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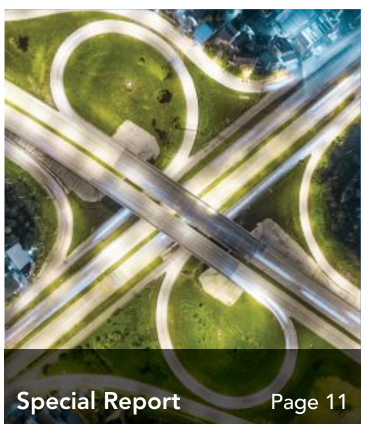
PRSA

STRATEGIES & TACTICS



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Editor's Note

Let's just jump right into this New Year! (*Said with some enthusiasm.*)

We're focusing this January edition on a handful of PR essentials, a refresher on tips and tactics for 2019. Starting on Page 8, frequent contributor Stephen Dupont, APR, offers input on developing your soft skills — "those intangible qualities such as creativity, empathy, listening, presenting, selling, interviewing, networking, collaborating and managing time."

Over on Page 9, Mandi Kane, APR, discusses five increasingly important — but often overlooked — communication skills that deserve your attention this year. Top of her list: finances. As she writes, "As communications professionals, we have to stop tolerating the commonly held view that it's OK for people in our industry to be 'bad at math.'"

And starting with this issue, we're introducing two new monthly columnists. On Page 6, Andrea Gils is writing Going Pro, which provides insights and tips of particular interest to those communicators starting their professional careers. Andrea, the marketing and communications manager at the University of Kentucky International Center, is active within the PRSA community, serving on the Diversity & Inclusion National Committee as well as being a Champion for PRSSA.

On Page 7, Christina Stokes is penning our new Hire & Seek column. Christina, the vice president and director of talent acquisition at Rubenstein in New York, will share how-to advice for job-seekers at all career levels as well as insights for the organizations doing the hiring. As her bio notes, she is passionate about refining and enhancing employee engagement, company culture, and diversity and inclusion efforts.

We thank 2018 columnists Stephanie Vermillion and Cathy Hackl, APR, who will continue contributing to *Strategies & Tactics* in 2019 via our Insights section.

Speaking of contributions, we welcome your ideas and bylines for articles. Our 2019 content calendar is here for your reference.

2019 *Strategies & Tactics* Content Calendar

January — The PR Essentials
February — Storytelling
March — Employee Communications
April — Transitions
May — Travel & Tourism
June — Technology
July — Independence
August — The Best of Silver Anvils
September — The Culture Issue
October — Corporate Communications
November — Leadership Development
December — ICON Recap

We're interested in articles that:

• Explain new trends
• Discuss new technologies that are changing the way that professionals practice public relations
• Convey timely news analysis of issues impacting the profession
• Reflect the growth and change in crucial areas of professional development with how-to pieces.

Please let me know if you have an interest in writing for us in 2019, and send your story ideas to me at: john.elsasser@prsa.org.

Meanwhile, we wish you good health, happiness and success in the coming year and always. ❖

@JohnElsasser

What's Trending

What people were talking about on social media this past month…

@InstituteForPR PR Journal Vol. 12 Issue 2 is now available! The PR Journal is presented by @PRSA and IPR and is dedicated to offering the latest public relations and communication-based research. Check it out buff.ly/2I802ks

@JumelPR "Getting mad is easy; staying calm takes poise and practice. Embody the latter." #MondayMotivation from @OGradyKL in a @PRSA #ICON presentation & @PRSAtactics article.

@_esclaudia Research is essential to PR professionals when it comes to finding the best way to interact, communicate and connect with the audience #PRSA

@emilyparkerPR #PRSA code values include protecting information flow, promoting open communication, protecting private information, promoting healthy competition, avoiding conflicts of interest and strengthening public trust in our profession. #MediaEdit

@PRSSA_USC "Be prepared for what your audience will want to know." -Heyward Barnes on how to communicate numbers. #prsa #prssa #scconnect

16 likes

robynrl "I'll never need to pick up a textbook again," I lied to myself when I finished my master's. Here I am, yet again with a textbook in my lap, this time preparing for my #APR. #neverstoplearning

#QOTD: What are your career goals for 2019?

Seriously pursue happiness.. :) — *Yasir Sarwar*

To obtain my APR certification and begin the next chapter of my career. — *Jacqueline Rafferty*

To be hip-deep in my PR masters program, heavily active in my PRSA Chapter and learn about the many facets of higher ed. — *Allison Anderson*

Ramp up my professional development efforts… remain relevant and "in the know" for myself and my clients. — *Joanna R.*

In Brief

Pew Study Finds Americans Still Prefer Watching to Reading the News

A new survey from Pew Research Center revealed that Americans prefer to watch the news rather than read it by a ratio of 47 to 34 percent, marking only a minimal change from 2016's study, which tallied 46 percent of respondents as news-watchers to 35 percent as news-readers.

omeer

Within the subset of news-watching respondents, 75 percent still favor television as their medium of choice. However, the survey suggests this strong majority may not last thanks to the internet. While in 2016 only 12 percent of news-watchers favored online content, now 20 percent report this preference. Overall, 34 percent of Americans now obtain their news from the web, marking a 6 percent increase from 2016.

The survey also reflected the country's declining dependence on print media. Only 7 percent of respondents, compared with 2016's 11 percent, say they rely on newspapers to stay connected to current events, while 63 percent of all news-readers prefer digital media to print.

Why Spotify and Pandora Are Getting Into Podcasting

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that Spotify and Pandora are working to expand beyond music streaming into podcasting, an immensely popular but not yet all that lucrative medium.

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A study by Edison Research shows that 26 percent of Americans — around 73 million people — listen to podcasts every month. However, ad revenue from podcasts in the U.S. are expected to reach only $402 million in 2018, a low number when compared with broadcast radio's $14 billion.

Despite the revenue issues, a foray into podcasting for Spotify (which already carries 150,000 podcasts) and Pandora makes sense for two reasons. First, music is the most popular genre of podcast, according to Nielsen. Second, the key to more revenue aligns with what Spotify and Pandora already excel at: personalized recommendations for users.

"When you contrast it to music discovery, it's like it's in the Stone Age," Pandora Media Inc. Chief Executive Roger Lynch told the *Journal*. "We think we can expand our audience by bringing people in to listen to a certain podcast and keeping them on the platform with the music we have."

Only 33% of small business owners say they are currently satisfied with their social media ROI. *(Sensai)*

How Leaders Can Unify a Disengaged Workforce

According to Gallup's "State of the Global Workplace" study, 85 percent of employees report feeling "not engaged" or "actively disengaged" at work, costing companies approximately $7 trillion in lost productivity.

aaron amat

While there is no simple fix for the disconnectedness of today's workforce — which can be attributed to everything from smartphone usage to an increase in telecommuting — Dan Schawbel, partner and research director at HR advisory firm Future Workplace, writes that leaders can create a more unified office by prioritizing the needs, interests and career trajectories of individual employees.

Schawbel says that leaders should try viewing their role in the office as more of a trusted coach than a boss. He recommends they schedule semi-regular mentorship and feedback sessions with employees, stress the importance of open collaboration and own up to their shortcomings as a leader.

"Vulnerability isn't a weakness," he writes, in a *Fortune* essay. "It's a strength that creates a safe space and allows people to have a deeper relationship with you."

Creating a Realistic Set of New Year's Resolutions

There are pros and cons to setting career-based New Year's resolutions. On one hand, it's productive to aspire to, for instance, improve the way we work and communicate around the office. However, at the same time, failing to make these changes can leave us discouraged and down on ourselves.

martin rettenberger

To create a realistic set of New Year's resolutions, Chris Christoff, co-founder of MonsterInsights, recommends breaking big goals down into smaller, more manageable tasks. "If your goal is to have a profitable business website with tens of thousands of unique visitors a month, and you don't even have a website, you have quite a way to go," he writes, in a blogpost for *Inc.*

He also advocates for setting reasonable deadlines on goals to "allow you to establish a flow of progress" and not being afraid of reassessing your original resolutions if your situation or needs have changed.

He writes, "Even if you don't become as successful as you'd hoped this year, you're still one step closer to your goal than if you just make the promise, get overwhelmed and quit."

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The Explainer

How to Productively Work From Home

pressmaster

Working from home can be convenient and fun, but it can also be isolating and claustrophobic. While there's more time for midday errands and doctors appointments, and you don't have to brave the morning commute, it can be lonely without those daily human interactions — and, especially during the winter months, it may be tough to make it outside each day.

If you have a flexible work schedule, then it's important to give yourself some structure. "It's also a good idea to schedule a regular work start time *and* work end time, so your brain can separate work from leisure no matter how stagnant the space," according to Lifehacker.

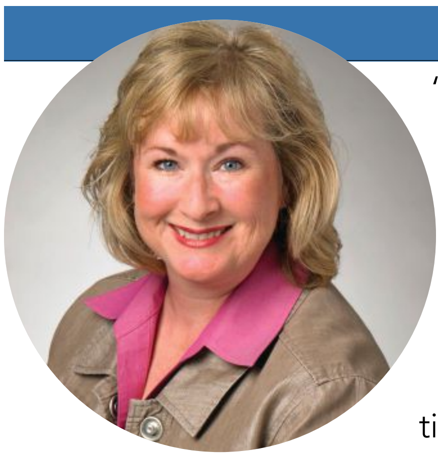
And for those who don't have a regular gig with set hours or who work on freelance projects, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to avoid altering your circadian rhythm, which can leave you feeling sluggish or slightly depressed, says Lifehacker.

Other tips from those who telecommute include: Turn on the TV or radio for some ambient noise to feel like you're in an office environment, give yourself some free time before starting the day for breakfast, take a walk and read the news. And above all, make sure to leave the house each day!

Here are a few more tips to make your workday more productive:

1. Keep to a schedule.
2. Get out of bed and put on clothes.
3. Try a co-working group or shared workspace.
4. Use a daily planner to stay organized.
5. Exercise or take a walk outside.
6. Make time for social activities.

#TheWayWeWork



"Emerging trends I see are a continuing blurring of lines for content. Marketing and communications must work together on strategies to reach fractured audiences without alienating them. Communications leaders will increasingly be called on to be an organization's chief integration officer to ensure that all the necessary parties are collaborating and bringing forward well-thought-out strategies with a bias toward action."

— Linda Rutherford, senior vice president and chief communications officer, Southwest Airlines

By the Numbers

maxx studio

In research on how brand controversies affect consumer opinions, Morning Consult found that the worst offense is lying to customers to increase profits, cited by 71 percent of respondents.

Americans are streaming 8 billion hours of content per month on connected TVs, Nielsen reported.

william potter

cozine

The average worker in the United States doesn't start saving for retirement until they're 31, a survey commissioned by the Nationwide Retirement Institute revealed.

Industry forecaster Zenith said advertisers will make more effective use of personalized messages as online video advertising grows by 18 percent per year between 2018 and 2021.

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A Kaplan Test Prep survey found that only 25 percent of colleges check on applicants' social media accounts, down from 40 percent in 2015.

Issues Trends

These were the most popular topics from our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter in the past month.

- Facebook's data scandal
- Corporate changes at Victoria's Secret
- Company holiday cards
- Amazon's new headquarters
- Emailing with Gen Z employees
- Two-page résumés
- Storytelling tips from Soledad O'Brien
- Twitter's Christmas ad

state of independence

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In 2019, Resolve to Prevent Productivity Killers

By Tim O'Brien, APR

It's 2019, and every independent PR practitioner's list of New Year's resolutions should include limiting and managing assignments that kill productivity.

A productivity killer is a work project that consumes so much of your time that there's little left over for serving other clients or pursuing new business. Such assignments might seem worthwhile at first, but over time they can threaten your practice by preventing you from delivering the highest-value work for all of your clients.

One example of a productivity killer might be a passion project that you handle pro bono for a local animal shelter. You believe in the cause, so you make yourself available at all times to help the organization. But when you look back at the end of each month, you wonder where your billable time has gone.

Or maybe you have a billable project that you absolutely love, but the client takes forever to make decisions, approve budgets and keep the process moving forward. Despite your enthusiasm for the work, the assignment is killing your overall productivity.

How to avoid productivity killers

For passion projects, the solution to managing productivity-killing work is pretty simple: Discipline yourself not to overcommit, and then scale back your work as necessary. Track your time as if you are working for a client.

On the business side, if you're in the prospecting phase of a client relationship, pay close attention to how the potential client handles the review process. Are they decisive? Are they clear about what they want and how they will define success? Do they know their budget? Do they have a clear timeline for decision-making? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then you might be setting yourself up for a productivity-killing assignment.

But what if you're already committed to a project that is demanding more and more of your attention, leaving you no time to spend on other clients or business development?

In that case, read your contract again and make sure you're delivering only what you promised. Be on the lookout for "scope creep," where the amount of work the client expects for the same price keeps expanding. Are the criteria for success growing beyond the original terms of your agreement? If so, then it may be time to revisit those terms. Even if the situation doesn't require you to re-draft the contract, then you should talk to the client and manage expectations.

Protect your business model

Remind the client that although you're doing your best to deliver your work on time and on budget, you are still a resource shared by other clients. Tactfully explain that if one or two clients monopolize your time, they hinder your ability to invest in your own business and better serve all of your clients.

For example, you might subscribe to a pricey media database, the cost of which no single client would justify. Economically speaking, you have determined that with four or five active clients, the cost of subscribing to the database is necessary to deliver the level of service that each of your clients expects and deserves.

When one client consumes so much of your time that you can't adequately serve four or five others, you might question whether you can still afford that media database on which your business model depends. In that case, it's time to rein in the productivity killer, for the good of your practice. ❖

What productivity-killing projects have you experienced? Let us know on Twitter at @PRSAtactics and @OBrienPR.

Tim O'Brien, APR, owns O'Brien Communications, an independent corporate communications practice in Pittsburgh, and hosts the "Shaping Opinion" podcast. Email: timobrien@timobrienpr.com. Twitter: @OBrienPR.

going pro

New Year, New Pros, New Goals

By Andrea Gils

Every New Year, we come up with new goals — many of them are utopian dreams, and a few are actual goals we can strive for. With the New Year, we feel ready and empowered to set the bar high with new objectives. But many of us set that bar so high that when we are halfway through the year, we feel like these goals are impossible to accomplish or, even worse, we completely forget about them.

To help combat this scenario, here are five realistic goals that you can set for yourself and start working toward today:

1. Learn a new language.

You don't need to seek full fluency. Just download the Duolingo app on your phone, and use it while you commute to work or need a quick break. It's an easy way to get started and makes learning more fun by breaking up lessons into different exercises.

2. Get certified in something (useful).

Learning about our profession doesn't stop with college. There are thousands of certifications available that you can prepare for on your own. This shows your interest in continued learning and growing as a professional — *a must* in public relations.

You can study for the APR certification or, if you think that's a bit too ambitious for this year, perhaps try something more specific to what you do now. Maybe you learned how to use Google Analytics but never had the formal education for it; so why don't you go for a Google Analytics certification? It helps you solidify knowledge that you've already acquired and, who knows, you may learn a new thing or two.

3. Watch TV shows, news or movies from a different culture.

One way to push yourself outside your comfort zone is to consume content that is different from your day-to-day news and entertainment sites. Have you befriended people from other countries and want to have deeper connections? What about understanding your audience better?

Consuming media that accurately portrays culture in a given context helps you learn and understand others, but it also helps you understand yourself. You may change your mind, or strengthen your point of view on a given issue. Whatever the result is, that discovery process with the world around you is exciting and beautiful.

4. Try new technology.

Artificial intelligence (AI) may be the new buzzword, but how can you dip your toes in? Depending on your role, you may have the opportunity to do something cool like build a bot. No, you don't need to know how to code in order to make a bot. Does it sound intimidating? Yes. But thinking about opportunities to integrate new tech and make your work and life more efficient is exciting. Even more so when you do it on your own without having to hire a software developer! I used MobileMonkey and by trying it out — along with watching tutorials and researching — I built my first bot in three weeks! And you may wonder: OK, but at what cost? None. Just my time and energy.

akira kaelyn

5. Practice mindfulness techniques.

We all want to be more relaxed, efficient and present — and that's where mindfulness comes in. Paying attention to what you are doing instead of dozing off with your own thoughts helps you become more grounded and enjoy what you are doing.

You can start with small steps like being thoughtful with your daily routine. Instead of mentally reviewing your to-do list while you brush your teeth, pay attention to how the bristles move through your teeth. How do they feel?

Though mindfulness is a simple practice, it can be hard to focus because our human body sends 11 million bits of information per second to the brain for processing, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. That's a lot to keep up with.

But the more you practice, the easier it will become for you to *listen* and appreciate conversations, *take in* the full flavors of a delicious meal or *view* a neighborhood you walk through. It will allow you to be in the moment. And the best part is: You will find it easier to focus, minimize stress and become your best self. ❖

Andrea Gils, a native of Uruguay, is the marketing and communications manager at the University of Kentucky International Center. She was on the PRSA New Pros National Committee in 2016, currently serves on the PRSA National Diversity & Inclusion National Committee and is a Champion for PRSSA. Connect with her on LinkedIn: andreagils.

taking the lead

Richard Jones on Leading With Humility

By Ken Jacobs

What are the key leadership principles that have guided your career?

Trust, communication and honesty. I've always considered these qualities to be foundational if I'm to be effective in influencing and inspiring others to work with me toward achieving a stated goal or objective.

At the top of the list is trust. To me, this means cultivating relationships that are defined by openness, honesty and transparency, relationships that give others confidence that I'm someone they can depend on. It means ensuring that those working with me can always expect to be consistently treated with respect.

Communicating is important, of course, because it's essential that a leader clearly articulate the vision, purpose or direction for an organization or team. I've always found it valuable to also foster an environment in which team dynamics are characterized by openness and candor, a place where colleagues feel confident in not only expressing a point of view but challenging others' perspectives as well.

I don't believe a leader can create such an environment unless they first establish a firm foundation built on trust and respect. And one of the most effective ways to demonstrate respect for someone is listening. I consider listening a critically important part of effective interpersonal communications and make it a point to solicit ideas from others and to genuinely listen to their perspectives.

A corporate leader who I admire once said to me that if you want to demonstrate to someone that you respect their contributions and inspire them to contribute even further, ask them what they think about an issue you may be grappling with and listen to what they have to say.

Finally, I believe that a little humility can sometimes be an important quality in a leader.

What qualities are necessary for growing in an organization?

The influential people that I've observed in any organization all seem to exhibit several qualities:

- **They cultivate a high degree of trustworthiness.** They do this by behaving ethically and by being open, honest and direct in interpersonal dealings.
- **They embody the organization's values.** Influential people understand what principles serve as the organization's North Star, and they exhibit those ideals in their dealings with work and industry colleagues.
- **They're respectful of others.** They cultivate a network of meaningful relationships. These relationships are often with colleagues who may be able to help them learn new aspects of the business.
- **They're collaborative.** Most organizations place a high value on teamwork and collegiality. Influential people understand how to work in an interconnected and cooperative environment.
- **They're dependable.** They do what they say they're going to do, and they do it when they say they're going to do it. They make it a point to not just be occasionally dependable but be consistently reliable.
- **They understand the organization.** They grasp its mission, its strategy, its growth objectives, its challenges, its competitive environment and, of course, its culture.
- **They invest the time to become an expert in their field.** This means they become regarded as the "go-to" person for answers concerning an area of the business or specific subject. At the same time, they understand the importance of being flexible and are always open to taking on new challenges.

Ken Jacobs is principal of Jacobs Consulting & Executive Coaching. Visit his website (www.jacobscomm.com) and contact him by email (ken@jacobscomm.com) or Twitter (@KensViews).

Richard Jones Highlights

Current job title:

Vice President, State Affairs and Government Relations, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America

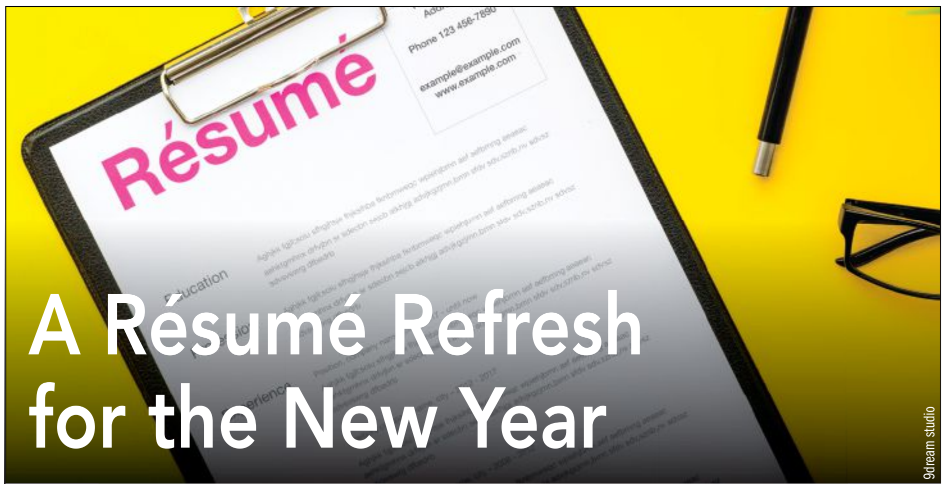
Previous executive role:

Chief Communications Officer, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America

Other leadership positions:

Vice President, Communications, The Americas, GE Money; Senior Vice President, Waggener Edstrom

hire and seek



9dream studio

A Résumé Refresh for the New Year

By Christina Stokes

The start of the New Year is always an excellent time to take stock of your accomplishments by refreshing your résumé, whether you're looking for new career opportunities in 2019 or not. A résumé is more than a formal list detailing where you went to school, the jobs you've held and what your core skills are; it's also one of your most valuable personal marketing tools.

When looking over your résumé and deciding what to remove and what to add, ask yourself the following questions:

Is this easy to read and error-free?

Let's start with the basics. Your résumé should be flawless (free of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors), and your formatting should be neat and consistent throughout the document. Avoid using too many bullets. Always double-check the tenses that you use when describing any work experiences, and stick with reverse chronological order (your most recent experience first).

Is this succinct enough for a recruiter to effortlessly consume and comprehend?

If you're an entry-level candidate, there is no reason for your résumé to be longer than a page. (And your cover note does *not* need to be a thesis, but that's a conversation for another day.) Detail your previous internships, and if you haven't had any yet, then make note of volunteer work and academic activities.

Further along in your career? The same applies — keep it short and sweet. Research shows that the average recruiter will only spend a few seconds looking at a résumé before deciding whether or not to keep reading. You need to quickly capture their attention with relevant information about you. Steer clear of groan-inducing buzzwords, but definitely use words that may come up in a search, like phrases from the job description.

Does this correspond with my social media presence?

If you use LinkedIn for networking, then your profile should be synonymous with your résumé when it comes to detailing your work history. It can potentially raise a red flag to talent acquisition professionals when something listed on your LinkedIn profile does not appear on your résumé or vice versa.

Are you a content creator? Do you have solid past work examples to highlight? Provide a link to your digital portfolio, too.

Will this be processed by an applicant tracking system or career portal?

Graphics-heavy résumés often do not parse correctly into applicant-tracking systems. Keep graphics and images on a separate document that you can provide to a recruiter or hiring manager once you've already secured an initial interview. Unusual fonts and headings sometimes skew how your information is pulled into databases, meaning that your information might never actually be seen.

Also, save your résumé under your full name with the current date. This helps hiring teams keep track of the documentation on file for you, and guarantees that they are referring to your most recent information.

Does this clarify the roles that I'm interested in, and that are a fit for me?

It's fine to have several versions of your résumé, especially if you're looking into branching out from your current career path. Keep track of which résumé you send to each company. When a recruiter first looks at your profile, they need to see how your experiences and skills run parallel to the role that you are interested in. If those facts are unclear, then you may need to revise how you have presented yourself.

Once you have covered all of the bases, get a second pair of eyes on your final, master draft. Always remember to ask a trusted mentor, professor or colleague to review your résumé for any errors that you may have missed, general readability and overall professional appeal. In the world of public relations, you are a storyteller and a brand builder. In 2019, use your résumé to tell *your* story.

Christina Stokes is the vice president and director of talent acquisition at Rubenstein. She is passionate about refining and enhancing employee engagement, company culture, and diversity and inclusion efforts. Twitter: @NewYorkRoses.

pm images

Soft Skills for Your Success in 2019 — and the Not-So-Distant Future

By Stephen Dupont, APR

This issue of *Strategies & Tactics* focuses on PR essentials for the New Year, but I can't help but jump ahead to the not-so-distant future, when the co-worker helping you develop a communications campaign might be a robot. Or when, with the press of a button, software on your computing device will write a news release using artificial intelligence (AI) that derives information from its analyses of company messages, news trends, sales data and social media sentiments.

This is not speculation. Little by little, automation and AI are creeping into our lives and becoming normal. As we type emails on Google, for instance, AI technology offers to finish our sentences for us, based on its analysis of previous emails we've written. At grocery stores, we find fewer cashiers and more self-checkout stations. When we visit Amazon.com, we find dozens of product suggestions based on our purchasing patterns.

All of this automation promises to make our lives happier and more productive. But oddly (and disconcertingly), when I ask the virtual assistant Siri, "Will robots take over the world?" I'm met with silence as I watch the little icon on my iPhone whirl. *Hmmm.*

Given that more and more jobs are being performed by robots and automation, how can you make sure you're still employable in the year 2030 and beyond? The key, I believe, is to develop skills that robots will find difficult to replicate. And it just so happens these are the same skills you should be developing to enhance your career, anyway.

They're what we call "soft" skills — those intangible qualities such as creativity, empathy, listening, presenting, selling, interviewing, networking, collaborating and managing time. In other words, they are the skills we depend on to work harmoniously with other people.

To develop your soft skills, consider these six tips:

1. Become self-aware.

First, recognize the soft skills at which you excel and those you need to improve. Some people are naturally adept at networking or giving presentations, for example, while others have to work to acquire those skills. Ask yourself, "What do I truly enjoy doing?" and "What comes naturally for me?"

List the soft skills you feel you're good at and those for which you need to improve. For example, one skill that comes naturally to me is interviewing people for market research and writing projects. But giving presentations has always been harder for me.

> "Ask people around you — those you trust and who are sincerely interested in seeing you succeed — for their feedback on your soft skills."

2. Seek feedback.

Ask people around you — those you trust and who are sincerely interested in seeing you succeed — for their feedback on your soft skills.

A number of years ago, I asked my department head to assess my presentation skills. His constructive feedback inspired me to join Toastmasters (a nonprofit network of clubs that help people become better public speakers) and eventually seek out speaking engagements to refine those skills. I also turned to a presentation specialist, who taught me how to create more compelling presentations. I don't consider myself a natural presenter, so I constantly look for new opportunities to build those skills.

3. Find a coach.

I know many people, myself included, who have hired personal trainers to help them develop good exercise habits or learn the right way to lift weights. You can likewise hire a coach to boost your soft skills, such as learning how to give more engaging presentations.

4. Volunteer.

Volunteering is another excellent way to build the soft skills that will advance your communications career and make you better prepared for the future. To improve your leadership abilities, for example, you might volunteer for your local PRSA Chapter and lead a committee.

To practice your coaching skills, volunteer to coach a youth team through your local school district. To become a better listener, volunteer to meet with seniors at an assisted-living center and ask to hear their stories. By volunteering to serve on the board of directors for a local nonprofit organization, I learned how boards make decisions.

5. Find a mentor, or become one.

AI robots are constantly learning, and you should be, too. But instead of trying to absorb more facts and figures, you can gain wisdom from others who have mastered their own soft skills. Seek out a mentor or team of mentors willing to share their insights on the art of building and maintaining human relationships.

Consider mentors of all ages and skill levels. I rely on my niece, a college student who is studying blockchain and cryptocurrencies, to help me better understand those technologies and their potential use in my field of marketing and communications.

6. Embrace change.

Perhaps the most important soft skill to develop is your ability to adapt to change. Future employers will look for people who are nimble, flexible and open to trying new things — and who can persuade others to recognize the benefits of change themselves. We'll likely see changes in products and services and how they're delivered, and changes in policies.

Curious people are good at embracing change. They constantly seek new ideas and can visualize multiple possibilities. As part of their creative process, they allow themselves to make mistakes. That constant reinvention will help you stay marketable and a step ahead of the robots in 2019 and beyond.

Don't wait to develop your soft skills. Get started now. Think of your career the same way you regard your 401(k), as an investment in your future. Make a plan to develop the skills you'll need five, 10 or even 20 years from now, and then work on learning them a little bit every day.

Acquiring new soft skills or taking your existing ones to higher levels may require you to make drastic changes. But more often than not, we need to take action — even if it's something small — to build our confidence in skills that may not come naturally to us.

Stephen Dupont, APR, is vice president of public relations and branded content for Pocket Hercules (pockethercules.com), a creative-branding powerhouse based in Minneapolis. Contact him at stephen.dupont@pockethercules.com or visit his blog, stephendupont.co.

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Down to Business

5 Skills to Sharpen in 2019

By Mandi Kane, APR

A new year is the perfect time to set professional-development goals. Here are five increasingly important — but often overlooked — PR skills you can sharpen in 2019:

Finance

When I interview job candidates it always raises a red flag when the applicant admits that they're "not a numbers person." As communications professionals, we have to stop tolerating the commonly held view that it's OK for people in our industry to be "bad at math."

To better serve our clients, we have to understand how they make money. We need financial literacy to analyze annual reports, manage budgets and read financial documents such as balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements.

Financial skills are also of utmost importance for PR practitioners who want to climb the ladder at agencies, where it's crucial to understand factors that affect and improve the bottom line.

Emotional intelligence

We don't talk enough about the importance of emotional intelligence in our profession. Also called "EQ," this skill is the ability to recognize, understand and manage our own emotions (and those of others), especially when we're under pressure. Emotional intelligence means knowing that our emotions can determine our behavior and affect the people around us, for better or worse.

> "When I interview job candidates it always raises a red flag when the applicant admits that they're 'not a numbers person.'"

As public trust in traditional media erodes, it's becoming even more important for PR pros to communicate with empathy, especially in high-stakes or crisis situations. Emotional intelligence provides that empathy, and helps build and strengthen relationships with colleagues, stakeholders and clients inside and outside of your organization. With our national culture demanding authenticity, self-awareness and vulnerability have become assets, not weaknesses.

Risk management

Preventing or mitigating risk might seem like the legal department's responsibility, but our Code of Ethics also calls upon us to protect our clients. It's imperative that PR practitioners learn to identify internal and external threats, and how to hedge against them.

If you work in a highly regulated industry such as health care or banking, then familiarize yourself with applicable laws and help ensure compliance.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication skills help you project self-confidence and make your messages more effective. To become a trusted counselor to clients, you need executive presence — which includes the nonverbal communication of posture and body language, eye contact, hand gestures and facial expressions that punctuate your words.

Writing

OK, this skill is more essential than underrated. But seasoned PR professionals might reach a point where they become complacent and stop trying to improve their writing, or even let it decline. Whether you're in your first job or have practiced our profession for decades, you can always improve your writing skills. How? Make it a daily habit to read good writing in newspapers and books, and to write and edit your own work.

With communication constantly evolving, our most demanding days are still ahead of us. But by incorporating these skills into your toolbox this year, you'll be better prepared to rise to the challenge. Happy New Year!

Mandi Kane, APR, is a senior managing adviser at Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock in Nashville, Tenn. She is a member of PRSA Nashville and PRSA's Counselors Academy. Follow her on Twitter @TheMandiKane.

6 Tips for Communicating Organizational Change

brian a jackson

By Bridgette Borst Ombres

"Another year, another reorganization."

"Did you hear the news? Why are they making this change?"

Cue the eye rolls, deep sighs, grumbling at the water cooler and millions of face-palm emojis flinging back-and-forth across Slack and texts.

People tend to initially see change as something negative. Annoyance, anger and panic don't have to go hand-in-hand with organizational change, but oftentimes, they do.

Nearly 70 percent of organizational-change projects fail because the right message isn't communicated to the right people at the right time, according to *Harvard Business Review*. That's why it's crucial that communications experts have seats at the change-management table.

And yet the success rate of change is stunningly low — because far too often, executives underestimate the importance of communications. The backbone of any organizational change, communication reduces uncertainty and guides a business through the transition.

"Ultimately, employees will determine whether a change succeeds. And how well you communicate and collaborate with them will directly impact the organization's performance."

According to a study by professional-services firm Willis Towers Watson, organizations that are highly effective at change management, engagement and communications are also five times more likely to outperform industry peers, 20 percent more likely to report lower turnover rates, and five times more likely to employ managers who actively support the organization's vision.

Some organizational changes are well-thought-out and planned in advance, while others have to be managed on the fly. Some changes are just small tweaks. Others are complete turnarounds and transformations.

Whether you're in the midst of a CEO shakeup, implementing a new policy or going through an acquisition, these six tips will help place your change project among the 30 percent that succeed.

1. Create a communications plan that prioritizes empathy. When organizational change occurs, people try to make sense of something new asked of them — from learning an unfamiliar computer system to following a new chain of command — while also dealing with all of the organization's usual demands. When writing your communications plan, try to put yourself in the employee's shoes. Remember that we're all creatures of habit, and during organizational changes people lose their known ways of doing things, and sometimes even their co-workers. As change agents, plan your communications with patience and understanding.

2. Develop clear, consistent messaging that other messengers can carry throughout the organization. And then, repeat, repeat, repeat. People want to know what's happening and why, and how it will affect them. Sanitized corporate-speak or contradictory statements only sow confusion and frustration. Employees will consider leaving if they aren't well-informed, so keep the information coming. In times of change, it's hard to overcommunicate.

Equip your messengers with talking points, an FAQ document and other materials to help them guide the conversation with their direct reports and address common questions and concerns. In that consistent messaging, the rationale for the change must be made abundantly clear. In addition to message points that explain the purpose of the change, craft responses to questions such as: *What is the change and what does it entail? Who will the change affect and how? How will it impact the company? When will the change go into effect?*

3. Think carefully about how you will deliver the news — and whom you should inform first, second and so on. To minimize the chances of the information being leaked to customers and competitors — or of fueling the rumor mill with inaccurate information — make sure that everyone receives the same information in a relatively short period of time, and in the appropriate order.

The order of whom you share the update with may vary depending on whether your organization is in the public or private sector, and how it's governed. Tell managers and change ambassadors the news before sharing it with the broader group; these leaders and influencers within your organization will be messengers and can help instill confidence within their circles of influence. They can also ensure that accurate information about the change is relayed. As soon as possible, brief those who will be directly impacted by the change, so they hear the news before it's widely shared.

4. Never underestimate the power of face-to-face communication during changes. Whenever possible, conduct in-person and town-hall meetings to communicate changes. To make sure employees don't miss the news, choose the right channels and communicate consistently across your company email, social media, intranet and website, and through direct mail, flyers or other media that make the most sense for your organization.

Employees want to hear the news from the person driving the change (often the CEO) or their direct supervisor. They want to receive it from the source, or as close to the source as possible. When they do, they're more likely to trust and understand the news, which is more important than just agreeing with it.

5. Get the timing right. Pay attention to important dates and plan your communications accordingly. Think about the best day and time to deliver the news in the context of company deadlines, industry news and other events. For example, avoid delivering the news over the weekend or outside normal office hours, at the tail-end of another major announcement, or on the first day back to work after a major holiday.

6. After informing people, listen to their feedback and involve them. By engaging in a collaborative, two-way dialogue, you give your employees (who are your best resources, after all) the chance to share their ideas about improving processes. Surveys and town-hall meetings are also opportunities for employees to comment and vote on ideas. Such involvement creates commitment. Conversely, lack of collaboration during change management means that employee commitment, motivation and efficiency will suffer.

Every change, organization and culture is different. But the best practices outlined above will help communicators develop effective strategies that win hearts and minds around any organizational change.

Ultimately, employees will determine whether a change succeeds. And how well you communicate and collaborate with them will directly impact the organization's performance.

Bridgette Borst Ombres is director of marketing and communications at A2U and heads up The Commsultant, a PR consulting shop specializing in communications planning and media strategy.

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The Roads to Convergence

Exploring the Future of Communications

By Keith Burton

SPECIAL REPORT

PR leaders surveyed on the future of our profession tell us the term "public relations" won't accurately describe their work in the next five years. Public relations is converging with marketing services, and a new world is emerging for practitioners, educators and students. Organizations are now integrating marketing services, content offerings and communications channels to deliver against key objectives.

In 2017, we at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication decided to lead the way in convergent communication and began implementing a new integrated model for our student-led agency, Talking Dog.

To create the right context for the new model, we interviewed thought leaders — CMOs, CCOs, heads of integrated agencies and educators — seeking their input on the forces that are shaping the new convergent model.

This report spotlights "The Seven Truths" leaders tell us are driving the future of our profession.

— Dr. Bryan H. Reber, Department Head, Public Relations, Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Georgia

Our world is changing faster than at any time in history. Marketing and communications leaders tell us the speed at which things are changing is unique and differentiating.

"We had a leadership meeting six years ago," said Steve Behm, president, Edelman, southeast region, "and we talked about a 'culture of change.' We had to think differently about how we did our business."

Change is accelerating in all business models and corporate cultures. While corporate and agency marketing and communications leaders once had the luxury of looking out over weeks or even months to measure and prove the value of their function, C-suite executives today demand immediate results. "We introduced a new Slim Jim product on the 'Today' show," said Jon Harris, chief communications officer at Chicago-headquartered Conagra Brands, "and by the afternoon, people were asking, 'How much product have we sold?'"

This demand, along with changes to corporate structure, has evolved a convergent communications model focused on the synergy between public relations and marketing. Here we'll explore what that means for our profession.

01 "Average" is officially dead.

Bob Pearson is a digital marketer, investor and communicator who has served global organizations like Dell, Novartis and W2O Group, the latter an integrated firm where he was vice chair and chief innovation officer. Now a senior adviser to the firm, Pearson is authoring a new manifesto for W2O Group on the agency of the future — one that will be convergent, data-driven and bold.

"We're educating our people to use analytics and new account-management strategies as opposed to old models," he said. "That's the separation that's occurring in our business."

For Dunkin' North America CMO Tony Weisman, if you're average, then you're dead. In 2017 Weisman arrived at Dunkin's headquarters in Canton, Mass., to find an in-house team that had grown complacent and change-resistant. "When I asked why things were done in certain ways, I was told, 'This is the way we've always done it.'"

To drive change, he dispatched C-suite leaders and team members into the world of franchisees, customers and thought leaders, challenging them to experience the shifting landscape in real-time — and raising expectations for higher performance.

Dr. Kirsten Strausbaugh-Hutchinson, senior lecturer in advertising at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, has watched Madison Avenue's storied advertising brands bundle and unbundle their services to address changing client demands. She said agencies want to be seen today as responsive to marketplace needs and trends, but they're not.

"They're all bogged down with layers and processes, and that costs clients money," said Strausbaugh-Hutchinson. "They're all the same."

02 The speed of disruption is unique, differentiating from the past.

What does speed *really* mean today?

"The speed of disruption has changed the way we think about deadlines," said Kim Landrum, senior lecturer in advertising at UGA's Grady College. "It's devalued the process we use. Clients think it's so much faster, and I can do this so much more quickly, but that doesn't change design and messaging, look and feel. It still takes time." And by the time we've educated clients, Landrum said, the technology will morph again.

The speed of disruption has also changed the way consumers access information. Edelman's Behm said the speed at which information is changing between mobile and other platforms, and the ability to go peer-to-peer direct as well as brand-to-consumer direct, is "incredibly disruptive to the traditional architecture of the agency world and our approach to the marketplace."

Anthony D'Angelo, APR, Fellow PRSA, professor of practice and director, communications management, at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, and 2018 chair of PRSA, said, "If you're managing today, you're managing change."

D'Angelo commissioned a research firm to identify actions that Syracuse should take to equip graduate students for the future. "This firm came back to me and said, 'We've studied a lot of professional disciplines. We're not sure we've ever assessed one that is changing faster than your field,'" he said.

And convergence in our profession was at the center of their findings.

03 Corporate and agency models are broken.

While serving as IBM's chief brand officer, Jon Iwata remembers a conversation with Sir Martin Sorrell, founder and former CEO of WPP, the world's largest advertising and marketing company. The day of reckoning had arrived for the big holding companies with semi-independent brands, and Sorrell was hammering home the point that clients no longer value being tethered to disparate and disconnected agencies. Within days, WPP merged two of its biggest PR brands, Burson-Marsteller and Cohn & Wolfe.

"Clients want more integration," Iwata said. "The model of agencies in a holding company brings massive redundancies and no economies of scale or efficiencies. On the profit side, it's killing those guys. They never actually integrated anything and don't share anything. The economic structure can't sustain that."

General Motors spends billions of dollars annually with partner agencies. In GM's offices in Detroit and suburban Birmingham, Mich., teams from Chevrolet are working with WeberShandwick, the Commonwealth Agency and McCann Worldgroup to understand outcomes that can be realized from the integrated agency model. Tony Cervone, senior vice president, global communications, at GM, has been a catalyst in helping drive the process.

"[GM's agency partners] always sat in the same building. They just never talked to each other," Cervone said. While the agency partners maintained that they were interacting and having conversations about shared work, he believes they weren't engaging for strategic business purposes.

Today, Chevrolet's social, marketing, advertising, communications and support is all under one roof, Cervone said, and the agencies are working together with greater effectiveness.

Companies at a critical juncture in the change process want partners who can drive a relevant, incisive point of view to help navigate the here and now.

"An agency like that isn't thinking about annual programs and budgets," said D'Angelo. "Those are almost quaint notions. It's almost like, 'We're going to get through this thing, and then we're going to run like hell to get through the next thing.'"


john lund/ photodisc

> "Companies at a critical juncture in the change process want partners who can drive a relevant, incisive point of view to help navigate the here and now."

Weisman thinks agencies suffer today because there isn't a bench of experienced professionals. He said agencies need a stable of racehorses, with strong leadership inside to coordinate it. "You have to naturally want to collaborate," he said. "You need an overdose of the collaboration gene."

D'Angelo believes that clients need programs pointed squarely at organizational outcomes. "We can debate the billions of tactics and delivery systems," he said, "but if they're not pointed at organizational outcomes integrated with what we're doing to support an organization, then I think we're sort of making noise."

Conagra's Harris worries about the diminished role of the corporate communications function as CMOs take on greater oversight for all marketing services and communications.

"We owned content at one time," Harris said. "Then, when the advertising function declined, everybody wanted to do what we do. We owned the brand and reputation, but we've relinquished it over time, too. We're spending more of our time creating loyalty for our work. We're playing in a much different sandbox."

And with the entry of consulting

firms in the communications profession, that sandbox is becoming smaller.

04 Space between creative firms, consultancies has converged.

Imagine for a moment you're leading an agency team into a big pitch. On most days, you prepare to compete against your brethren in public relations or advertising, but today is different: Your team is competing against a new division of a major newspaper whose declining revenues forced the company into the brand journalism content generation.

D'Angelo heard this tale from the agency leader who competed in that "bake-off," and it caused him to consider the implications of the new field of competitors in our profession. "How would you like to go into a pitch, and you could be up against a major newspaper or a Hollywood producer?"

Iwata said the trend of nontraditional firms like McKinsey, Deloitte Digital, Accenture Interactive, PwC Digital Services, IBM iX and others moving into the agency space will surely accelerate as these firms leverage existing clients and exploit C-suite relationships, where they've historically supplied accounting or consulting services.

Sir Alan Parker, chairman, Brunswick Group, London, has led global teams squaring off against these new competitors. He's more sanguine about the true abilities of consultancies when a client's reputation is at stake. "Communications is really our 'taproot,'" Parker said. "It's a live business. Strategy and consulting are not live. Markets are live, and media are live. McKinsey can't stop the clock for 90 days to come back with a 300-page deck to tell you what you need to do. We get the call and might have 90 minutes to prepare what we need to say."

What is perceived as a threat for some, however, may be an opportunity for the next generation of communicators.

"The good news for people entering the profession is, you can fight from a number of different angles," said Weisman. "You can go to work at Facebook or Google. You could go straight to clients. Or you could go to a social media shop like VaynerMedia, where they write their own code and buy their own technology. Or IBM, Accenture or Deloitte. Or Hearts & Science, the most successful agency in the last five years because it's run by data guys. The other choice is to be a pure-play creative shop."

In the end, however, Weisman said that the digital operation is still "the tail on the consulting dog — and the world's greatest creative talent doesn't work there yet."

05 Accountability is critical to our credibility and success.

It was a momentous time in January 2018 when Alex Taylor, great-grandson of Cox Enterprises founder James Cox, was named CEO. In the days that followed, Taylor began laying out his agenda, and Bob Jimenez, senior vice president, corporate communications and administrative services, was at the center of activity as Taylor sought guidance on a range of issues.

At Atlanta-based Cox, as in other major companies, executive leaders often sit in a bubble; they don't necessarily have the benefit of hearing all that is going on inside an organization or externally. Jimenez said his leaders expect the communications team to provide insights on what might occur, counsel when something erupts and to have an informed point of view on the possible implications an issue may have on the business.

"Above all, they expect us to be accountable," Jimenez said.

Weisman agrees: "You can't go a day without a question from the CEO or the board saying, 'Prove to me that it worked.' We grew up in an industry where we could say, 'Fifty percent of advertising doesn't work… I just wish I knew which 50 percent!' You can't say that anymore. You *do* know. If you don't, your competitors have the answer."

06 Data is at the core of everything we do.

Modern marketing has become a mash-up between the CMO and the CTO: Those ascending the ranks through strict technology offerings tend to be data scientists, computer scientists, architects or engineers, who don't behave like marketers. On the flip side, CMOs are suddenly being asked to justify major capital expenditures for data-management platforms, software and ad tech that boards of directors were unaccustomed to approving.

"You've got this overlap," said Weisman. "What's the CTO's role and what's the CMO's role?"

Iwata likens data to instrumentation. "With the rise of digital, marketers and communicators can actually capture and understand what's happening right now, what people are saying, doing, looking for, and what they like and dislike," he said. "That's phenomenally valuable data that we can act on, and I don't think we're using enough of it to understand stakeholders."

07 Convergence is the new ROI.

Boundaries between traditional marketing and communications are disappearing. Companies like IBM, Conagra, Tenneco and Cox have undergone radical shifts in their business portfolios through mergers, acquisitions and spinoffs, or they've entered more complex markets, requiring new corporate positioning for reputation management. Senior executives need a cohesive approach to effectively reach stakeholders through an explosion of media channels.

At IBM, Iwata championed original content development, the adoption of new platforms and channels and the use of data analytics. "We sometimes hear about these in pieces, but more-advanced organizations think about these three things as integrated," he said. "Modern workforces use mobile, they use social and they consume content in all the modern ways. Inside, outside, the same kind of mechanisms are needed."

With the explosion of growth at Cox, Jimenez recognizes the benefits of convergence: "We've integrated our communications team into one team with one leader. We've created this very robust content development and channels team that is producing content that can be used across multiple channels and multiple audiences. They are a machine. It's a beautiful thing. We have this stable of writers now. And this is where we're heading."

Parker has contemplated the convergence of advertising, marketing and communications, and the type of professionals who will succeed. "There are some people who are born as natural general counselors," he said, "but they've probably come up through the firm as a specialist. The great difference today is that a specialist has to see themselves as bringing the whole of the firm to the client, and the whole of the client to the firm."

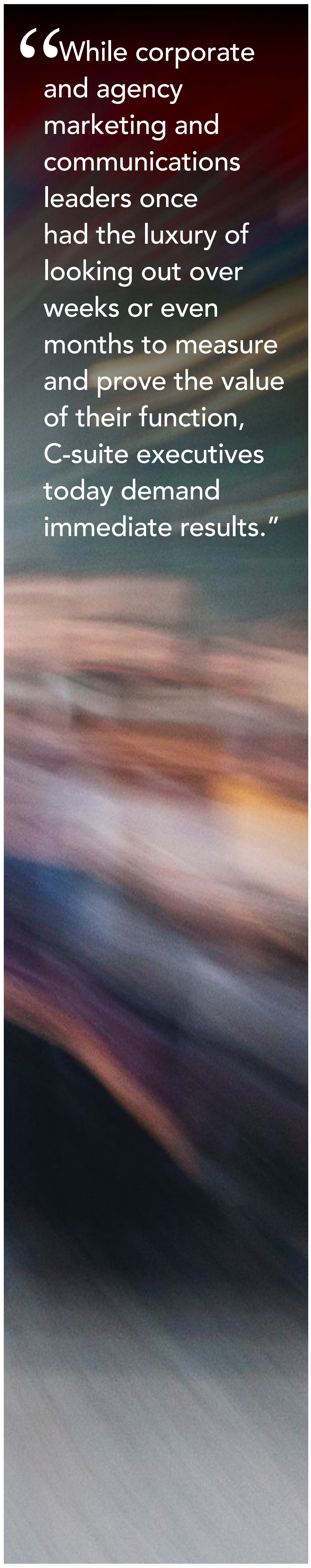
One challenge to becoming convergent is turf wars in the C-suite. The threat of collapsing the PR function under marketing strikes fear among many. "For some reason, people in the PR business are scared to death to be connected with anything other than being in the PR business," said Michael Meath, interim chair and professor, public relations, at Syracuse's Newhouse School.

> "One challenge to becoming convergent is turf wars in the C-suite. The threat of collapsing the PR function under marketing strikes fear among many."

Conagra's Harris is more direct: "Our industry is at the mercy of marketing. Actually, at some point I see brand communication moving over to marketing. Marketing has bigger budgets. The CMO and chief growth officer have more influence than we have."

The biggest challenge to convergence, however, may come from the academy, where educators are digging in to protect the advertising and PR silos they've created over many years.

"I can't tell you how many times … I get into this discussion and people are saying, 'Well, that's just advertising, and we have to define ourselves and stand up for our identity here,'" Meath said. "If our faculty have this attitude, we're not going to be able to do anything with our students to help them view the world in a broader sense."



Keith Burton, principal, Grayson Emmett Partners, Chicago, is recognized as one of the world's leading employee communication consultants. He has been a PRSA member since 1984 and is Chairman of the Board of Advisors for the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations and is a trustee of the Institute for Public Relations.

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Clearing the Path

Leadership Advice for Emerging PR Pros

By Susan Young

Communication and self-confidence are timeless cornerstones of success. Here are 10 tips for developing those skills, so newcomers to the PR profession can thrive and become leaders in our quickly changing world:

• **Know how to connect PR metrics to business outcomes.** Professional communicators mustn't be intimidated by statistics and numbers. After all, bosses — and clients — want us to demonstrate our knowledge and interest in business outcomes. You must be able to connect your work and communications campaigns to revenue. Learn how to formulate hypotheses about the impact of your work and follow up with visually appealing one-page reports that include supporting data and next steps.

To get noticed, show stakeholders that you respect their time — and that *you took the time* to extract important highlights from your communications metrics. Rather than just bringing a binder stuffed with spreadsheets to a meeting, break the data down into easily understood visual nuggets such as charts or bar graphs. Busy executives appreciate this practice — called data visualization — because the brevity and clarity it provides helps them glean insights and ask follow-up questions. Be prepared to respond with supporting information. Another benefit of data visualization is that it helps you develop your own critical-thinking and oratory skills.

• **Practice self-awareness.** Too often, leaders mistakenly believe they are communicating with respect and kindness. Introspection often reveals this belief as self-deluding. Left unchecked, it can poison the performance and behaviors of others.

In its book "Leadership and Self-Deception," the Arbinger Institute, a management-training and consulting company, posits there are two kinds of people: those who are "inside the box," and those who are "outside the box."

"Inside the box" types have distorted views of themselves and others. They treat people as objects that don't have feelings. This absence of empathy and emotional intelligence reveals itself in subtle signs of disrespect, such as brusque responses or lack of eye contact. When two "inside the box" people try to communicate or negotiate with each other, a positive outcome is unlikely.

Conversely, "outside the box" executives are thoughtful, considerate and attentive. They treat people — including strangers — with kindness.

• **Be curious.** As television journalist Diane Sawyer says, "Wake up curious." Get out of bed every morning with a renewed sense of excitement for what the day will bring. This childlike trait will serve you well throughout your life.

"Too often, leaders mistakenly believe they are communicating with respect and kindness. Introspection often reveals this belief as self-deluding."

Remember that people and stories are not always what they appear to be. Your willingness to ask questions and listen to uncover what lies beneath will give you fresh perspectives and enthusiasm. When you approach every day with an open mind and heart, you also bond emotionally with people. That's the beauty of being human.

• **Avoid "time traveling."** There is immense value in being fully present and engaged. My mantra is: "Wherever my feet are, my head is." Learn to control the relentless internal chatter that can turn people into "time travelers," lost in the past or anxious about the future. When we quiet our minds — as in meditation, mindfulness or yoga — we stop depriving ourselves of whatever lies right in front of us.

For example, if you daydream during a meeting with a prospective client, then you'll likely miss something that could have helped you land the contract. But when you're fully present and listening, you'll ask quality questions and connect with others on a deeper level.

• **Cultivate your public-speaking skills.** Savvy leaders feel comfortable talking to small groups or packed auditoriums. Forget the excuse that you're an introvert; if you aspire to be a leader, get out of your own way. Start speaking up at meetings, on video calls and at networking events. Pay attention to successful presenters and note their styles, charisma and delivery. Also dissect the performance of subpar speakers and why they fall flat. Developing your own public-speaking techniques requires practice, trial and error, and a thick skin.

• **Craft powerful introductions about yourself.** A business acquaintance who owns a tech-marketing consultancy recently told me that for years she was humiliated because she — and her company — had an identity crisis. "I have an MBA, but I couldn't explain to people what I do," she said. I coached her to find the right words to describe herself and her business, in the right order, at the right time, for the right audiences.

Intriguing introductions spark curiosity and move conversations forward. Make yourself memorable and compelling so folks will hire you or refer business to you. If you find yourself in an elevator with the CEO, what will you say? Be prepared.

• **Offer meaningful comments online.** Yes, people do want to know your opinions. Prerequisites for writing a thoughtful comment (as opposed to the generic "Great post!") are that you take the time to read the other person's statement, think about it, formulate an opinion and add to the dialogue. When we comment on social media posts, we improve our own outreach, along with our writing and critical-thinking skills. Above all, we invite differing opinions and open ourselves to new perspectives and ideas.

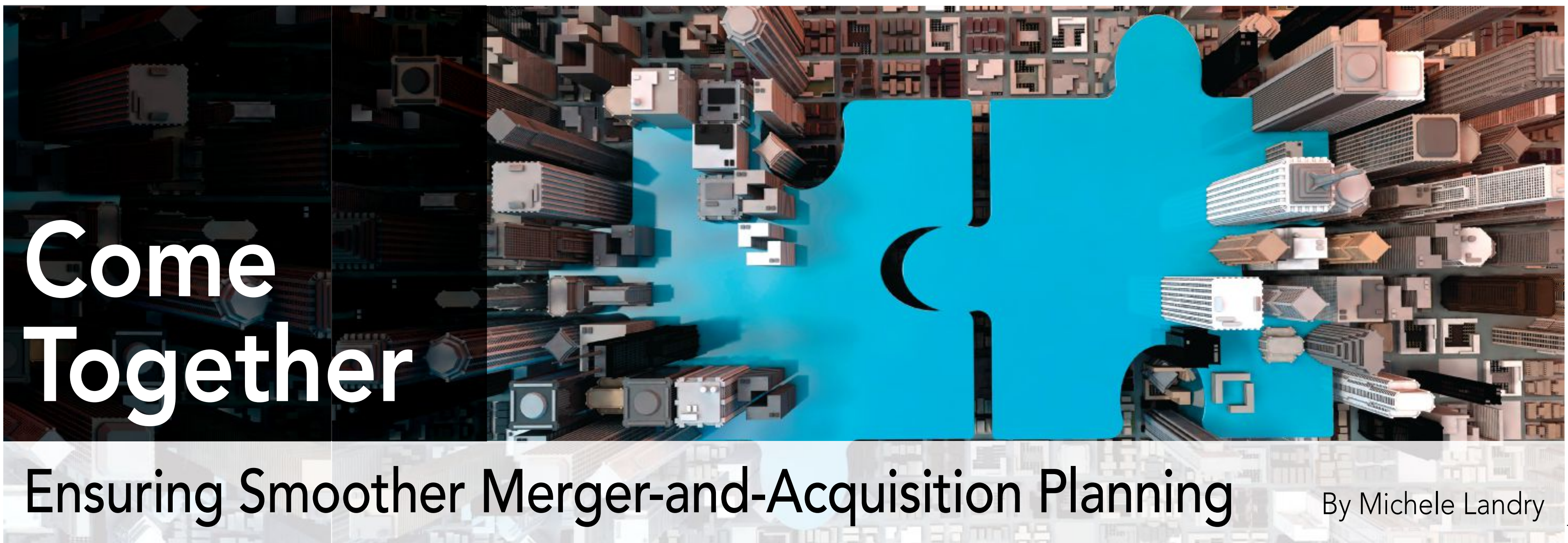
• **Understand the fine art of charisma.** Charisma is defined as magnetism, charm, allure and appeal. Charismatic people have a lighthearted sense of humor that draws others to them, both online and in real life. They also have an uncanny way of building rapport, trust and influence. To cultivate relationships, remember that your presence affects your prosperity. People must know who you are and what you do. If there's any doubt or confusion, they will go elsewhere, probably to your competition. Does your personality need refining?

• **Know when to shut up.** My grandmother — who lived to be 95 years old — wasn't educated, but she was a wise woman. She gave me one of the most important communication lessons I have ever learned.

When my husband and I got married, my grandmother told me: "Know when to speak up and when to shut up." I soon realized this sage advice applies outside the home, too. Not every remark, question or comment that someone makes requires a response. Silence is often more powerful than words, and can keep you out of trouble.

• **Develop positive daily routines.** Human beings are creatures of habit. Successful people stick to schedules that prime them for success. Many executives wake up early and incorporate exercise, meditation or reading into their daily routines. Oprah Winfrey says she jots down what she's grateful for in a "gratitude journal," and that this simple habit has changed her life. Nurturing your physical, emotional and spiritual growth every day will help you develop a positive attitude that leads to your success. Ask anyone you admire and respect about their habits, and they will undoubtedly share similar regimens.

Susan Young, CEO of Get in Front Communications, is an award-winning news reporter, PR entrepreneur, storyteller and speaker. She is the manager and facilitator of Communication Nation on Facebook.



Come Together

Ensuring Smoother Merger-and-Acquisition Planning

By Michele Landry

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When companies plan mergers or acquisitions, they often overlook communications, leaving it as the last function brought into the fold. But how well the story of the deal is communicated can impact the return on investment.

The right communications strategy, messaging and execution for a merger or acquisition help boost stock prices and investor confidence, gain customer acceptance and increase employee morale. But when communications are not carried out properly, these same factors can spiral out of control and undermine the deal.

I've been fortunate to be part of the due diligence process for acquisitions, and have had the opportunity to influence those teams on the importance of communications and preparing in advance. I've also observed what happens when the communications team isn't notified until right before a merger or acquisition is announced: They're given no time to consider all the stakeholders the deal will affect — usually resulting in confused and panicked employees, negative press coverage and audiences left uninformed about the deal's value.

Here are some tips to help you develop and execute engaging communications at every step of a company merger or acquisition, from when the deal is first announced to when its integration activities are complete:

Plan messages.

Work with executives and your company's integration-management office to start planning communications well in advance of when the merger or acquisition will be announced. A well-thought-out plan and proactive messaging can determine whether your audiences will accept the acquisition. Communications should support the rationale and overall business strategy behind the merger or acquisition.

In your communications, consider incorporating elements of the vision, values, brand strategy and positioning of the company being acquired. This goes a long way toward winning over that company's customers and employees. Evaluate what you want the new, combined company to stand for and the experience that others will have with the business, and then develop an appropriate brand-transition plan.

It's important to create messaging narratives for each audience — such as employees, customers, partners, investors, press, suppliers, union reps, lawmakers and regulators. Communications should help all of them understand the deal's strategic value, its reason and how it will affect them. Once you've created narratives for each audience, the messaging can also be used by the leadership team, spokespersons and managers.

> "A well-thought-out plan and proactive messaging can determine whether your audiences will accept the acquisition."

Align strategies and involve employees.

Companies involved in a merger or acquisition need to align their media strategies. Allow enough time to connect the respective PR teams, so they can decide how they want to announce the deal.

You might conclude the best strategy is to provide an exclusive story to a top-tier media outlet. But this approach could mean that other important media organizations don't cover the announcement at all. Before deciding on the PR strategy for announcing the acquisition and merger, make sure you understand both companies' goals.

At my firm, we recently decided to work closely with local media to announce that a Chinese company was acquiring two manufacturing plants in the United States. The company needed the support of local communities and did not want national media attention for the story.

Employees are the key to any successful integration, so make them feel empowered and part of the process. Solicit their input early so you can develop a baseline of employee perceptions, concerns and opportunities. Soon after the acquisition closes, conduct another survey of employee attitudes and perceptions.

To engage employees, also partner with your information technology and human resources departments. Before and after a merger or acquisition, the communications team should work with HR and IT to issue frequent communications to employees. Written forms such as newsletters and memos can help, but whenever possible, in-person communication is still the best method. Arm and train managers with tools they need to answer employee questions and minimize rumors.

Combine digital assets.

It's difficult to imagine how many webpages will need to be revised to reflect the stories of the combined companies, so it's best to create a phased approach to integrating digital assets such as websites and social media accounts. Linking sites and accounts and creating promotional banners about the merger are good first steps.

Once the two companies start integrating, decide on a common website platform, user interface and design. Assemble a team that will inventory content, create a site map, and decide what to change for the new website and when. Your social media channels and accounts can also be slowly integrated to bring old followers to the new platforms, before the old accounts are removed.

Plan Day-1 actions.

Once the merger or acquisition has been announced, hold regular planning sessions to develop Day-1 actions and a longer-term plan. Meet with other departments proactively to understand their plans and milestones. Doing so will help ensure a coordinated and timely delivery of the various communications leading up to, during and after the integration phase. These communications will cover a wide range of activities and purposes, such as external investor conferences and meetings, managing customer expectations and experience, providing the sales team with materials they need, and making sure employees receive information that empowers and motivates them.

You'll also have to decide what the communications function will look like on Day 1 of the new company. Determine which communication vendors and tools are duplicates and therefore redundant. These decisions should be thoughtful and made with the combined company in mind. Remember that the acquiring company's resources might not be best for the new organization.

Understand risks and assign accountability.

Scenario planning will help you foresee possible risks and issues for both companies. It's important to be prepared with action plans and holding statements, in case those scenarios should arise after the merger.

Finally, determine accountability for your integration communications. Assign an internal owner and/or hire additional short-term help from outside the company to oversee and execute integration communications. That way, you'll protect the existing team from becoming sidetracked, overburdened or slowed down by the company's normal, day-to-day operations.

With global and U.S. merger and acquisition activity hitting an all-time high during the first half of 2018, communications teams in industries ripe for M&A activity — such as adtech, blockchain and fintech — should start engaging with their leadership teams to plan early for successful deal announcements and integrations.

Michele Landry is principal of Tanis Communications and leads its M&A practice. She has helped lead communication strategy and execution for several mergers and acquisitions.

Insights

- Writing
- Brainstorming
- Client Relations


phil ashley/Stone

Hard to Say Goodbye: How to Manage the Departure of a Well-Liked Employee

As a manager, how you handle the resignation of a well-liked employee will influence whether that person's departure becomes an isolated incident or starts a downward trend for your team.

In a recent *Harvard Business Review* piece, contributor Liane Davey suggests processing your own reaction before sharing the news. If you move too quickly and try to communicate a positive message while still harboring anxiety, frustration or bitterness, then those emotions will show in your body language.

Once you've reflected on your own reaction and shared the news, don't minimize the moment. Throw a party to wish the person well. Say a few words about what he or she has done for the team. To show your appreciation and strengthen the bond among those who remain, laugh about your shared experiences.

After the party, ask the departing employee what you can learn from his or her decision. Even if your organization has a formal process for exit interviews, conduct your own. Ask generic rather than personal questions, so the departing employee will feel more inclined to share any uncomfortable truths. Be ready to take lumps.

Take a night to sleep on the feedback you receive, and then share your conclusions with your team. Ask for their insights. Notice when their language suggests frustration ("We always do this" or "We never do that") or powerlessness ("I think sometimes we might …"). Listen closely. Be open about what you can do differently. — *Greg Beaubien*

#Writing

How Fake Benefits Fail Both Readers and Communicators

By Ann Wylie

When a hotel soap wrapper tells its user to "Clean your face," I want to respond: "No, YOU clean YOUR face!"

Recently, I've seen a lot of fake benefits messages like these, which sound as if they convey the benefits of using a product but really don't.

These fake benefits mirror the structure of benefits messages — "if you do this, then you'll be better in some way" — but not their spirit.

To move someone to buy or do something, you'll want to avoid them at all costs. Here's how readers can spot these messages, and how communicators can amend them.

> ## Get the Word Out
>
> Would you like to learn more techniques for writing benefits statements that move readers to act? If so, please join PRSA and Ann Wylie at **Catch Your Readers** — a two-day Master Class on April 10–11 in Dallas. PRSA members: Save $100 with coupon code PRSA18. APRs: Earn four maintenance points.

1. No actual benefits

Yesterday, I received an email with this subject line: "Learn more about New Media Gateway."

While this looks like an actual benefits statement — it starts with a verb and the implied "you," after all — it's really a fake. How do I know this? Its real subject is not the reader, but the communicator's organization.

Instead of using your verb to point to your product, service, program or idea, write about what readers can do with your product, service, program or idea.

atrodesigner

2. Vague, congratulatory statements

If you're trying to spot a fake benefits message, then ask yourself this question: "Does it feel like I just won an award?"

Rather than tell the reader how their life will improve if they use a product or purchase a service, organizations often rely on vague statements that try to make you feel special for making a purchase:

- "Congratulations on choosing us."
- "Reap many rewards."
- "Rely on our 75 years of experience."
- "Value the attention we pay to detail."
- "Appreciate our dedication to accuracy."

Though these statements may imply a positive effect, they are hollow. Instead, write about how a reader's life will be different because they chose you.

3. Use of imperative voice

In high school, we learned that the imperative voice is also the command voice: *Go to your room. Make your bed. Take out the trash.*

For organizations hoping to inspire action with their communications, don't command — invite: *Save money. Make money. Save time. Avoid effort.*

This is because the command voice often involves tasks:

- "Take our class."
- "Stop by our booth."
- "Attend our conference."
- "Subscribe to our e-zine."
- "Sign up for our webinar."

Rather than tell readers what to do, let them know what they'll get when they do it:

- "Learn to double your income when you take our class."
- "Get a chance at a free Apple Watch when you stop by our booth."
- "Network with peers — and maybe even meet your next boss — when you attend our conference."

The hardest part of crafting a benefits statement is, ironically, finding the benefit. So, dig in. Think. Don't be satisfied with a statement like "Get our feature." Learn enough about both the subject you're writing about and your target audience to determine what the former will do for the latter.

Remember what you learned in kindergarten: When you cheat, you only hurt yourself. But when you cheat on benefits statements, you hurt yourself, your readers and your organization. ❖

Ann Wylie (WylieComm.com) works with communicators who want to reach more readers and with organizations that want to get the word out. To learn more about her training, consulting or writing and editing services, contact her at ann@WylieComm.com.

#MediaRelations

A Simple Trick to Personalizing Pitches on a Tight Deadline

By Michael Smart

The timeless, endless struggle continues: You, the savvy and realistic PR pro, know it's better to approach fewer targets with more personalized pitches. But your boss or client keeps pushing you to bombard many more contacts with generic outreach.

To them, it's quantity over quality, like direct marketing. If 10 is good, then 100 is better, right? You disagree — if you didn't, then you wouldn't keep reading my stories, where I emphasize customization until my fingers get sore.

But because your boss is the one signing the checks, you need to respect their request.

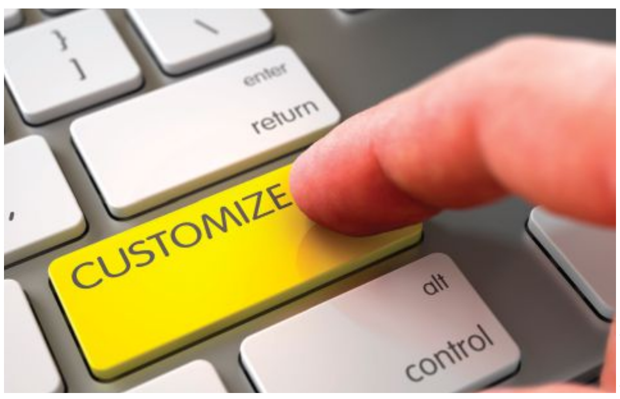
Here's a decent compromise when they demand you pitch more contacts than you can properly research and customize for: Begin your pitch with "I know you cover ..."

This simple step gets you closer to preventing the No. 1 complaint from media about PR pros. They say, "They don't know what I cover and their outreach is irrelevant to me." So the more specific your opening line, the more effective it is.

"I know you cover new password managers" is more convincing than "I know you cover consumer technology." Be more precise than most of your competitors who merely rely on media databases for beat information.

Another example: "I know you cover the struggles of working moms to balance their home life and career." This is a specific and safe opening hook that should interest most workplace/careers reporters.

After this one-line intro, transition into how your pitch relates to this subject area, in one sentence. After that, pivot to your one-paragraph story idea, then your call to action, and you're done.



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The precise phrasing isn't the point: "I know you're into …," "I see you cover …," and "I see you're interested in …" all fulfill the same purpose. You're striving toward the ideal of personalization while working under the burden of a reality where you don't have time to achieve that ideal.

I was doing a phone-pitching training with a consumer PR firm and we found that this approach also tightened up their phone pitches and built a stronger connection with journalists right away.

Use this simple hack to get results even when bosses don't give you the license to apply your expertise. Then, after you've built a track record of unassailable success, good managers will give you autonomy to work how you want and where you want, because they know you'll deliver. ❖

Michael Smart teaches PR professionals how to dramatically increase their positive media placements. He's engaged regularly by organizations like General Motors, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Georgia Tech to help their media relations teams reach new levels of success.

#Brainstorming

What's the Big Idea?

The Case for Questioning Grand Concepts

By Melissa K. Flynn, APR

I love big ideas. I live for those shoot-for-the-moon concepts that get everyone excited to act. Or even those smaller ideas that pop up mid-meeting and seem — at first blush, anyway — to finally fix an issue that's been dragging on too long: "Let's just place an advertorial and write an op-ed to change the dialogue — they're simple and relatively inexpensive. Who's in?" Or my PR big-win favorite: "We should take over Times Square with mascots and product samples — let's own the biggest media market for a day!"

OK, I'm being sarcastic. To be fair, there's nothing wrong with any idea that inspires a team or that tries to solve tough problems. After all, we *should* be solutions-oriented. But the question I always find myself asking — and which I'll soon have emblazoned on a T-shirt — is "Great idea, but to what end?"

Call me a wet blanket if you must. Then again, perhaps we should all wear the "wet blanket" label like a badge of honor when we ask the questions that strong PR professionals need to ask — those cemented in the business implications of our communications campaigns.

For example, let's say we issue a press release that announces, "Watch Out: Bears Are Taking Over Times Square!" And then we have dancing-bear mascots offer free packets of gummy-bear vitamins to passers-by. We interact with tons of consumers. But will the event accomplish our client's business goal? What's the return-on-investment for that Times Square takeover? Dollar for dollar, will it move product and create awareness more effectively than grass-roots outreach to health stores and health media would?

I'm not sure, but the onus is on us as PR professionals to question our big ideas — and frankly, to question *any* ideas that arise, to make sure we're not acting merely on excitement, but also on behalf of business objectives.

Step 1: To avoid a tactical free-for-all, ask tough questions.

When money is at stake — and we all have budgets — we must ask tough questions. It's too easy to settle for the new, shiny idea. PR people often get a bad rap because our ideas don't offer meaningful, measurable results.

For example (and I'll bet you've sat in this exact meeting), your client will soon launch a new product or service, and the discussion starts with someone asking about the best way to "get the word out" to target audiences so they're aware of the new product and will consider buying it, or they'll spread the word vocally or online. Immediately, the team in the meeting dives into tactics — asking what kind of news release should be written and when, how best to engage people online, what media outlets and resources to tap first, and how to ensure the launch is seamless and timed just right if the company is global.

At that exact moment — when that discussion starts — is when we, as seasoned PR practitioners, should engage the team to question the "why" and "what" of the situation. *Why* is our company or client introducing this new product? *What* are the business objectives? With these questions on the table, the discussion will take a different, more strategic path, versus a tactical free-for-all.

Step 2: Determine whether the "big idea" can be improved in some business-driven way.

Now you're midway through a thoughtful strategic-planning session for the new product. Someone throws out a big idea that gets everyone around the table buzzing. They start brainstorming *how* it's going to happen, *who* needs to be involved, etc. Nine times out of 10, business imperatives and metrics are lost in the discussion.

> "When money is at stake — and we all have budgets — we must ask tough questions. It's too easy to settle for the new, shiny idea."

Everyone else is excited about the idea, and perhaps you recognize that elements of it do have merit. Rather than immediately becoming the soggy blanket that spoils the fun, consider how the idea could be modified to fulfill business needs. For example, could a suggestion that your client ring the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange be tweaked so that it connects to a more meaningful story about the new product or service, which will then be shared through a series of media interviews and regional grass-roots efforts? To help evolve it into something that delivers more impact, look for objective-driven nuggets within the big idea.

peshkova

Step 3: Determine how you will measure the campaign's success.

PR practitioners often preach that measurement is the missing piece in communications plans. We tend to jump into action first, realizing halfway through the campaign for that new product or service that we haven't included a way to measure its success. Metrics wind up being retrofitted to the campaign, rather than driven by business goals.

The good news is that you can be the one who improves this flawed approach. Ask the team upfront how the campaign's success will be defined. I regularly find myself asking: "What will a win look like?" This is followed by: "Great, now how will we know when we've hit the mark?"

For instance, could the team create messaging for company leadership to deliver that would later be used to measure the effectiveness of media relations, based on whether the message was included in news coverage? How about conducting research on the front end to benchmark public awareness of the product or service, and then replicating that research after the launch to determine whether awareness has increased?

You can be the PR professional who makes a difference by paying attention to the bottom line. Ideas are only as good as the results they create, so be bold and wear the T-shirt that asks: "Great idea, but to what end?" ❖

Melissa K. Flynn, APR, is principal at Melissa Flynn Public Relations & Marketing and a relentless strategist with more than two decades of experience at some of the country's top PR and ad agencies. Reach her at melissa@melissaflynnpr.com.

#ClientRelations

A Modest Proposal

How the Co-Creation Process Helps Work With Clients

By Craig Severinsen

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You've spent hours crafting the perfect proposal for that client you know is the ideal fit for your services. It was a painstaking process, and now — after a few final touches — you press "send" to launch your finely crafted email and attached proposal into cyberspace. You have no doubt the client is waiting with bated breath for your email and will instantly respond by saying that not only is this the perfect proposal, but they want you to start work immediately.

But then weeks pass without any word from the client. You've followed up several times, but haven't heard back. Finally, months after sending the proposal, you get them on the phone, only to learn they've hired a different agency.

Unfortunately, this is the reality of proposals. They typically require too much time for too few results.

It's no secret that proposals are among the most frustrating ways to acquire new clients. You've probably heard (or experienced) horror stories, ranging from clients who go silent to shady comms managers who steal your ideas. However, there are some instances in which submitting a proposal is the right move. With a little know-how, you can overcome many of the major problems of proposals.

> "It's no secret that proposals are among the most frustrating ways to acquire new clients. You've probably heard (or experienced) horror stories, ranging from clients who go silent to shady comms managers who steal your ideas."

When to use proposals

The majority of your potential clients won't need proposals, because they're less concerned with *how* you accomplish your goal (assuming you act ethically and with integrity), than with achieving a certain result.

If your communications practice focuses on a specific client niche, then most of the people in that specialty are going to need similar services. That's why a pre-built package of services, rather than a proposal, is the easiest and most direct path to a sale for most clients.

You can customize the package for a potential client's particular needs. However, there's a big difference between "customizable" and "custom" — which is the first of two reasons why submitting proposals is sometimes the better approach.

When you're building a custom service program from scratch for a client (as opposed to customizing an existing package), you'll need a proposal to outline the scope of work, goals and investment required. Remember that a custom package should demand a premium price.

Submitting a proposal is also the better approach when the sale represents a significant investment for the client. What exactly "significant investment" means will vary from industry to industry and from client to client. For a small business, $10,000 may be a huge investment, while a Fortune 100 corporation would add a few zeros to that number. When purchasing your services involves significant investments, proposals give clients security and tangibility.

For most PR practitioners, these two reasons for using a proposal will coincide: Custom packages usually also require significant investments for the client.

How to co-create a proposal

Typically, proposals present a few major problems for those writing them: They take too much time, and prospective clients sometimes don't respond. But when we can solve those problems, proposals become a much more effective tool for acquiring clients. Luckily, the answer lies in simply co-creating the proposal with the potential client.

Before you create a proposal, ask the client some direct questions, and for their buy-in to your ideas. You're probably already having some sort of sales or exploratory conversation with prospects before creating proposals, but you can add the co-creation process to the discussion.

Once it's been established that the client is interested in your services and requires a proposal, you might say something like, "I'll need to put a proposal together for this project. Do you mind if we walk through some of those items right now?"

Go over the project's goals, situation analysis, strategies, tactics and budget with the prospective client. Doing so will make your proposal much more effective for three reasons:

1. You will focus on the client's most important items. This is because they've told you what those things are.

2. You're more likely to get buy-in. The potential client will appreciate your bringing them into the creation process.

3. You'll know exactly how much the client wants to spend. You can still try and push that budget a little, but they won't suffer sticker shock later on, because you've discussed the subject before setting a price.

Walking through this co-creation process with a client will take you about five to 10 minutes, and then you'll have the majority of the ingredients you need for your proposal.

Schedule another meeting to review the completed proposal with the client within the next few days after the conversation. Let them know you'll be working on the proposal and won't give it to them until the meeting. That way, you can go through the plan together and receive an answer from the client immediately. This second meeting is your opportunity to close the sale.

With a little practice, this method will help you create proposals in minutes instead of hours, and hear back from prospective clients in days instead of weeks, months or never. ❖

Craig Severinsen works with PR pros to help them land more clients, faster than they think possible. Find more about Severinsen and his coaching/consulting programs at BrightWorksPR.com. Email him at Craig@BrightWorksPR.com or connect with him on LinkedIn.

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How to Tell Your Organization's Story to Get Media Coverage

Matt Charles, DPA, APR, president, Matt Charles Public Relations
Jan. 29, 3–4 p.m. ET

How Curiosity and Attention Drive PR Outcomes

Susan Young, CEO, Get in Front Communications, Inc.
Feb. 21, 3–4 p.m. ET

Survival Planning
Busting Silos, Breaking Bad Habits and Embracing Your Heresy in Order to Return to Growth

Joseph Jaffe, admiral, The HMS Beagle
Feb. 26, 3–4 p.m. ET

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Michael Smart, principal, MichaelSMARTPR
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— Ann Wylie, President
Wylie Communications, Inc.

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Profiles in PR

PRSA Chair Debra Peterson on the Year Ahead

Q What do you consider the biggest challenges ahead for the profession — and PRSA?

A For our profession as well as for PRSA, we have several key challenges:

- Navigating the impact of rapid technological change, disruption and innovation
- Playing a leadership role in creating and sustaining respectful discourse in society at large
- Ensuring our profession is viewed as key to organizational leadership and success
- Keeping PR professionals and leaders from all sectors engaged at all levels of PRSA
- Building on our diversity and inclusion efforts.

As the nation's largest professional organization serving the communications community, we can partner with other organizations to help address some of these challenges. In addition, PRSA can help its members not only stay abreast of myriad changes, but also provide learning and networking opportunities that help members in their daily work and future career growth.

Just as communications professionals need to understand financial, operational and leadership concepts, we must also understand how technology impacts our organizations. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, virtual and augmented reality and big data are all examples of how technology and innovation are impacting us and will continue to do so even more in the future. It is critical PRSA stays ahead of every innovation and disruption and equips our members to thrive in this rapidly changing environment.

Q What do you consider to be the main values of a PRSA membership? How do you plan on building on that value?

A I'd highlight several areas:

1. Continuing to demonstrate how our Code of Ethics is more than words; it is a living document that is highly integrated in our careers.
2. Expanding Professional Development to make it even more top of mind and readily accessible.
3. Enhancing the opportunities for networking and engagement for each member.
4. Ensuring PRSA is considered indispensable to every professional engaged in the communications profession.

I would sum up my goal for 2019 in one word: growth. This includes membership growth, growth in our professional development opportunities, growth in our diversity and inclusion efforts, and growth in our members' engagement with PRSA. These key topics are among those that will be discussed as we work in 2019 to develop our next three-year strategic plan.

PRSA offers its members extensive benefits, which makes membership an incredible value. I have found the most value from the people I've met through PRSA. We join PRSA because we want to learn, grow and connect. The more involved I became at PRSA, the more I enjoyed being a member and derived even more value from my membership. If you're a member who hasn't sought a volunteer opportunity with a Chapter, District, Section and/or national committee or task force, I encourage you to get involved.

We had a terrific International Conference in Austin, Texas, and I would like to build upon that success at our 2019 International Conference, to be held Oct. 20-22 in San Diego. Our committee has been hard at work for months, and we have exciting things planned.

Q Describe your leadership style.

A It's collaborative and results-oriented.

Q What are you most looking forward to in the year ahead?

A Working with a terrific group of leaders and engaging more members to produce results that benefit the profession, the professional, the organizations we work with and our students as they transition into the profession. ❖

Editor-in-Chief **John Elsasser** interviewed Debra Peterson, APR, for this month's member profile.

Name:
Debra Peterson, APR

Current job title:
Vice President — Corporate Communications, CenturyLink

Current location:
New Century, Kan.

Favorite downtime activity:
Exercise

3 dinner guests — past or present:
My two kids and my dad; he died when they were both too young to know him.

Favorite book:
"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen Covey, because the principles it espouses — honesty, integrity and fairness — are key

Favorite news sources:
Too many to name — I'm a news junkie.

Favorite words of wisdom:
My dad would say, "Into each life, a little humility must fall." It's a constant reminder that we're all equal.

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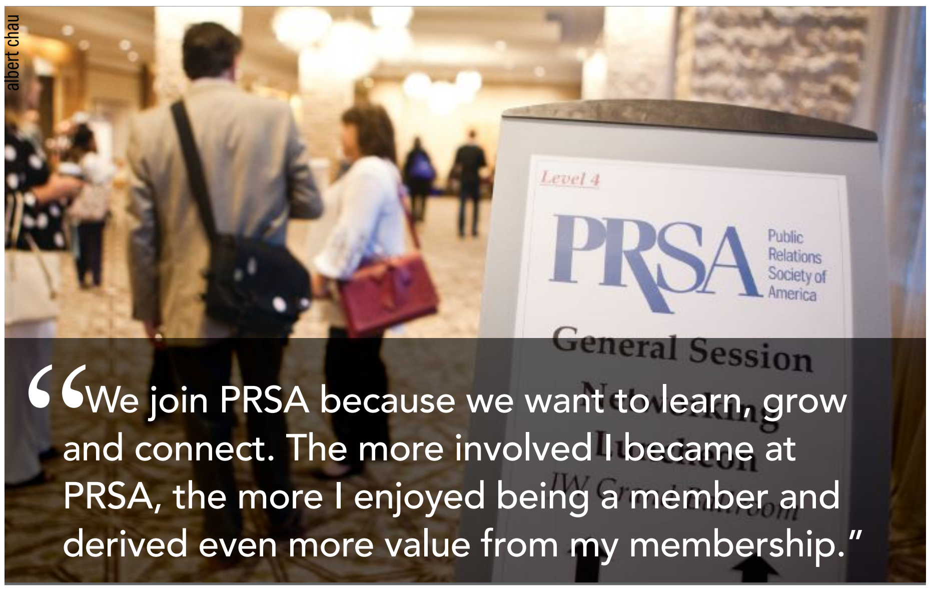

"We join PRSA because we want to learn, grow and connect. The more involved I became at PRSA, the more I enjoyed being a member and derived even more value from my membership."

What is your work-related New Year's resolution?

"My goal is to empower myself so I can make a meaningful impact on other people's lives; they win when I win. I will convert every obstacle on my path into a catalyst for something bigger and better."

—Nivedita Ramakrishnan
Los Angeles

"Seek new sources, platforms and methods to communicate the issues, interests and achievements of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, who, in many cases, have difficulty telling their own stories due to verbal and other challenges resulting from their disability."

—Anthony Hicks, APR
Memphis, Tenn.

"My 2019 resolution is to help grow the voices of diversity in my community, and on behalf of my clients, and continue to bring greater understanding of ethics into daily PR practice."

—Dianne Danowski Smith, APR, Fellow PRSA
Portland, Ore.

If you're interested in answering a future question here, then email john.elsasser@prsa.org for more information.

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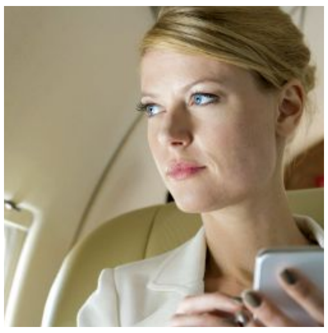

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