools of politicians in election campaigns, of governments in propaganda and countless groups in adversary postures. They can be used for good or bad causes...."
- "We in the community of bigger businesses **must be more accessible to our customers.** We must identify with them and their needs. We simply must serve them better." – Thomas Murphy, chairman, General Motors
- **"PR types are continually fretting about their image** to their various publics, and about their professional titles. I suggest the so-called professionals stop talking and start doing. Public relations has earned its reputation by virtue of its acts, not its voice. Let's clean up our act and the

term public relations person will elicit the respect that we all desire it to carry.” – William Ennis, dpr, Shimano Sales Corp

NO UNIFYING PR ORGANIZATION MEANS NO STRONG VOICE

The next year National Communication Council for Human Services merged with PRSA, bringing combined membership to 8,500. But the trend

fizzled, despite many attempts. PR still does not have a single, strong, vocal professional society.

- It remains a Balkanized field, seemingly more concerned with the petty affairs of this association or that one, than in creating a powerful integrating entity that can bring the essential pr philosophy to resolving the world's problems – and maybe avoid the socioeconomic revolution many observers now say is coming.
- As Paul Alvarez said in his Schrantz lecture ([pr 7/15/96](#)): “Polarization is happening in the US. White supremacists are seeking out sympathetic colleagues and sharing information on making bombs. On the other side of the spectrum, left-wing activists are using the net to plan boycotts of companies and disrupt their business. This all can be done without any attempt at dialogue or debate with people of opposing viewpoints. Anyone who disagrees risks getting ‘flamed.’”

PR's negotiating and reconciling skills must be brought into play now, to influence the environment in which humankind lives and practitioners must work.

PREDICTION : '98 WILL SEE PR PROFESSION DECIDE ITS FUTURE

For several years the field has been undergoing two critical changes:

1. **Finding its way beyond print-oriented mass communication** practices that overcommunication, new technology and changing personal interests and values have made obsolete and ineffective – toward relationship-building activities that can motivate stakeholder behavior
2. **Sorting out the role**, size, personnel makeup, assignment mode and services package of pr firms, while simultaneously reengineering the role, size, budget and accountability of internal pr departments

As pr has phrased it, the field is searching for the balance between (a) communications products manufacturing and (b) strategic counsel and training of all members of organizations for their communications responsibility – since relationship-building is everyone's job.

WHY THIS MAY BE THE YEAR IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

- Two major firms adopted slogans that are harbingers. Burson-Marsteller says its skill is perception management. Ketchum touts its ability to change minds and modify behavior
- Harold Burson told a Boston U group recently that 35% of the firm's work is now strategic, which he expects to rise to 65%
- The proposed trade association for pr firms is being formed in conjunction with leaders of PRSA's Counselors Academy, auguring a reasonable division between promotion & lobbying and professionalism; if it became just one more pr organization, that would be divisive
- Pressure from consulting wings of accounting and management consulting firms is forcing pr firms and departments to move more boldly
- Outsourcing of communication products continues apace, resulting in leaner, more focused staffs *and* a growing cadre of specialists and boutiques to use for projects
- Strategy is the fastest growing element of internal departments, according to Tom Harris' survey (pr 10/6/97)
- Budgets are growing almost everywhere, according to several studies
- PR is outperforming advertising and other techniques, especially in the sales arena as that moves to 1-on-1 relationship marketing

NOT EVERYTHING IS ROSY

- There's still a shortage of top-flight pros to fill senior positions, which too often go to non-professionals

- Some trade pubs still argue that the role of pr is media relations
- Efforts to bring diversity to the practice continue to receive strong support, but have not yet found the key to attracting minorities in sufficient numbers that pr reflects the publics it works with
- Too much of the tactical follow thru for bright new approaches like Reputation Management is still old, tired, one-way information transfer

PR SOCIETIES HAVE MAJOR OPPORTUNITY IN '98

As agents to unify the profession in its new

direction, PRSA, IABC, CPRS et al have a chance to really prove their worth. For some it may be a stretch – but the totality provide a powerful potential voice and venue.

- **PRSA**, the largest and pr's traditional bellwether, has unmatched resources – if they can be targeted. It is beginning to recapture senior members lost sight of when it started to focus on membership quantity; and on beginner skills and glitz in its most visible symbol, a publication called *Tactics* that replaced the venerable *PR Journal*. It remains a US organization
- **IABC** has overcome financial problems, but still faces the challenge of becoming a truly functioning international organization. *Communication World* has cut back some but remains among the best publications
- **NIRI** and the **Arthur W. Page Society** are booming as smaller gatherings with plenty of focus and a large chunk of the profession's leaders
- Regional groups like **FPRA**, **SPRF**, **TPRA** and others are holding their own, and can add strong voices to a consensus statement about the field
- **CPRS** isn't growing much, but its programming is strong – and it has far more sensitivity to the global realities
- Specialty groups remain strong influences: **NSPRA** came out of its deficit hardier than ever, with a new owner-occupied HQ & vibrant programming; **CASE** is battenning down the hatches for an assault on higher education now brewing – but *CASE Currents* may be the best magazine in the field overall; **ARC** continues but may be well advised to find a partner due to its smaller size
- **WICI** metamorphosed but as a collection of journalists, pr pros and others may have a lesser role in defining pr's future
- **Foundations** affiliated with PRSA and IABC, plus the **Institute** for PR Research & Education, are as strong as they've ever been in many ways – if only they can now find a way to raise significant funds for significant projects
- **North American PR Council** is there to coordinate, and has some notable successes like new universal accreditation and the uniform ethics code

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF PROFESSION STIMULATES UNIFIED GOALS

As pr practice becomes very similar in every type of organization, and socio-economic-political impacts are global in effect, practitioners in one area now need to understand and care about what's happening in the others.

- Corporate pr cares about schools, because education is a business concern
- Since they are important supporters, school pr must know about corporations
- Corporate pr also must know healthcare, a major cost and employee benefit issue
- Higher ed pr has to know all the above, since they're taught on campus
- All interact with pr in NPOs, far beyond the United Way campaign level, because social responsibility projects lie there – as does volunteerism
- All must understand government and its pr, as they attempt to influence policy

And on and on. Evidence of this is far easier access to jobs between industry areas. Practitioners move from schools to corporations, from military to higher education, from NPOs to government etc.

INSTANTANEOUS INFO ANOTHER PUSHER

Change in structure of pr units is responsive to the absolute

need for One Clear Voice – in an era where something said to a single member of one stakeholder group can be worldwide within the hour.

- Boxes separating employee relations, media, community relations etc are either disappearing in favor of problem-solving teams – or tighter coordination is introduced
- Influencing this movement are rightsizing and cost reduction, with smaller staffs dropping low-return tasks to focus on the Big Opportunities

Strategies like Total Relationship Management, Integrated Communications & Reputation Management turn these influences into positive programs. A strategy begins to emerge – one that started in school pr and now fits almost everywhere:

UNIFORM 5-STEP RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGY

1. **GO DIRECT** to stakeholders, around the 3 gatekeepers that want to interpret your message for you: media, politicians, special interests
 2. **TARGET KEY STAKEHOLDERS**, the ones able to give supportive behaviors now or in the short term
 3. **FOCUS ON REACHING THE OPINION LEADERS** in these groups, since they drive decisionmaking anyway -- and there's neither time, budget nor the mechanisms for reaching everyone
 4. **USE THE EMPLOYEE FAMILY** as the outreach arm that builds relationships, carries out community & industry projects, satisfies customers, leads grassroots lobbying, serves as sales ambassadors -- the whole 9 yards
 5. **ALL ACTIVITIES ARE LOCAL**, because all issues & concerns are -- but a network of local action adds up to a large national/global impact
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Vol.41 No.19
May 11, 1998

WHAT NEXT, NOW THAT TACTICAL PR HAS BECOME A COMMODITY ?

There's a glut of good vendors for this commodity, so the selection is based on who can do it less expensively. This is so in spite of important new directions in tactics, e.g. no longer just throwing mass communications "out there" but using surgical techniques (see [pr 5/4/98](#)).

- **The trouble is, anyone with basic pr savvy can do this.** That creates an oversupply of in-house or pr firm suppliers, driving the cost down.
- **Adding to the problem is new evaluation methodologies,** most of which cast doubt on the impact of the old tactics. So their value is questioned – driving both cost and demand down as organizations and execs become wiser about pr.

RELATED CASE

Despite claims of choosing agencies for their "creativity," advertising is also a commodity – which is why the old 15% commission system died, to be replaced by "deals," i.e. lower cost. At least advertising has the advantage of controlling the message (though anyone can do media buys, tie-ins etc.)

But pr cannot even control the message in tactics such as publicity, but must work thru gatekeeper journalists. In publications, Websites or video, the part that gets the most notice is that allied to advertising: design.

THE FALLOUT, SO FAR

- Outsourcing **tactics to firms and freelancers** has meant staff downsizing.
- **Most of the effort of large firms and departments remains tactical:** media relations (read publicity), events, promotions, publications, with perhaps community or employee relations by departments, less by firms.
- **Firms or departments stuck in tactics realize their future may be limited,** since any rigorous evaluation finds less and less impact from these activities – particularly since old-style tactics are predominant in these outfits. So they are rushing to become more strategic. With good reason: strategy reports in at the CEO/senior mgmt level and is worth any price; tactics report in at the sales, marketing, mid-manager level.

THE PREDICABLE FUTURE

1. **Strategists will be in tight demand,** especially those with internal relations, organizational transformation and issue anticipation skills.
2. **Tactics will become far more sophisticated,** with a strong research and theoretical base. We know how to do this but many have resisted change.

3. **Symbolic communication**, often based on deep, mythic beliefs, will become the art form of pr – the most valued creative element – as words and rhetoric continue to decline in credibility.
4. **Evaluation will become universal and rigorous.** Why should anyone invest in something that cannot demonstrate its worth and effect?
5. **Research will come out of the closet** and be routine for every project, program and plan. Shooting in the dark, guessing, flying by the seat of our pants – these are not only unprofessional but downright unethical practices when fast, low- or no-cost research methods are available. (See pr's book, *Practical, Actionable Research for Public Relations Purposes*.)
6. **Compartmentalization of pr will erode or end** as teaming, integrated communications and Total Relationship Management techniques pull programs into unified activities that reach all stakeholders with One Clear Voice. Goodbye community relations, employee relations, investor relations et al.
7. **Eventually a uniform engineering process for pr practice** will evolve, based on the Body of Knowledge and incorporating best practice options as they emerge. These standard protocols will free energy and brainpower from process considerations to apply to strategy and creativity.
8. **And tactical implementation may still be a commodity** – since once the direction is charted (strategy) implementation can be farmed out.

PLEASE, SOMEONE CHART THE COURSE

Neither the professional societies,
educational institutions nor publications

(in your editor's defense, we keep trying) have tackled the issue of necessary future direction for the profession –

- so it can rebuff inroads from management consulting giants, lawyers and others
- and serve society and its institutions during coming periods of wrenching change and social unrest by applying pr's knowledge of human nature

Conferences of PRSA, IABC, CPRS, Page Society, NSPRA, CASE, FPRA et al offer a few sessions that investigate the topic. But someone needs to provide a macro view. Perhaps North American PR Council, as a coalition body, can do so. Or PRSA's task force on the future of pr, which has so far been busy on ideas to transform that organization to meet the future.

“SPIN” – HOW DID PR GET STUCK WITH THIS BUM RAP?

Every *preacher* who ever gave a sermon. Every *salesperson* or *retail clerk* who ever pitched a product. Most certainly every Wall Street *broker*. And every *lawyer* who ever addressed a jury. All *politicians*. Plus *editorial writers*, as well as *journalists* whose reporting becomes biased – more often the case than not, since objectivity may be psychologically impossible. *Each one of us* when we’re discussing beliefs or positions we hold with others who are neutral or disagree. We’re all “spinners” – *because it simply means marshalling the data from your viewpoint, attempting to persuade others your viewpoint is legitimate.*

WHY THEN IS PR SINGLED OUT FOR THIS OPPROBRIOUS APPELATION?

1. **Basically, of course, it’s one more chance for journalists to slam pr.** Considering the falsehoods and plagiarism media are guilty of recently, maybe they ought to throw fewer stones from inside their glass houses.

2. **The word has gained cachet in book titles -- three in particular:**

■ ***PR: A Social History of Spin*, by social historian Stuart Ewen.** This is a scholarly look at pr’s origins from the viewpoint of the public’s right to accurate information and democratic participation – which thus makes the field look anti-social, especially in periods like the present when a monied establishment uses huge pr budgets to set the agenda.

- A valuable read for practitioners. It’s the title that’s damaging.

■ ***The Father of Spin*, Larry Tye’s biography of Eddie Bernays.** A Boston Globe reporter’s look at the truths and extravagances of the grand old man (as most of us knew him) and when he was at his prime. The author told pr the title was insisted upon by his publisher – but we note he uses the phrase in strategic points of the volume. Tye tries again to settle the question whether ELB is the “father” of pr. His answer is probably correct: not the first practitioner but undoubtedly the one who gave the field its intellectual substance. In the text, Harold Burson agrees.

- Forget the title and enjoy the oft-told tale, with comments from many current practitioners and much new data, from ELB’s papers in the Library of Congress and other sources.

■ **The 3rd book, *Global Spin: the Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* by Sharon Beder,** is a year old, hasn’t had much impact and is about practice globally, not just North America. But it is an

Side Note: In researching pr’s evolution, a prime source for Ewen was the *Public Relations Journal* – which PRSA scrapped for a glitzy tabloid that is about as far as possible from a source for serious inquiry. Maybe it should be brought back – especially as it lost less money than its replacement (even though “losing money” was touted as a main reason for ditching the *Journal*).

indictment that could be hard to refute – because most of the data is verifiable or even undisputed. It does make a value judgment – against pr as a matter of philosophy – and that is refutable.

- Maybe the most important read of the three. Polishes up pr's moral compass.

WHAT SHOULD THE FIELD DO ABOUT IT?

Probably not much. At least not until we see whether the word proves to be a fad and short-lived.

1. Practitioners should correct people they actually hear use the term, especially in groups.
2. Writing letters to editors and similar protests will only cement the word into the vocabulary.
3. For those who can't help themselves from engaging in public debate, one tactic would be to finger the bunch really responsible – political media consultants and campaign strategists. "Spinning" to the point of lying has become part and parcel of their work – and they're usually confused with legit practitioners.

After all, pr has been called "manipulation" for decades –but it is not a word most people associate with the profession. Critics of this pr activity or that pr plan will grab onto it, but everyone knows you can't manipulate people in a free society where there are no longer *any* secrets.

Maybe that's what will happen to "spin." Reread the opening paragraph and see if you agree with the evidence.
