A VALUES-DRIVEN APPROACH

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**Public Relations** 



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Public relations. The term is bandied about by many and, unfortunately, understood by few. Some see it as a synonym for things such as propaganda, free advertising, hyperbole, and publicity. People unfamiliar with the profession often use the term as a pejorative. They link it to individuals such as P.T. Barnum, the master showman and promoter who never let the facts get in the way of a good story. While it is true that the history of public relations includes the Barnums of the world, it would be a mistake to define the profession through these personalities.

It has been 100 years since the first public relations agency opened in the United States. During the 20th century, the practice of public relations grew from a vague notion to a powerful force in democratic societies. As we begin a new century, the profession has made impressive gains in respect and access to power. Yet, in a very real sense, public relations has a public relations problem. Although its roots date back to the beginning of recorded history, the fact remains that public relations—both as a profession and as a discipline—remains largely misunderstood.

Public relations is an honorable profession with a glorious past and a brilliant future. Like any other human pursuit, it also has its share of flaws. However, at a time when much of the world is embracing democratic institutions for the first time, public relations is an important catalyst for bringing change and promoting consensus. Through the practice of public relations, organizations and individuals communicate their ideas and advance their goals in the marketplace of ideas. This concept is increasingly understood within the nations of Eastern Europe, where, since the fall of communism, the demand for public relations education has skyrocketed.

Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach introduces this dynamic profession to the practitioners of the 21st century. Through a realistic blend of theory and practical examples, this book seeks to remove the veil of mystery that has shrouded the profession from its very beginnings. Using the conversational style of writing favored by today's college students, this book takes the reader on a journey of discovery, often through the eyes of leading practitioners and scholars.

#### **Values-Driven Public Relations**

As the title suggests, however, these pages contain more than just a recitation of facts and concepts. This book champions what we call *values-driven public relations*: an approach that challenges practitioners to align their efforts with the values of their organization, their profession, their targeted publics, and society itself.

Values-driven public relations is a logical response to a dynamic and diverse society in which complex issues and competing values bring different groups of people into conflict. This approach links communication with an organization's values, mission, and goals. Today, public and private organizations are increasingly held accountable for their actions by a variety of stakeholders. No longer is an organization's behavior measured solely by traditional indicators of success such as profits, stock dividends, and jobs created. Additional measures of social worth now include an organization's relationships with its employees, its communities, its customers, and its physical environment. Stakeholders expect that decisions will be made in an ethical framework. *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach* prepares future practitioners and the organizations they represent for a world of increased responsibility, scrutiny, and accountability.

#### **Public Relations in the Social Context**

Another notable feature of this book is its discussion of relevant issues within a broader social context. Public relations did not develop, nor is it practiced, in a vacuum. Throughout history the practice of public relations has been shaped by great social forces. Its emergence in the United States was linked to the Industrial Revolution and the related Populist Era reforms. The 20th century's military and social conflicts served as a catalyst for the profession's growth. Public relations was also transformed by the economic globalization and technological advances of the 1980s and 1990s. *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach* provides this broad social context so that future practitioners can have a clearer understanding of the so-called "real world" they are about to enter. The book includes full chapters on history, ethics, law, cross-cultural communication, and new technologies. Throughout the book, students are directed to online sources of further information.

#### **Features**

A major goal of this book is to strengthen students' problem-solving skills. Every chapter provides two hypothetical but realistic scenarios: the opening scenario and "It's Your Turn," at the end of each chapter. Each scenario places students in the shoes of a practitioner and challenges them to create an ethical, values-driven, effective solution. Each chapter also includes relevant case studies that expose students to successful as well as unsuccessful public relations approaches. Following each scenario and case study are questions designed to engage students in a meaningful analysis of the issues raised. The book further promotes problem-solving skills by introducing a variety of processes that guide students through the stages of research, planning, communication, evaluation, and ethical decision making.

Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach also contains pedagogical elements that engage students in the subject matter. Each chapter begins with a list of learning

objectives that set the stage for the topics that lie ahead. QuickChecks, a series of questions focusing on the book's content, are interspersed as learning aids throughout each chapter. QuickBreaks, lively and relevant sidebars, bring depth and texture to each chapter. In keeping with the values focus of this text, Values Statements from a broad range of organizations are scattered throughout the book. A list of key terms appears at the end of each chapter, and a full glossary is provided at the end of the book. Each chapter also includes a Memo from the Field, a message to students from one of today's leading public relations professionals. These professionals represent a broad range of public and private interests and reflect the diversity of the society upon which they wield so much influence.

#### **Acknowledgments**

The authors have learned that writing a textbook is itself educational. During this two-year process they have learned much that not only has aided them in their class-rooms but has helped them in their everyday lives. They have also learned that the collaboration required in the writing of a textbook goes far beyond the authors themselves. Dozens of people, many of whom were unknown to the authors before they began writing this book, have made valuable contributions to this effort.

The authors wish to thank Dean James Gentry and the faculty, staff, and students of the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications of the University of Kansas for their advice, support, and patience during this project. They wish to single out student research assistant Eryl Cochran and office assistant Carlena Haney for their invaluable assistance in securing copyright permissions. The authors also wish to thank the dozens of companies, agencies, and individuals who gave their permission for the use of photographs, publications, and other artwork used in the text.

Sixteen men and women gave of their valuable time to write memos to the students who will read this book. The value of providing firsthand wisdom to students is immeasurable. The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of Samuel L. Waltz Jr. of Sam Waltz & Associates Business & Communications Counsel; Mike Swenson of Barkley Evergreen & Partners; Tim Moore of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum; Gordon Lindsey of J.C. Penney Company; Tresa Coe of Mothers Against Drunk Driving; Terrie Williams of The Terrie Williams Agency; Walter Lindenmann of Ketchum Public Relations Worldwide; retired public relations consultant Fred Repper; Evie Lazzarino of the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace; Kerry Tucker and Adam Behar of Nuffer, Smith, Tucker; Craig Settles of Successful.com; Tom Ditt of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management; Vin Cipolla of Pamet River; Renu Aldrich of PR Newswire; Richard S. Levick Esq. of Levick Strategic Communications; and 1998–99 PRSSA National President Kent Landers.

A group of dedicated educators served as reviewers for this book and, in doing so, helped the authors maintain a focus on the needs of the students who read this text: William C. Adams, Florida International University; Susan L. Dimmick, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Frankie A. Hammond, University of Florida; Diane M. Harney, Pacific Lutheran University; Laurel Traynowicz Hetherington, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale; Lori Melton McKinnon, University of Alabama; Bruce E. Pinkleton, Washington State University; and Gayle Pohl, University of Northern Iowa.

Once the text was written and the necessary artwork and permissions secured, the burden of this project shifted to the talented editors, designers, and technicians of Allyn and Bacon and Omegatype: Paul A. Smith, Editor in Chief; Karon Bowers, Series Editor; Carol Alper, Developmental Editor; Annette Joseph, Production Editor; Jay Howland, Copy Editor; and the team at Omegatype Typography.

Last, and certainly not least, the authors wish to thank their families for their love and unwavering support during this long and challenging process. They are our inspiration and motivation.

David W. Guth, APR Charles Marsh, Ph.D.

## **About the Authors**

The authors of this book come from very different backgrounds but share a common passion for public relations education. Both are associate professors at the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Kansas. They also share real-world experience in the dynamic profession of public relations.



Before becoming an educator, David W. Guth served as a broadcast journalist in six states and won numerous local, state, regional, and national reporting honors, including the prestigious George Foster Peabody Award. He has also served as a public relations practitioner in the public and private sectors, including holding several positions in North Carolina state government. As an educator, Guth coauthored *Media Guide for Attorneys*, a publication that received regional and national awards. In addition to his teaching and research responsibilities, Guth has served as crisis communications consultant to several government agencies and public utilities. Guth is an accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America. His international experience includes public relations work in Japan, Italy, and Russia.



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