

Fourteenth Edition

THE PRACTICE OF

Public Relations

kipling 

kipling 

Fraser P. Seitel



About the Cover

The Power of Celebrity

In the 21st century, celebrity rules.

Worldwide organizations as diverse as Nike with NFL activist Colin Kaepernick to Guess with Instagram megastar Chiara Ferragni to WW with rapper DJ Khaled to all those assorted goods endorsed by various Kardashians have found that using known personalities as public relations spokespeople sells products and services.

One such company was the Belgian fashion brand Kipling, a 130-year-old maker of handbags and backpacks. When Kipling launched a 2018 marketing expansion, it decided to launch its campaign on QVC, the American cable, satellite, and broadcast television shopping network, and chose as its spokesperson, the lovely and talented (not to mention, related!) NBC–television personality Raina Seitel. The Kipling QVC initiative (thankfully!) was a great success.

The public relations impact of personalities and celebrities and much, much more will be discussed in detail in this 14th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raina Seitel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R' and 'S'.

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FOURTEENTH EDITION

The Practice of PUBLIC RELATIONS

Fraser P. Seitel

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Dedicated to

To the world's greatest grandson and my boss,
Hunter R. Gittlin.

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Foreword



David Rockefeller (Photo courtesy of Virginia Sherwood)

Opaque, confused, and inadequate communications by business and financial leaders characterized both the response to the 2008 financial crisis and the dizzying descent into global economic recession, as well as the subsequent effort to recover and rebuild. Unfortunately, their political brethren did not do a much better job then and sowed confusion rather than enlightenment in the years since. As a result, all institutions are under unprecedented stress and scrutiny, and the level of public dissatisfaction with both the private sector and government is at very high levels.

As Fraser P. Seitel shows in this text, good public relations will not solve these problems, but the dissemination of principled policies by seasoned professionals will allow the rest of us to understand the basic issues and lead to the formulation of more appropriate and effective policies.

Regaining and maintaining public confidence is essential as we move forward. But saying it and doing it are two different things. For students, and even for professionals who have worked in the field for some time, *The Practice of Public Relations* is an excellent place to start. Seitel bridges the gap between theory and practice in a compelling and vivid way. His use of case studies, interviews, news photos, and other techniques, as well as his humorous and lucid text, brings the process brilliantly to life.

Leaders in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors have learned from painful experience that they should rely on their public relations counselors for cogent advice on strategy and policy as well as communications. I learned to trust Mr. Seitel's instincts and abilities long ago when I was the chair and chief executive officer of The Chase Manhattan Bank.

For those who are working to restore and enhance the capacity of our institutions and their leaders to deal honestly and effectively with the public, this book will provide useful and essential guidance.

—David Rockefeller

*David Rockefeller, who died in 2017 at the age of 101, was one of the most influential figures in the history of U.S. business, finance, and philanthropy. He was considered by many to be "America's last great business statesman." Over four decades, Mr. Rockefeller served as an executive with The Chase Manhattan Bank, joining as assistant manager in the foreign department in 1946 and retiring in 1981, after 11 years as chair and CEO. During the 101 years of his life, Mr. Rockefeller met hundreds of world leaders and traveled around the globe many times. After retirement from Chase, Mr. Rockefeller continued to stay active, with wide-ranging interests and involvement in the fields of international relations and civic affairs. He was the last remaining child of John D. Rockefeller Jr., who hired Ivy Lee in 1914 as the first modern-day public relations counselor. For nearly 50 years, it was your author's great privilege and honor to consider David Rockefeller as a close colleague and cherished friend. Mr. Rockefeller authored this Foreword for the prior edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* in 2015.*

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New to this Edition

The changes in the 14th edition are as follow:

- Eleven new, full cases featuring the most current and relevant topics in the industry, including:

- Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment scandal
- Presidential election of Donald Trump
- Chobani's battle with a conspiracy theorist
- United Airlines' passenger dragging crisis
- Garrison Keillor's #MeToo moment
- America's first "tweeting" President
- NFL's kneeling controversy
- Senator Al Franken's undoing
- Starbucks' diversity dilemma
- Victimized by a pedophile doctor
- Rise of the *Black Panther*

- Continuing emphasis on ethics with 16 brand-new ethics mini-cases, including:

- Harvard rejects Chelsea Manning
- New York Yankees expand safety netting
- School shootings and gun control
- Equifax hacking embarrassment
- Fall of an anti-Trump comic
- Dallas Cowboys deal with domestic violence
- Britain's red-faced boat naming
- Confronting fake news
- YouTube star's suicide stunt
- Delta goes easy on Eazy E
- The "Mooch's" hot minute
- Cam Newton's sexist comments
- Volkswagen's shameful actions
- Schneiderman hoisted on his own petard
- A community foundation's come down
- *The Simpsons* go on diversity defense

- A new chapter on "Diversity Relations," addressing society's expanding focus on equal treatment of minorities, discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and other issues related to an increasingly diverse population. As the importance of dealing with diversity in the 21st century has increased, so, too, has the challenge to every organization of steering a positive community relations course through the shoals of controversy.

CASE STUDY | When Being United's CEO Is a Real "Drag"

Maybe Oscar Munoz should have gotten the message in October 2015 when, at the age of 56 and on his 38th day as CEO of United Airlines, he suffered a massive heart attack. But after receiving a heart transplant in an exhaustive 11-hour operation and undergoing months of physical therapy, the charismatic Munoz returned to action, one of the few CEOs ever to return

Embarrassed by the national publicity, United sought to bury the controversy but wasn't helped by its competitors. Delta Airlines tweeted in response, "Flying Delta means comfort. That means you can wear your leggings." United wasn't amused.

CASE STUDY | Axing a Beloved Prairie Home Companion

The sexual harassment/MeToo tidal wave of 2017, begun by household celebrities in the arts, media, government, and business.

radio host. The show took place in Keillor's imaginary little hometown of Lake Wobegon, where everybody knew everybody else. A *Prairie Home Companion* was "sponsored" by good old Powder

CASE STUDY | The Election that Shook the World ... and Tested Public Relations

The U.S. Presidential election of 2016 was one for the ages. A brash, bombastic, real estate developer, Donald Trump, with no political background whatsoever came out of nowhere to defeat a wily, well-financed, professional politician, Hillary Clinton, to become the 45th President of the United States.

frills commuting flight linking Boston, Washington, and New York, was converted by Trump into a lavishly appointed experience, complete with chrome seat belt latches and gold-colored bathroom fixtures. The whopping cost: the new owner paid for such non-essential items help drive the Trump Shuttle into the ground, and in four years it was gone.

A Public Relations Triumph but also ...

Trump's dark horse victory was an outright triumph for the practice of public relations. For decades, "The Donald" (the son of a wealthy New York City builder who owned lucrative, debt-free apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Queens, had meticulously constructed a public persona built primarily on public relations publicity, special events, media appearances, and round-the-clock image maximization.

- Trump Steaks was launched in 2005, with its founder dubbing the premium meals, "the world's greatest." Apparently not, Trump Steaks, distributed through the Sharper Image stores, never sold. In 2012, Trump Steakhouse in Las Vegas was closed down for 51 health code violations. And the steak line was discontinued.
- Trump Vodka was launched in 2006, with its namesake

A QUESTION OF ETHICS

The One Evil Public Opinion Can't Stop

In February 2018, the United States was once again shaken by an occurrence that had become all too frequent in the richest nation in the world—helpless students shot and killed at school.

The news from a Parkland, Florida, high school that dozens of students were killed in a mass shooting in 2017, a Florida nightclub in 2016, and a Colorado theater and a Connecticut elementary school in 2012, the latter where 20 children were among those slaughtered.

A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Burson Fumbles Facebook Flap

As noted, there is no more respected individual in the practice of public relations than Harold Burson. The agency he founded, Burson-Marsteller, has a long and proud tradition of ethical practice. (Your author, himself, is a proud alumnus of the firm.)

But in the spring of 2011, Burson-Marsteller was caught red-handed in an embarrassing scheme to make a client's competitor look bad. The fact that the client was Facebook and the competitor was Google—two of the most powerful names in the social-media world—only added to Burson's dilemma.



A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Harvard Disinvites a Leaker

No matter where you work—company, government body, trade association, sports team, or academic institution—the practice of public relations looms large.

Consider what happened at Harvard, one of the world's most prestigious universities, in the fall of 2017. Harvard's Kennedy School of Government is a well-respected haven for political leaders to study, deliberate, and debate the most pressing issues of the day. Each year, the Kennedy School invites a new list of Visiting Fellows to join its Institute of Politics to meet regularly with like-minded scholars. Among those honored as part of the class of 2017 Visiting Fellows—along with President Trump's former press secretary Sean Spicer and former



- Every chapter begins with a contemporary issue relating to the chapter content—from the spread of the #MeToo movement to the fake news attacks on traditional journalism to Oprah Winfrey’s presidential aspirations.
- Updated “Public Relations Bookshelf” features the most current public relations literature—published over the past decade—as well as one new contemporary “Pick of the Literature” per chapter.
- Updated “From the Top” interviews with today’s top authorities in the worlds of management, media, and academia, including crisis counselor extraordinaire Michael Sitrick and the first “fake news interview” with an absent Trump Press Secretary Sarah Sanders.

The Art of PR

Public Relations is a uniquely practical art. From interpreting management positions to the media to drafting social media messages via Twitter or Facebook to counseling clients in crisis—the public relations professional must be a consummate strategist and accomplished tactician. *The Practice of Public Relations* 14th Edition provides the philosophical foundation and pragmatic knowledge that enables students to confront the complex challenges and contemporary cases of the day with the competence, confidence, and critical thought that 21st century public relations demands.

Solving Teaching and Learning Challenges

This book has been around for a good while, as have I.

Public relations continues to be a practice that is “contemporary” in every respect: new research findings, new communication methods, new social media communication techniques, and constantly changing case studies. Stated another way, a text like this one can’t afford to rest on its laurels. It has to keep up to remain current.

In that context, your author is fortunate to continue to spend each day engaged in the practice of public relations, as a teacher and working consultant, with real clients, who demand real public relations counsel and occasionally find themselves in real crises.

This helps keep the text fresh and up-to-date and practically grounded, so that events and innovations can be approached in proper public relations context. For example, in the final years of the second decade of the 21st century, society has been dominated by a handful of hot-button issues, among them diversity, sexual harassment, fake news, and last but not least, Donald Trump. With respect to all these topics, we’ve tried here to take an “objective” stance, focusing exclusively on the ramifications for public relations.

Alas, given how polarized 21st century society has become, it is no easy task to try to treat objectively such phenomena as Starbuck’s revised store access rules or the #MeToo movement or the NFL kneeling policy or President Trump. But the hope here is that this book might help stimulate open-minded and nourishing classroom discussion about the significant public relations implications of these and other similarly provocative issues.

To accomplish that—and support instructors in encouraging students to think independently about converting public relations theory and principle into effective practice—this 14th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* provides the theoretical underpinnings, strategic approaches, and tactical considerations that need to be applied in confronting the contemporary cases that the book features.

Above all, public relations responses and relationships must be based on the single concept of *doing the right thing*. Indeed, acting *ethically* lies at the heart of the solutions for the more than three dozen case studies that this edition presents.

The field remains, at heart, a personal, relationship-oriented practice, demanding experienced judgment, and finely honed interpersonal communications skills. And so, this 14th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* places its emphasis on the principles, processes, and practices that lead to building positive relationships in a 24/7 communications environment.

This contemporary, real-life approach is intended to increase student enthusiasm for public relations study and practice. The strength of this book continues to reside in its application of theory to real-life practice, including:

- **Social Media Chapter**

As in so many other lines of work, mastering social media has become a key tool for public relations practitioners to engage in “direct conversations” with public relations publics. Public relations professionals must understand the communications opportunities and limitations of mobile and tablets; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, blogs, podcasts, and all the rest.

No public relations textbook offers a more comprehensive discussion of social media than the 14th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations*.

- **Expanded Diversity Chapter**

The importance of diversity in the workplace and society-at-large is discussed in depth in a revitalized Diversity Relations chapter. The public relations profession plays a significant role in building relationships with diverse publics. This chapter explores that role with respect to women, African-Americans, Latinos, LGBTQ individuals, senior citizens, immigrants, and all the other constituents who form broader society.

- **Refortified Emphasis on Ethics**

Proper public relations practice must be underpinned by a strong sense of ethics. The principle of *doing the right thing* is what should distinguish the practice of public relations.

This edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* focuses on the ethical base that provides the theoretical foundation of effective communications and public relations.

The book’s introductory chapters place significant attention on how an understanding of and facility with communications research, theory, and public opinion can be applied to strategic public relations planning and creation of believable and persuasive messages.

Also included in each chapter is a mini-case: “A Question of Ethics.” These cases bring to life the ethical dilemmas that confront professional public relations practitioners on a daily basis.

- **New Contemporary Cases**

Public relations practice confronts an ever-changing landscape of problems and opportunities. It is imperative, therefore, that a textbook in the field keep current with the most contemporary examples of the good, the bad, and the ugly in public relations work.

This 14th edition does so by chronicling the most important contemporary public relations cases—from Hollywood’s Harvey Weinstein and the evolution of the #MeToo movement to the NFL’s fumbling attempt to deal with athletes kneeling during the national anthem to Starbucks’ racial sensitivity crisis to the global success of the *Black Panther* movie.

In addition to the new, contemporary cases and the expanded social media discussion, unique elements in the 14th edition include:

CASE STUDY • Axing a Beloved Prairie Home Companion

The sexual harassment/#MeToo tidal wave of 2017, begun by Harvey Weinstein's reprehensible actions, swept away scores of household celebrities in the arts, media, government, and business. One of those caught up in the Weinstein aftermath was National Public Radio's Garrison Keillor. The accusations against Keillor, his response to them, and the eventual end result were far different and more subtle than those involved in the Weinstein case. Here's a recap.

NPR's Brightest Star

For four decades, Garrison Keillor held forth as NPR's brightest star. As the avuncular host of NPR's most popular program, *A Prairie Home Companion*, Keillor presided over a weekly old-fashioned, homespun variety program of song, satire, sound effects, and nostalgic good humor. It was heard by 4 million listeners a week on 700 public radio stations. Keillor was a storyteller, humorist, author, voice actor, and astute grammarian, all rolled into one creative, non-threatening

radio host. The show took place in Keillor's imaginary little hometown of Lake Wobegon, where everybody knew everybody else. *A Prairie Home Companion* was "sponsored" by good old Powder Milk Biscuits and Ketchup. Its stars included private eye Guy Noir, a detective, voiced by Keillor, who got into embarrassing—and often very funny—situations. The humor was good-natured and harmless, and its host was more a trusted friend than a radio personality. It was not an overstatement to conclude that the program put Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), from which it originated, at the top of NPR's offerings from 1974 to 2016. As proof of the high esteem in which Keillor was held, he and his show were parodied on *The Simpsons* and *Saturday Night Live*, and he was the subject of pop songs and book parodies. In 2006, Robert Altman directed a feature film, *A Prairie Home Companion*, starring Keillor as himself and an all-star cast including Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Woody Harrelson, Tommy Lee Jones, Kevin Kline, and Lindsay Lohan (Figure 6-7). One magazine profile called Keillor "a genius," reminiscent of Mark Twain. But, despite such accolades, Keillor, true to his

A QUESTION OF ETHICS •

Burson Fumbles Facebook Flap

As noted, there is no more respected individual in the practice of public relations than Harold Burson. The agency he founded, Burson-Marsteller, has a long and proud tradition of ethical practice. (Your author, himself, is a proud alumnus of the firm.)

But in the spring of 2011, Burson-Marsteller was caught red-handed in an embarrassing scheme to make a client's competitor look bad. The fact that the client was Facebook and the competitor was Google—two of the most powerful names in the social media world—only added to Burson's dilemma (Figure 2-6).

It all started when two Burson staff members—both former journalists—approached daily newspapers and bloggers about authoring articles critical of a feature on Google's Gmail service called "Social Circle." The social media feature, said the Burson representatives, was guilty of trampling the privacy of millions of users and violating federal fair trade rules.



FROM THE TOP •

An Interview with Edward L. Bernays



Photo courtesy of Barry Spector
Edward L. Bernays, who died in 1995 at the age of 103.

What are the most significant factors that have led to the rise in public relations practice?

The most significant factor is the rise in people power and its recognition by leaders. Theodore Roosevelt helped bring this about with his *Square Deal*. Woodrow Wilson helped with his *New Freedom*, and so did Franklin Delano Roosevelt with his *New Deal*. And this tradition was continued as time went on.

Do you have any gripes with the way public relations is practiced today?

I certainly do. The meanings of words in the United States have the stability of soap bubbles. Unless words are defined as to their meaning by law, as in the case of professions—for instance, law, medicine, architecture—they are in the public domain. Anyone can use them. Today, any plumber or car salesman or unethical character can call himself or herself a public relations practitioner. Many who call themselves public relations practitioners have no education, training, or knowl-

FYI •

Interpreting a Sensitive, Sexual Issue

In May 2015, approximately 17 million viewers tuned in to watch an ABC-TV interview.

Bruce Jenner, a former U.S. Olympic decathlon gold medalist, told *20/20* interviewer Diane Sawyer and a worldwide audience about his journey to becoming a woman. Jenner, father of six who was formerly married three times—the last to reality star and Kardashians clan matriarch, Kris—announced to one and all that he considered himself a transgender woman (Figure 1-4).

Jenner's announcement, which had been the subject of media speculation for months, attracted one of the biggest audiences in *20/20* history and drew 972,000 tweets. While some criticized the Olympic hero for maximizing the publicity of what should have been a private decision—Jenner also agreed to be the subject of a reality show following her transition—others commended her for bringing national attention to the transgender issue. Adding to the intrigue was that Jenner also acknowledged

others in Hollywood. The leader of the Log Cabin Republicans, a gay and lesbian conservative Republican group, congratulated Jenner "in the tremendous courage he [sic] demonstrated" and for "being true to himself [sic] both in terms of his [sic] personal identity as well as his [sic] political identity."

Jenner, herself, vehemently protested that her interview with Sawyer "was not a publicity stunt." Indeed, Jenner's candor and straightforwardness in the two-hour interview with Sawyer qualified as the first "interpretation" of the transgender world to many of the millions viewing.

Questions

1. Do you think it was a wise idea for Caitlyn Jenner to choose ABC-TV for her announcement?
2. What other options might you have suggested for announ-

NEW! CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS CASES,

many ripped from today's headlines to give students a feel for handling the hottest public relations issues of the day. Such real-life cases as Chobani's battle with conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, NPR icon Garrison Keillor's #MeToo confrontation, Michigan State University's and USA Gymnastics' dilemma with pedophile Dr. Larry Nassar, and United Airlines handling of a passenger dragged off a plane are all offered up as case study food-for-thought in the 14th edition.

NEW! PR A QUESTION OF ETHICS MINI-CASES,

which highlight the ethical challenges that public relations professionals face on a daily basis—from Harvard's rejection of Chelsea Manning to the embarrassing hacking of customer information from Equifax to YouTube personality Logan Paul's disastrous video of a suicide victim.

NEW! DIVERSITY RELATIONS

chapter, focusing on the importance of diversity in the workplace and the broader society. Specific minority publics are discussed, and contemporary cases in diversity explored.

NEW! FROM THE TOP

interview with one of the industry's leading crisis managers, Michael Sitrick, as well as a tongue-in-cheek—but fair-minded—"Fake News Interview" with White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, who turned down an interview request. These complement real-life interviews with President Obama's former press secretary and current United Airlines communications director Josh Earnest; legendary public relations counselors Harold Burson, Howard Rubenstein, and Richard Edelman; former Johnson and Johnson communications director Ray Jordan; and three late icons, management guru Peter Drucker, *USA Today* founder Al Neuharth, and Edward Bernays, one of the "fathers" of public relations. Every case is designed to test student application of the theories discussed in solving real-world challenges.

NEW! FYI

features that expose off-line curiosities that make the practice of public relations such a fascinating art form.

NEW! PUBLIC RELATIONS BOOKSHELF AND PICK OF THE LITERATURE features, encompassing the most comprehensive, post-2008 bibliography in public relations literature.

NEW! NEWS PHOTOS, taken straight from the news wire, add a real-life feel to this edition that isn't found in any other textbook.

PICK OF THE LITERATURE

Rethinking Reputation: How PR Trumps Advertising and Marketing in the New Media World

Fraser P. Seitel and John Doorley. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

One outstanding educator and another person critique how a social media-dominated society with declining journalistic societal standards impacts the quest for credibility.

The authors demonstrate how public relations can help build successful enterprises, even with a minimum of advertising support. The book focuses on real-life cases, including student designers of a successful footwear company who market themselves through networking, Facebook, and Twitter; Merck CEO Roy Vagelos, who developed a cure for river blindness and ensured the drug was made available where needed for free; and Exxon-Mobil, which resurrected its

reputation through on-the-ground meetings with critics and a more accessible public relations posture.

The book also reviews the new 21st-century public relations realities, in which even "taking the low road" can lead to success, as in the cases of Donald Trump (before he was elected), Al Sharpton, Nancy Grace, and Dominic Strauss-Kahn. They forcefully argue, though, that "taking the high road," à la Paul Volcker and T. Boone Pickens, is eminently preferable. Worth buying, if for no other reason than one of the authors needs the money!

Based on Fraser P. Seitel and John Doorley, *Rethinking Reputation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2012): 187-189.

All of these elements add not only to career-building but also to the excitement of this book. So, too, does the full-color format that underscores the liveliness, vitality, and relevance of the field.

Unique Perspective

Clearly, *The Practice of Public Relations*, 14th Edition, isn't your grandma's PR textbook.

This book is a lot different from other introductory texts in the field. Its premise is that public relations is a brutally practical field, whose emphasis is on doing the work—counselling, writing, promoting, and dealing with constantly changing circumstances. The extensive explanation of diversity relations and social media and their application to public relations practice are unique in public relations textbooks.

Although other texts may steer clear of the contemporary major cases, perplexing ethical mini-cases, thought leader interviews, "how to" counsel, and the public relations conundrums that force you to think, this book confronts them all. Admittedly, some of the issues discussed here are difficult ones. But if public relations students are to be prepared for the real world of the 21st century, these are the kinds of issues they will confront. So, *The Practice of Public Relations*, 14th Edition doesn't shy away from introducing them.

It is, if you'll forgive the vernacular, an *in-your-face* textbook for an *in-your-face* profession.

Most important, *The Practice of Public Relations*, 14th Edition, is built around the technical knowledge of theory, history, process and practice, judgment skills, and personal relationships that underlie public relations practice and will be so essential in building the trust and respect of diverse communities as we approach the 2020s.

Happy reading, and thanks again for buying the book.

Developing Career Skills

The overriding focus of this book is to introduce the philosophical underpinnings and provide the technical skills necessary to become a successful professional in the practice of public relations. The essence of public relations is communicating collaboratively to build a mutually beneficial relationship. Among the unique aspects in terms of career-building are the following five critical skills:

- **Communications**

The essential skill of public relations practice is communications. Chapter 3 introduces and elaborates on the communications process. Chapters 15 and 16 translate that process into tactical strengths.

- **Business Ethics and Social Responsibility**
Ethics is the great differentiator in the practice of public relations; public relations professionals must always emulate and counsel ethical behavior. The importance of acting ethically is reinforced in every chapter by contemporary “A Question of Ethics” cases. In addition, Chapter 6 is devoted to Ethics, and Chapter 13 addresses the related issue of Social Responsibility.
- **Critical Thinking**
Public relations professional confront complex challenges that demand critical thinking in considering alternative solutions and ethical pathways that lead to effective communication. Contemporary case studies at the conclusion of every chapter are designed to test critical thinking skills. Chapter 17, which discusses the bedrock public relations skill of Crisis Management, also deals throughout with critical thinking.
- **Collaborative Solutions**
Public relations practitioners must work collaboratively with other organizational professionals to be effective. Internally, public relations professionals must have a keen understanding of the challenges incumbent on colleagues in management, discussed in Chapter 5; the law, discussed in Chapter 7; marketing, discussed in Chapter 17; and the employee public in general, discussed in Chapter 11. Externally, public relations professionals must work collaboratively with the media, discussed in Chapter 9; social media, discussed in Chapter 10; government representatives, discussed in Chapter 12; the community, discussed in Chapter 13; and the international community, discussed in Chapter 14.
- **Knowledge Application and Analysis**
Finally, public relations practitioners must be equipped with a comprehensive knowledge of the field’s history and the theory that underpins it, discussed in Part I; the preparation and process necessary for effective public relations work, discussed in Part II; the primary publics with whom public relations professionals must interact, discussed in Part III; and the analytical skills and tactical requirements that must be applied for successful performance, discussed in Part IV.

Instructor Teaching Resources

At the Instructor Resource Center, www.pearsonhighered.com, instructors can easily register to gain access to a variety of instructor resources available with this text in downloadable format. If assistance is needed, our dedicated technical support team is ready to help with the media supplements that accompany this text. Visit <https://support.pearson.com/getsupport> for answers to frequently asked questions and toll-free user support phone numbers.

Supplements available to instructors at www.pearsonhighered.com	Features of the Supplement
Instructor’s Manual authored by James Lingwall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teaching Notes ● Teaching Outline ● Solutions to all questions and problems in the book

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Acknowledgments

The 14th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* owes much to a multitude of talented professionals who have helped immeasurably in the evolution of this work.

First and foremost, there is a reason the Pearson publishing empire towers above the field, the competence of its dedicated practitioners. In the case of this book, four Pearson stalwarts, in particular, assured that your author was “kept honest” in his meanderings through the public relations thicket. **Kelly Murphy, Ana Diaz-Caneja, Sugandh Juneja, and Bhanu Sherla** performed magnificently in steering the editorial ship. And we were all led, once again, by the steady hand of our captain, **Neeraj Bhalla**.

I am also most grateful to the busy communications leaders who agreed, once again, to be interviewed for this text. In particular, **Michael Sitrick**, the dean of public relations crisis managers, was generous with his time for a new interview.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the following reviewers for providing valuable feedback:

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And finally, there is the important director behind the scenes, who is primarily responsible for my every move, my boss, **Hunter R. Gittlin**.

Thank you all so very much.

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About the Author



Fraser P. Seitel is a veteran of five decades in the practice of public relations, beginning, he claims, “as a child.” In 2000, *PR Week* magazine named Mr. Seitel one of the *100 Most Distinguished Public Relations Professionals of the 20th Century*.

In 1992, after serving for a decade as senior vice president and director of public affairs for The Chase Manhattan Bank, Mr. Seitel formed Emerald Partners, a management and

communications consultancy, and also became senior counselor at the world’s largest public affairs firm, Burson-Marsteller.

Mr. Seitel has been a regular guest on television and radio, appearing on a variety of programs on the Fox News Network and CNN, ABC’s *Good Morning America*, CNBC’s *Power Lunch*, as well as on MSNBC, Fox Business Network, the Fox Radio Network, and National Public Radio.

Mr. Seitel has counseled hundreds of corporations, hospitals, nonprofits, associations, and individuals in the areas for which he had responsibility at Chase—media relations, speech writing, consumer relations, employee communications, financial communications, philanthropic activities, and strategic management consulting.

Mr. Seitel is an internet columnist at odwyerpr.com and a frequent lecturer and seminar leader on communications topics. Over the course of his career, Mr. Seitel has taught thousands of public relations professionals and students. For more than a decade, Mr. Seitel has been an adjunct professor in public relations at New York University.

After studying and examining many texts in public relations, he concluded that none of them “was exactly right.” Therefore, in 1980, he wrote the first edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* “to give students a feel for how exciting this field really is.” In four decades of use at hundreds of colleges and universities, Mr. Seitel’s book has introduced generations of students to the excitement, challenge, and uniqueness of the practice of public relations.

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1

PART 1 • EVOLUTION (Chapters 1, 2)

Defining Public Relations

Chapter Objectives

- 1.1. To define the practice of public relations and underscore its importance as a valuable and powerful societal force in the 21st century.
- 1.2. To explore the various publics of public relations, as well as the field's most prominent functions.
- 1.3. To underscore the ethical nature of the field and to reject the notion that public relations practitioners are employed in the practice of “spin.”
- 1.4. To examine the requisites—both technical and attitudinal—that constitute an effective public relations professional.



▲ **FIGURE 1-1 Public relations conundrum.**

The 2016 election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States depended largely on the use of public relations tactics at the expense of public relations ethics.

Photo: Gino's Premium Images/Alamy Stock Photo

DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR YOUR CAREER

In the 21st century, all students should be required to study *the practice of public relations*, regardless of their field of study.

The essence of public relations is communicating collaboratively to build a mutually beneficial relationship. And in a world connected by instantaneous and pervasive, global social media, no force is more important or powerful in reducing barriers and building bonds than effective public relations. Whether or not you plan a career in public relations—and every industry or occupation includes public relations professionals—this book will be relevant in introducing you to the

communications objectives, strategies, and tactics that will help you build support for your ideas and goals. It will help bolster your confidence in the critical skills of writing, speaking, and independent thinking that help motivate others to action. And it will help you understand the necessity for always approaching every business or life decision from a foundation of fairness and ethical conduct.

Most importantly, this book will help you understand the forces that underpin the political campaigns, business programs, and social movements that can change society; forces that depend for support on *the practice of public relations*.

At 9:39 a.m. on January 2, 2018, the most powerful man in the world began his day once again with his most favored public relations medium, tweeting to the world:

“The Failing New York Times has a new publisher, A.G. Sulzberger. Congratulations! Here is a last chance for the Times to fulfil the vision of its Founder, Adolph Ochs, ‘to give the news impartially, without fear or FAVOR, regardless of party, sect, or interests involved.’ Get . . . ” at 9:53 a.m.: “. . . impartial journalists of a much higher standard, lose all of your phony and non-existent ‘sources,’ and treat the President of the United States FAIRLY, so that the next time I (and the people) win, you won’t have to write an apology to your readers for a job poorly done! GL.”¹

And therein lies the conundrum confronting the practice of public relations in the 21st century.

On the one hand, public relations—barely into its second century—has never been more powerful or more valuable. There is no greater proof than the President of the United States. Donald Trump rode to the presidency by communicating directly—through social media, frequent contact with friendly media, and town hall meetings with supporters—using, almost exclusively, public relations techniques and tactics. Once in the White House, President Trump continued to “go direct” to the public, eschewing the traditional media “interpreters” on whom his predecessors—and virtually all others in powerful positions—had traditionally relied.

On the other hand, Trump’s communications approach—including regularly denigrating the established media, such as *The New York Times*; demeaning allies and critics alike; resorting to boasts and bluster; and, according to at least one news database, making nearly 2,000 false or misleading claims in his first year in office—flies in the face of practically every time-honored public relations principle.²

Reconciling this conflict between the President’s pervasive and effective use of public relations techniques on the one hand and the blatant violation of public relations ethical standards on the other is the dilemma that confronts every current practitioner of modern public relations. It is not an overstatement to say that the conduct of Donald Trump’s communications has seriously complicated the practice of public relations. (Figure 1-1)

There is no question, though, that in the second decade of the 21st century, the practice of public relations has become one of society’s most potent forces.

Everyone, from the President of the United States to the President of the Russian Federation, from the Pope to the Queen of England, from Apple to Walmart, from Taylor Swift to Kendrick Lamar, practices public relations on a daily basis.

Today, few societal forces are more powerful than the practice of public relations, especially when combined with social media—the agglomeration of Facebook and Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, instant messages, email, cell phone photos, blogs, wikis, podcasts, Pinterest, and all the other emerging technologies of the internet.

Together, the combination of social media and public relations has revolutionized the way organizations and individuals communicate to their key constituent publics around the world.

What exactly is the practice of public relations?

That’s a question that still perplexes many, including those in the field, who can never seem to agree on precisely what it is they do.

In fact in 2012, when the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) tried to reach a common definition of the practice by asking the 200,000-plus people in the United States and the thousands of others overseas who practice public relations, the effort was greeted, as

The New York Times put it, with “widespread interest, along with not a small amount of sniping, snide commentary and second-guessing.”³ The PRSA received 927 suggested definitions from public relations professionals, academics, students, and the general public, finally selecting the winning definition:

*Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.*⁴

Not bad, although practitioners still grumbled and even the CEO of PRSA admitted, “Like beauty, the definition of ‘public relations’ is in the eye of the beholder.”⁵

In a society overwhelmed by communications—from traditional and increasingly threatened newspapers and magazines, to 24/7 talk radio and broadcast and cable television, to nontraditional social media—the public is bombarded with nonstop messages of every variety. The challenge for a communicator is to cut through this clutter to deliver an argument that is persuasive, believable, and actionable.

The answer, more often than not today, lies in public relations. Stated another way, in the 21st century, the power, value, and influence of the practice of public relations have never been more profound.

Prominence of Public Relations

In the 21st century, public relations as a field has grown immeasurably both in numbers and in respect. Today, the practice of public relations is clearly a growth industry.

- In the United States alone, public relations is a multi-billion dollar business practiced by 260,000 professionals, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Furthermore, the Bureau projects public relations specialist employment will grow 9% between 2016 and 2026, with the expected addition of more than 23,000 jobs, “when the need for organizations to maintain their public image will continue to drive employment growth.”⁶
- Around the world, the practice of public relations has grown enormously. The International Public Relations Association, founded in 1948, boasts a strong membership in more than 80 countries.
- The field’s primary U.S. trade associations have strong membership, with the Public Relations Society of America, founded in 1947, encompassing more than 30,000 members and 10,000 college students in 300 chapters and the International Association of Business Communicators, founded in 1970, including 10,000 members in 70 countries.
- Approximately 250 colleges and universities in the United States and many more overseas offer a public relations sequence or degree program. Most universities offer at least some public relations courses. Undergraduate enrollments in public relations programs at U.S. four-year colleges and universities are conservatively estimated to be well in excess of 20,000 majors. Graduate education in public relations is also growing, with one study reporting the number of graduate public relations programs increasing from 26 to 75 since the start of the new century.⁷ Moreover, in the vast majority of college journalism programs, public relations sequences ranked first or second in enrollment.⁸ One reason for this trend was

1.1

To define the practice of public relations and underscore its importance as a valuable and powerful societal force in the 21st century.

that the income gap between public relations specialists and journalists was growing, with the annual median income of public relations professionals standing at \$54,940 while the equivalent for a journalist was \$35,600.⁹

- The U.S. government has thousands of communications professionals—although none, as we will learn, are labeled *public relations specialists*—who keep the public informed about the activities of government agencies and officials. The Department of Defense employs nearly 30,000 professionals in recruitment, advertising, and public relations.¹⁰
- The world’s largest public relations firms are all owned by media conglomerates—among them Omnicom, The Interpublic Group, and WPP Group—that refuse to divulge public relations revenues. The field, however, is dominated by smaller, privately held firms, many of them entrepreneurial operations. A typical public relations agency has annual revenue of less than \$1 million with fewer than 10 employees. Nonetheless, the top 10 independent public relations agencies in the United States record annual revenues in excess of a billion dollars, with the top independent firm, Edelman Public Relations, with 5,903 employees, earning more than \$875 million in annual revenues.¹¹

In the 21st century, as all elements of society—companies, nonprofits, governments, religious institutions, sports teams and leagues, arts organizations, and all others—wrestle with constant shifts in economic conditions and competition, security concerns and shifting public opinion, the public relations profession is expected to thrive as increasing numbers of organizations are interested in communicating their stories.

Indeed, public relations people have already attained positions of prominence in every aspect of society. The U.S. President’s press secretary is quoted daily during televised White House press briefings. Former Press Secretary Robert Gibbs remains a close adviser to former President Barack Obama. Karen Hughes, a public relations advisor to George W. Bush for many years, moved from Special Assistant to the President in the White House to become Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy responsible primarily for changing attitudes internationally about the United States.

Corporate professionals, at the top of the wage scale, earn seven figure salaries. Where once public relations was a profession populated by anonymous practitioners, today’s public relations executives write books, appear on television, and are widely quoted. When United Parcel Service (UPS) appointed communications professional Christine Owens to its top internal body in 2005, CEO Mike Eskew said, “Communications is just too important not to be represented on the management committee of this company.”¹²

Perhaps the most flattering aspect of the field’s heightened stature is that competition from other fields has become more intense. Today the profession finds itself vulnerable to encroachment by people with non–public relations backgrounds, such as lawyers, marketers, and general managers of every type, all eager to gain the management access and persuasive clout of the public relations professional. (Often this transition isn’t a smooth one, as in the disastrous 2017 case of investment banker-turned White House Communications Director Anthony Scaramucci, which we’ll review [painfully!] in Chapter 12.)

The field’s strength stems from its roots: A democratic society where people have freedom to debate and to make decisions—in the community, the marketplace, the home, the workplace, and the voting booth. Private and public organizations depend on good relations with groups and individuals whose opinions, decisions, and actions affect their vitality and survival.¹³

As people around the world continue to strive to secure their own freedoms, the power of communications—of public relations—will continue to ascend.

What Is Public Relations?

The PRSA's 2012 definition—*“Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics”*—is really pretty good.

Public relations is, indeed, a “strategic” process that focuses on helping achieve an organization’s goals. Its fundamental mandate is “communications,” and its focus is “building relationships.”

Another approach to a definition is, *“Public relations is a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication.”*

At least that’s what your author believes it is.

This definition adds the elements of “planning,” so imperative in sound public relations practice, the aspect of “listening” through “two-way communications,” as well as the elements of “character” or “ethics” and “performance.” This is why the Trumpian approach to public relations is so problematic for public relations professionals. Public relations is most effective when it is based on ethical principles and proper action. Without these two essential requisites—character and performance—achieving sustained influence might be either transitory or impossible; in other words, you can fool some of the people some of the time but not all of the people all the time: “You can’t pour perfume on a skunk!”

The fact is that there are many different definitions of public relations. American historian Robert Heilbroner once described 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.”*¹⁴

In 1923, the late 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.*¹⁵

And way back in 1975, when people didn’t have a clue what “public relations” was, one of the most ambitious searches for a universal definition was commissioned 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 88-word 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.*¹⁶

In adopting its 2012 definition, the PRSA noted that its definition implied the functions of research, planning, communications dialogue, and evaluation, all essential in the practice of public relations.

No matter which formal definition one settles on to describe the practice, to be successful, public relations professionals must always engage in a planned and ethical process to influence the attitudes and actions of their target audiences.

Influencing Public Opinion

What is the process through which public relations might influence public opinion? Communications professor John Marston suggested a four-step model based on specific functions: (1) research, (2) action, (3) communication, and (4) evaluation.¹⁷ Whenever public relations professionals are faced with an assignment—whether promoting a client’s product or defending a client’s reputation—they should apply Marston’s R-A-C-E approach:

1. **Research.** Research attitudes about the issue at hand.
2. **Action.** Identify action of the client in the public interest.
3. **Communication.** Communicate that action to gain understanding, acceptance, and support.
4. **Evaluation.** Evaluate the communication to see if opinion has been influenced.

The key to the process is the second step—action. You can’t have effective communication or positive publicity without proper action. Stated another way, performance must precede publicity. Act first and communicate later. Indeed, some might say that public relations—PR—really should stand for *performance recognition*. In other words, positive action communicated straightforwardly will yield positive results.

This is the essence of the R-A-C-E process of public relations.

Public relations professor Sheila Clough Crifasi has proposed extending the R-A-C-E formula into the five-part R-O-S-I-E to encompass a more managerial approach to the field.¹⁸ R-O-S-I-E prescribes sandwiching the functions of objectives, strategies, and implementation between research and evaluation. Indeed, setting clear objectives, working from set strategies, and implementing a predetermined plan are keys to sound public relations practice.

Still others suggest a process called R-P-I-E for research, planning, implementation, and evaluation, which emphasizes the element of planning as a necessary step preceding the activation of a communications initiative.¹⁹

All three approaches, R-A-C-E, R-O-S-I-E, and R-P-I-E, echo one of the most widely repeated definitions of public relations, developed by the late Denny Griswold, who founded a public relations newsletter.

*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.*²⁰

The key words in this definition are *management* and *action*. Public relations, if it is to serve the organization properly, must report to top management. Public relations must serve as an honest broker to management, unimpeded by any other group. For public relations to work, its advice to management must be unfiltered, uncensored, and unexpurgated. This is often easier said than done because many public relations departments report through marketing, advertising, or even legal departments.

Nor can public relations take place without appropriate action. As noted, no amount of communications—regardless of its persuasive content—can save an organization whose performance is substandard. In other words, if the action is flawed or the performance rotten, no amount of communicating or backtracking or post facto posturing will change the reality.

The process of public relations, then, as Professor Melvin Sharpe put it, “harmonizes long-term relationships among individuals and organizations in society.” To “harmonize,” Professor Sharpe applied five principles to the public relations process:

- Honest communication for credibility
- Openness and consistency of actions for confidence
- Fairness of actions for reciprocity and goodwill
- Continuous two-way communication to prevent alienation and to build relationships
- Environmental research and evaluation to determine the actions or adjustments needed for social harmony²¹

And if that doesn’t yet give you a feel for what precisely the practice of public relations is, then consider public relations Professor Janice Sherline Jenny’s description as “the management of communications between an organization and all entities that have a direct or indirect relationship with the organization, i.e., its publics.”²²

A QUESTION OF ETHICS ●

Harvard Disinvites a Leaker

No matter where you work—company, government body, trade association, sports team, or academic institution—the practice of public relations looms large.

Consider what happened at Harvard, one of the world’s most prestigious universities, in the fall of 2017.

Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government is a well-respected haven for political leaders to study, deliberate, and debate the most pressing issues of the day. Each year, the Kennedy School invites a new list of Visiting Fellows to join its Institute of Politics to meet regularly with like-minded scholars. Among those honored as part of the class of 2017 Visiting Fellows—along with President Trump’s former press secretary Sean Spicer and former campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign manager Robby Mook, spokesman Karen Finney, and anti-Trump broadcasters Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski—was former U.S. Army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning.

Manning had become a household name four years earlier after being court-martialed and sentenced to 35 years in prison for violating the Espionage Act and other offenses, after leaking thousands of classified, confidential, and sensitive military documents to WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks began disseminating the explosive Manning documents to the world in February 2010; three months later, Manning was arrested. At least one of the charges against Manning, “aiding the enemy,” could have resulted in the death sentence. In January 2017, President Obama commuted Manning’s sentence, and she was released in May. (Figure 1-2)

In announcing Manning’s inclusion as a Visiting Fellow, the acting director of the Institute of Politics, noted that students would be able to interact with a diverse group of “experts, leaders and policy-shapers. We welcome the breadth of thought-provoking viewpoints on race, gender, politics and the media.”

Well, not for long.



▲ **FIGURE 1-2 Disappearing invitation.**

Convicted Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning was first invited and then she wasn’t as a Harvard Visiting Fellow after the university suffered a public relations blowback in 2017.

Photo: Erik Pendzich/Alamy Stock Photo

Manning's invitation drew immediate, widespread criticism, placing Harvard squarely in the middle of a public relations crisis. Michael J. Morell, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) deputy director, under President Obama, resigned as a Fellow, calling the invitation to Manning "*wholly inappropriate*" in that it "*honors a convicted felon and leaker of classified information.*" President Trump's CIA Director Mike Pompeo followed suit by withdrawing from a Harvard forum in which he had agreed to participate.

Within days, Harvard got the message. Harvard Kennedy School Dean Douglas Elmendorf announced that the university was rescinding the invitation to Manning, taking blame for what he called a "mistake," acknowledging, "*I see more clearly now that many people view a Visiting Fellow title as an honorific, so we should weigh that consideration when offering invitations.*"

For further information, see Liam Stack, "Sean Spicer and Chelsea Manning Join Harvard as Visiting Fellows," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2017; Matthew Haag and Jonah Engel Bromwich, "Harvard Disinvites Chelsea Manning, and the Feeling Is Mutual," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2017; "Statement from Douglas W. Elmendorf, Dean of Harvard Kennedy School, regarding the School's invitation to Chelsea Manning to be a Visiting Fellow," Harvard Kennedy School (September 15, 2017); Trevor Timm, "Chelsea Manning Has a Lot to Teach. Harvard Doesn't Agree." *The New York Times*, September 15, 2017.

Dean Elmendorf allowed that even though the university was revoking its invitation for her to become a Visiting Fellow, Harvard would still be interested in Manning speaking on campus. Manning declined, tweeting that she was "*honored*" to be disinvited by a university that had folded "*under CIA pressure.*"

Questions

1. Do you think Harvard was right in inviting Chelsea Manning to become a Visiting Fellow? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Harvard was right in disinviting Manning in the wake of public pushback? Why or why not?
3. Had you been Harvard's public relations director, what would you have advised the Kennedy School upon its consideration of Manning as a Visiting Fellow?

No matter what definition one might choose to explain the practice, few would argue that the goal of effective public relations is to harmonize internal and external relationships so that an organization can enjoy not only the goodwill of all of its publics but also stability and long life.

Management Interpreter

The late Leon Hess, who ran one of the nation's largest oil companies and the New York Jets football team, used to pride himself on *not* having a public relations department. Hess, a very private individual, abhorred the limelight for himself and for his company.

But times have changed.

Today, the CEO who thunders, "I don't need public relations!" is naive. He or she doesn't have a choice. Every organization *has* public relations whether it wants it or not. The trick is to establish *good* public relations. That's what this book is all about—professional public relations, the kind you must work at.

Public relations affects almost everyone who has contact with other human beings. All of us, in one way or another, practice public relations daily. For an organization, every phone call, every letter, every face-to-face encounter is a public relations event.

Public relations professionals, then, are really the organization's interpreters.

- On the one hand, they must interpret the philosophies, policies, programs, and practices of their management to the public.
- On the other hand, they must convey the attitudes of the public to their management.

Let's consider management first.

Before public relations professionals can gain attention, understanding, acceptance and, ultimately, action from target publics, they have to know what management is thinking.

Good public relations can't be practiced in a vacuum. No matter 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 senator's press secretary to explain the reasoning behind

an important decision without first knowing what the senator had in mind. So, too, an organization's public relations staff is impotent without firsthand knowledge of the reasons for management's decisions and the rationale for organizational policy.

The public relations department in any organization can counsel management. It can advise management. It can even exhort management to take action. But it is management who must call the shots on organizational policy.

It is the role of the public relations practitioner, once policy is established by management, to communicate these ideas accurately and candidly to the public. Anything less can lead to major problems.

Public Interpreter

Now let's consider the flip side of the coin—the public.

Interpreting the public to management means finding out what the public really thinks about the firm and letting management know. Regrettably, history is filled with examples of powerful institutions—and their public relations departments—failing to anticipate the true sentiments of the public.

- In the 1960s, General Motors (GM) paid little attention to an unknown consumer activist named Ralph Nader, who spread the message that GM's Corvair was "unsafe at any speed." When Nader's assault began to be believed, the auto-maker assigned professional detectives to trail him. In short order, GM was forced to acknowledge its act of paranoia, and the Corvair was eventually discontinued at great expense to the company.
- In the 1970s, as both gasoline prices and oil company profits rose rapidly, the oil companies were besieged by an irate gas-consuming public. When, at the height of the criticism, Mobil Oil spent millions in excess cash to purchase the parent of the Montgomery Ward department store chain, the company was publicly battered for failing to cut its prices.
- In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan rode to power on the strength of his ability to interpret what was on the minds of the electorate. But his successor in the early 1990s, George H. W. Bush, a lesser communicator than Reagan, failed to "read" the nation's economic concerns. After leading America to a victory over Iraq in the Gulf War, President Bush failed to heed the admonition, "It's the economy, stupid," and lost the election to upstart Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton.
- As the 20th century ended, President Clinton forgot the candid communication skills that had earned him the White House and lied to the American public about his affair with an intern. The subsequent scandal, ending in impeachment hearings before the U.S. Congress, tarnished Clinton's administration and his legacy.
- At the start of the 21st century, Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, earned great credit for strong actions and communications following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the nation. The Bush administration's public relations then suffered when the ostensible reason for attacking Iraq—weapons of mass destruction—failed to materialize. Bush's failure to act promptly and communicate frankly in subsequent crises, such as Hurricane Katrina, hurt his personal credibility and tarnished his administration.
- Bush's successor, Barack Obama, was hailed for his messianic communications skills as he stormed into the White House with a message of "hope and change" in 2008. But by the end of his first term in 2012, with the economy flagging from