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“By Any Other Name”

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There is a story about a little third-grade girl in Cincinnati whose class assignment was to write her autobiography.

"My great-grandfather," she wrote, "was President of the United States. My grandfather was a United States Senator. My father is an Ambassador. I am a Brownie."

In light of the distinguished tradition my eight predecessors have established as Annual Lecturers of the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, I share both her pride in those who nurtured her and the glory of being a Brownie.

In this assemblage of old friends and the larger number of younger men and women who have yet to shape the future of this profession, I may very possibly become as popular as the ghost at Banquo's feast. For I remind myself -- and you -- that public relations today is neither what it was yesterday nor what it will be tomorrow. Further, the laws of change make short shrift of whatever plateau we enjoy today in *any* area.

A scholar once said of John Adams that "he often arrived at the forbidding wall of doubt and he frequently gave way to the passionate expressions of immediate vision." I don't ask you to accept my "immediate visions," but do request that you ponder them.

Public relations -- like theology, law, medicine, and journalism -- is under fire. From three English authors who have written certainly the finest book about our 1968 Presidential election, *The American Melodrama*, I find lines like these: "With a cynicism that would do justice to a 21st century public relations man..." or, "He is a public relations man -- not a policy maker."

I find by examination of the curriculum and the literature of the graduate schools of business administration -- whose MBA's are now moving out of junior into middle and sometimes senior management -- that public relations is almost a pejorative expression.

Within the past month the NAM has distributed a screed written by an accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America saying that the difference between public relations and public

affairs is "involvement in the formation of policy." In New York on November 6, at a seminar on The Corporation and the Campus, I saw an old friend who was a charter member of PRSA. He no longer attends these conferences because, as he says, "I'm vice president of public affairs."

I don't believe that we -- even as comfortable and well-fed as we now are -- can ignore significant evidences of apathy or even disrespect for whom and what we are or what we stand for.

Santayana wrote, "Men have come to power having no stomach for the ultimate, who burrow themselves downward towards the primitive."

It is because I cannot bear even the thought that public relations should ever deserve this epitaph than I ask you to examine our tomorrows with me.

Since tomorrows have their roots in yesterday, my analysis will be introspective, at least for the moment.

I am in my 31st year in public relations. During this time I have been fortunate enough to establish lasting friendships with some of the brightest and most attractive people that this country's educational, political, economic and cultural systems can produce.

My colleagues have given me all the honors and responsibilities within their power to bestow. I have devoted a good deal of time to the quest for professionalism, sometimes with the finesse of a blunderbuss and sometimes perhaps more effectively. I have had the humbling experience of being fired, the soul-searching that accompanies voluntary resignation and the sense of catapulting into the wild blue yonder that is handmaiden to opening a business of one's own.

Along with the pleasure of friendship, the humiliations of failure and the occasional gratification of knowing that a direct line or advisory responsibility has been well handled, there have been disappointments almost too great to bear. I have never been cynical about public relations or its mission. However naïve, I have never been prepared for slander, or conspiracy, nor for the infrequent but jarringly flagrant code violations that have marred the public image of this profession. It is sometimes useful to remember that George Washington met his ultimate end as a result of being bled by a barber to relieve a fever. This was 125 years before public relations, as such, even received its name. The advances in medical science in less than two centuries will surely be matched by those in public relations over a like period.

Perspective on the nature of man itself, and upon other professions, clearly indicates that aberrations from honor are not unique to public relations. Too frequently they characterize all professions and all vocations; yet the soundly based professions and vocations survive in service and viability to the needs of the society. Medicine and law survive their charlatans. Corporations can survive, for a time, ineptitude of management. The institutions of government, in some form, always outlive their traducers.

What follows, then, is an inquiry into the nature of the claims, protestations and contributions of public relations as they relate to the future of the art. To have been a practitioner and protagonist of these claims, protestations and contributions for 30 years is not a valid reason to conclude that what has been, will be. The anatomy and laws of change grant even less immunity to public relations than to politics or to business administration.

Within the past month the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has granted \$210,000 to the Scientists' Institute for Public Information to "stimulate communications about public issues involving science and technology." Why not to the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education? Do we in PRSA face the danger that the mainstream of development in idea communications is outside our province?

Whether we bear the label of public relations, or are called by any other name, where have we been? Where are we? Where are we going? Surely, these questions deserve the examination of those who hire us, but, even more, of the bright, attractive, and able men and women whom I admire intensely, my friends who spend their lives wanting a larger degree of social utility than may be found merely in projecting the ideas of others and in being paid for it.

The rest of my professional career will be devoted to the quest for answers to these questions. There must be a beginning. If what follows today ultimately is seen to be fragmentary or fumbling, to the degree that it has any validity, others will join me in expanding, improving and perfecting. My deepest personal conviction is that the arts and sciences of idea communication have been, are, and will be, integrated into the web of life itself. I think we all seek a larger -- not smaller -- role for the creative communicator of ideas than may now be found within the framework of conventional public relations.

So much for introspection. Let's look at the external image of the state of our profession. We create it, you know. No one else does. Our late dear friend Pendleton Dudley hand-delivered the first corporate press release ever received by *The Wall Street Journal* early in this century. The art and science of press releases is a factor of college credits to this day. Press agency had its antecedents long before P. T. Barnum. The relics of Barnum's Jumbo, "the world's largest elephant," stand now in the museum of a great university. Every public relations man worth his salt either knows how to be a press agent, or knows where to turn to get one, however loud his protestation of naïveté in this regard.

Without taking the time to describe the many specialties that have sprung to life within the public relations portfolio, each of them is the source of part of the reputation public relations has in a critical world. Perhaps the single understatement in this entire speech is this: The reputation of public relations leaves something to be desired. If this is true, what do we do about it?

It would be tempting to concentrate on the symptoms and to ignore the disease. What should

PRSA, or its chapters, do to improve the public relations of public relations? Why is no public relations professional ever appointed as director of USIA? How shall our Code of Professional Conduct be improved? How can accreditation become even more meaningful?

These and other questions have great significance -- assuming that our profession itself is tuned to the nature of our times. If it is, then all the symptoms or blemishes are superficial, and can be cured. If public relations is not tuned in to the cybernetic age, then the symptoms are the outward evidence of a pervading cancer. In either case, accurate diagnosis is essential.

Since public relations is not an isolated set of phenomena that developed in a vacuum, let's turn the camera of our minds upon the world of our time.

Since Pen Dudley hand-delivered that first company financial release, the world has been in continuous revolution.

My father had telephone number 11 in Sioux City, Iowa. When I was 10, he and I wrapped copper wire around a salt box, found a crystal and a tickler, hooked up a small battery with a telegraphic receiver headset, and actually heard call letters from a mile away! The revolutions include total war in practice, not theory, television, atomic power, the end of the physical frontier in America, discovery of the secrets of the origins of life, the bare beginning of the conquests of space, the behavioral sciences, the population explosion, participatory democracy, race war, cybernetics, affluence, sex permissiveness, change of value structures, universal challenge to once respected -- or feared -- leadership, the crumbling pedestals of the chief executive officer, the dispassionate machine running other dispassionate machines, the mind-control drugs, education by riot, loss of personal security in an age of social security, with crime and barricades a way of life, with police dogs rented out at fees ranging from \$50 to \$400 per month, a deserted Washington at night, the American Bar Association dismissing secretaries at 4:30 p.m. and escorting them off the University of Chicago campus by taxi for their safety, 27 bank robberies in the national capitol in the first 34 days of 1969, nuclear pacts and non-pacts, national engagement in the Far East, the Middle East, Europe and the Caribbean on a war footing, a militant antiestablishment grounded in the practices of Che Guevara at work within our greatest educational institutions.

As I said, a fragmentary list. And all the while machines grind out affluence; affluence grinds out greater opportunity for freedom; freedom is sometimes anarchy; anarchy breeds the iron fist; the police who keep classes open become the fuzz, or pigs; the fuzz strike back; the liberals who defend their own rights become the status quo, or even the neo-fascists; the New Left defies Marcuse a few miles from here because he justifies violent suppression of even the *advocacy* of personal liberty, much less its practice, if that liberty interferes with the destruction of everything, "so we can start over, making love, not war."

I am reminded of a Victrola record of my childhood which recounted a whole series of disasters starting from the death of a dog to the burning down of the house. It ended with the line, "Outside that, there ain't no news." Ladies and gentlemen, outside this list of revolutionary changes, plus

others you will hear about shortly, "there ain't no change."

The professions of law, theology and medicine outlive cataclysmic changes of this dimension. They deal with the material, spiritual, physical and psychic needs of man. Journalism outlives revolutions because there are always survivors, or participants and happenings to report or to interpret. Chapter 17 of the *The Acts of the Apostles* demonstrates this: "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing."

In this sense, there will always be communicators and if to communicate is the sole objective of public relations, we have a future, too. There is nothing dishonorable about being an industrial or an institutional journalist, contrary to an assumption already widely made about us by many university colleges of journalism. Indeed, there is nothing *wrong* about any of the disparate forms of communication that gather themselves under the public relations umbrella, whether they are called press agency, financial relations, public affairs, community relations, employee communications, special events management, or whatever.

Today's major question about public relations is not whether we are wrong in maintaining and improving these valuable skills; it is whether the profession as a whole is thought to be *relevant* to the leadership of the professional management revolution which has emerged with its own codes, standards and language.

One measure of relevance is an examination into the quest for our abilities. Who wants us?

Some of you may scan the 16-24 pages of display advertising that appears at the end of the Business Section of the Sunday *New York Times*. These are block ads, not classified and they range from a few column inches to a quarter-page or more. The advertisers more often than not are high in the *Fortune 500* list. As an exercise in preparation for these remarks, I have counted, over a four-Sunday span, about 3,500 job openings, mostly from \$15,000 up, and found exactly three companies interested in interviewing for a conventional public relations post. Another clue: I have made personal inquiries of two of the advertisers -- not for a job, but that's not unthinkable either -- but to find out how many apply for the jobs. Usually about three or four hundred within the first week.

Frequently, in this inspection, the eye lights upon requests for "information specialists," or "information technicians." Don't let your heart leap up. What these firms want are specialists in electronic data processing and skill in computer programming.

I find this tabulation discouraging.

I find the all-too prevalent attitudes on the dimensions of public relations inadequate to the satisfaction a man should derive from a useful life. Unless public relations relates to, and is related to, the new age of professional management, it will not be attractive to the bright youngsters any

profession must attract to remain viable.

The very fact of this audience indicates unity among us in groping for a better profession. This Foundation, and PRSA to which I am extraordinarily devoted, has presented learned papers on the lives of Hamilton, Madison and other historical figures to depict their usages of what are now public relations techniques and skills. In every case these men were doers, makers of history and creators of corporations or institutions. They were not the hired hands -- which we so often are -- whose task is to create broad public awareness of how smart or innovative someone else may be.

If public relations wasn't full of seeking, groping people, if it were willing to settle for merely reflecting events, not shaping them, we probably wouldn't be here today relating ourselves to the social sciences for one thing.

I believe our reach *should* exceed our grasp. I believe that we should be shaping the environments in which the institutions we serve have at least a chance of survival 5, 10, 20 years from now. We can't do it by beating our breasts, or standing like the Pharisee in a public place thanking God we are not as other men.

How then?

In a systems society, whether as public relations professionals or by any other name, we must demonstrate that we *are* vital to the system. Today, anything extraneous to a system is irrelevant to it, the first to be disposed of; the last to be hired. *You* should read those 3,500 ads!

They represent the voice of today's professional management in applying the systems approach to the management of information. They are being written and paid for by the new breed of management to whom public relations as a term may be anachronistic -- a voice of the past. This blighted condition may in part be attributed to the naïveté of some graduate schools of business which confine themselves to only the four traditional M's of management: money, men, machinery, market, and who are indifferent to the fifth M -- the mind of man.

Notice my phrase "in part." In this exercise, we seek solutions, not scapegoats. The question I raise is not whether modern management understands us. Do we understand modern management?

And there is an even larger question: do we understand that we are communicating to a new breed of public, with more education, more energy at their disposal, different value structures, a public with vast expectations, and the power either to achieve them -- or to wreck a social order?

The take-over generation has much in common with modern management. They spring from the same revolutionary ferment. Both are contemptuous of traditional patterns. Both are goals-oriented. Both are convinced that the applications of new systems will build a highway to a better future, not just for themselves, but for all mankind.

Once again, our challenge is not to force modern management or modern man to be relevant to public relations. It is rather to make public relations become relevant to them.

At risk of over-simplification, I will attempt to describe the systems approach to the management of information. It is essentially simple in theory, complicated in practice. It demands that the public relations professional understands the ultimate objective of his client, whether it be profit, education, health or peace. The best way to understand an ultimate objective is to help construct it. When we, as public relations men -- or by any other name -- can help define the Holy Grail, and are not blinded by it, we can then work our way back from the long future to the now-present. We can construct a PERT path, or a reverse decision tree chart from the future to the present, thus becoming goals-oriented. We can then apply our communications skills designed to achieve a share of the human mind against the ultimate great and exciting goals of the improvement of the human condition.

No one can describe for you the fierce joy of liberating yourself from the hurly-burly wastage of your public relations talents in merely holding a mirror up to yesterday. You will recognize this joy deep within yourself when you determine your ultimate goal, draw your roadmap back to where you are today, measure each usage of your communicative talents as it applies to goal achievement.

Because most of you are corporately or institutionally related in terms of your incomes and your life-satisfactions, I shall devote my remaining few minutes to proposing a systems approach which the field of public relations may find useful.

Executive managements quite generally accept four traditional responsibilities mentioned earlier:

1. The management of money
2. The management of men
3. Management of machines
4. Management of marketing

Rarely does any single individual excel at all four, but the genius of professional management is capacity, through incentive, to acquire and use skills in any of the four traditional areas that may not be covered by the expertise of the chief executive officer. I will state dogmatically that any company that does not successfully manage all four of those functions does not survive.

I propose that the revolutions of our time have given us the tools and created the urgent necessity for a fifth vital area of management, without which modern institutions can't survive even if they excel at the conventional four already listed: the management of information.

The management of information requires basic comprehension of each of the other four: money, men, machines and marketing. Truly the education of a public relations professional -- a manager of information -- must be a timeless, ceaseless process, a continuous growth in perception and

wisdom. But management of information requires even more. It requires the invincible conviction that none of these four, or all together, is enough to sustain the corporate system or an institution in public esteem without an organized system for the management of information.

It is readily apparent to you that management of information includes, but certainly is not limited to, the flexible intuitive seat-of-the pants ability of the public relations man to help the management of one or all of the historic functions get off a hot spot, or to put the best public face on last year's or last quarter's results. Again, we all honor that skill.

For the public relations man to supply and to become the recognized professional source of supply for the fifth M in the family of management systems, he must be capable and willing to address himself to the shaping of political, social and economic environments his colleagues in managements must face. He must do so courageously against opposition, and create and sell to management the fundamental plan by which the company or institution can adapt itself to the new environment.

You may say, "I already do this. I assist the managers of money, men, machines and marketing in their communication with the outside world." Certainly you do this, and more. But how many of us help the managers of money get ready for inflation, or deflation, or the financial impact of the end of one war, the beginning of another, or act in any important way to assist in planning for the age of affluence in an ocean of poverty?

How many of us assist the managers of men prepare for a world in which the blue-collar worker will be almost non-existent?

How many of us even know, much less prepare, management for the foreman-machine which directs the worker-machine?

How many of us actually sit in preparation of the marketing plans which depend so much on demography, psychology, ecology and evolving needs of the ultimate purchaser of what our company produces? Do we have the "stomach for the ultimate," or do we "burrow downwards toward the primitive?"

Let me take you for a moment into analysis of top management trends and concerns today. The chief executive officer of any corporation has two primary interests: (1) Profit (2) Growth.

Increasingly, management looks askance at internal or external corporate costs which are not carrying their freight or which have not demonstrated that they are carrying their freight. The professional manager of today wants a lean, hard-core group, with a minimum of built-in overhead.

Growth is universally a prime target. The inside corporate development group is frequently inhibited by too much awareness of what can't be done -- too many sacred cows. This has created

an increasing tendency among chief executive officers to turn to outside service groups with records of accomplishment for growth recommendations and cost-saving.

Any review of the conventional management of information (research, analysis and interpretation, executive consultation, and the multitude of staff services -- such as product publicity, financial public relations, community relations, special events, etc.) indicates ferment within both corporations and counseling firms that rent their services to corporations or institutions.

This ferment derives from several sources. The new breed of professional managers find the conventional public relations patterns unsystematic and non-structured in the frame of reference in which they are trained.

Secondly, the directors or managers of large internal staffs find themselves less and less influential at top levels for the simple reason that they spend more and more of their time as father-confessor or protector of their domain. I have been guilty of this error. It may very well be one reason that chief executive officers are naming others as vice presidents of public affairs.

A third source of ferment is that the "brand names" of the public relations fraternity are fast disappearing and their personal hold on employers or clients weakening.

Fourth, proprietors of numerous well-established counseling firms want a way out, with equity privileges, and without loss of name identity. This is difficult to achieve.

Logic indicates that sweeping changes are inevitable, both in corporate practice regarding services and in consulting firms that offer services.

Conglomerate corporate managements have set the precedent for conglomerate management services, inside or outside the corporation, *provided* they are soundly staffed and managed, professionally and financially.

For what services in the area of systems management of information are modern management hospitable and ready? I suggest the following:

1. Basic marketing and attitude research facilities.
2. Appreciation and understanding of the roles of tabulation and electronic data processing in modern decision-making.
3. Analysis and interpretation of research -- based on findings and communicated in terms that decision-making managements can use.
4. Public relations -- information projection.

Looked at through the eyes of professional public relations managers or counselors, each of these four levels depends on the credibility of information based on research and the quality of interpreted truth. Each level is also capable of being its own profit center, selling its services in

whole or in part.

Research becomes the floor of a four-level pyramid. The second level is ability to comprehend the complexities of tabulating and processing data; the third is the consultative function, based on analysis and interpretation of information provided by the first two. And the top of the pyramid is the function of information projection, based on decisions made possible by access to the lower three levels, and impossible scientifically without them.

An example may help. Earlier this month, my friend and colleague, Walter Barlow, was asked by a company, whose annual new capital investments exceed \$100 million, to focus our corporate strategy and public relations resources on an early-warning system to help management prepare now for the public problems it must meet successfully in 1972.

Only after 90 minutes of intense discussion on factors involved in corporate adaptation to environmental change did management representatives exclaim, in some surprise: "This will tell us how to handle our publications, and will give us a wealth of valid material to project. We'll know not only what we want to say, but whether the public will listen."

Thus a goals-oriented approach, plus a reverse PERT process, led one management to an increased appreciation of the potential contribution of modern public relations. No arguments under the sun could have sold that company on new and improved public relations techniques without this application of the systems approach to management of information.

The pyramidal structure, in which today's conventional public relations has been changed to information projection and is only one stage of an integrated system of the management of information, becomes a selling spearhead for the next age of public relations. This modern system of information management is geared to growth needs of trained professional management. It is available when needed without large capital investment. It need not saddle the corporate or institutional operation with bureaucratized permanent overhead.

Further, it enlarges -- not threatens -- the careers of the public relations professional provided we assume that public relations, like all other functions in a revolutionary society, cannot resist change.

In conclusion, I hope I have successfully challenged you to examine for yourselves the skeletal relationship of public relations to the society about us. The public relationships of public relations deserve our best thought. Our role in a systems world demands analysis.

But it demands more. It demands our advocacy and adoption, on a rational basis, of a systems approach to the fifth M, the management of information. And the objective of information management is a share of the human mind for the causes we project.

Along with you, I have carried a torch for public relations. I think it will survive under that title.

But what is more important is that bright young men and women equip themselves with the technical skills of our profession, apply them in planned sequence towards attainment of any goal worth reaching and not waste them in the frippery of the inconsequential -- unless, of course, it's absolutely necessary today so that you'll be around to be goals-oriented tomorrow.

On that unexpectedly practical note, I've concluded telling you all I know. Whether by public relations, or by any other name, our calling is as exciting, challenging and demanding as any on earth. For we presume to affect, through a systems approach to management of information, the mind of man and the human condition itself. This is heady wine and there is no assurance, except your own sense of mission, which you won't drown in it. Some of us have. Those who do survive are building a great and changing profession, relevant to a new age. This is just as well, since the old age no longer exists.