

OPPORTUNITIES IN

Public Relations Careers



MORRIS B. ROTMAN

VGM Opportunities Series

OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS CAREERS

Morris B. Rotman

Revised by
Luisa Gerasimo

Foreword by
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris B. Rotman, APR, is a veteran public relations counselor and former Chicago journalist. He served as consultant to several large corporations and as an adjunct professor of public relations at the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, California.

He built Chicago-based Harshe-Rotman & Druck, Inc., into an international public relations firm with offices in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and London, England. Following a merger in 1982, the firm became Ruder, Finn & Rotman, Inc., with Rotman serving as president and chief operating officer until he retired from the firm and moved his business base to his home in the California desert.

His original firm, Harshe-Rotman & Druck, was retained by many large corporations and was involved in many major public issues of the day, including two presidential campaigns (Nelson Rockefeller and Adlai E. Stevenson). However, Rotman was most widely known for his relationship with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, in

Hollywood, which stages the annual Academy Awards. He worked on it for more than thirty years despite the fact that he was based in Chicago. It was a record for long-term client relationships in public relations circles. He also enjoyed a counseling relationship with Whirlpool, Inc., which covered a span of nearly twenty-five years.

Mr. Rotman was born in Chicago where he attended Tuley High School, Wright Junior College, and Northwestern University. He began his career in journalism before World War II at the Lerner Newspapers on Chicago's northwest side, progressed through the famed City News Bureau of Chicago, joined the *Chicago Sun*, and during World War II served for one year as editor of the Scott Field, Illinois, *Broadcaster*. At the close of the war he entered the public relations field at the Community War Fund and in 1946 became a partner to William Harshe, taking over the firm after Harshe died in 1949. During the next thirty-five years he built and led Harshe-Rotman & Druck, Inc., in its rise to one of the largest and most capable public relations firms in the United States.

Mr. Rotman has counseled nearly every kind of professional, business, and trade organization during his long career and is the author of dozens of articles, speeches, and chapters in books on public relations. Now a member of the Chief Executives Organization, he has been involved with the Public Relations Society of America and was a national director of the Young Presidents Organization, an international organization of company presidents who are under

forty-nine years of age. In the Palm Springs desert, he serves as chairman of another group of sixty graduate YPOers called The Desert Rats.

In addition to his business responsibilities, Rotman spent time as a trustee of Chicago's Roosevelt University and is now an emeritus trustee. He is also a Life Director of The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago after more than twenty-five years of service as a director. He won several awards for his work in creating better understanding and acceptance of the handicapped in everyday life.

Since the inception of the idea by the late actor-director Sam Wanamaker, Rotman served as an American director of the Shakespeare Globe Trust, which built a replica of the original Globe theater on the west bank of the Thames in London, England.

This edition has been revised by Luisa Gerasimo, a freelance writer living in Wisconsin.

FOREWORD

Many people without training in the field consider themselves somewhat expert in public relations and advertising. When you stop to think about it, that is not totally irrational—after all, each of us is the public. We are the target of the effort of those who seek to inform and shape public opinion. We know what we like and what we don't like. And we at least indirectly develop standards, expectations, and opinions as to what might have been done to have caused our reaction to be different, or what has caused our receptivity to have been favorable. Yet finding ourselves in this position may be one of the most dangerous of opinions to hold. For we are at the greatest risk of not knowing what we do not know.

It has been my privilege to know a few of the leading public relations executives of the country. I consider Morris Rotman a dean among his peers. A quality that each of these executives holds, and what Morris Rotman possesses in abundance, is a love of people and an understanding of them. I presume there are some people successful in the PR

business who do not necessarily have this genuine affection and empathy for people and who succeed at their level as a function of their expertise at the process. But if I were to advise someone entering the public relations field, I would ask them how deep is their interest in people. How able are they to put themselves in the shoes of those whom they wish to influence for good? I have listened to and watched Morris Rotman work his way through a public relations issue and subject with consummate skill at the processes. But the distinguishing characteristic that added to the worth of what he was bringing to the issue was his intimate knowledge of what was on the mind of the public at that time. What could be realistically offered and reasonably accepted? At all times these well-rooted thoughts were matched against a standard of integrity, for he, as well as anyone I know, realizes that the public will accept only the truth.

This book encourages bright people to consider opportunities in public relations. Those with the most genuine interest in the public will serve those opportunities best.

Robert W. Galvin
Chairman, Executive Committee
Motorola Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give special thanks to Robert W. Galvin, chairman of the executive committee of Motorola, Inc., for his elegant foreword to this book. I recognize the world beats a path to Bob Galvin's door in search of his attention and time. I am fortunate indeed to have had his friendship. Bob is not only one of the world's great industrial leaders but constantly adds to his burden by taking on enormous tasks in the public interest.

Morris B. Rotman

INTRODUCTION

What does it take to be a public relations specialist? Public relations is based in communication, but it can take a wide array of forms including investor relations, public affairs, corporate communication, employee relations, product or marketing publicity, consumer service, or customer relations. Public relations people need a wide variety of skills because they will likely deal with everything from research and evaluation to writing and emergency response.

Because people today move from one job to another many times over the course of a career or careers, it is important to have knowledge of numerous subjects and be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world. It makes sense to be a jack of all trades *and* to have the specific knowledge of the industry for which you work. Applied psychology and intuition help practitioners evaluate what's going on in people's minds; economic and financial savvy brings an understanding of business; knowledge of foreign affairs and foreign languages bridges the gap between cultures; interest in the arts deepens that individual's personality.

Sociology helps the professional to tune into rapidly changing fads and trends. Messages must continuously appeal to the audiences toward which they are directed, and the process for getting that message across changes from month to month, week to week, even day to day. The general public can be fickle, and the public relations person must adapt to these constantly changing moods and preferences.

A public relations specialist performs many invaluable functions for businesses. The effort is based on expertise and draws from many skills. A public relations person must communicate effectively, write well, and be able to present oral material in a straightforward and interesting fashion. Jargon—language that only experts understand—does not convey information clearly.

The public relations specialist must be a consummate journalist, and he or she must be good as are the best reporters and broadcasters. A highly developed news sense, based on a deep understanding of journalism, remains one of the fundamentals of public relations. News sense is the ability to understand why and how stories are covered in print, broadcast, and specialized media, including trade publications. That's why the most successful people in the field still come from journalism's many branches.

Press relations is the heart of the public relations business. In fact, the general public (composed of distinct, separate publics) perceives public relations mostly through the media. Consequently, public relations firms must have the trust of the press in order to make different kinds of best impres-

sions with different publics. To gain that trust, public relations specialists must deliver facts.

To help corporations deal effectively with the press, the public relations person must stay in step with the times. He or she must serve as the person who comprehends the problems that require communications. Public relations people should try to know what major changes will occur well in advance of when they actually occur.

Media sophistication in this technical world is very great. This is especially true in television and Internet news, with its very strict time limits. Station and network directors and producers choose between equally strong stories for their broadcasts. Some materials that could be shown must be left out. Selectivity becomes all-important, and the public relations specialist plays a key role in deciding what appears in news media and what does not. The professional public relations person cannot dictate what is shown on national or local news, but he or she can suggest possible story angles and subjects. What a public relations expert does and how he or she does it often influences how and whether the client's story gets told.

Public relations is an art used in most areas of our lives. Politicians and political parties, entertainers, medical professional organizations, and major sports teams regularly utilize the skills and techniques of public relations specialists to transmit certain messages or images. Each entity wants to convey a favorable image to those segments of society whose support is needed for the organization to reach its goals.

The message must be appealing and forceful, but, above all, it must be accurate. The days of press-agentry, in the sense of “planting” material in the media, are a thing of the past. Today, truth is the watchword of the public relations profession.

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that more people are entering the public relations field each year. Although there were barely a few thousand people in the field when I began my career, there are now more than 122,000 people working in public relations. About 13,000 of these are self employed. The four largest firms employ thousands of public relations specialists. In addition, thousands of other people are employed full-time by various corporations, government agencies, and associations to represent them in this burgeoning field. Over the years the number of females entering the field has increased dramatically. More than one-half the number of people in PR are women.

Perhaps you, too, can become a public relations person and enjoy a rewarding career that has fulfilled many thousands of individuals. The rest of this book will survey the field and give you a sense of what public relations people do and where the opportunities lie.

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CHAPTER 1

DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A CAREER FIELD

Because a good public relations effort is applicable to so many aspects of everyday life, it is nearly impossible to arrive at an all-encompassing definition. This is further complicated by the fact that public relations, as it has grown in importance over the past few years, has also become more complex and diverse.

The Public Relations Society of America says: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. Often, it is a term used to describe both a way of looking at an organization’s performance and a program of activities.” Public relations efforts not only communicate a company or organization’s story to the world; they also can help shape the organization itself.

The ultimate quality evaluation for any public relations campaign is the final performance. Though the information conveyed through public relations is crucial, the final judge of a campaign’s effectiveness is what that distribution of information helps to achieve. Public relations is goal-oriented, and the final test is whether it achieves what it sets out to do.

As public relations specialists, we must constantly bear in mind that we communicate our messages to multiple and diverse publics. However, nothing today is carried out in an information vacuum, and we must assume that at any given time, the world is watching us and listening to what we say.

The messages we communicate must have the good of a society in mind, and that includes promoting products and causes. Public relations can be a force for good—a persuasive force. As such it has to be employed in the open, with public scrutiny. Public relations requires a degree of acceptance. It's one part of the job to communicate well—the other is to influence the audience to accept the messages and respond according to your design.

COMPARISON TO THE FIELD OF ADVERTISING

Public relations is often compared with advertising, and the two disciplines have many similarities. Both are persuasive and communicate through print and broadcast media. Both often strive toward the same goal or promote the same product or service. People who enter the two fields are commonly creative, full of energy, and stimulated by responsibility.

Both public relations and advertising are at their best when they work side by side. Most of advertising's messages are communicated through paid media. And in advertising, unlike public relations, where material appears at an editor's discretion, the agency has control of what appears in that space. It also tries to use variations on the same theme in