



Chapter Two: The History and Growth of Public Relations



How did we get here?

Major 20th century trends:

- Growth of big institutions
- Heightened public awareness and media sophistication
- Societal change, conflict, and confrontation
- Growth of global media, public opinion, and democracy
- Dominance of the Internet



Yet, PR has ancient roots

- ❖ Archaeologists have found:
 - Bulletins in Iraq, from 1800 B.C, that told farmers of the latest techniques of harvesting, and irrigating.
 - In ancient Greece the best speakers, were generally elected to leadership positions. Occasionally, aspiring Greek politicians enlisted the aid of sophists to help fight verbal battles.
 - Sophists gathered in the amphitheaters of the day to extol (praise) the virtues of particular political candidates. Thus, the sophists set the stage for today's lobbyists, who attempt to influence legislation through effective communication techniques.
 - The Romans were also masters of persuasive techniques in war. When faced with an upcoming battle, Caesar would rally public support through published pamphlets and staged events. Similarly, during WWI, a special U.S. public information committee, the Creel Committee, was formed to channel the patriotic sentiments of Americans in support of the U.S. role in the war.
 - Even the Catholic Church had a hand in the creation of public relations. In the 1600s, under the leadership of Pope Gregory XV, the church established a College of Propaganda to "help propagate (spread) the faith." in those days, the church simply wanted to inform the public about the advantages of Catholicism.

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A young democracy: Early American experience

- PR's Role in the Revolutionary War: The colonists tried to persuade King George III that they should be accorded the same rights as Englishmen. "Taxation without representation is tyranny" became their PR slogan.
- When King George refused to accede (agree) to the colonists' demands, they combined the weaponry of sword and pen.
- Samuel Adams, organized Committees of Correspondence as a kind of revolutionary Associated Press to disseminate (distribute) anti-British information throughout the colonies.
- Thomas Paine, wrote periodic pamphlets and essays (Federalist Papers) that urged the colonists to band (group) together.

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Later American Experience

- The creation of the most important document in American history, the Constitution, also owed much to PR.
- To advocate ratification (approval) of the Constitution, political leaders such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay banded together, under the pseudonym Publius, to write letters to leading newspapers. Today those letters are bound in a document called The Federalist Papers and are still used in the interpretation of the Constitution.
- Hailed (greeted) as the father of the Constitution, Madison framed (outlined) the Bill of Rights in 1791, which ultimately became the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. The first amendment safeguarded, among other things, the practice of PR: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the rights of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." In other words, people were given the right to speak up for what they believed in and the freedom to try to influence the opinions of others. Thus was the practice PR ratified.



Later American Experience: Into the 1800s

- The practice of PR continued to percolate (penetrate) in the 19th century. Among the more prominent, yet negative antecedents (backgrounds) of modern PR that took hold in the 1800s was press agentry.
- One of the most known practitioners of this art was Amos Kendall, who in 1829 served under President Andrew Jackson, as first presidential press secretary.

Kendall:

- wrote speeches
- wrote news releases
- conducted public opinion polls
- produced an administration newsletter



Later American Experience: Into the 1800s

- Most PR professionals would rather not talk about circus master P.T. Barnum as an industry pioneer. Like him or not, Barnum was a master publicist.
- In the 1800s, as owner of a major circus, Barnum generated article after article for his travelling show.
- He was respected in his time as a user of written and verbal PR techniques to further his circus.
- Barnum staged bizarre media events and generated coverage of circus performers.
- Love him or hate him, Barnum pioneered publicity techniques that are still used today.



Emergence of the Robber Barons

- The American Industrial Revolution ushered (accompanied) in many things at the turn of the century, not the least of which was the growth of PR.
- As people flocked (gathered) to cities, big business dominated industry.
- The men who ran America's industries seemed more concerned with making a profit than with improving the lot (share) of their fellow citizens.
- William Vanderbilt, J.P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller controlled the fortunes of thousands.
- Typical of the reputation acquired by this group was the famous response of Vanderbilt when questioned about the public's reaction to his closing of the NY Central Railroad: "The public be damned!"
- Seeds of discontent were sown (spread) far and wide.



Enter the Muckrakers

- When the axe fell on the robber barons, it came in the form of criticism from a feisty (aggressive) group of journalists called “muckrakers”. The “muck” (dirt) that these reporters and editors “raked” (gathered), was dredged (searched) from the supposedly scandalous operations of America’s business enterprises.
 - Upton Sinclair attacked the deplorable (disgraceful) conditions of the meatpacking industry with the novel “The Jungle”
 - Ida Tarbell wrote the “History of the Standard Oil Company”, which stripped away the public face of the nation’s leading petroleum firm.
 - Magazines such as “McClure’s” struck out systematically at one industry after another.



Ivy Lee: The father of modern public relations

- ❖ Ivy Ledbetter Lee was a former Wall Street reporter who entered PR work in 1903.

Lee:

- Disdained (despised) the press agents of the time and based his work on honesty and candor (frankness, openness)
- “The public be informed”
- Emphasized news value over ads or publicity stunts
- Believed companies must strive (attempt) to earn public confidence



The Growth of Modern Public Relations

Public relations goes to work in government

- WWI:

President Wilson creates the Creel Committee to mobilize public opinion in WWI in support of the war effort and to stimulate the sale of war bonds through Liberty Loan publicity drives (initiatives).



- WWII:

The Office of War Information was established to convey the U.S. cause at home and around the world.



The counseling era

Edward Bernays enters the field in 1913 and becomes the first true "public relations scholar."

Bernays:

- was a giant in the PR field for nearly the entire century.
- taught the first PR course at NYU in 1923
- wrote the first seminal works in public relations, including "Crystallizing Public Opinion"
- Helped pave the way for women in PR with wife Doris Fleischman



Corporations

- As 20th century rolled on, big business came back into style.
- Smart companies such as General Electric, General Motors and AT&T learned that it takes both words and actions to earn a good reputation.
- PR legend Arthur W. Page became AT&T's first public relations vice president in 1927. Page's five principles of successful corporate PR are as relevant now as they were in the 1930s:
 - To make sure management thoughtfully analyzes its overall relation to the public.
 - To create a system for informing all employees about the firm's general policies and practices.
 - To create a system giving contact employees (those having direct dealings with the public) the knowledge needed to be reasonable and polite to the public.
 - To create a system drawing employee and public questions and criticism back up through the organization to management.
 - To ensure frankness in telling the public about the company's actions.



Public relations comes of age

- PR came of age largely as a result of the confluence of five general factors:
 1. Growth of large institutions
 2. Heightened public awareness, plethora of media, publics have become more segmented, specialized, and sophisticated
 3. Increasing incidents of societal change, conflict, and confrontations
 4. Growing power of global media, public opinion and democracy
 5. Dominance of the Internet



The influence of technology

- Technological innovations, especially in communications, have led to awareness and sophistication about the world, shrinking it to what McLean predicted would be a "global village."
- Extraordinary growth and refinement of the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) that allow millions of people worldwide access to information that makes them more sophisticated citizens and consumers. Plus, with the growth of web, users of the Internet have become generators of information.

❖ Review Questions:

1. List the major trends that have helped the practice of public relations come of age in the United States of America.
2. In what ways has technology fostered evolution of modern-day public relations practice?