**Part I: Evolution**

**Chapter 1: Defining Public Relations**

# Teaching Perspective

Chapter 1 seeks to clarify the function. It explains that there is no one generally accepted definition of public relations, but rather many approaches to a definition. It explains that because of this fractured identity —the practice of public relations is often misunderstood. At the same time, in the first two decades of the 21st century, the power and value of public relations have never been greater.

But—and here is the key “*but”—*the chapter makes crystal clear that the essence of public relations lies in the ethical underpinnings of the field. Public relations, stated simply, come down to “*doing the right thing*.” And the chapter tries to reinforce to students, the importance of this thesis; that it is “*telling the truth*” that lies at the essence of public relations counsel. “*Spin*,” the chapter suggests, is antithetical to that thesis. Spin, in other words, is the “enemy” to professional public relations professionals. Teachers should work hard to hammer home this concept. That’s why beginning in Chapter 1 and continuing throughout the text, ethical cases are featured in each chapter.

The chapter also stresses the importance of public relations as a planned process to influence public opinion—one that answers to top management and deals directly with the critical publics on whom an organization depends.

The importance of candid and truthful communications instead of corporate posturing lies at the heart of the BP Oil Spill *Case Study* at the chapter end. Subject of the *From the Top* Interview at the conclusion of Chapter 1 is Harold Burson, arguably the most revered public relations practitioner in the world today.

Among topics discussed in Chapter 1 are:

Prominence of public relations

Planned process to influence public opinion

Public relations as management interpreter

Public relations as public interpreter

The publics of public relations

The functions of public relations

The sin of “spin”

Technical/attitudinal requirements for public relations work

#### PR Ethics Mini-Case: Firing the Nazi in the House of Dior

Celebrity image has become a revered commodity in the 21st century. At times, it seems the more outrageous the image, the better……that is, until a celebrity threatens to destroy an entire brand with anti-Semitic behavior.

In the spring of 2011, John Galliano, creative director of the legendary Dior fashion house, was the toast of Paris. He was a master designer in all phases of fashion, and his outrageous getups were celebrated across the international fashion community.

Given the weight of the Dior name and its role in saving the French couture industry after World War II, it was particularly ironic that in February 2011, Galliano was arrested for allegedly making anti-Semitic comments at a Paris bar.

Dior suspended Galliano on the news of his arrest, and subsequently fired him when a damning video of his behavior in the Paris bar was published.

Bottom line: no matter how talented or valuable a company’s creative director might be, the credibility and reputation of their organization is eminently more important.

**Answers:**

1. Dior could have simply reprimanded Galliano and forced him to make a public apology. Unfortunate incidents such as these can always be used as “teachable moments” and opportunities to publicly re-affirm one’s organizational values.
2. My opinion: absolutely yes. In this case, Dior officials made the right decision in electing to completely disassociate the company from Galliano, his outrageous views, and his anti-Semitic behavior.

## Discussion Starters

1. Public relations has never been more prominent. In a world linked by satellites, social media, the Internet, and cellular technology, how one communicates becomes increasingly more critical.
2. According to PRSA’s 2012 definition, “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their Publics.” Public relations can also be defined as a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication.
3. Public relations means different things to different people. It is a confusing term to most, who are unfamiliar with its functions.
4. Planning is an essential factor in effective public relations. The success of a public relations program depends on knowing the goals for which communications is intended.
5. Action, or performance, is the most critical component. You can’t have effective communications without proper performance.
6. Advertising and marketing promote products and services. Public relations promotes an entire institution.
7. Among the United Way’s most important publics are its donors, its employees, and the recipients of its charity.
8. Seven functions of public relations practice are: 1) writing, 2) planning, 3) researching, 4) publicity, 5) media relations, 6) consumer relations, and 7) government relations.
9. Effective public relations is about truth, honesty, and integrity. “Spin” is the enemy, and is to be avoided at all costs.
10. Technically, public relations professionals must have knowledge of a) the public relations field, b) communications, c) technology, d) current events, e) business and f) management. Attitudinally, public relations professionals must a) be pro-communications, b) be advocates for their organizations, c) be oriented toward counseling, d) be ethical, e) be willing to take risks, and f) be positive.

# Case Study: BP’s Loose Lips Sink Credibility Ship

On April 20, 2010, gas, oil, and concrete from the Deepwater Horizon rig unleashed an explosion that killed 11 workers and plunged the BP Corporation into the most damaging corporate public relations catastrophe in history. In the end, it cost the energy conglomerate billions of dollars, along with its corporate reputation.

As oil spewed into the Gulf of Mexico, President Barack Obama leaned heavily on the company for a quick solution. The crisis was rapidly deteriorating into a full-blown media onslaught, and nobody at BP seemed to have the foggiest idea of what to do.

Determined to prevent another *Valdez*, BP immediately: (1) stepped up to take charge of handling the spill; (2) stepped forward to pick up any “legitimate claims” associated with the Gulf spill; and (3) dispatched its young, dynamic chief executive, Tony Hayward to take charge on the ground of the Gulf oil spill.

This final decision proved to be a tragic miscalculation. Among Hayward’s most egregious public relations errors:

* He predicted a speedy conclusion to the crisis.
* He painted a perpetually upbeat picture.
* He whined that he wanted to get his life back.
* He went sailing for several days in the middle of the crisis.

Ultimately, teams were able to stop the oil leak, and the Gulf Coast was left to begin the rebuilding process. Hayward’s demise came approximately three months later. On July 26, 2010, BP replaced him as CEO.

**Answers:**

1. Judging from its tentative initial response, BP appeared to be caught off guard by the oil spill. The company’s next moves – to step up and take charge of the oil spills and to offer payment for legal claims – were laudable from both ethical and legal standpoints. However, BP officials’ trust in Hayward was sadly misplaced.
2. BP could have put its corporate leaders through extensive training for such a crisis -- a common practice among organizations. BP could also have put its top spokespeople through media training to prepare them for the firestorms that inevitably follow such catastrophes. Finally, BP could have selected a more qualified spokesperson.
3. Regardless of the questions journalists asked, as Hayward’s advisor I would have counseled him to report only the known facts, and to exhibit trustworthiness and empathy in all his statements. I would have also counseled Hayward to avoid predicting a speedy conclusion to the crisis, to avoid painting a perpetually upbeat picture, and to avoid whining about getting his life back.

**Chapter 1 Review Quiz (\* Indicates Correct Answer)**

1. Public relations can be defined as:
   1. Marketing a firm’s products.
   2. Management of communications between a firm and its publics. \*
   3. Publicizing the products of a firm.
   4. Advertising to sell products.
2. A valid definition of public relations is the following:
   1. An organization’s efforts to win the cooperation of groups of people.
   2. Persuasive communications designed to influence specific publics.
   3. The art of analyzing trends, predicting their outcomes, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs to serve both the organization’s and the public’s interest.
   4. All of the above. \*
3. The job of a public relations professional is very much that of a/an:
   1. Interpreter. \*
   2. Mouthpiece.
   3. Shill.
   4. Advertising agent.
4. The “essence” of the practice of public relations is:
   1. Promotion.
   2. Marketing.
   3. Truth. \*
   4. Publicity.
5. The Internet has had \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ impact on public relations.
6. Minimal
7. Some
8. Negligible
9. Significant \*
10. Often in a political campaign, the vote of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is critical.
11. Traditional
12. Marginal
13. Uncommitted \*
14. Active
15. Effective public relations means practicing \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
16. Proper product packaging.
17. Obfuscation and subterfuge.
18. Aggressively posturing a difficult point of view.
19. Ethics, truth, and credibility. \*
20. The key element of the R-A-C-E process of public relations is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
21. Action. \*
22. Audience.
23. Analysis.
24. Attention.
25. Winning goodwill for an organization can be done relatively quickly.
26. True.
27. False. \*
28. The key to public relations today is product publicity, impressive tours, and a smile at the teller’s counter.
29. True.
30. False. \*
31. Two leading pubic relations organizations are the Public Relations Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators.
32. True. \*
33. False.
34. Public relations is effective as a temporary, defensive measure to compensate for management misjudgment.
    * 1. True.
      2. False. \*
35. Supervisors, clerks, managers, stockholders, and the board of directors are examples of “external” publics.
    * + 1. True.
        2. False. \*
36. Immediately after 9–11, President Bush received high approval ratings. But in his second term, Bush’s popularity plummeted. Did public relations skills enter into this?

Yes indeed. President Bush improved as a communicator after 9–11. His frequent public appearances and speeches served to bolster the war effort. And his strong suit was expressing humanity to the families of wounded service people and others. He came across as sincere and believable, if not exceptionally articulate.

In the out-years of his presidency, Bush did a poorer job of explaining the lingering Iraq War. Revelations of mistreatment of prisoners by U.S. troops and even instances of American soldiers killing civilians were also not handled well, in a communications sense, by the Bush administration.

1. If you were the head of the Democratic/Republican Party and learned a lobbyist had subsidized a congressman’s trips and lifestyle, in violation of congressional ethics rules, what would you recommend?

Take immediate action and announce it to the American public. The key to proper public relations is full disclosure of all facts. Integrity and credibility, particularly of the people’s chosen representatives, cannot be compromised.

**Chapter 1: Essay Examinations**

1. Describe the practice of public relations.

Public relations is a process that “harmonizes” long-term relationships among individuals and institutions. There is no one definition. But the proper practice of public relations involves: 1) researching the attitudes of the public about an organization, idea, product, or individual, 2) identifying action within the organization that answers the public need, 3) communicating to the public about that action, and 4) evaluating the results of that communications program.

1. Discuss the concept of “spin.”

“Spin” means defending your client—right or wrong, truthful or untruthful, honest or dishonest. It is anathema to the proper practice of public relations and should be dismissed and disdained by any practitioner. What some do is “spin” the truth in behalf of political and public relations clients. But the best counselors don’t “spin;” they communicate “truth.”