

Alexander Hamilton Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Public Relations
Remarks of Acceptance by James E. Grunig
November 10, 2005

Thank you very much for honoring me with this award. I am deeply honored to be included in the company of Chester Burger, Harold Burson, Betsy Ann Plank, Patrick Jackson, Edward Block, and Jack Felton—all of whom I have learned from and worked with over the years. It is especially an honor to be the first public relations educator and scholar to receive the award.

I believe that the award recognizes the work of the academic community in public relations overall as much as it recognizes my own work. I have been able to build on the work of academic scholars who preceded me—most notably Scott Cutlip, Otto Lerbinger, Edward Robinson, Albert Sullivan, and William Ehling. There have been many others, of course, but these public relations scholars have been especially influential in my career.

In addition, I was deeply influenced by my academic mentor at the University of Wisconsin, Richard Carter, and my professional mentors, James Tirone of AT&T and Patrick Jackson of Jackson, Jackson, and Wagner. The most influential person in my life, both personally and professionally, has been my wife Lauri Grunig, who has shared most of the achievements of our joint careers.

A year ago, Jack Felton delivered eloquent remarks about Alexander Hamilton's contribution to the history of public relations. He quoted historian Allan Nevins, who argued that Hamilton and the other authors of the *Federalist Papers* did the best job in public relations history by gaining support for the Constitution of the United States. For my acceptance, therefore, I also looked at my yellowed copy of the *Federalist Papers*, which I had saved on my bookshelf from a course I took in U.S. history over 40 years ago. My undergraduate underlining was still there for me to save time.

I skimmed through the *Papers* to see if Hamilton's ideas were close to my own, which we scholars often do when we cite sources. I found the third paper, discussing the inadequacies of the *Articles of Confederation* to be the most useful. As Jack pointed out, I discovered that Hamilton was a strong supporter of a strong national government—in contrast to my long-time hero, Thomas Jefferson, who believed that more power should be left to the people and to the states. In this third paper, I found a strong rationale for why we need large, powerful organizations—including government. According to Hamilton, individuals do not behave in a way that benefits the collective good unless they are constrained to do so. Thus, we benefit as a society when large organizations produce products, services, and regulations—collective goods—that we could not attain individually.

At the same time, Hamilton said, “In addition to all this, there is in the nature of sovereign power an impatience of control that disposes those who are invested with the exercise

of it to look with an evil eye upon all external attempts to restrain or direct its operations.” This quote, I believe, describes what I hope has been my contribution to public relations—overcoming this evil eye of management. Throughout my career, I have argued that public relations provides a voice for the publics in the management of large, powerful organizations—publics that both influence and benefit from those organizations.

From the beginning of my interest in public relations when I was an undergraduate student, I have believed that public relations could benefit society by improving the management of the organizations that are necessary in society but that do not always behave in ways that are socially responsible or responsive to publics. In recent years, that belief has developed into my view that public relations is more than a messaging function or a marketing support function. It is a critically important strategic management function whose greatest value lies in bringing information from publics into the organization and in building relationships with the publics from which organizations need support and that benefit from the activities of organizations.

Research, I believe, is a critical component of the strategic management role of public relations. Research makes it possible to identify publics and the problems they need organizations to solve—publics with whom the organization needs relationships. Research also makes it possible to develop strategies for cultivating relationships with those publics and for evaluating the success of our communication activities. I am proud to have been a champion of three kinds of public relations research: 1) research actually used *in* the practice of public relations; 2) critical, evaluative research *on* the practice of public relations; and 3) research *for* the practice of public relations—theoretical research that develops and tests strategies and methods that can be used in practice.

I am especially appreciative of the Institute for Public Relations, which has been the foremost supporter of all three kinds of research for the 45 years that I have studied and taught public relations. Therefore, I am deeply honored that the Institute has chosen to bestow its highest honor on me.