

The Practice of  
**PUBLIC RELATIONS**  
PUBLIC RELATIONS?

THIRTEENTH EDITION



**Fraser P. Seitel**

# About the Cover

## TV Rules, Social Media Gains

The prior edition of this book featured public relations queen Lady Gaga on its cover. Since then, celebrities—and everyone else, for that matter – have gotten more prickly, more risk-averse, more protective about their images; and thus today’s communications queen, Taylor Swift, after ruminating for months, respectfully turned down your author’s request for cover treatment.

But to the rescue rode NBC television personality Raina Seitel (Don’t ask!), who thankfully agreed to grace the cover. (Eat your heart out Taylor Swift!) And how appropriate that she did. TV, you see, is the place where more than half of all Americans still turn for their news and current events, but Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other online sites are coming on strong as sources of news and information, particularly for millennials.

Public relations professionals must understand all of them—traditional print and broadcast media as well as social media upstarts, alike. Dealing strategically with all these 21st century information channels and all the new ones to come is the front—line responsibility of *The Practice of Public Relations*.

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

*This page intentionally left blank*

# The Practice of **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**THIRTEENTH EDITION**

**Fraser P. Seitel**

Managing Partner, Emerald Partners  
Adjunct Professor, New York University

**PEARSON**

Boston Columbus Indianapolis New York San Francisco Amsterdam  
Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montréal Toronto  
Delhi Mexico City São Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

Vice President, Business Publishing: Donna Battista  
Editor-in-Chief: Stephanie Wall  
Editor-in-Chief: Ashley Dodge  
Senior Sponsoring Editor: Neeraj Bhalla  
Editorial Assistant: Eric Santucci  
Vice President, Product Marketing: Maggie Moylan  
Director of Marketing, Digital Services and Products: Jeanette Koskinas  
Field Marketing Manager: Lenny Ann Raper  
Product Marketing Assistant: Jessica Quazza  
Team Lead, Program Management: Ashley Santora  
Team Lead, Project Management: Jeff Holcomb  
Project Manager: Becca Groves  
Operations Specialist: Carol Melville  
Creative Director: Blair Brown  
Art Director: Janet Slowik  
Vice President, Director of Digital Strategy and Assessment: Paul Gentile  
Manager of Learning Applications: Paul DeLuca  
Full-Service Project Management, Composition and Design: Integra  
Printer/Binder: RR Donnally/Willard  
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color/Hagerstown

---

Copyright © 2017, 2014, 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved. Manufactured in the United States of America. This publication is protected by copyright, and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise. For information regarding permissions, request forms, and the appropriate contacts within the Pearson Education Global Rights and Permissions department, please visit [www.pearsoned.com/permissions/](http://www.pearsoned.com/permissions/).

Acknowledgments of third-party content appear on the appropriate page within the text.

Unless otherwise indicated herein, any third-party trademarks, logos, or icons that may appear in this work are the property of their respective owners, and any references to third-party trademarks, logos, icons, or other trade dress are for demonstrative or descriptive purposes only. Such references are not intended to imply any sponsorship, endorsement, authorization, or promotion of Pearson's products by the owners of such marks, or any relationship between the owner and Pearson Education, Inc., or its affiliates, authors, licensees, or distributors.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Seitel, Fraser P., author.

The practice of public relations/Fraser P. Seitel.—Thirteenth edition.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-13-417011-4—ISBN 0-13-417011-3 1. Public relations—United States. I. Title.

HM1221.S45 2016

659.20973—dc23

2015032218

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**PEARSON**

ISBN 10: 0-13-417011-3  
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-417011-4

## Dedicated to

The world's greatest kiddies—**David, Hunter, Raina,**  
and **Theo.**

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Brief Contents

## **Part I Evolution**

- Chapter 1 Defining Public Relations 1
- Chapter 2 The History and Growth of Public Relations 23

## **Part II Preparation/Process**

- Chapter 3 Communication 46
- Chapter 4 Public Opinion 63
- Chapter 5 Management 82
- Chapter 6 Ethics 106
- Chapter 7 The Law 128
- Chapter 8 Research 149

## **Part III The Publics**

- Chapter 9 Media 172
- Chapter 10 Social Media 200
- Chapter 11 Employee Relations 225
- Chapter 12 Government Relations 246
- Chapter 13 Community Relations 269
- Chapter 14 International Consumer Relations 291

## **Part IV Execution**

- Chapter 15 Public Relations Writing 309
- Chapter 16 Integrated Marketing Communications 334
- Chapter 17 Crisis Management 355
- Chapter 18 Launching a Career 375



*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

Foreword	xix
Preface	xxi
About the Author	xxvii

## Part I Evolution

### Chapter 1 Defining Public Relations 1

Prominence of Public Relations	2
What Is Public Relations?	4
Influencing Public Opinion	5
<b>A Question of Ethics</b> Repping the Russian Lion	6
Management Interpreter	8
Public Interpreter	8
Public Relations Publics	9
<b>FYI</b> Interpreting a Sensitive, Sexual Issue	11
Public Relations Functions	12
The Sin of “Spin”	13
What Manner of Man or Woman?	14
<b>Last Word</b>	16
Discussion Starters	17
<b>Pick of the Literature</b> Rethinking Reputation: How PR Trumps Advertising and Marketing in the New Media World	17
<b>Case Study</b> The New CEO’s Trial by “Switchgate” Fire	18
<b>From the Top</b> An Interview with Harold Burson	20
Public Relations Bookshelf	21

### Chapter 2 The History and Growth of Public Relations 23

Ancient Beginnings	26
Early American Experience	27
Later American Experience	28
<b>FYI</b> P. T. Barnum Redux	30
Ivy Lee: The Father of Public Relations	31
The Growth of Modern Public Relations	33

**A Question of Ethics** Burson Fumbles Facebook Flap 36

Public Relations Comes of Age 37

Public Relations Education 40

**Last Word** 40

Discussion Starters 41

**Pick of the Literature** A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power (paperback) 42

**Case Study** Welcome to the NFL 42

**From the Top** An Interview with Edward L. Bernays 44

Public Relations Bookshelf 45

## Part II Preparation/Process

### Chapter 3 Communication 46

Goals of Communication 47

Traditional Theories of Communication 48

Contemporary Theories of Communication 49

**A Question of Ethics**irate Actor Takes to the Air 51

The Word 52

**FYI** Profizzle of Lexicizzle 54

Receiver's Bias 55

Feedback 57

**Last Word** 58

Discussion Starters 58

**Pick of the Literature** The Power of Communication 58

**Case Study** Race Relations with That Soy Latte? 59

**From the Top** An Interview with Denise Hill 60

Public Relations Bookshelf 61

### Chapter 4 Public Opinion 63

What Is Public Opinion? 65

What Are Attitudes? 65

How Are Attitudes Influenced? 66

Motivating Attitude Change 67

Power of Persuasion 68

Influencing Public Opinion 69

**A Question of Ethics** *The Doctor Is Piqued* 70  
 Polishing the Corporate Image 71  
**FYI** *Winning Reputation...* 72  
**FYI** *...Losing Reputation* 73  
 Managing Reputation 73  
**Last Word** 74  
 Discussion Starters 74  
**Pick of the Literature** *The New York Times, nytimes.com, and  
 The Wall Street Journal, wsj.com* 75  
**Case Study** *The Tylenol Murders* 75  
**From the Top** *An Interview with Ray Jordan* 79  
 Public Relations Bookshelf 80

**Chapter 5 Management 82**

Public Relations Management Process 83  
 Reporting to Top Management 84  
**A Question of Ethics** *Deflated Standards* 85  
 The Public Relations Plan: Conceptualizing 86  
 The Public Relations Plan: Creating 87  
 Activating the Public Relations Campaign 87  
 Setting Public Relations Objectives 88  
**FYI** *Disappearing Roots* 89  
 Public Relations Budgeting 90  
 Public Relations Implementation 91  
 Public Relations Departments 92  
 Public Relations Agencies 94  
 Reputation Management 95  
 Where Are the Jobs? 96  
 What Does It Pay? 97  
 Women and Minorities 98  
**Last Word** 100  
 Discussion Starters 100  
**Pick of the Literature** *Reputation Management: The Key  
 to Successful PR and Corporate  
 Communication, 3rd Edition* 101  
**Case Study** *Uber Success Brings Uber Public Relations  
 Problems* 101  
**From the Top** *An Interview with Peter Drucker* 103  
 Public Relations Library 104

## Chapter 6

### Ethics 106

Ethical Issues Abound 107

Doing the Right Thing 109

Ethics in Business 112

**A Question of Ethics** Sorry for Your Loss but... Nice Bag 113

Corporate Codes of Conduct 114

Corporate Social Responsibility 115

Ethics in Government 115

**FYI Test Your Workplace Ethics** 117

Ethics in Journalism 118

Ethics in Public Relations 120

**Last Word** 122

Discussion Starters 122

**Pick of the Literature** Ethics in Public Relations,  
2nd Edition 123

**Case Study** Ethical Hammer Falls on Daddy Huxtable 123

**From the Top** An Interview with Howard J. Rubenstein 125

Public Relations Bookshelf 126

## Chapter 7

### The Law 128

An Uneasy Alliance 129

The First Amendment 130

Defamation Law 131

**A Question of Ethics** Whistleblower or Traitor? 132

Insider Trading Law 134

Disclosure Law 135

**FYI Criminal Attorneys—Literally** 136

Ethics Law 137

Copyright Law 138

Internet Law 139

Litigation Public Relations 142

**Last Word** 143

Discussion Starters 144

**Pick of the Literature** Advertising and Public Relations Law,  
2nd Edition 144

**Case Study** Walmart's Legal Crackup 145

**From the Top** An Interview with Robert Shapiro 146

Public Relations Bookshelf 147

## Chapter 8 Research 149

- Essential First Step 150
- What Is Research? 151
- Public Relations Research Principles 151
- FYI Figures—and Faces—Lie** 152
- Public Relations Research Types 152
- Public Relations Research Methods 154
- A Question of Ethics Study: Diet Soda Sparks Weight Loss—Whaaaa?** 163
- Evaluation 164
- Online Research 165
- Last Word** 167
- Discussion Starters 167
- Pick of the Literature Primer of Public Relations Research, 2nd Edition** 168
- Case Study Researching a Position for Alan Louis General** 168
- From the Top An Interview with Sandra Bauman** 169
- Public Relations Bookshelf 170

## Part III The Publics

### Chapter 9 Media 172

- Paid vs. Owned vs. Earned 173
- Objectivity in the Media 174
- A Question of Ethics Anchors Away** 176
- Print Media Hangs In 177
- Electronic Media Leads 182
- Online Media Competes But... 183
- Dealing with the Media 185
- Attracting Publicity 186
- Value of Publicity 187
- FYI Confessions of a Media Maven** 188
- Pitching Publicity 190
- Online Publicity 191
- Handling Media Interviews 192
- Outside the Lines Two-Minute Media Relations Drill** 194
- Last Word** 195

Discussion Starters 195

**Pick of the Literature** On Deadline Managing Media Relations,  
5th Edition 196

**Case Study** They're Heeere! 196

**From the Top** An Interview with Al Neuharth 198

Public Relations Bookshelf 199

## Chapter 10 Social Media 200

Brief History of the Net 201

Public Relations and the Net 202

Web Sites 203

E-mail 205

Blogs 207

**FYI** King Blogs; Subjects Cheer 208

Social Networks 209

**A Question of Ethics** Ain't No Sunshine for Wikipedia  
Alteration 214

Online Communication Vehicles 217

The Online Dark Side 218

**Last Word** 219

Discussion Starters 220

**Pick of the Literature** Social Media and Public Relations 220

**Case Study** Don't Mess with the Queen of Social Media 220

**From the Top** An Interview with Richard Edelman 222

Public Relations Bookshelf 223

## Chapter 11 Employee Relations 225

A Critical Function 227

The Employee Public 228

Communicating "Trust" 228

**A Question of Ethics** How Not to "Cosi" Up to Employees 230

Credibility Holds Key 231

S-H-O-C the Troops 231

Internal Tool Kit 232

**FYI** Disney's Credibility Correction 233

Internal Social Media 239

The Grapevine 239

**Last Word** 240

Discussion Starters 240

**Pick of the Literature** Strategic Internal Communication: How to Build Employee Engagement and Performance 241

**Case Study** Sony Shoots the Messenger 241

**From the Top** An Interview with Jay Rayburn 243

Public Relations Bookshelf 244

## Chapter 12 Government Relations 246

Don't Call It "Public Relations" 247

Government Public Relations 249

**A Question of Ethics** Schock-ing the Downton Abbey Congressman 254

White House Press Secretary 256

Lobbying the Government 258

**FYI** Are Ya' Havin' a Laugh? 259

Political Action Committees 262

**Rapid Response** 262

Dealing with Local Government 263

**Last Word** 264

Discussion Starters 264

**Pick of the Literature** All the Presidents' Spokesmen 264

**Case Study** Bridgegate 265

**From the Top** An Interview with Josh Earnest 266

Public Relations Bookshelf 267

## Chapter 13 Community Relations 269

Multicultural Diversity 270

CSR—Corporate Social Responsibility 271

Community Relations Expectations 274

Community Relations Objectives 276

**A Question of Ethics** How *NOT* to Win Friends & Influence Communities 277

Serving Diverse Communities 278

Nonprofit Public Relations 282

**FYI** 13 Rules for Radicals 284

**Last Word** 285

Discussion Starters 285

**Pick of the Literature** Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals 285



**Case Study** Up Your Bucket for a Wonderful Cause 286  
**From the Top** An Interview with Mike Paul 288  
Public Relations Bookshelf 289

**Chapter 14 International Consumer Relations 291**

Worldwide Consumer Class 292  
Consumer Relations Objectives 294  
Consumer-Generated Media 294  
Handling Consumer Complaints 295  
The Consumer Movement 296  
**A Question of Ethics** Targeting Plus-Sized Critics 297  
Operating Around the Globe 298  
Consumer Internet Activists 300  
**FYI Think Multilingual—or Else** 301  
Business Gets the Message 301  
**FYI Straighten Out Your English—or Else** 302  
**Last Word** 303  
Discussion Starters 304  
**Pick of the Literature** Business as Usual 304  
**Case Study** Hiding “Under the Dome” 304  
**From the Top** An Interview with Kathy Bloomgarden 306  
Public Relations Bookshelf 307

**Part IV Execution**

**Chapter 15 Public Relations Writing 309**

Writing for the Eye and the Ear 311  
Fundamentals of Writing 312  
**FYI The Greatest Public Relations Writer of All Time** 313  
Flesch Readability Formula 314  
Inverted Pyramid Simplicity 314  
**FYI Churchill’s Worst Nightmare** 315  
The News Release 316  
News Release News Value 317  
**FYI Write the Release** 319  
News Release Content 319  
News Release Essentials 320

**A Question of Ethics** No “Pardon” for Anti-Obama Facebook Poster 321

**FYI News Release 10 Taboo Terms** 322

Internet Releases 322

Art of the Pitch 323

Writing for Listening 326

Importance of Editing 329

**FYI Twitterspeak** 329

**Last Word** 330

Discussion Starters 330

**Pick of the Literature** Public Relations Writing, 10th Edition 330

**Case Study** The Raina, Inc. News Release 331

**From the Top** An Interview with Hoa Loranger 332

Public Relations Bookshelf 333

## **Chapter 16 Integrated Marketing Communications 334**

Public Relations vs. Marketing/Advertising 336

Product Publicity 336

Third-Party Endorsement 338

**A Question of Ethics** End of a Subway Super Spokesman 339

Native Advertising 340

Building a Brand 341

**FYI World’s Top 10 Sports Team Brands** 343

Traditional Integrated Marketing 343

21st-Century Integrated Marketing 346

Infomercials 348

Buzz Marketing 348

You Name It 349

**Last Word** 349

Discussion Starters 350

**Pick of the Literature** Integrated Marketing Communication, 2nd Edition 350

**Case Study** Arrogant Alex Learns Humility—Finally 350

**From the Top** An Interview with Tadd Schwartz 352

Public Relations Bookshelf 353

## **Chapter 17 Crisis Management 355**

Crisis Pervades Society 356

Issues Management 358

Risk Communication/Message Maps 358

**A Question of Ethics** Lion Killer, Qu'est-ce que c'est? 359

Signs of a Crisis 360

Planning for Crisis 361

Communicating in a Crisis 362

**FYI** When “No Comment” and “Comment” Are Equally Catastrophic 366

Handling the Beast 367

Social Media Crisis Management 368

**Last Word** 369

Discussion Starters 369

**Pick of the Literature** Crisis Management in the New Strategy Landscape, 2nd Edition 370

**Case Study** The Rise and Fall and Rise of Queen Martha 370

**From the Top** An Interview with Sandra Macleod 372

Public Relations Bookshelf 373

## Chapter 18

**Launching a Career** 375

Public Relations Rebounds 376

Getting a Jump 377

Organizing the Job Search 377

Organizing the Résumé 378

**A Question of Ethics** Hiding the Truth/Padding the Resume 379

Organizing the Job Interview 380

**FYI** Online Public Relations Job References 381

Ensuring Public Relations Success 382

**FYI** Don't You Dare... 384

**Last Word** 384

Discussion Starters 385

**Pick of the Literature** Ready to Launch: The PR Couture Guide to Breaking into Fashion PR 386

**From the Top** Ultimate Word to the Wise (Student): An Interview with Bill Heyman 386

Public Relations Bookshelf 387

Appendix A PRSA Member Code of Ethics 2000 389

Appendix B PRIA Code of Ethics 399

Index 401

# 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 the 13th edition of his 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. I continue to rely on his advice to this day.

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 celebrated his 100th birthday in June 2015, is one of the most influential figures in the history of U.S. business, finance, and philanthropy. He is 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 100 years of his life, Mr. Rockefeller has met hundreds of world leaders and traveled around the globe many times. Since his retirement, Mr. Rockefeller has continued to stay active, with wide-ranging interests and involvement in the fields of international relations and civic affairs. He is the last remaining child of John D. Rockefeller Jr., who hired Ivy Lee in 1914 as the first modern-day public relations counselor.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Preface

First, thank you for buying my book. I appreciate it.

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 publicity 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, social media, which has become so important in the field, is approached here in a realistic, practical application sense as an important public relations “tool,” but a tool nonetheless.

The point is that the approach of this book, unlike other basic texts, is intensely practical—long on reasoning and justification and applications that work and short on ethereal philosophy, dubious theory, or new wave communication panaceas. This 13th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations* will prepare you for real-world public relations work in the second decade of the 21st century.

## What’s New in the 13th Edition of *The Practice of Public Relations*?

- **Twelve new, full cases featuring the most current and relevant topics in the industry, including:**
  - General Motors recall
  - National Football League’s domestic abuse scandal
  - Uber’s global problems
  - Sony’s e-mail embarrassment
  - Chris Christie’s “Bridgetate”
  - China’s “Under the Dome” scandal
  - Walmart’s Tracy Morgan crash
  - Starbucks’ gun policy
  - Alex Rodriguez’s comeback
  - Bill Cosby’s meltdown
  - The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge
- **Refortified emphasis on ethics with 17 brand-new ethics mini-cases, including:**
  - Vladimir Putin’s public relations counsel
  - Alec Baldwin’s meltdown
  - Brian Williams’ fall from grace
  - Product claims of Dr. Oz

- New England Patriots' Deflategate
- Edward Snowden: Criminal or hero?
- Diet Soda is good for you study
- Violating Wikipedia's rules
- Dolce Gabbana's same sex marriage battle
- Subway Jared's child pornography scandal
- The death of Cecil the lion
- **Five new "From the Top" interviews with today's top authorities in the worlds of management, media, and academia, including:**
  - Obama Presidential Press Secretary Josh Earnest
  - Noted public relations professors Denise Hill and Jay Rayburn
  - Reputation management leader Sandra Macleod
  - Writing specialist Hoa Loranger
- **New, expanded social media content in Chapter 10, "Public Relations and Social Media," encompassing the most up-to-date (at least as we write this) analysis of social media applications to public relations practice. In addition, comprehensive coverage of the role of social media in Public Relations is discussed throughout the text.**
- **Updated "Public Relations Bookshelf" features the most current public relations literature—primarily post-2005—as well as one new contemporary "Pick of the Literature" per chapter.**
- **Every chapter begins with a contemporary issue relating to the chapter content—from ISIS terrorists' use of public relations for diabolical ends to Kim Kardashian's tweeting controversy to her stepfather Caitlyn Jenner's coming-out communications.**

Social media applications run throughout the chapters and, as noted, the chapter devoted to "Public Relations and Social Media" offers a comprehensive, updated discussion of social media vehicles and how they relate to public relations practice.

As important as social media has become to public relations work, the field still depends on technical skill, experience, and judgment, all grounded in solid relationships with colleagues, constituents, and media.

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.

With economic and political uncertainty around the world, the practice of public relations has never been a more potent force in society or a more valuable factor in an organization's reputation. In the second decade of the 21st century, public relations crises and opportunities are front-page news on a daily basis.

The field remains, at heart, a personal, relationship-oriented practice, demanding experienced judgment, and finely-honed interpersonal communications skills. And so, this 13th 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 your enthusiasm for public relations study and practice.

Among the highlights of the 13th edition:

## Comprehensive Social Media Content

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, SnapChat, and YouTube; blogs, podcasts, and Pinterest; and all the rest.

No public relations textbook offers a more comprehensive discussion of social media than the 13th edition of *The Practice of Public Relations*.

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

## 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 13th edition does so by chronicling the most important contemporary public relations cases—from GM’s troubling cover up and then recall of unfit automobiles to Taylor Swift’s use of public relations to rise to the top of the world popularity, from Sony’s mishandling of hacked e-mails to Alex Rodriguez’s astonishing reputational comeback from baseball purgatory.

Every case is designed to test your application of the theories discussed in solving real-world challenges.

## Additional New Elements

The strength of this book continues to reside in its application of theory to real-life practice.



In addition to the new, contemporary cases and the expanded Social Media discussion, unique elements in the 13th edition include:

- **NEW! From the Top** interviews with distinguished communicators including President Obama’s press secretary. These complement interviews with 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.
- **NEW! PR A Question of Ethics mini-cases**, which highlight the ethical challenges that public relations professionals face on a daily basis—from the harsh employee communications of Cosi’s CEO to the forced resignation of a star-crazed congressman to Target’s savvy handling of a plus-sized controversy.
- **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-2005 bibliography in public relations literature.
- **NEW! Newscom photos**, taken straight from the news wire, add a real-life feel to this edition that isn’t found in any other textbook.

All of these elements add 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*, 13th 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—counseling, writing, promoting, and dealing with constantly changing circumstances. The extensive explanation of Social Media and its application to public relations practice is 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.

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*, 13th Edition, is built around the technical knowledge of theory, history, process and practice, judgmental skills and personal relationships that underlie public relations practice and will be so essential

in building the trust and respect of diverse communities in the second decade of the 21st century.

Happy reading, and thanks again for buying the book.

## Acknowledgments

The author and the publisher would like to thank the following reviewers for providing feedback for this revision.

Joseph Basso, Rowan University  
Richard T. Cole, Michigan State University, East Lansing  
Suzanne Fitzgerald, Rowan University  
Dr. Andrew Lingwall, Clarion University  
Jack Mandel, Nassau Community College  
Michael Smilowitz, James Madison University

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 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 [Forbes.com](http://Forbes.com) and [odwyerpr.com](http://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 the past 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.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# **The Practice of PUBLIC RELATIONS**

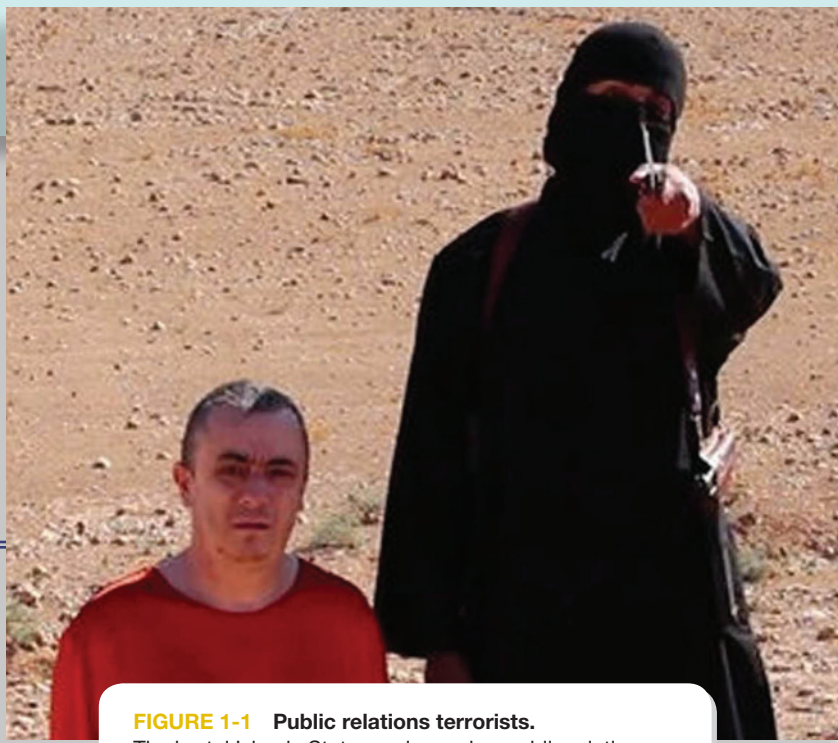
*This page intentionally left blank*

# Chapter 1

## Defining Public Relations

### Chapter Objectives

1. To define the practice of public relations and underscore its importance as a valuable and powerful societal force in the 21st century.
2. To explore the various publics of public relations, as well as the field's most prominent functions.
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."
4. To examine the requisites—both technical and attitudinal—that constitute an effective public relations professional.



**FIGURE 1-1** Public relations terrorists.

The brutal Islamic State used macabre public relations techniques, such as videos and social media, to shock the world with its brutality.

*Photo: Ropi/ZUMA Press/Newscom*

The practice of public relations—barely into its second century—has never been more powerful or more valuable. Indeed, in the latter half of the second decade of the 21st century, most accepted that the practice of public relations had become one of society's most potent forces.

Everyone from the Pope to the Queen of England, from the President of the United States to the President of Russia, from Apple to Walmart, from George Clooney to Ariana Grande practices public relations on a daily basis.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to that reality came from one of the most evil enemies the civilized world has ever known, the terrorist group that labeled itself, "Islamic State," also known as Daesh or ISIS or ISIL. Even though IS began as a

ragtag group of anti-social fanatics, lacked the weapons of an established military and had no air power whatsoever, its terrorist stature grew as it used public relations techniques to shock the world (Figure 1-1). Among the techniques, ISIS:

- Used an aggressive social media campaign to release statements of its conquests and major battles,
- Staged elaborate events, particularly parades, to showcase the weapons it captured, and
- Posted chilling high-quality videos of torture and beheadings of prisoners, including American journalists, to underscore the group's brutality (Figure 1-1).



As IS used its public relations power in seizing parts of Iraq and Syria, it replaced the equally demonic Al Qaeda as terrorist enemy number one.<sup>1</sup>

In the 21st century, 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, e-mail, cell phone photos, blogs, wikis, Web casting, RSS feeds, and all the other emerging technologies of the World Wide Web.

Together, the combination of the two—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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.*

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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.

---

## **1 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 multibillion-dollar business practiced by 208,000 professionals, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Furthermore, the Bureau projects public relations specialist employment will grow 12% between 2012 and 2022. During that time period, an additional 27,400 jobs will need to be filled.<sup>4</sup>

- 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 PRSA encompassing nearly 22,000 members and 11,000 college students in 330 chapters and the International Association of Business Communicators including 12,000 members in 80 countries.
- Approximately 250 colleges and universities in the United States and many more overseas offer a public relations sequence or degree program. Many more offer 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.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the vast majority of college journalism programs, public relations sequences ranked first or second in enrollment.<sup>6</sup> One reason for this trend was that the income gap between public relations specialists and journalists was growing, with the annual median income of public relations people standing at \$54,940 while the equivalent for a journalist was \$35,600.<sup>7</sup>
- 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 alone has 7,000 professional communicators spread out among the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- The world's largest public relations firms are all owned by media conglomerates—among them Omnicom, The Interpublic Group, and WPP Group—which refuse to divulge public relations revenues. The field 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 5,308 employees, earning more than \$797 million in annual revenues.<sup>8</sup>

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 from his televised White House press briefings. Former Press Secretary Robert Gibbs remains a close adviser to President Barack Obama. Karen Hughes, a public relations advisor to George W. Bush for many years, moved from a Special Assistant to the President position 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.”<sup>9</sup>

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.

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.”<sup>10</sup>

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 PRSAs 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, which 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.” 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 of the time; in other words, “*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.*”<sup>11</sup>

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.*<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>*

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.<sup>14</sup> Whenever a public relations professional is faced with an assignment—whether promoting a client’s product or defending a client’s reputation—he or she 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. 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.

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.*<sup>15</sup>

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.”<sup>16</sup> 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 harmony

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.*”

No matter what definition one may 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.

## A Question of Ethics

### Repping the Russian Lion

Ever since the first time he became president of Russia in 2000, Vladimir Putin (Figure 1-2)—“the lion of Russia”—has been a constant thorn in the side of the United States.

Putin’s periodic criticisms of U.S. imperialism, even while Russia pushed the boundaries of its power, and his

almost impish provocations of U.S. presidents hearkened back to an earlier era of “cold war” between the United States and the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Putin seemed eager to keep the flame of conflict burning.



**FIGURE 1-2 Strongman rides.**

Ketchum Public Relations received beaucoup criticism for its representation of Russian president and constant U.S. thorn Vladimir Putin.

*Photo: Alexey Druzhinyn/ZUMAPRESS/Newscom*

That's why in 2006 when one of the world's most respected public relations agencies, Ketchum, agreed to represent Russia and its president to influence public opinion, many wondered if the agency had done the right thing.

The Ketchum relationship started innocently enough, with the firm representing Russia's interests in hosting the Group of 8 meeting in St. Petersburg. Ketchum then helped Putin be selected as *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2007. But soon thereafter, things started going downhill for Ketchum and its client.

Critics of the Russian government began turning up dead. In 2008, Russia fueled a war with the Republic of Georgia, a former USSR state. In 2013, Putin published an Op-Ed column in *The New York Times* that criticized the whole notion of American "exceptionalism." In 2014, Russian-backed troops began a civil war in another former USSR entity, Ukraine. The United States immediately responded with economic sanctions against Russia and its leaders. And the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations called Russia's actions in Ukraine a "threat to all of our peace and security."

Ketchum, which from 2006 to 2012 was reportedly paid almost \$23 million in fees and expenses on its Russia account, began to feel the heat. The firm cut back its staff assigned to the Russian account and generally kept a low profile.

Ketchum, it must be said, wasn't the only public relations firm representing questionable foreign governments

and leaders. Over the years, public relations firms have represented a host of U.S. antagonists from Libya's Muammar Gaddafi to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Indeed, some public relations professionals argue that representing a controversial nation and its president is akin to representing a company that sells arms or cigarettes.

For its part, Ketchum defended the Russian relationship. Said its senior manager on the Russian account, "Where we can help facilitate communication, at the end of the day that can only help."

One former Ketchum executive, Angus Roxburgh, who left the agency and wrote a book in 2011, said that in signing up for lucrative fees from Russia and working for Kremlin leaders, it meant "helping them disguise all the issues that make it unattractive: human rights, invasions of neighboring countries, etc."

#### Questions

1. Do you think a public relations agency should represent a nation that holds views contrary to the United States? Why or why not?
2. Should Ketchum have resigned the Russian account after the 2014 invasion of Ukraine? Why or why not?
3. Where should a public relations agency draw the line in representing controversial clients?

*Note:* For further information, see Brett Logiurato, "Meet the PR Firm That Helped Vladimir Putin Troll the Entire Country," *Business Insider*, September 12, 2013; Ravi Somaiya, "PR Firm for Putin's Russia Now Walking a Fine Line," *The New York Times*, August 31, 2014; and Joe Weisenthal, "Vladimir Putin Calls Out U.S. Exceptionalism in Intense NYT Op-Ed," *Business Insider*, September 11, 2013.

## 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. Mr. 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 a fool. 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 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 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 automaker assigned professional detectives to trail him. In short order, GM was forced to acknowledge its act of paranoia, and the Corvair was eventually sacked 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 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 ruined 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 irreparably 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 an unprecedented financial meltdown, Obama struggled to regain his “communications mojo.”

In the midst of the second decade of the 21st century, individuals and institutions continued to struggle, on a daily basis, to “interpret” their actions to the public. Whether in the midst of natural disasters, like the 2015 killing earthquakes that rocked Nepal or the devastating incidents of police shootings of unarmed young black men in the United States, the importance of rapid communication to explain action remained critical.

The point remains that the savviest individuals and institutions—be they government, corporate or nonprofit—understand the importance of effectively interpreting their philosophies, policies and practices to the public and, even more important, interpreting back to management how the public views them and their organization.

## **2 Public Relations Publics**

The term *public relations* is really a misnomer. *Publics* relations, or relations with the publics, would be more to the point. Practitioners must communicate with many different publics—not just the general public—each having its own special needs and requiring different types of communication. Often the lines that divide these publics are thin, and the potential overlap is significant. Therefore, priorities, according to organizational needs, must always be reconciled (Figure 1-3).