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“An Old-Timer Surveys the Public Relations Scene”

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Good afternoon.

And I'll do my best to make it that.

You should know I have sort of a road map for my remarks, with stopovers for visits with good and bad examples of public relations in action. These examples will be up front in my text.

And let me level, please. I'll be including a few provocative observations which I hope you'll find interesting and maybe even enjoyable. Will my comments betray an occasional bias or prejudice? Naturally.

After that I'd like to explore the role of PRSA today and tomorrow. And then I'll close with a few observations on public relations education, which happens to be a favorite subject. Considering that many promising, bright-eyed young people are investigating our business -- I think we owe them more recognition.

And I'll try to keep it all as easy-going as possible so that by the end of my presentation, we'll still be friends, I hope. And that's the plot.

Question: What's your favorite definition of public relations?

Answer: Ask my wife, Esther, and here's what she'll say: "Public relations is that business in which you are nicer to the public than you are to your relations."

But wait a minute...

I've got a favorite definition, too. Mine is a little more serious than Esther's. My definition says, "Public relations is simply an attitude of top management."

Example: If top management determines that it wants to communicate fully and forthrightly with its employees, that is precisely what will happen. Let it be hoped that public relations professionals have had a role in shaping management's attitude, but, regardless, it is top management -- one way or another -- calling the shots and choosing the public relations path the organization will take. Even though this point is rather fundamental, it should not go unmentioned in my rundown.

Another example: If top management determines that it wants to communicate fully and forthrightly with its stockholders, beyond tokenism, then that is precisely what will happen. Here, again, let it be hoped that public relations professionals have helped shape the effort, but in the final analysis, influential folks in the high halls of management get the credit -- or the blame - - for ongoing programs of investor relations. Make no mistake about it. As we all witness daily, management composes the rallying overture.

Another example: If top management determines that it wants its organization to be an exemplary influence in community affairs and wants to help make the local scene the epitome of cooperation among all interested parties, that is precisely what will happen. And once more, let it be hoped that public relations professionals have been persuasive in helping convince management that what's good for the ABC Corporation is good for Main Street and vice versa. But at all costs, don't fail to recognize that the attitude of management is the sun and moon and stars, and that the staff function of public relations is often simply the most pestiferous item on the agenda as the CEO puts his head down on the pillow each night and frets about the morals and morale and performance of his organization. Will environmental considerations in a plant community be duly weighed? Will cooperation with local school systems be part of company policy? If these and other high standards are on the agenda, don't forget to chalk up the fact that top management's attitude is the most powerful force of all, whether or not the public relations troops have sounded their trumpets and drums.

And if management's attitude is negative, you can dig up Houdini as your public relations wizard and even he couldn't generate any enthusiasm without a supportive spark from on high. In this connection, let me admit that one of the most frustrating experiences I've ever had was dealing with a high executive of a client company whose attitude on public relations was always "how little can we get by with?" In a word -- sad.

So much for the attitude of management as a definition of public relations.

Today I should like to concentrate on the role of communications, foregoing many of the fundamentals about public relations being primarily an exercise in counsel to management. Indeed, not long ago when I was doing a public relations analysis for General Motors in Detroit, I bumped into the mission of the GM public relations operations, which plainly positions counsel with top management as a matter of first priority.

GM's public relations mission is spelled out like this: "to maintain and enhance the worldwide reputation of the corporation through counsel with its management (first and foremost) and, also, through communications with its stockholders, employees, business partners and the public in all the countries and communities in which it does business."

In other words, counsel with management is primary in Detroit, and communication with principal constituencies, although high on the list, is secondary.

Be that as it may, I still intend to pass along to you some fact and opinion mainly about the trials and triumphs of communications and to tread lightly in the counseling game.

No offense to radio and television and other passing fancies, but I would like to stress that the written word is the official language of business. Conversely, oral communications are fraught with peril and are often as prudent as a trip to Las Vegas. As I look back on the highways of life, I recall that some of the most devastating collisions have been caused by misunderstandings brought about by strictly oral communications -- their user-friendly advantages notwithstanding. In my book, "Write It, Don't Recite It" is the most golden rule of all.

It is interesting to note that the famous Hot Line between the U.S. and the Soviet Union has been mainly a two-way service focusing on the written word -- by teletype. Matters of such importance cannot be relegated to small oral chit-chat with Armageddon just a slip of the tongue away. Anyway, it should be some comfort to us all to know that for the most part, written language -- not oral adlibbing -- has been at the heart of the Hot Line system. Such responses as "Whoops, sorry" and "You've got to be kidding" happily have not been allowed in Hot Line communications.

Was the tempestuous Billy Martin of the New York Yankees "hired" or "fined" or "fired?" Those little five letter words tend to sound about the same on radio and TV. In order to differentiate between similarities, the written word is the surest way to go, of course.

Idle comments and risky forecasts are the bane of public relations. Did you know that in 1899, the director of the U.S. Patent office -- no less -- said, "Everything that can be invented has already been invented?" Or that the founder of Warner Brothers Pictures in 1927 said, "Who in the hell wants to hear screen actors talk?" Or that Grover Cleveland in 1905 said, "Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote." Or that the immortal Tris Speaker of baseball fame in 1921 said, "Babe Ruth made a big mistake when he gave up pitching." Let it be said that these fearless commentators should have had a public relations person nearby, with a draft of their remarks in written form.

Now let me get a little more contemporary.

I am unhappy to report that there is a very successful public relations agency -- which we'll call the Ajax agency -- that allows its staff people to serve as public spokesmen -- or spokespersons -- for a client company rather than persuading the client company to live up to its own responsibilities in the area of corporate spokesmanship and to speak out in its own behalf.

Is this a trend? Let it be hoped not a serious trend. Actually, as most public relations folks know, there is an implied relationship between spokesmanship and leadership and it behooves the client company not to distance itself further from the media by having strangers in a downtown agency quoted in the news media when the client company and its people should be identified as the primary source of attribution.

Anyway, it is regrettable, one would think, that remote strangers in the Ajax agency would be identified as the source of information when corporate leaders default in their responsibility to keep the media directly informed.

As a rule of thumb, when important information is on tap for dissemination by corporate officers, public relations agency personnel should of course be in on the planning for responding to media inquiries, but the actual attribution to agency people is not sound practice. I believe.

One wonders who conceived the idea of a client hiding in the high weeds while dispatching an agency to identify itself and its people in relaying information which a client itself should be openly passing along as a part of media service. Does Hill and Knowlton or Burson-Marsteller find itself identified on page one of *The New York Times* as the source of attributable quotes? Hardly. Actually, it is my conviction that very few clients will ordinarily cotton up to defaulting in press relations identification for the reason of convenience or for other purposes.

Who had the idea of using agency people as quote bearers in the first place? And why? Did the client feel it could lessen the hassle of press relations by ordering the public relations agency to "take the heat off the officers' backs and keep editors out of our hair?" Or was it the agency's idea as a way of cushioning client-media interchange and increasing billable staff time?

Regardless, it seems inappropriate if a company fails to respond openly and directly when media folks are on the phone with a hot list of questions on a breaking story. In fact, client management belongs visibly on stage and should not be hiding in the wings.

Indeed, it is pertinent -- or maybe a bit impertinent-- to ask the client company, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" Perhaps the company people become visible when the news is favorable and become invisible when the news is negative, using agency people as hapless messengers and substitute stand-ins when the blue clouds turn to gray. This business of using agency folks as spokesmen is not simply a technicality. It's a bad system, in my judgment.

Now, next subject: Let's wonder why I can find no one --or almost no one -- who has heard that PRSA has dealt soundly with the ambiguities of the term public relations and has, praise the Lord, had a blue-ribbon task force to deal with the pestiferous nomenclature of our specialty.

As things turned out, the PRSA task force evidently got caught up in the endless rag-tag of different names such as public affairs, corporate communications, information services, etc. -- and ultimately the task force came to a remarkable but unsurprising conclusion.

If you don't know the outcome of the blue ribbon group's finding, here it is as described in a recent newsletter from PRSA headquarters.

"It is apparent," the report said, "that no alternative term to 'public relations' is likely to emerge by its own power as the generic term that a majority of practitioners in the world will settle on. The term 'public relations' is already widely imbedded as a generic term in public use around the free world. Either the field chooses to foster the use of 'public relations' and a clear understanding of what it embodies, or it will let public usage go on making the decision." End quote. To which I add, "Amen. Let's not fiddle with the flag called public relations." When temptation arises, let's simply count our blessings for the public relations signature which unifies our mission.

And there you have it, in summary form, from the task force. Actually, a glance at the New York metropolitan yellow pages will show the acceptance of "public relations" as the focus for counseling professionals who have chosen a common encampment and a uniform listing in the phone book.

If it's any comfort, other professional groups have also been undergoing their own identity crises. As an example, Joan Konner, the newly appointed dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, said she is facing the "challenge of helping journalism define itself." To which let it be added that public relations -- a much newer specialty -- has been trying to define itself, in terminology and in content, since the days when Ed Bernays was a pup. To be sure, the PRSA task force on nomenclature has at least done a comprehensive study on the language we use on our calling cards and has endeavored to clear the air. Cheers!

Question: How about that thing called issues management?

Answer: Issues management is pretentious nomenclature and should never have raised its head in the first place.

Let's face it: Many issues, per se, can be anticipated and diagnosed and addressed in terms of their public relations consequences, but -- and here's the point -- issues cannot ordinarily be managed by public relations personnel.

Take Japanese imports. Who in public relations is going to manage this issue?

Take AIDS. Anyone want to volunteer to accept the management of this issue?

Is the National Guard as patriotic as the draft? Anyone anxious to manage this hot potato?

It's nice, of course, to see the function of public relations spread its wings over new terrain, but some ombudsman perhaps should have asked if opportunistic self-anointing in the actual management of issues is appropriate.

"Issues analysis" would have been a better approach and a little less haughty. But issues management should be laid to rest, I believe, despite the headway it has unfortunately gained.

Don't we take words seriously anymore? Isn't precise language ever considered before we go off charging through the thicket with new titles and slogans?

Further, I hope that seductive word "image" will be sparingly used. Or better still; let's give it to the ad agencies that seem to specialize in taking liberties with language. Or maybe we should simply donate all of our picturesque words to our friends in that sanctuary called marketing, which seems to rise in splendor as brightly and as frequently as the morning sun.

John Dierdorff, managing editor of *Business Week*, recently demonstrated his sensitivity on image making when he observed, "The word image in media training programs for corporate executives connotes a difference between what you are projecting and reality." For my part, I

wish that Madison Avenue would consider less emphasis on the packaging and more emphasis on the fundamentals -- the content, the facts -- in order to best serve the public interest. Plus well-directed communications, of course.

Does this mean creative, new experiments in public relations should be shelved in order to stick to the good old days and good old ways? Not at all -- as long as the fundamentals are not abandoned. And as long as we think things through regarding the consequences. New concepts in communicating with a company's constituencies are constantly being advanced and the traditional methods of distributing corporate information are being constantly refined through use of new technology and new ideas.

Take the new arrangement between Hill and Knowlton and my alma mater, Monsanto, for instance. This is a revolutionary partnership which I promised several friends I would not overlook in these remarks this afternoon.

Under terms of the arrangement announced last January, most of the corporate -- and that adjective corporate is an important word -- public relations staffers at Monsanto have gone onto the Hill and Knowlton payroll, here and abroad. Bob Dilenschneider of Hill and Knowlton sees the vast resources of the agency giving Monsanto a leading edge and a broadened base in public relations. Further, Dilenschneider sees Monsanto saving from two to three million dollars a year as the result of public relations manpower efficiencies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Isn't it dangerous for an industrial giant, such as Monsanto, to position most of its corporate staffers remote from the day-to-day proximity needed by a CEO and by corporate public relations troops accustomed to an ultimate, continuing relationship with the captain on the bridge? Can outsiders on someone else's payroll have the same fingertip "feel" as insiders? Didn't grandpa -- or maybe grandma -- once say to keep in close touch and maintain close relationships with the top people who make policy, who strive for performance and who are responsible for the morale and morals of the corporation? Isn't something lost when a company fails to differentiate sufficiently between the role provided by outsiders and insiders? In the final analysis, insiders are crucial because of their intimate proximity to matters of policy. We need more insiders, not fewer.

Indeed, many thoughtful observers are watching the far-reaching Hill and Knowlton-Monsanto experiment. And you can be sure that CEOs in other companies are wondering, "Can we also save a few million dollars a year?" Indeed, the Hill and Knowlton switchboard has brought welcomed inquiries. Even if the cost reductions meet forecasts, will the net result be a plus or a minus? As a loyal Monsanto alumnus and small stockholder, I am rooting for the home team, of course. And you can be sure I am not about to sell Dick Mahoney, Monsanto CEO, short.

Dick Mahoney expressed interest when I told him I'd be unveiling a few of Monsanto's trade secrets at PRSA's Cincinnati outing and when I asked him to explain what he and Hill and Knowlton are up to, here is exactly what he said in a note that headed my way only a few days ago.

"Monsanto entered into the agreement for three reasons. First, we wanted to have full flexibility in putting our public relations people and money where the greatest opportunities exist and to be able to shift these resources relatively quickly as opportunities change. We didn't want our organizational structure to drive our work.

"Second, we wanted to have the global reach made possible by a global consulting firm. And third, we wanted to see if we could save some money."

Then Mahoney added that "Both Monsanto and Hill and Knowlton are learning to work together on a huge scale. So far I give the relationship reasonable and improving grades. Beyond that, I would simply suggest, 'stay tuned.' "

So there you have it -- straight from the pen of Monsanto's CEO, who knows that it would be premature to post final numbers on the scoreboard after a trial period of only 11 months. My own view is that it took a bit of courage to try out such an unconventional scheme in the first place. Significantly, a friend of mine with the Bank of America, who knows Mahoney, simply commented that "Mahoney is the type of chap who places principle very highly and is not about to change his values, cost reductions notwithstanding."

Meantime, is the widespread acceptance of public relations as a crucial function of business continuing to grow? And the answer is that public relations not only survives but flourishes -- in two respects.

First, let's look at it as being synonymous with reputation and perhaps even synonymous with behavior. That's the conceptual side of the coin.

Then let's also look at public relations as the physical carpentry of communications, where technology revolutionizes the tools of our trade. Without batting an eye we take for granted the fact that the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* can be zapped across the world by satellite, causing even cynics to observe that wonders never cease.

In the conceptual sense, therefore, public relations becomes a way of life. In the sense of strategic communications, public relations becomes the user and even the originator in putting ideas to work in behalf of management and clients everywhere. Indeed, during the days that follow at this PRSA Conference, we'll all witness the new advances being made in the business of making things happen, which is what public relations does expeditiously.

Every once and a while, punsters continue to position public relations in an unfavorable light. When this happens, public relations folks should not be overly sensitive. Not long ago when I was in Paris, I picked up a little brochure at the Inter-Continental Hotel which tended not to glorify our specialty. It said, "To rent roller skates, call Public Relations." So that's what we do.

And I hope we didn't pout when Chief Justice William Rehnquist advised us that there is no such word as "irregardless." The word is "regardless," he pointed out. Who says lawyers should stay out of our bailiwick -- even prestigious lawyers -- when they can render landmark decisions as our proof-readers?

Well, anyway...

Or regardless...

Before moving ahead, I would like to comment on a fresh innovation on the public relations scene.

This little case history concerns a young man in St. Louis who is in his second year of operating a small public relations agency. As reported in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, this rookie counselor says he wants to make sure his clients get their money's worth. So he has come up with a price list for what he calls guaranteed publicity.

Here are some of his rates for client publicity: If a publicity story is used by a publication with a circulation of 10,000 or more, clients pay \$1,132 for a story running three or more inches in length. For so-called "louse items," the tab is only \$299. But here's a question from cynical old me. If he keeps something out of the papers, what will the fee be then?

When I learned of this guaranteed publicity scheme, my initial reaction was negative. Obviously, the scrubbiest old walrus on the beach -- Forrestal -- doesn't normally cheer for novelty concepts even when they are entrepreneurial. Actually, the so-much-per-inch idea seemed to tilt more toward quantity than quality. After all, in our business we're not selling salami by the slice.

In my view, the St. Louis rookie's game plan may work if he delivers the goods effectively and with professional integrity. After all, the plan is not dishonest, illegal or immoral. Some old-timers gathered here in Cincinnati may recall that at one time PRSA'S code of ethics frowned on guaranteed publicity but, subsequently, as I recall, the code was modified and softened. So what will be the outcome of the St. Louis experiment and others like it? Who knows? But it's hardly a show-stopping trend, in my view.

While we're going around corners on fast forward, I suggest that we in public relations might gain by pausing to ask some tantalizing questions, such as: Are we still a growth industry? Where are we heading? And where will we be 12 years from now when the next century dawns?

Allowing that public relations can be the just-right calling for both pragmatists and idealists, will we simply be unabashed dreamers and our own cheerleaders when the 21st century comes in? Or will a larger role await us at the doorstep of two-oh-oh-oh?

One of my most valued friends and one of the most organized public relations men I've ever worked with, Jim McKee of St. Louis, has told me, "Dan, your Cincinnati audience deserves an answer to the question of where we are heading." Thanks, Jim. I suggest that to better understand the future, let's look at the past and try to find those experiences of yesterday which can guide us.

To lead off the box score, let's look at numerical growth in the membership ranks of PRSA. Let's not only look back 12 years but let's speculate where we'll be 12 years down the road when the 21st century dawns. And here's the big news. The numbers show that since 1976 -- 12 years ago -- PRSA has grown from 7,000 members to 14,265 members. That's a 104 percent bump and is particularly encouraging since there has been a lag in the public relations job market during that 12-year period of the Society's growth. Which means we have bucked the trend.

But where are we headed? More growth? Or course. Indeed, it will not be surprising to me if the recent rate of growth continues even though my friend Bill Lydgate, who is perhaps the most distinguished public relations recruiter in the business, points out that softness in the job market keeps persisting. Yet, even the conservatives in the ranks believe PRSA might very well top a 20,000 membership figure by the year 2000, at the minimum.

Suggestion: Let's ask the PRSA hierarchy to team up with an actuarial expert and to estimate what our Society's manpower -- and womanpower -- will be when the new century is ushered in by bells and kazoos in Times Square.

If a new surge in the ranks is our expected destiny, will the quality of our endeavor persist? Will our helter-skelter array of semi-autonomous chapters give us the support and strength we need? Will the very best people in public relations leadership continue to be available to fill chapter and national posts, as was recently the case when, in August, an amazing and encouraging wave of talent was announced as our top PRSA leadership for 1989? Believe me, leadership is the ballgame, outshining numbers and everything else. And even outshining dollars, as crucial as dollars always loom.

And don't forget, we know how to tough it out. With all the mergers and restructurings and buyouts and takeovers and resignations and upheavals making life nerve-wracking, it's important to weather the blizzard and to keep our options open, as the scholarly counselor Loet Velmans used to preach. Ah, public relations! As General Patton said of war, "God help me. I do love it so."

Regardless of how great our ultimate growth will be, PRSA will continue to be a member-service organization, of course, but that's only half the battle. In recent talks I've had with Dwayne Summar and John Paluszek, I've been impressed by the fact that both the 1988 and 1989 presidents of PRSA lean toward a pluralistic philosophy rather than a purely elitist philosophy, but neither man rules out the possibility that accreditation and other phenomena may receive fresh attention.

Also, Messrs. Summar and Paluszek agree regarding the need for addressing the national agenda visibly by having PRSA take public positions on appropriate national concerns as a way of saying, "Here's who we are and here's what we stand for." But there's a need for a caution flag here considering the diverse views of our far-reaching membership.

Further, both men envision more participation by senior professionals. This touches a nerve especially in old-timers like me who keep saying, "I've done my bit," which is like telling the United Way solicitor, "I gave at the office."

Suffice it to say, PRSA is determined not to be asleep at the switch as new needs arise. An increase in membership of 104 percent over the last 12 years actually offers little consolation in light of the heavy demands. It will be an exciting time as PRSA continues on its pattern of growth and I am confident that IABC will probably follow suit and score comparable gains.

But how's business? And from where will the supporting dollars come to finance more PRSA benefits for more people: Are agencies, for example, reporting comparable gains in income to match PRSA's membership gains and the other advances which require budgeting? Answer: During the first half of 1988, most public relations agencies have experienced solid growth, with net fee income increasing as much as 25 percent over results for the same period of 1987. This means the old cash registers have been playing a happy tune.

Are there any other encouraging numbers worth noting? This question is my favorite because it leads to the glorious and magic numbers which belong to the student society spawned by PRSA -- the student society which, as we all know, is PRSSA.

The box score shows that while PRSA went to a 104 percent gain in members over the 1976-1988 period, PRSSA went from 2,000 members to 5,133 members, amounting to a 157 percent advance. Amazing.

And listen to this: In the same 12-year period, PRSSA went from 59 chapters to 154 chapters for an increase of 161 percent versus a much more moderate chapter increase for PRSA. And 12 years down the road -- in the year 2000 -- PRSSA may very well be the growth champion of them all. With PRSA in the role of parent and with PRSSA in the role of offspring, it is obvious that the child is growing up faster than the parent.

So, in my waning minutes, please let me concentrate on our own proprietary youth movement -- PRSSA. For that's where much of tomorrow's leadership can be found. And that's where public relations, for the 21st century, is being spawned -- in what major league baseball would call its "farm system." Let me offer a wide-angle view of how PRSSA sits poised in the wings. Here's my little story:

Not long ago I was invited to give a speech -- just an ordinary, garden-variety speech, not a high-falutin' lecture -- for a PRSSA dinner at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Illinois. During the course of my afternoon and evening visit, I had a close-up opportunity to mix and mingle with many PRSSA members and, believe you me, I have seldom had such an invigorating experience. Through what they learn in classrooms and in communications exercises and in research projects, these young men and women are developing skills, plus an understanding of public relations which someday will be the foundation of programs at employer locations -- including counseling firms -- across the land.

Indeed, the students' "feel" for public relations and their instincts for public relations are being readied for action in the trenches of the future. Granted, the young PRSSAers I met at SIU aren't quite ready to advise on strategies for the board of directors of AT&T -- but give them time. And let's hope they never lose their contagious enthusiasm for the validity and power of public relations.

Even during my one-day exposure at SIU, I kept thinking, "What an extraordinary resource for tomorrow," this being in contrast with the old days when too many untrained aspirants brought spotty credentials to the marketplace and when many hopefuls were stone-cold dead in financial communications and when young candidates were bothered and bewildered by such business mysteries as debentures and balance sheets and annual reports and interim statements for stockholders.

Were some of us, sitting in this room today, ill-prepared to take the right baggage to a client's or company's turf for an entry-level job? You can bet your buns we were, in lieu of proper preparation of employment.

And too often in the past, the younger generation, bubbling with curiosity about this novelty called public relations, was given only a sniff and a snort of what public relations and its components were all about.

In my own case, I had the advantage of having been strenuously trained in the disciplines of newspaper editing and writing -- a priceless background for public relations, I might add -- but in 1947 when I abandoned the fourth estate to respond to the call of chemicals, at Monsanto, I am sure I exhibited a thousand shortcomings in the workings of the business world. Upon realizing my vulnerability in business matters, Edgar M. Queeny, Monsanto chairman, decided to compensate for my shortcomings by dispatching me to the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School with a directive to Harvard, suggesting, "See if you can wise him up."

Did the Harvard inoculation take? Did the West Point of Capitalism sculpt this Irish clump of clay into someone prepared to cope with the intricacies of the business system? Well -- I wasn't fired, which means that maybe I learned about Wall Street and Main Street and chemicals and related glories while Monsanto gambled that its loyalty to a rookie employee -- and to itself -- might ultimately pay off. In other words, I was salvaged.

Due to the patience of my comrades, I did familiarize myself with the infrastructure of a bastion of business and, thus, persevered. And ultimately I chose public relations as a long-term career despite my earlier pride in being a journalist. But this was long before anyone came up with the idea -- and the ideal -- of PRSSA.

Yet then was then and now is now.

Today, students participate in educational programs of at least five basic college courses, mostly in the liberal arts, while preparing for the high hurdles of life.

In PRSSA training sessions, there still may be more promise than performance -- in other words, more potential than realization -- but the point remains that opportunities in 1988 for learning public relations from the ground up are proliferating around the clock.

At SIU, the evening of my speech, there were three attractive PRSSA girls aboard when we drove 90 minutes into St. Louis at midnight on the return trip, during which time the young

ladies' enthusiasm for public relations never slowed down. That's livin'. Really livin' in the fast lane of life.

Was this old codger cranked up by the vitality of the St. Louis-bound midnight cargo on Highway 64? Of course. Was the old codger a flirtatious passenger? Of course. Did the girls flirt back? Only moderately -- just moderately.

Now let's turn to Betsy Plank of Chicago, the Mother Superior of PRSSA, and to Jon Riffel of Los Angeles, PRSSA's Father Confessor, who like Betsy has devoted many hours and dollars guiding young hopefuls. As Betsy and Jon will attest, the nation has thousands of eager, young students who may very well be prominent on the national scene in tomorrow's lineup, and they'll be a very supportive resource as industrial organizations and public service organizations and counseling agencies strive to provide professional assistance in the new, upcoming century we're talking about. Believe me, this promise will not be unfulfilled. This happy outcome may not be sufficient to assure Jim McKee in his wish for a better tomorrow for public relations, but in my view it's inevitable that academic programs will provide substance in our responsibility to develop trained manpower and womanpower for a new era in public relations.

Can public relations be taught? Of course it can. During my career in journalism, I noticed that too many old-time, ink-stained newspaper people preached the heresy that journalism can be learned only "on the job" and never in institutions of higher learning. Actually, my favorite managing editor -- a fire-eating news veteran named Lon Burrowes -- was an advocate of the position that experience is the only teacher worth fiddling with. With respect -- and I mean deep respect -- the late Lon Burrowes was wrong. Dead wrong. Happily, in recent years, the bias of crusty, old, old-timers has receded and one doesn't have to go very far to see journalism -- and public relations -- blossoming under the care and guidance of faculty heavyweights.

But educators and students need help and encouragement, if my optimism is fated to survive. And, returning to PRSSA, I wonder if enough of our senior practitioners are providing sufficient help and encouragement. Or are our senior colleagues "too busy" to help further advance the cause.

To those who hold this view, I am inclined to say, "OK, maybe you're too busy to learn a few new items, but can't you at least share the fruits of your experience with those young people who want to merit inclusion in this wondrous world called public relations?"

When I asked Betsy Plank precisely what can -- and should -- be done to help advance the cause for young candidates, she offered some specific suggestions. She began by stressing the importance of internships. "How great it would be," she said, "if those established senior members of PRSA could systematically provide places in which PRSSAers could encounter senior practitioners and perhaps where established veterans could open a few doors at companies and agencies. Interview programs could guide young men and women into situations where internships could be mutually explored." So said Betsy Plank.

Some PRSA chapters have lent a helping hand, but others have failed to catch the spirit of young people who yearn for encouragement and support.

I would hope, by the way, that PRSA's officers and its board will consider working out some sort of incentive program which would motivate chapters to make interchange between PRSA and PRSSA a high priority.

Think of it this way: Someday, when you and I are no longer around, our protégés of today will be carrying the banner of public relations to new accomplishments.

In any event...

Let's say "welcome" to those men and women who have said they want to qualify for our consideration. And let's make sure that when the year 2000 dawns, these promising, studious, eager-to-learn young men and women will be at their visionary best when a public relations department or agency calls them and says, "Come on in!"

Thank you for your attendance and attention and endurance. I am proud to be one of you and am grateful for the honor of standing here. God bless—and good afternoon to you all.