

PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES

Managerial Case Studies & Problems

FIFTH EDITION



ALLEN H. CENTER ▲ PATRICK JACKSON

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**Managerial
Case Studies
and Problems
Fifth Edition**

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Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

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A Simon & Schuster Company
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 0-13-098153-2

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

Preface

Twenty-two new cases have been added to this edition. So many major and rapid changes are occurring, affecting relationships, communications, and behavior that this additional material seemed essential.

On a grand scale, huge enterprises and wings of government are seeking to adjust beneficially to the global village of disparate cultures, values, and standards of behavior. At the local community level, life is strained, as jobs fall victim to technology or are moved to an area of lower wages and costs, with the tax base and public services such as education suffering. The function of public relations must be able to mediate in these changing circumstances, as they have in the past. Textbooks and courses must keep pace.

The practical purpose of this text remains the same. We seek, with case studies and problems, to help future practitioners develop agility in the principles and the application of effective two-way communications in a wide variety of situations likely to confront them and their employers.

- We have retained several timeless cases that involved turning-point issues or broke new ground in the maturing of the public relations function. These are identified as classics.
- Several cases with evolving subjects were updated.
- Some cases that have lost significance were dropped.

New cases are of such a nature that entry-level practitioners can readily identify with the topics. They deal with such broad matters of public concern as animal rights activism, the political correctness debate, corporate ethics and integrity, unsafe products, and financial takeovers.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

1. The first two chapters describe the purposes of public relations and the manner in which the function deals with problems and opportunities.
2. The bulk of the book contains real-life case studies in eight chapters organized according to primary publics such as employees and media or major problems such as public issues, crisis management, and standards or ethics.
3. Each chapter has a definitive introduction providing insights that come to life in the cases that follow. Introductions vary in size and substance, tailored to the assumed knowledge of students. Employee relations, for instance, reflects that most students have had work experience of some kind, whereas crisis management contains elements most students will not yet have encountered.
4. Each chapter closes with a case problem or two for class discussion closely related to the thrust of the chapter.
5. The last chapter deals candidly with career preparation.

We believe that there is enough variety to permit selectivity by educators, fitting the size of the class and the structure of the course—and enough provocation for lively classroom participation. For those interested in behavioral science research in depth, one case about the colossal effort to advance Beyond War (see Case 8-5) provides a clear application of diffusion theory in the real world of today and tomorrow. Another explains new research in risk communication.

THE AUTHORS AND THEIR APPROACH

Patrick Jackson has taught at several institutions, but is best known as editor of *pr reporter* and is a leading seminarian in professional development. He developed all the new case studies. He also amended and updated definitive passages to reflect the changes in the nature and emphasis of the calling and the roles and responsibilities of practitioners. Allen Center remains the book's originator and guiding spirit.

Patrick Jackson acknowledges help from colleagues Robin Schell, Lois Hogan, Stacey Smith, Isobel Parke, Robin Matchett, June Barber, Jim Beakey, Dick Dyer, and Jenna Wilson. Thanks additionally go out to the numerous student interns who contributed to the book in many ways: Marcy Resnick, Constance Chay, Andrea Proulx, Suzanne Canali, Tony Betke, Aimee Eliason, Kimberly Morris, and Kate Douglas.

Patrick Jackson and Allen Center mutually thank John Luecke, APR, who reviewed some of the new cases and provided valuable information to fine-tune them. Additional thanks go out to Frank Stansberry, APR, who, with the help of some of his students, provided some great case studies. They also thank the educators who reviewed the book and gave counsel on what worked in the classroom and what didn't.

The authors purposely chose to use a narrative description and avoided a set format for presenting each case. The real world does not come neatly packaged. The many teachers who regularly share their experiences with the text tell us they want students to gain experience in picking out the problem situation, delineating an environmental scan, and having to decide whether the solutions chosen were wise or flawed. Outlining the cases according to a formula denies them this most important learning from case studies.

Putting together a text of real-life case *studies*, contrasted with a collection of successful case *histories*, requires objective cooperation by the organizations represented, particularly when the subject, the scenario, or the conclusion is not laudatory. We are grateful for the information and illustrations supplied. We hope the cooperation pays off and this text enables instruction to be better attuned to the pressing needs of employers and the profession.

And finally, we would like to stress the importance and necessity of combining all public relations actions with both personal and professional ethics in behavior. This combination is outlined by the *Declaration of Principles* of PRSA's *Code of Ethics*. (see below). Other sections of the Code will be covered in further sections (see Case 5-1 for the interpretation of the code as it applies to financial relations and the introduction to Chapter 10 for the specific articles of the code of professional standards for the practice of public relations.)

CODE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

This Code was adopted by the PRSA Assembly in 1988. It replaces a Code of Ethics in force since 1950 and revised in 1954, 1959, 1963, 1977, and 1983.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Members of the Public Relations Society of America 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, and of equal opportunity of employment in the public relations profession.

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;

And to adhere to the articles of the Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations as adopted by the governing Assembly of the Society.

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The Purposes of Public Relations

PUBLIC RELATIONS IS AN APPLIED SCIENCE

However firm our grasp of the principles, the history, and the theories of any field, we must be able to apply them to actual cases. This statement is true for the entry-level recent graduate and for the seasoned professional. The proof of capability is in handling cases successfully for employers or clients.

- The bottom line of public relations practice is in the results that come from putting theories and principles to work—in a way that benefits the organization issuing the paycheck and the society of which that organization is a part.

For this reason, the case study method of learning about public relations is an essential part of a practitioner's education. Case studies accurately model situations that organizations, managers, and public relations practitioners routinely must face.

Though this book came into being primarily for use in the classroom—and includes practical exercises in each chapter suitable for students—it is also the major collection of carefully analyzed case studies for the field. Students can feel confident that they are using these cases right alongside seasoned veterans.

PUBLIC RELATIONS IS A RESPONSIBILITY OF MANAGEMENT

Although everyone in the organization can affect its relationships with various publics, establishing public relations policies, goals, and activities is clearly a managerial function. Public relations staffers are part of management.

The term *public relations* is often confusing because it is frequently used inaccurately. Used correctly, *public relations* describes the *processes* of practice—the techniques, strategies, structures, and tactics of the field. As such, the term is analogous to *law, medicine, nursing*, and so on. Too often, *public*

relations is also used to describe the *outcomes* of effective practice—so we hear of “good public relations.” The proper term for the desired outcomes of public relations practice is *public relationships*. An organization with effective public relations will attain positive public relationships.

In approaching the cases and problems presented in this book, an understanding of the meaning of management is essential. Here is a basic definition.

- Management is getting things done with people.

This statement means that managers work with and through others to carry out their assignments. Their job is not to do the work themselves but to guide and assist others in doing it. But there is another implication here that is related directly to public relations:

- Organizations must be able to get the cooperation of people both inside *and* outside the organization in order to achieve their objectives.

Thus, public relations managers must build capabilities in both the internal and external aspects of management. For this reason, they are usually selected as much for their managerial abilities in leading a staff and counseling others in the organization as for their public relations skills. The cases and problems in this book will help you practice both aspects.

THE FOCUS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IS ON BEHAVIOR

When an organization invests resources in public relations, it expects that something will be different than before or than it would have been had the investment not been made. Examples of change might be:

- Improved purchases by and relationships with customers,
- Better community relationships,
- Active support on issues from opinion leaders,
- Reduced tension with watchdog agencies,
- Greater employee loyalty or productivity,
- More confidence in the value of a company's stock.

If all public relations does is maintain the status quo, it is being used ineffectually. In addition, if it changes only the way people feel or think about the organization—and vice versa—it has not realized its full potential. **Effective public relations elicits mutually favorable *behavior* from both the organization and its publics.**

Behavior may be of three types:

1. Getting people to do something,
2. Getting them not to do something,
3. Winning their consent to let the organization do something.

Looked at from another perspective, the type of change sought may be to

1. *Motivate* new behavior,
2. *Reinforce* existing positive behavior, or
3. *Modify* negative behavior.

In studying the cases we present, ask yourself what is different about behaviors after the public relations activities have been carried out. If the answer is nothing, you must consider whether public relations has failed.

ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP THE FUNCTION

In general, public relations *is* what public relations *does* (which is true of every field). The employer, by formulating objectives, and practitioners, by accepting those objectives, define the function for that organization at that time.

Historically, the function has evolved from *one-way information transfer* to a *two-way concept* of sending messages and listening to feedback to the present idea of an organization's *adjusting harmoniously* with the publics on which it depends.¹ Underpinning this perspective, however, are at least six activities that are basic and endemic to practice:

Research. The first step in any project is to **gather intelligence**, in order to understand the variables in the case. What are key publics' opinions and attitudes? Who are the opinion leaders that matter? Which groups or persons are concerned enough to act?

Strategic planning. The situation and the data need to be formed into a strategy. Where are we now? How did we get here? Where do we want to be? How do we get there?

Counseling. Fellow managers must understand the plan and agree it should

¹For thoughtful analysis of the evolving definition, see Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 7th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), chapter 1.

be implemented. They may have a role in implementation and, at least, will need to explain it to their staffs.

Internal education. People in the organization need to be informed about the plan and their roles in it. Public relationships are not formed only by the executives or the public relations professionals, but by *everyone who interacts* with customers, employees, the community, stockholders, and all other publics.

Communication/action. The plan must be carried out. Messages or appeals are sent to the various publics involved; activities or actions are staged; feedback must be interpreted; and everyone must be kept informed as the project unfolds.

Evaluation. Another type of research, evaluation, charts effectiveness, or lack of it, and very likely will result in a new plan.

Chapter 2 reviews how this sequence is applied, in a four-step model.

PLANNING: MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES

Effective organizations have a business plan made up of long-range *goals* far into the future and short-term *objectives* attainable soon. The name commonly given to this type of plan is *management by objectives*, or *MBO*.²

Within the statement of goals and objectives, the role expected of public relations is usually stated in general terms. Public relations activities tied to overall objectives constitutes what is called the **management concept** or **public relations strategy**.

Then, the public relations staff draws up a set of specific departmental goals and objectives. They devise programs or campaigns, hire talent, plan budgets, establish timetables, implement activities and communications, evaluate results—all, however, tied to the organization's overall business plan. This working process is called the **functional concept**, or **public relations tactics**.

One key to success in planning—observable in several cases in this book—is to anticipate problems and opportunities. This proactive, or preventive, approach is preferable to the reactive, after-the-fact, approach because it lets you take the lead, rather than being forced to respond to others. Increasingly, this **issue anticipation** approach is becoming one of the major values public relations is expected to provide.

²Courses in marketing and business methods are recommended for all students planning a career in public relations whether in profit or nonprofit enterprises. Readers who want a detailed understanding of management by objectives (MBO) should see Norman Nager and T. Harrell Allen, *Public Relations Management by Objectives* (New York: Longman, 1984).

WHAT COMES ACROSS IS VALUES

More than anything, what public relations activities communicate are the values and vision of the organization—for better or worse. These may be socially positive, acceptable values or questionable ones. But whatever the explicit message sent forth, with it goes an implicit message of whether the organization really cares about people, the community, the future, or is self-centered and concerned only with its immediate profits or success or possibly even antisocial.

The primary value public relations professionals promote inside organizations is the *open system*. An open system fosters the willingness to adjust and adapt to change, with management sensitive to all interactions in the environment. Such managers are available, listen well, and communicate forthrightly both within the organization and with external stakeholders.

In contrast is the *closed system* organization, where change is difficult. Managers cling to the status quo, sometimes desperately, and seek to change the environment that is unfavorable to the old ways. Usually they try to limit or tightly control the flow of information. In such organizations, public relations is often on the defensive, forced to put forth the view, "If only you knew us better, you'd agree with us." Private enterprise, as a system, is often accused of being closed. Often it seems to insist its ways are inviolate. "Everything, everybody else, must change to our ways" is the value that sometimes comes across. Needless to say, this attitude limits effectiveness.

For public relations practitioners, the conflict between closed and open systems of management poses a major issue. Must an organization always go along with public opinion? When is it acceptable to advocate change in public opinion? Many cases discussed here illuminate this conundrum.

THE COMMON DENOMINATORS

In almost all programs or campaigns, seven common characteristics prevail:

1. Concern about social norms, group attitudes, and individual behavior,
2. A strategy embodying specific objectives, selected audiences, careful timing, and cost controls,
3. Actions that are consistent with the policies, standards, and personality of the organization represented,
4. Emphasis on the use of **communications and participative activities to persuade**, rather than coercion,
5. Consideration of the ethical and legal implications and consequences,
6. A method of assessing the outcome in terms of benefits and costs, and