

PART ONE THE BASICS 1

1 What Is Public Relations? 3

Interview: Walt Seifert 6

Coming of Age 3

Overview of Public Relations 4

Interpreting Management to the Public 12

Interpreting the Public to Management 13

The Publics of Public Relations 14

The Essence of Public Relations

Practice 16

Case Study: Watergate 18

2 The Evolution of Public Relations 23

Interview: Edward L. Bernays 26

Responding to a Complex Society 23

Ancient Beginnings 24

Early American Experience 25

Ivy Lee: The Father of Modern Public Relations 30

The Growth of Modern Public Relations 32

Public Relations Comes of Age 36

Public Relations Today 38

Case Study: The public relations of Henry Ford 39

3 Organizing for Public Relations 45

Interview: Edward M. Block 48

Public Relations as Management Process 45

Just What Is It You Do Exactly? 46

Scope of the Practice 47

Planning for Public Relations 50

Measuring Public Relations Objectives 51

Programming/Budgeting for Public Relations 52

Organizing the Public Relations Department 54

Organizing for Communications at the Chase Manhattan Bank 55

Organizing the Public Relations Agency 57

What's It Pay? 62

What Manner of Man/Woman? 66

Case Study: The loquacious bank economist 68

CONTENTS

4 The Court of Public Opinion 73

Interview: Herb Schertz 76

- A Perishable Commodity 73
- Defining Public Opinion 74
- Defining Attitudes 74
- Types of Attitudes 75
- Sources of Motivation 78
- Types of Publics 79
- Influencing Public Opinion 79
- Polishing the Corporate Image 81
- Discovering the Corporate Image 84
- Beware: The Traps of Public Opinion 89
- The Public's Perception of Public Relations 90
- One Step ahead of Public Opinion 92

Case Study: The tragedy of Love Canal 93

5 Communications: The Backbone of Public Relations 101

Interview: Ron Nessen 104

- A Professional Communicator 101
- The S-E-M-D-R Approach 102
- Barriers to Communications 115

Case Study: Chantilly laced 116

6 Research 121

Interview: Paul H. Alvarez 122

- Beginning to Listen 121
- An Unglamorous/Demystified Practice 124
- Research Applications 124
- Common Objectives of Research 125
- Types of Research 125

Case Study: The Atwater attitude survey 139

PART TWO PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS 143

7 Public Relations Writing Fundamentals 145

Interview: Wes Pedersen 148

- Write Makes Might 145
- Writing for the Eye and Ear 146
- Writing Fundamentals 146
- The Secret of the Inverted Pyramid 151
- The News Release 154

- The "Announcement" 162
- The "Management Change" 164
- The "Management Speech" 166
- The Importance of Editing 167
- Case Study: The Raina, Inc. news release 168**

8 Writing For The Eye 173

Interview: Lyle L. Erb 176

- Traditional Strength 173
- The Biography 174
- The Backgrounder 175
- The Feature 179
- The Case History 179
- The Byliner 181
- The Memorandum 181
- The Pitch Letter 182
- Other Tools 184
- To Write or Not to Write 188

Case Study: The leather pitch letter 189

9 Writing for the Ear 193

Interview: Robert L. Fegley 196

- The Spoken Word 193
- The Speech 194
- The Speech Writing Process 194
- The Spoken Word 199
- Radio, Television Writing 202

Case Study: The chairman's speech 210

10 Public Relations Marketing 215

Interview: Howard Geltzer 218

- The Marketing Plan 216
- Product Publicity 216
- Third-Party Endorsement 217
- Responding to Negative Publicity 219
- Public Relations Marketing Activities 223
- The Age of "Public Relations Marketing" 235

Case Study: Rely tampons 236

11 Public Relations Advertising 239

Interview: Steve Rivkin 242

- Emergence of Image Advertising 246
- Issue Advertising Emerges in the 1980s 250

CONTENTS

Purposes of Public Relations

Advertising 256

The Future 257

**Case Study: The bank that cried
"wolf" 261**

12 Support Services 267

Interview: Richard Weiner 270

Writing and Research Supports 268

Photographic Supports 268

Audiovisual Supports 273

Graphics Supports 275

Dissemination Supports 276

Radio-TV Services 276

Media Directories 278

Measurement Assistance 279

Special Events 281

Case Study: Chino Chemicals 283

PART THREE THE PUBLICS 287

13 Employees 289

Interview: Roger D'Aprix 292

A Hot Ticket 289

Credibility: The Key 291

Objectives 294

Employee Communications Methods 296

Bulletin Boards 302

Battling the Grapevine 307

**Case Study: Much ado about
Mary 309**

14 Media 313

Interview: Edwin L. Dale, Jr. 316

Dealing with the Media 313

"Objectivity" in the Media 318

Media's View of Officialdom 321

Officialdom's View of the Media 321

Role of Public Relations 323

**Case Study: The media relations ruckus
at Goliath Industries 327**

15 Publicity Techniques 331

Interview: Andrew S. Edson 334

The Art of Publicity 331

Securing Publicity 332

Avenues of Publicity 338

Press Junkets 354

Professionalism: The Key 356

**Case Study: Illinois Power's
reply 356**

16 Government 361

Interview: Robert K. Gray 364

Explosive Growth 361

Public Relations in Government 362

Dealing with Government 369

Political Action Committees 373

Dealing with the Congress 374

Dealing with Local Government 377

**Case Study: "Glassroots" government
relations 377**

17 The Community 383

Interview: Carlton E. Spitzer 386

Responsibility to the Community 383

The Community 384

Community Relations Objectives 390

Emergence of Public Affairs 393

Responding through Social

Responsibility 398

Case Study: Three Mile Island 400

18 Consumers 405

Interview: Jean Way Schoonover 408

Dealing with Consumerism 405

Growth of the Consumer Movement 406

Philosophy 410

The Future of Consumerism 415

**Case Study: The unfortunate Firestone
500s 417**

19 Investors 421

Interview: James O. Rollans 424

Growth of Financial Relations 421

Essence of Investor Relations 422

Sources of Investor Information 426

Corporate Communications Tools 429

Takeovers/Proxy Contests/Tender

Offers 437

Credibility 438

Case Study: The raid of Microdot 442

20 Special Publics 446

Interview: Harvey K. Jacobson 450

Women 448

Ethnic Groups 448

Other Minorities 449

Educators 453
 Nonprofit Organizations 453
 Associations 454
 Health and Hospitals 456
 Military 458
 Other Special Publics 458
**Case Study: Procter & Gamble's
 symbol 462**

21 The International Community 467

Interview: Donald Lightfoot 470
 Transcending International
 Boundaries 467
 The International Professional 468
 Organizing for International Public
 Relations 468
 The State of Public Relations
 Abroad 469
 The Media Overseas 473
 Dealing with Foreign Clients Abroad 473
 The Foreign Press in the United
 States 474
 The Outlook 476
**Case Study: The new international
 image 478**

22 Managing Public Issues 481

Interview: Ray Ewing 483
 Issues Management is "In" 481

Issues Management Defined 482
 Approach to Issues Management 482
 Organizing for Issues Management 487
 Public Relations Role 488
 Identifying Emerging Issues 489
 Issues of the Day 489
Case Study: The Tylenol murders 492

23 The Future 501

Interview: Joseph T. Nolan 504
 Growth in the 80s 501
 Blossoming of Public Relations 502
 Challenge for the 80s: Counseling
 Management 503
 Landing a Public Relations Job 508
 Emerging Trends 512
Case Study: The voluntary recall 513

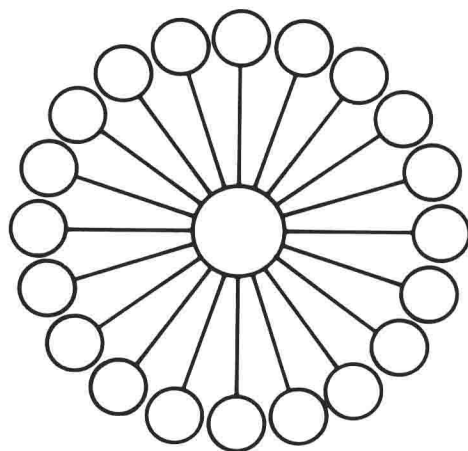
Appendices 517

A: Code of Professional Standards 518
B: Corporate Reporting Requirements 523
C: Annual Meeting Checklist 533
D: Code of Ethics 536
**E: Official Statement on Public
 Relations 537**

Index 539

THE BASICS

PART ONE



CHAPTER 1: What Is Public Relations?

**CHAPTER 2: The Evolution of Public
Relations**

**CHAPTER 3: Organizing for Public
Relations**

**CHAPTER 4: The Court of Public
Opinion**

**CHAPTER 5: Communications: The
Backbone of Public Relations**

CHAPTER 6: Research

COMING OF AGE

In the 1980s, the practice of public relations stands at a crossroads.

On the one hand, public relations has finally arrived. In an age, as columnist George Will puts it, "of skimmed surfaces, of facile confidence that reality is whatever can be seen and taped and reported,"¹ the practice of public relations has acquired new-found respect. Indeed, in an era of unrelenting questioning by the media and the public, an organization must not only be sensitive to but highly considerate of its many publics.

A primary vehicle through which an organization shows its public sensitivity and consideration is its public relations professionals. Accordingly, the practice of public relations has shed its old misconceptions, acquired new responsibilities, and inherited an increasing amount of power, prestige, and pay in the 1980s.²

The striking metamorphosis of public relations from a misunderstood trade to a respected profession will likely continue through the 1980s.

On the other hand, along with its new stature, the practice of public relations is now faced with unprecedented pressure.

- The very name *public relations* is being challenged by such euphemisms as public affairs, corporate communications, public information, and a variety of others.
- As public relations positions take on greater credibility, the competition to fill them becomes more intense. Today, the profession finds itself vulnerable to encroachment by people without public relations backgrounds, such as lawyers, marketers, and general managers of every stripe.

1

What is public relations?

- Educational institutions, who themselves have recognized the need to practice public relations intensively, have nonetheless been slow to recognize the need to teach it.
- While organizations throughout society desperately need professionals of universal interests and broad-reaching ideas in sensitive public relations jobs, there is a continuing trend toward specialization in the field.
- The field is still plagued by misrepresentations of what it's all about. More often than not, the public's perception is that public relations is *aimed at* not *for* them; that they are the *object* of public relations, not the *beneficiaries*.³

The public relations profession is buffeted by countervailing pressures. It has earned the respect of management, yet must still fight for its identity among the general public. It has earned acceptance in most organizations, yet must fight for its rightful role in society. It is blessed with unlimited opportunities in the years ahead, yet its very survival is threatened by encroachment from outsiders.

Few other professions are subject to as continuous a current of controversy as the practice of public relations. In any event, it is irrefutable that public relations today, in a comparatively short time and despite a number of handicaps, has evolved from a fringe function to a basic element of society. It is indeed a force to be reckoned with.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations affects almost everyone who has contact with other human beings. All of us, in one way or another, practice public relations daily.

To be sure, public relations is not yet a profession like law, accounting, and medicine, in which practitioners are trained, licensed, and supervised. There is nothing to prevent someone with little or no formal training from "hanging out a shingle" as a public relations specialist. Such frauds embarrass professionals in the field. Thankfully, these phonies are becoming harder and harder to find.

Over the last decade, public relations has steadily built its reputation, increased its prominence, and earned respect across a wide span of society. As today's institutions strive to understand more clearly the forces of change, to adapt their activities to new pressures and aspirations, and to listen and communicate more effectively, public relations has become more important. Institutions rely on their practitioners to help win public support and trust. Without such public support, they know they will be rendered powerless.

As the field increases in prominence, it grows in professional stature. The Public Relations Society of America, with a national membership of over 11,000, has accredited about one-third of its members through a standardized examination. The Society has also investigated legal licensing—similar to the accounting and legal professions—of public relations practitioners.

The Society's main objective is to increase the field's professionalism. It has a code of standards (see Appendix A), which dwells heavily on a practitioner's ethical responsibilities. The Society also provides additional opportunities in specialized areas of practice: association, corporate, counseling, educational institutions, educators, financial institutions, government, health, investor relations, and utilities. These sections have their own publications, seminars, and programs.

Today, less than 10 percent of the more than 100,000 practitioners in the United States are members of the Society. Thousands of practitioners are former newspaper reporters and magazine writers, journalism school graduates, advertising agency alumni, and lawyers. Increasingly, one also can find individuals formally educated in public relations practice.

In an attempt to begin to understand what public relations is and what it can and cannot accomplish, here are a few approaches toward defining public relations.

APPROACHES TO A DEFINITION

First, public relations is not:

- the \$5 million quarterback glad-handing the local businessmen at the cigar company's annual luncheon
- the sultry screen actress seductively caressing the after-shave lotion to the clicks of photographers' shutters
- the fast-talking hustler eagerly touting his "contacts" to a prospective client
- a U.S. President's brother (Billy Carter), the former heavyweight champions of the world (Joe Louis/Muhammed Ali), or the palimony roommate of a famous actor (Michelle Triola Marvin).

Yet all of these and worse have, from time to time, been mistaken as part of the practice of public relations. As one of the industry's leading publications, *PR Reporter*, put it (only slightly tongue-in cheek): "Ex-convicts, child molesters, political fixers, call girls and their procurers, gambling casino bouncers and a variety of glad-handing front men have been described as 'public relations counselors.'"⁴

A similar thought was expressed by John Sattler, former director of public relations at Ford: "Public relations is an easy and all-encompassing label to hang on people and events. Like cosmetics, it can be thought to cover all types of imperfections and blemishes. It was bound to attract varying levels of capability and competence and motives . . . and has its share of 'schlock' operators."⁵

While all organizations have, by their existence, some kind of public relations, not all enjoy *good* public relations. And that's what this book is all about—good public relations, the kind you must work at.

Whereas *marketing* and *sales* have as their primary objective to sell an organization's products, public relations attempts to "sell" the organization itself. Central to its concern is the public interest.

Advertising also generally aims to sell products through paid means. Good public relations, on the other hand, cannot be bought; it must be earned. And the credibility derived from sound public relations work may far exceed that gained through paid advertising.

Product publicity, although an aspect of public relations, is more closely aligned with advertising. In general, the elements of the marketing mix—advertising, product promotion, sales, publicity, and the like—may be but a small part of public relations. As Louis B. Lundborg, retired chairman of Bank America, has pointed out, "If the person who advises top management on the public implications of company policies and decisions . . . can be influenced by pressures from advertising or marketing forces, he is worthless to management as a PR counselor."⁶

The earliest college teachers of public relations exhorted students to:

learn new ways of using knowledge you already have—a different viewpoint, as if you moved to one side and looked at everything from unfamiliar angles. Project yourself into the minds of people you are trying to reach, and see things the way they do. Use everything you've learned elsewhere—English, economics, sociology, science, history—you name it.⁷

INTERVIEW

Walt Seifert



Walt Seifert is professor of public relations in the School of Journalism at Ohio State University. He has taught at Ohio State since 1958. In 1967, he founded the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and in 1976, he founded the Educator's Section of PRSA. A former newspaper reporter, Mr. Seifert was a public information officer in the U.S. Navy during World War II, an account executive

for N. W. Ayer & Son, and spent ten years in public relations with Byer & Bowman in Columbus, Ohio. More than 500 graduates of Professor Seifert's classes are now practicing public relations.

What are the most striking changes in the public relations profession since you began in the practice?

Since I started as a manager of the Bermuda News Bureau in 1938, I have watched this emerging profession develop fast in both qualitative and quantitative senses. In today's highly competitive society, it is widely understood that any individual, organization, or institution that seeks public support must hire professional communicators to advocate in the Court of Public Opinion as it hires lawyers to advocate in the courts of law.

What changes have you noticed among public relations students?

Today's public relations students, like all other students, are concentrating on their goals and their glands—and are much more job-oriented than the angry students in the 70s.

How do you define public relations?

Several decades later, it is still widely felt that a broad background is essential to effectively manage public issues. While specific definitions of public relations may differ, most who practice it agree that good public relations requires a firm base of theoretical knowledge, a strong sense of judgment, solid communication skills, and, most of all, an uncompromising attitude of professionalism.

Public relations is "doing good and making sure you get caught." Another way of saying this is "good deeds made known."

What distinguishes a good public relations practitioner?

A good public relations practitioner touches all four bases in the professional PR process: *R*(esearch), *A*(ction), *C*(ommunicating), and *E*(valuating). This requires planning, doing, telling, and proving. A mediocre practitioner only communicates.

What advice do you give your students who want to become professional public relations practitioners?

Study under a seasoned public relations professional, whether he has fancy academic degrees or not. Join the student society and make contacts at PRSSA meetings and conventions. Work on PRSA accounts, summer PR jobs, and academic internships that will give you experience and a strong portfolio. Get lots of bylined clips from your school newspaper.

Why should a student be interested in a career in public relations?

In the last 22 years at least 500 graduates of our classes have entered fulltime PR work. More than 92 percent say they like it, and almost all are still in it.

How easy is it to get a job in the field?

It is still relatively easy for graduates to get PR jobs if they have a decent academic

record supplemented with strong collegiate PR experiences.

What are the most significant challenges confronting public relations today?

Public relations, like many other professions, is highly differentiated. At the top are the seasoned counselors who sit with management at the policy-making table. At the bottom are youngsters at the news bureau or house organ level. No two practices are alike, but success comes fast to those who have lots of natural intelligence, talent, and desire. The need for clear, effective communication keeps growing.

Twenty years from now, what will be the stature of public relations?

Public relations, as a profession, will keep growing bigger and better as rival organizations compete for approval and seek to offset the negativism of our national mass media.

If you had your career to start over again, what would you do?

I would do exactly what I have done for almost 50 years: pay my dues by proving myself in many phases of real-life PR practice, and then settle back to the easy, inspiring world of academe.

Is there anything else you'd like readers of this book to know?

The only thing between you and the top of the ladder is the ladder!

SEARCHING FOR A SINGLE DEFINITION

What, then, is public relations?

While a lot of people seem to have a pretty good idea, few seem to agree. American historian Robert Heilbroner describes the field as “a brotherhood of some 100,000, whose common bond is its profession and whose common woe is that no two of them can ever quite agree on what that profession is.”⁸

Basically, Heilbroner is right, although he can’t say there haven’t been a great many efforts over the years to come up with a suitable public relations definition. Perhaps the first recorded definition of public relations was found in the Bible: “To do good, and communicate, forget not.”⁹

In 1923, Edward Bernays described the function of his fledgling public relations counseling business as one of providing “information given to the public, persuasion directed at the public to modify attitudes and actions, and efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with those of that institution.”¹⁰

In 1939, *Fortune* magazine, in an article entitled, “The Public Be Not Damned,” said “public relations is the label used to describe, at one and the same time, techniques and objectives” and “the conduct of individual businesses, as organizations of people banded together in an effort to make a living for themselves and a profit for investors.”¹¹

In 1944, the Dictionary of Sociology defined the field as “the body of theory and technique utilized in adjusting the relationships of a subject with its publics. These theories and techniques represent applications of sociology, social psychology, economics and political science, as well as of the special skills of journalists, artists, organizational experts, advertising men, etc. to the specific problems involved in this field of activity.”¹²

However, as late as 1960, *Webster’s Dictionary* showed little understanding when it defined public relations as “relations with the general public through publicity; those functions of a corporation, organization, branch of military service, etc. concerned with informing the public of its activities, policies, etc. and attempting to create favorable public opinion.”

Today, while a generally accepted definition of public relations still eludes practitioners, substantial headway toward a clearer understanding of the field is being made. One of the most ambitious searches for a universal definition was that commissioned in 1975 by the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education. Sixty-five public relations leaders participated in the study, which analyzed 472 different definitions and offered the following sentence:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.¹³

FEATURE

Rocky Mountain News

March 3, 1981

Trying 36-24-36 PR

The former Rebecca Ann King was once a queen, or about as close to being a queen as you get in this country. She was Miss America, vintage 1974, and there's nothing wrong with that.

But the 30-year-old looker, whose name is now Dreman, has been named public affairs director for the Regional Transportation District at \$42,000 a year, and there very well may be something wrong with that.

We're not saying she's just another pretty face. She did, after all, win a law degree at the University of Denver, she has been on speaking tours to raise money for cancer and asthma research and she has been a consultant for a number of large firms.

But just how qualified is she for this job? There are people out there—a lot of them—who have mastered the difficult field of public relations through years of hard work. Dreman may be bright, and with measurements that read 36-24-36, a real attention getter, but there's nothing to indicate she's an expert at explaining complicated issues to the public.

And what about the salary of 42

grand a year? It's true, RTD has had a hard time getting its message across—namely, ride the bus and leave the driving to us—but does it take that kind of money to persuade a skilled PR hand to climb aboard?

Dreman is no stranger to controversy. After winning the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, critics said she wasn't the prettiest or the most talented contestant, and she said, "If they don't like me, that's fine." Then, in her first official appearance as Miss America, she said she favored legalizing marijuana and abortion. That caused something of a stir.

If she thinks the going was tough then, however, wait until she has to explain why buses don't arrive on time or why routes are always being changed or why costs of the Denver mall keep going up and up or why the RTD board should be permitted junkets at taxpayer expense.

Some people have accused the RTD of being inept. Interesting, isn't it, that the agency was inept in hiring someone whose job it will be to justify that ineptness.

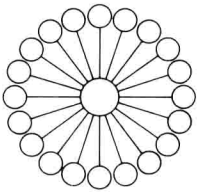
While decisions to fill public relations positions may still be clouded by irrelevant factors from time-to-time, as this editorial

implies there is increasing recognition in society of the complexities involved in professional public relations work.

Another definition emerged from an assembly of public relations associations in 1978:

Public relations practice is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization's and the public's interest.¹⁴

In 1980, the Task Force on the Stature and Role of Public Relations, chartered by the Public Relations Society of America, offered two definitions that project a perspective of the field at the highest policy-making level and encompass all its functions and specialities:



MINICASE

The railroaded railroad

The Grand Northern Railroad couldn't get a break.

In the summer came the floods. In the winter came the snow. In between came the cows mistaking the GN tracks for grazing land. For the 50,000 commuters who depended on the Grand Northern to get them to and from work each day, it meant perpetual and massive delays.

The GN—or as it was derisively labeled by its riders, the Grand Nuisance—was a laughing stock.

One afternoon, Grand Northern's president decided to take action. He called a press conference.

"From now on," he told the skeptical journalists, "this railroad will run on time every time. We will make a concerted effort to improve all phases of our customer service. You're going to see a real change in this railroad." He went on to announce a special program that would award bonuses to staff members demonstrating superior service to customers.

The next morning, sixteen miles from its destination, in the middle of an expansive open field miles from civilization, the GN Mainliner—pride of the GN fleet—sputtered miserably, coughed one last puff of steam, and collapsed with a groan; leaving hundreds of irate commuters to ponder their morning headline, "Grand Northern Promises 'Real Change' for Passengers."

QUESTIONS

- 1 What's wrong with Grand Northern's public relations strategy?
- 2 Was the timing of the press conference appropriate?
- 3 Was the content of the conference appropriate?
- 4 How might Grand Northern be treated in the next day's paper?
- 5 If you had been the firm's public relations counsel, what would you have advised GN's president about his press conference idea?

- Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.
- Public relations is an organization's efforts to win the cooperation of groups of people.¹⁵

Communications counselor L. L. L. Golden has suggested that more people would understand the field if the term *relations with the public* were substituted to describe it.¹⁶ While it is unlikely that a generally accepted definition of public relations will soon—or perhaps ever—be agreed upon, the attempts mentioned here provide some idea of the scope of the practice.

R-A-C-E FORMULA

Communications professor John Marston suggested that public relations be defined in terms of four specific functions: a) research, b) action, c) communication, and d) evaluation.¹⁷

Applying the R-A-C-E approach, one researches attitudes on a particular issue, identifies action programs of the organization that speak to that issue, communicates these programs to gain understanding and acceptance, and evaluates the effect of the communication efforts on the public.

This formula is similar to one of the most repeated definitions of public relations, developed by Public Relations News, a leading newsletter for practitioners: Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.¹⁸

The key word in this definition is *management*. Although most practitioners believe the field is close to the top of the policy-making pyramid, some think the word management is not part of a definition. For example, the Public Relations Society of America did not include it for “simplicity” reasons. Its definition called public relations “the function that maintains an organization's relationships with society in a way that most effectively achieves the organization's goals.”¹⁹

Underlying these definitions is an unstated word: *performance*. Without proper performance, good public relations is impossible. Stated another way, performance must precede publicity. Or yet another way, in the less grandiose terminology of public relations professor Mack Palmer, “First lay the egg, then cackle.”

SHORTHAND DEFINITIONS

Other attempts to define the field have been simpler than the previously discussed approaches, although no less germane.

At the British Institute of Public Relations: “Public relations is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.”

At *Fortune* magazine: “Public relations is good performance today publicly appreciated because it is adequately communicated.”

To one counselor: “Public relations is communicating truth—good works well told.”

To others, it's:

"Persuasive communication designed to influence specific publics."

"The winning of public acceptance by acceptable performance."

"Doing good and getting credit for it."

"Performance plus *Recognition*."

This book will define *public relations* as the management of communications between an organization and its publics. But whichever definition you prefer, it is clear that the more we try to define it, the more we understand about the scope of the practice. That no one can agree about a definition shows that public relations is an evolving profession.²⁰

INTERPRETING MANAGEMENT TO THE PUBLIC

At base, practitioners are interpreters. On the one hand, they must interpret the philosophies, policies, programs, and practices of their management to the public; and on the other hand, they must translate the attitudes of the public to their management.

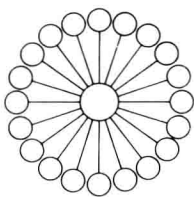
To accomplish these tasks accurately and truthfully, they must gain attention, understanding, acceptance, and ultimately, action from target publics. To do this, they first have to know what management is thinking. Lewis A. Lapham, former vice-chairperson of Banker's Trust Company, admitted that he'd learned "in tears and sweat, if not in blood, that public relations philosophy, inspiration, and action must flow from the top."²¹

So good public relations can't be practiced in a vacuum. No matter what the size of the organization, a public relations department is only as good as its access to management. For example, it's useless for a political press secretary to explain the reasoning of an important decision if the secretary hasn't first found out what the senator had in mind. So too, an organization's public relations staff is impotent without the first-hand knowledge of the reasons for management's decisions and the rationale for organizational policy. As Lapham put it, "No matter how skillful the public relations techniques and technicians, they simply cannot succeed if top management is unaware of or sidesteps its responsibilities in describing its place in the community and in defining its objectives."²²

The public relations policy of Standard Oil of Indiana is an example of sound objectives:

We are in business to find oil, make good products, and sell them at fair prices and profits. We try to operate in the best interest of shareholders, employees, customers, and the public. We believe our company and all business and industry can do this best under American free enterprise and competitive private management. Our public relations policy is to treat people right, heed their opinions and keep them informed.²³

The public relations department can counsel management. It can advise management. It can even exhort management to action. But management must call the tune on organizational policy. Practitioners must fully understand the why's and wherefore's of policy and communicate the ideas accurately and candidly to the public. Anything less can lead to major problems.



MINICASE

The uninformed PR veep

Osterman, Bimbo Manufacturing's public relations vice-president, sensed trouble when he walked in at 8:30 and found his boss waiting for him, shaking his head disgustedly.

"It's trouble, Herb," the boss fumed. "We're sending out hundreds of pink slips in the morning mail. The press is gonna be all over us if word leaks out."

"You mean we're not going to announce the layoffs? Osterman asked incredulously. "We're intending to 'stonewall' it?"

"What's there to announce?" his boss rumbled. "Any way you slice it, it's bad news, and we can't win by saying anything."

"I suppose you're right," Osterman reasoned. "In that case, don't give me any of the details. That way, if I do get called, I won't be lying when I tell 'em I know nothing more about it than we've effected some layoffs. Agree?"

"Absolutely."

QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you, too, agree with Osterman's approach?
- 2 What might a reporter think of Osterman and Bimbo Manufacturing upon getting wind of the story?
- 3 Do you think a reporter would write a story about the layoffs even without Osterman's help?
- 4 If so, how might Bimbo Manufacturing be treated in the article?
- 5 What would you have done in Osterman's place?

INTERPRETING THE PUBLIC TO MANAGEMENT

The flip side of the coin is interpreting the public to management. Simply stated, this task means finding out what the public really thinks about the firm and letting management know. Regretfully, recent corporate history is filled with examples of public relations departments failing to anticipate clearly the true sentiments of the public.

For example, in 1962, U.S. Steel produced a credible argument that a rise in steel prices was in the public's best long-term interest. The decision, however, was ill-timed and denounced by three government agencies and many national leaders. President Kennedy condemned the company's move as a blatant act of "contempt for 185 million Americans." Then both the company and the industry were subject to scornful broadsides from all quarters.

In another incident several years later, General Motors did not pay much attention to a little-known consumer activist named Ralph Nader, who spread the