

Chapter 2: The History and Growth of Public Relations

Teaching Perspective

Chapter 2 synthesizes the history of public relations – from the Sophists in Greece to the early American experience to modern-day leaders. The study of public relations history is important in explaining to students how and why this relatively new field came into being. In addition, the chapter also talks about the pioneers in the field and what they contributed.

It's important to indicate to students that while public relations antecedents stretch back over time – as long as individuals tried to persuade others to adopt their cause – the practice itself is very much a recent phenomenon. Ivy Lee assisting John D. Rockefeller, Jr. at the turn of the last century arguably “founded” the modern practice of public relations. The first public relations course was taught at New York University in 1923.

The point is that modern public relations practice is not yet even 100-years-old. Its history is still being written. Its leaders, therefore, are those teaching -- and learning -- in the practice as we speak. So the responsibility to help “build” this field lies with each of its practitioners and students.

The subject of the *From the Top* interview in Chapter 2 is Ray Jordan, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs at Amgen, and former public relations executive with Johnson & Johnson.

Among topics discussed in Chapter 2 are:

- Ancient beginnings
- Early American experience
- Later American experience
- Ivy Lee: The real father of modern public relations
- The growth of modern public relations
- Public relations comes of age
- Public relations education

PR Ethics Mini-Case: Burson Fumbles Facebook Flap

In this mini-case, the venerable Burson-Marsteller was caught trying to make Google, their client's competitor, look bad by approaching media members and bloggers with a “whisper” campaign about one of its products.

In failing to reveal that they were representing Facebook, the two Burson employees committed a cardinal public relations sin, according to the PRSA Code of Professional Ethics.

One blogger was so enraged with the staffer's actions that he posted Burson's entire pitch online. The story took off and grabbed media headlines across the world. Given the nature of media and the fact that it is uncontrolled information, Burson should have seen this coming a mile away.

Burson's clumsy attempt to disparage a competitor led to considerable embarrassment at both Google and Facebook. To put it mildly, Burson-Marsteller was chastened.

PRSA was quick to denounce the "fake news" efforts: "This reflects poorly upon the global public relations profession. Burson took the road of misleading and not disclosing who they were representing."

Questions

1. How should Burson have handled its Facebook assignment?
2. Should a public relations client always be identified?

Answers:

1. The Burson team would have been wise to consult Chapter 1 of this text, which advises us that true public relations is based on sound character and proper performance. Spin is the enemy and must always be avoided. Instead, the employees should have built a straightforward campaign based on Facebook's positive attributes.
2. Ideally, yes. Although some cynics claim that "the best public relations is invisible," leading practitioners (including the historical luminaries discussed in this chapter) have always held that honest and openness is the only credible approach.

Discussion Starters

1. The factors influencing the spread of public relations in society were: 1) the growth of big institutions, 2) increasing incidence of change, conflict, and confrontation in society, 3) heightened awareness of communications, and 4) increased importance of public opinion.
2. Barnum deceived as much as informed.
3. Adams organized Committees of Correspondence as a kind of revolutionary Associated Press.
4. Muckrakers reported the abuses of robber barons, thus leading to the creation of public relations professionals to explain the other side.
5. Both Lee and Bernays were among the first to realize that everyone deserved his or

her day in the Court of Public Opinion.

6. Both were effective forces in mobilizing public opinion in support of the United States and its objectives. They set the foundations for today's United States Information Agency.
7. Page was a pace setter as one of the first corporate public relations professionals, whose aim was to promote AT&T as an ethical and credible company.
8. Today, most public relations education programs are situated within colleges, schools, and departments of journalism and/or communication. However, given the growing influence of public relations within all organizations and across society, public relations education should also be incorporated into business programs at colleges and universities.
9. The importance of communications in every sector of society has propelled public relations practice to center stage. The field's major associations boast growing membership. The agencies that dominate public relations practice aggregately earn revenues in the billions of dollars. And public relations professionals are important in every sector of society.
10. The encroachment of the field by practitioners of other disciplines is a concern. So is the small number of minority practitioners and the number of women in management positions. The Internet and how it should best be "harnessed" is another issue of importance. The question of "respect" continues to dog public relations professionals, who must constantly strive to convince their employers of the merit and importance of what they do.

Case Study: The Tylenol Murders

Tylenol's response in this case is, without question, *the* most notable example of proper public relations practice. It is the premier case in the history of the field. Few others rival the response of Johnson & Johnson in the face of unspeakable crisis.

In both Tylenol cases, it became clear, early on, that the company's products were not at issue. Rather, the issue was sabotage.

J&J had no obligation to remove Tylenol on the basis of suspected product danger. Nonetheless, J&J immediately determined that keeping Tylenol on the market might permanently damage the product's sales and the company's reputation.

Therefore, with full knowledge that the decision would cost it millions, J&J voluntarily acted to calm a hysterical public – twice. In so doing, Johnson & Johnson demonstrated how an intelligent, socially responsible company deals with a disaster.

J&J even took the unprecedented step of inviting public scrutiny of its operations in the wake of the tragedy. To prove that its products bore no blame, Johnson & Johnson threw open its doors to media exposure.

Ironically, prior to the first Tylenol murders, J&J was not known as a particularly “open” company. However, through its prompt and responsible actions following the Tylenol murders, J&J enhanced its reputation immeasurably in the eyes of the world.

Answers:

1. Had J&J decided to “tough out” the report of the initial deaths, it would have risked permanent damage to its corporate credibility.
2. The company could have done nothing or adopted a more limited public relations response. As it turned out, the strategy it chose was correct.
3. Yes, Tylenol was a bread-and-butter product for Johnson & Johnson. Further, the company had made no mistakes with the product, but, rather, was the victim of a horrible saboteur. So it was correct to reintroduce Extra-Strength Tylenol.
4. Yes again. Johnson & Johnson learned from the first incident that, where the company’s credibility is involved, it generally makes great good sense to act quickly to shore up public trust. That’s what it did the first time, and it repeated that successful approach in the second incident.
5. One lesson from the way J&J handled the tragedy was that if an organization has nothing to hide, its best policy is total candor. Skeptical marketing analysts questioned whether Tylenol would ever be able to regain its lost market share. In the end, not only did customers return to the product once, they returned to it the second time as well. On all fronts, then, J&J survived its tragedies with sustained sales and stronger credibility.
6. The media environment in the days of the Tylenol crisis was a less pervasive one than exists today given the realities of social media, the Internet, 24/7 cable TV news, and talk radio. Today, companies engaged in similar crises have little time to think upon being barraged by the media. Nonetheless, acting properly – as Johnson & Johnson did – still is the best way to operate in crisis.

Chapter 2 Review Quiz (* Indicates Correct Answer)

1. Among the fundamental trends related to the evolution of public relations is the following:
 - A. The growth of “big institutions.” *
 - B. The increasing incidence of agreement in society.
 - C. An increasing naiveté of people about what is going on around them.

D. All of the above.

2. The precursor of today's lobbyists were the:

- A. Romans.
- B. Committees of Correspondence.
- C. Sophists. *
- D. British loyalists.

3. The first Presidential press secretary was:

- A. Sam Adams.
- B. Edward Bernays.
- C. Ivy Lee.
- D. Amos Kendall. *

4. The reputed originator of the line, "The public be damned!" was:
- A. J.P. Morgan.
 - B. Henry Clay Frick.
 - C. William Vanderbilt. *
 - D. John D. Rockefeller.
5. The "muckrakers" were:
- A. Reporters and editors. *
 - B. Robber barons.
 - C. Early public relations practitioners.
 - D. None of the above.
6. Public relations pioneer Ivy Lee was criticized for his involvement with:
- A. The Creel Committee.
 - B. The German Dye Trust. *
 - C. Seton Filmways.
 - D. The American Tobacco Company.
7. In the 21st century, manipulation of the world's ____ has become a disturbing objective of terrorists.
- A. Trains
 - B. Ships
 - C. Media *
 - D. Political system
8. P.T. Barnum is beloved by public relations professionals.
- A. True.
 - B. False. *
9. The Great Depression gave no impetus to the development of corporate public relations.
- A. True.
 - B. False. *
10. The basic principle of successful corporate public relations is to make sure management thoughtfully analyzes its overall relation to its publics.
- A. True. *
 - B. False.

11. McClure's magazine had an anti-industry bias.

- A. True. *
- B. False.

12. To advocate ratification of the Constitution, political leaders like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison banded together, under the pseudonym Scandalous.

- A. True.
- B. False. *

13. What were the four fundamental trends that helped shape public relations?

The growth of "big institutions."

The increasing incidence of conflict and confrontation in society.

The heightened awareness of people everywhere because of more sophisticated communications technology.

The outbreak of democracy in the world.

14. Why is public relations more important for organizations today?

The credibility of organizations today is challenged constantly, and their role in society changes instantly.

Expectations of an organization's responsibilities have increased today.

Emerging technologies of the computer age put added pressure on an organization to adapt continually to the standards of society.

For all these reasons, good public relations is no longer an option, but a necessity.

15. What did Ivy Lee contribute to public relations?

Ivy Lee, the "father" of public relations, was one of the first to preach that the key to business acceptance and understanding was that the "public should be informed." Lee firmly believed that the only way business could answer its critics was to present its side honestly, accurately, and forcefully. This he did in representing the Rockefellers and other business leaders.

Chapter 2: Essay Examinations

1. Explain why public relations is a "20th century phenomenon."

It was not until the early part of the century, when John D. Rockefeller hired Ivy Lee to "humanize" him did public relations emerge as a bone fide line of work.

Today, the size of society, change and conflict that pervade our lives, pervasive communication from all varieties of media and, of course, the Internet have all contributed to the great value and importance of public relations.

2. What is the likely “historical impact” of the Internet on public relations?

The Internet has and will have a profound impact on the practice of public relations.

With hundreds of millions already wired around the world and with Internet innovations computerizing every aspect of society, the Net as a persuasive communications vehicle – for sales, news, and information, et al – will be unrivalled.

The challenge to public relations professionals will be to “harness” the Net so that messages not only are received but understood.