

Chapter 2: Public Relations in Society

This chapter provides an overview of the history and evolution of public relations. Rooted as it is in all social interaction throughout history, public relations has come into its own as a legitimate profession contributing to the betterment of society.

Public relations is as ancient as clay tablets in Mesopotamia and as contemporary as the next generation of digital tablets. It is as traditional as a political speech in the public square and as cutting edge as an international social media campaign for human rights.

Historical Antecedents of Public Relations

In tracing the development of public relations, we look back not out of nostalgia or for the sake of trivial knowledge, but rather to support the premise of this chapter: *Public relations is a natural, essential and recurring element of human social interaction.*

Public relations is part of what makes us human. As such, it is one of the oldest and most foundational aspects of society. In fact, it's difficult to imagine a society in which effective communication and information, advocacy and positive relationships are not among the most basic components of everyday life.

Edward Bernays, one of the founding fathers of contemporary public relations, observed that "The three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society: informing people, persuading people, or integrating people with people." Thus an understanding of the evolution of public relations give us glimpses into what the professional has become in today's world.

It's not accurate to say that this look back through the centuries reveals people who were consciously practicing public relations as we understand it today. But it does show that the various elements of public relations have been present in society since the earliest of times. [In this chapter, these elements are printed in italics, so you can better observe some aspects of public relations throughout the ages.]

Be forewarned. This look back also reveals that common practice has not always been consistent with ethics. Some past practices employed elements of dubious moral principles.

Traces of some of these remain today, generally disavowed by public relations practitioners but nevertheless part of the underbelly of persuasive communication and the contentious battle for public opinion that exists within a world of competitive economics, aggressive politics and competing worldviews.

Public Relations in Classical Antiquity

The antecedents of modern public relations practice lie in the ancient world.

We can begin in Mesopotamia, the land of contemporary Iraq. Archaeologists have discovered building inscriptions that are artifacts of a public relations campaign to boost the reputation of the kings. Clay tablets dating to 1,800 BCE served as *bulletins* and *brochures* that instructed farmers how to sow crops, irrigate fields and increase their harvests. What today we call *consumer affairs* was important to kings and other rulers, who knew that governmental stability depended on subjects who were well fed and prosperous.

Two of the oldest-known pieces of literature—The *Iliad* and The *Odyssey*, ascribed to the Greek poet Homer about 850 BCE—feature examples of effective *persuasive speeches*. Odysseus convinces the Cyclops not to eat him; Paris entreats Helen to leave her husband and go off with him; Hector and Achilles give stirring speeches to pump up their troops.

Earlier though difficult-to-date pieces of literature—the Pentateuch of the Hebrew Bible and the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh—also have passages with strong persuasive rhetoric, again positioning advocacy as an important drive for both individuals and groups.

To enhance the *credibility* of communication, ancient Egyptian stories often were written as advice from a father to a son, generally implying that the wisdom had been handed down for many generations.

In China in the 4th century BCE, Confucius elevated the concept of *eloquence* in speech, persuasion based on the elegant use of language and expression of emotions. Chinese culture, as well as related cultures of Korea and Japan, emphasizes *interpersonal relationship* and the role of *personal influence* in the civic and professional spheres. Other aspects of Northeastern Asian rhetoric show the value of *silence* as a tool of communication.

In the 3rd century BCE in Athens, Socrates and Plato taught that effective communication should be *based on truth*. Plato's student Aristotle analyzed persuasive communication and taught others how to be effective speakers, specifically by developing *compelling and ethical arguments* that offer verbal proofs. Gorgias of Sicily taught that fostering skill in persuasive speaking was the primary job of a rhetorician.

Public Relations in Government

In antiquity, poems and stories often were written to bolster the reputation of kings and military leaders. The pharaohs of classical Egypt commissioned statues and built temples and pyramids to impress their people. Court advisers in Egypt 2,400 years ago told the pharaohs to *communicate truthfully* and *address audience interests*.

From the period of classical Greece, the antecedents Aristotle is still important today because he sought to equip his students with the persuasive skills to function effectively in a *democracy*. These skills have become increasingly useful as the world moves, meanders and, at times, marches toward giving all citizens a voice in their civic life.

In perhaps the 5th century BCE, the biblical Joseph (Yosef ben Yaakov in the Hebrew Bible, Yusuf ibn Ya'qub in the Quran) functioned in the role of *public relations adviser* in Egypt, analyzing trends and counseling the pharaoh as he developed a campaign to educate farmers about gathering food for a seven-year famine.

Philip of Macedonia and his son, Alexander the Great, used public relations as they extended Greek rule throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East into Central Asia and India. They employed tactics such as *public monuments, commemorative stamps and coins, and named buildings and stadiums*.

Elsewhere in the classical Mediterranean world, others also were studying communication. Corax of Syracuse wrote about *persuasive speaking*. Rome's most acclaimed orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero, developed the earlier Greek rhetorical methods for presenting *persuasive arguments* in public.

Julius Caesar wrote the first *campaign biography* to publicize his battlefield exploits as military governor of Gaul, successfully making the case that he was the best candidate to rule Rome. After maneuvering himself to be proclaimed "dictator in perpetuity," Caesar ordered the posting of the first public *newsletter* to keep his citizenry informed.

Later the first Roman emperor, Octavian Augustus Caesar (the adopted great-nephew of Julius), actively courted *public opinion*, realizing that he needed the support of the people in order to reign successfully. One of his tactics was to commission the poet Virgil to write an epic poem (The *Aeneid*) depicting Caesar as being ordained by the gods to rebuild Rome. This gave *credibility* to the emperor as a legitimate ruler of his people as a successor to the Roman republic.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, poets played a role in news and public relations, often commissioned by tribal chiefs to create poetry and stories that influenced public opinion.

In 9th-century Persia (present-day Iran), caliph Harun al-Rashid (Aaron the Just) engaged in international *diplomacy*, sending emissaries to the European court of Charlemagne, the Chinese court of the Tang dynasty and the Pala empire of present-day Bangladesh. His internal public relations included what today would be called *constituent research* and *community relations*. The Arabian tales recount his practice of wandering among his subjects in disguise to learn how his government administrators were working for the benefit of his subjects.

Civil society and religion intersected in 1215, when the archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, used tactics of *lobbying* and *government relations* to persuade the influential English barons to join him in demanding that King John recognize the rights of both the barons and the church. The result of this successful persuasion was the Magna Carta, the document that laid the foundation for constitutional government not only in England but also, eventually, around the world.

Whereas Western rhetoric focused on persuasion, communication in Asia often valued *consensus*. Hindu philosophy developed the concept of *dialectics* particularly during the Gupta empire around the 4th century. This is a form of *dialogue* and *conflict resolution* in which participants with different points of view discuss a topic not to

persuade each other but together to reach a common understanding, which is very much in line with a contemporary approach to public relations. The message often had an underlying theme such as supporting rulers and social elites.

India also had the experience of sutradhars, who had a role much like the more musical troubadours of medieval Europe. Both were traveling storytellers, narrators who interpreted the story, often with a message or moral with a bit of humor.

Public Relations and Religion

Much of the history of public relations, like so many other aspects of Western society, is connected with religion.

The Hebrew scriptures depict Aaron as a great public speaker who served as the *spokesman* for his brother Moses. In the Christian scriptures, John the Baptist was shown as the advance man what became a new religion, *generating interest* and preparing the way for Jesus Christ. Jesus himself was a great storyteller who used *parables* and other *short stories* with strong, simple and easy-to-understand messages to teach moral lessons.

Indeed, all of the major religious scriptures associated with Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as the texts of Hinduism and Buddhism all reveal the importance of *storytelling* as an essential ingredient in communication on religious, moral and spiritual topics.

In the mid-1st century, Shim'on bar-Yonah (known to history as St. Peter) and Saul of Tarsus (St. Paul) led the Christian apostles in using many persuasive techniques: *speeches*, *staged events*, *letters* and *oral teaching*. Their aim was to increase interest in Jesus, recruit for the new religious movement, and maintain morale and order among church members. Paul's letters in particular are examples of the *eloquence of the written word*.

The gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John used the strategies of *interpretation* and *audience segmentation*, each presenting the same story in four different versions to appeal to the interests, experiences and needs of four different audiences (Matthew writing for Jewish Christians, Mark for non-Jewish Greeks, Luke for non-Jewish Christians, and John for nonbelievers and later the network of Christian communities spreading throughout the Eastern Mediterranean).

The Roman Emperor Nero used the strategy of *orchestrating events* when he blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians, already the social scapegoats of his empire. It was a classic example of *framing*: telling one side of the story first so that any other versions are received as being different from what people already have heard.

The early Christian Church preserved and enhanced the concepts of *rhetoric*. In Roman Africa, the 5th-century philosopher-bishop Augustine of Hippo developed the art of preaching, insisting that *truth is the ultimate goal* of such public speaking. He had great influence in both civil and religious practice. Later in Northern Europe, the 8th-century Saxon theologian Alcuin reinterpreted Roman rhetorical teachings for the Emperor Charlemagne and his medieval court.

Use of public relations strategies and tactics was not limited to Christianity. In 6th-century Northern Africa, the prophet Mohammed sometimes retired to an out-of-the-way place to ponder problems facing his people, eventually to emerge with writings that he identified as the word of Allah. These writings, assembled as the Quran, thus received a *credibility* that encouraged acceptance by his followers.

In the Middle Ages, church leaders applied principles of *persuasive communication* in an effort to recapture the lands of Christian origin. Pope Urban II in 1095 sent his message throughout Europe using the only efficient communication system of the times—the network of monasteries and dioceses. He used a *sustained approach* that involved all the communication tactics of the times: *writing*, *public speaking*, *word of mouth*, *slogans* and *symbols*. The role of *opinion leaders* and the influence on *public opinion* was effective, attracting thousands of volunteers for the first in a series of crusades.

During the eclipse of Western civilization, the classical teaching of Aristotle had virtually been lost to European society. It was Muslim scholars, Christian Arabs and Arabic-speaking Jews who, during the 9th century, kept alive the study of Aristotle in the Middle East. One of the less-unfortunate consequences of the crusades was the subsequent introduction of this Arab scholarship to the West, such as the “science of eloquence” associated with the Persian scholar Abd al-Jurijani.

In the 15th century, Franciscan friar Bernardino of Siena overcame a speech impediment and became respected for his skills in *public speaking* and *preaching*, as well as the now-recognized public relations roles of *conflict resolution* and *reconciliation*. Bernardino became so well known that he successfully negotiated a peace settlement between warring factions in Italy and later participated in negotiations to reunite Greek and Roman branches of Christianity.

Soon the printing press made possible greater *literacy* and with it, an interest in reading the Bible. This laid the foundation for the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Catholic Reformation. When friar Martin Luther tacked on the cathedral door his argument against various church practices, he was using a common technique for *public discussion* during that time in history.

That era led to the Catholic Church's establishment of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) to educate and support missionaries and advance the religion as Europeans pursued new openings in Asia, Africa and the Western Hemisphere.

The term "propaganda" comes from that organization, later applied to any group set up to spread a doctrine or promote a principle. In its original form, *propaganda* was the common word used to describe what today is public relations. Until the 1950s, both terms were used interchangeably, but propaganda increasingly took on negative connotations by its association with the propaganda ministry of the Nazi regime and other totalitarian governments. It came to indicate manipulative communication, hidden motives and half-truths. (With that in mind, American public relations pioneer Edward Bernays quipped that he practiced propaganda and not im-propaganda.)

Back to the field of religion, we find other aspects of public relations beyond Christianity. Some of these suggest additional approaches to communication and relationships.

As Buddhism extended throughout eastern Asia between the 6th and 12th centuries, it lifted up literature and poetry as elements of communication. Until recent times in Asia, imperial rule and social cohesion were the norm, and the Eastern social environment had little need for public discussion of issues and *persuasive discourse*. In Japan and China, Buddhism emphasized the unity of speaker and audience. Communication often was based on *relationships*. *Silence* and *nonverbals* often are more important than words.

Meanwhile, religious and cultural traditions for centuries intermingled in African society and among indigenous people of Australia and the Americas. These communities often emphasized the value of *storytelling*, the graceful use of language, the development of *consensus*, and the communicative value of *silence*.

All of these concepts of communication and social relationships have practical relevance for today's public relations practitioner, and they are finding their place within the strategic toolbox of the profession.

Public Relations in Colonization

Public relations also played a role in European expansion and colonization of newly discovered lands.

In the 10th century, Vikings landed on an uninhabited island of ice and snow in the North Atlantic. Led by Erik "The Red" Thorvaldsson, they used creative *labeling*. The *Saga of Erik the Red* is explicit: "[which] he called Greenland, as he said people would be attracted there if it had a favorable name." Erik was successful, attracting 5,000 or so immigrants from Norway and Iceland (which, ironically, is warmer than Greenland). Pleasant labeling aside, it was harsh climate change and unfriendly newcomers (the Inuits) that caused them to abandon the Greenland settlements five centuries later.

In the 16th century, Sir Walter Raleigh employed *positive messaging* when he sent glowing reports to England about Roanoke Island off present-day North Carolina. Compared to England, this new land had better soil, bigger trees and more plentiful harvests, as well as friendly Indians—so he said when recruiting settlers. *Promotional leaflets* with wild exaggerations attracted settlers and financial backers, but the claims didn't match reality. The island was largely swamp, food was scarce, sickness was prevalent, and harsh treatment by the colonists turned the native peoples hostile. The colony was abandoned after two years, giving evidence of another axiom of public relations: *Mere words are ineffective when do not reflect reality*.

In other parts of the hemisphere, conquistadores sent similarly enthusiastic reports to Spain about cities of gold and fountains of youth. Neither were found, but the stories helped spur immigration to the Americas. In French Canada, public relations tactics were less exaggerated. Tactics included a *book* by Samuel de Champlain in order to "lure settlers," as well as a campaign to recruit young women from France as wives of the immigrants already in New France, most of them single men.

For more than 150 years, England had sent convicts and its Irish or Scottish prisoners of war as cheap labor to the American colonies. After the revolution, other destinations had to be found. At the same time, the war of 1776 displaced thousands of American loyalists, who found themselves no longer welcomed in the fledgling United States. Coincidentally, English explorers had recently claimed Australia, a potential haven for disaffected American colonists. At a time when reformers in England were demanding better conditions for prisoners, Australia also was a likely successor as a penal colony. A potential *win-win situation* was developing.

Again, *positive messaging* with romantic descriptions of Australia were sent back to England: fertile soil, mild climate, exquisite beauty and friendly Aborigines—though the facts didn't always match the claims. (Where have we heard this before?) Shipping corporations encouraged immigration. *Newspaper ads* back in England promised free land and representative government.

In the 17th century, the first Europeans in Australia were convicts being resettled, but soon other immigrants came of their own will, lured by *publicity* and *advertising* promising land opportunity. Germans responding to similar *advertisements* went to Australia to escape religious conflict in Europe. Later, in the mid-1800s, looking for a cheap source of labor in the Northern Territories, Australia advertised in Chinese and Malaysian newspapers for immigrants.

This early aberration of public relations—exaggerated promises and unfounded claims—popped up once again in North America. The western expansion in the US brought a *glorified view* of life on the frontier. The *legend* of Davy Crockett and *stories* about Calamity Jane and Buffalo Bill Cody were among the persuasive messages developed to encourage expansion.

Corporations began using public relations to stimulate westward migration. The Southern Pacific Railroad, for example, hired a *publicity agent* to promote Southern California and *commissioned artists* to paint romanticized images of the Southwest. Land companies hired *promoters* to attract settlers, and the federal government hyped the California Gold Rush to foster *public opinion* for the war against Mexico. After the American Civil War, the Burlington Railroad promoted land grants for army veterans along its route in the northern plains. It even took out *newspaper ads* in Germany, Scandinavia and The Netherlands to attract European immigrants.

Who knows? Future generations may find similar exaggerations about undersea colonies or the first settlements on the moon.

Public Relations in Revolution

The American Revolution stands as an example of the power of *public opinion* and the role that public relations can play.

Samuel Adams, the chief *strategist* for the independence movement, used many public relations strategies and tactics. He encouraged *organizing groups* such as the Caucus Club and the Committees of Correspondence. He created *activist organizations* such as the Sons of Liberty.

Adams organized *staged events*, most notably the Boston Tea Party, which was part of the resistance movement designed to satirize the British tea tax and symbolize colonial defiance. The in-your-face tactic shocked not only the British but also many colonists as well, and the propaganda machine went into high gear. *Sketches* and *pictures* were circulated depicting the fight with inaccurate details that inflamed the colonists. *Brochures* (many of them anonymous) were distributed in America and in England, describing—against the facts—an unprovoked attack on peaceful citizens.

In an example of *framing*, the colonists got their “official” version of the story of the Boston Tea Party across the Atlantic before pro-British loyalists could be heard. Benjamin Franklin, in residence in London, lost no time in being the first to circulate the revolutionary version of the event throughout the city.

Meanwhile, the rebel colonists were using persuasive messages including *songs* of protest and patriotism, *symbols* such as the Liberty Tree, and *slogans* (“Taxation without representation is tyranny”).

They also became adept at *orchestrating the message*, such as their elaboration of the Boston Massacre—hardly a massacre, rather a riot caused by a drunken colonial mob. But *poems*, *essays* and *engravings* memorialized the event throughout the colonies (except in New York, where the story was suppressed by colonial leaders because of their continuing rivalry with Boston).

The colonists also built *alliances* with American Indians, though most tribes sided with the British because England recognized their lands and protected them from encroaching colonists.

The independence movement also had some of the darker elements that sometimes have been associated with public relations. It *demonized the opposition*, ridiculing King George and his representatives in the colonies. More seriously, it *ostracized sympathizers* of the opposition, such as the *plays* and *poetry* of Mercy Otis Warren ridiculing loyalists in the colonies, and the Patriot Committee in each colony that harassed loyalists (real and suspected), including confiscation of their land, torture, even murder. Such actions caused most of the loyalist colonists to flee to Canada or relocate to Australia or elsewhere. (The term “lynching” derives from Judge Charles Lynch of Virginia, who, without trial, beat and jailed colonists accused of being loyal to their king back in London.)

Another negative strategy of the independence movement capitalized on people's *fears* and *bigotry*. The notable example of this was the anti-Catholic prejudice fanned in the colonies after England promulgated the Quebec Act. That law allowed Catholics in the former French colony of Quebec (recently conquered by the British) to practice their faith, something not permitted in most of the American colonies. The colonial leaders fueled the revolutionary sentiment against England by playing to anti-Catholic bigotry in what essentially were Protestant colonies.

All together, specific tactics employed during the American Revolution included:

- Anniversaries of events as news pegs for publicity
- Letters to opinion leaders
- Town and county meetings
- Petitions in colonial (later state) legislatures
- Leaks to the press
- Use of all existing communication tools (in today's terms, a multi-media campaign)
- Publications such as 85 Federalist Papers
- More than 1,500 booklets and pamphlets in the 20 years of the independence movement
- Ghostwritten articles and letters (Samuel Adams wrote under 25 different aliases)
- Newspaper essays and editorials
- Speeches and sermons
- Personal correspondence
- Word-of-mouth planted by personal visits to taverns and other public gathering places
- Meetings
- Parades
- Posting of notices in public places

Consider the following observations showing the influence of public opinion and the power of public relations:

1. Despite the political rhetoric, colonists were not an oppressed people. In fact, they generally paid no taxes. Because of distance from Mother England, they were already autonomous in most practical day-to-day matters.
2. Most of the colonists were not in favor of separation from England. Many families and even entire communities moved through New York and across the Niagara River into Canada or north through New England into the Maritime Provinces. About 100,000 colonists escaped to Canada, returned to England, or fled to the Bahamas, Australia or other British territories.
3. The colonies were not united. Indeed, there were serious and deep divisions and hostile suspicion among them. For example, the Boston Massacre was not reported in New York because of intra-colony feuding, and the issue of slavery nearly scuttled the ability to find common ground among the colonies.
4. The colonial experience had not been about freedom and equality for everyone, and the American Revolution did not seek to change that. The very people who founded the colonies had introduced human trafficking and slavery, and many leaders of the independence movement owned slaves. The colonists confiscated Indian lands that had been protected under British rule. Most colonies excluded Jews and Catholics. Voting and other legal privileges were denied to women and to all men except white Protestant landowners, a very small percentage of the colonial population.
5. Yet the independence movement was successful, because *public opinion* ultimately is stronger than legal right or military might. And public relations lies at the heart of public opinion.

Modern History of Public Relations

While history shows aspects of public relations as a constant element of human interaction, it has been only in relatively recent times that society had recognized and begun to practice what can be called the profession of public

relations. Jobs have been created for public relations functions. Education has been developed to support this. Research has been undertaken to better understand the new discipline.

American scholar James Grunig is associated with a framework showing a four-phase evolution of modern public relations. These can be called the publicity era, information era, advocacy era and relationship era.

Publicity Era (1800s)

- Focus: Dissemination and attention-getting
- Nature of Communication: One-way
- Ethics: Full truth not considered important
- Research: Little
- Current Use: Entertainment, sports and marketing

Sometimes called the public-be-damned era, this is seen as the dawn of public relations as a contemporary profession. The focus was on *dissemination of information* and *gaining attention*. This **publicity model** is an aspect of public relations that exists today, particularly in entertainment, sports and marketing.

In the 1820s, Kentucky newspaper editor Amos Kendall became essentially the first presidential press secretary, though with more power and influence than is associated with that position today. Kendall assisted Andrew Jackson during his election campaign and his terms as president. He conducted *polls*, drafted *speeches*, wrote *news releases* and *editorials*, distributed favorable *reprints*, and advised Jackson on *image* and *strategy*.

As a member of the president's Kitchen Cabinet, Kendall helped Jackson play to populist elements and overcome his most controversial issue, his brutal and life-long campaign of ethnic cleansing against Native Americans. He also helped arrange for financial backers to make loans to editors and buy newspaper ads to guarantee *positive publicity*.

Meanwhile, Jackson's political opponents fought back. They raised up a backwoodsman Tennessee congressman with a larger-than-life *reputation*. Armed with *ghostwritten speeches* and even a *book* penned by someone in his name, Davy Crockett was elected to congress, where he unsuccessfully opposed Jackson's policies, particularly the Indian Removal Act. His public relations handlers and financial backers launched him into an unsuccessful re-election campaign.

After leaving Washington, Crockett went to Texas, later to gain fame by dying at the Alamo.

Once again, *propaganda* of the day wasn't constrained by facts. It was the Mexicans who were defending their country against the Texans seeking a breakaway territory where they could own slaves. In Disney's version of the story, Crockett died fighting, though weeks after the battle stories circulated that he and several other Texans had surrendered and were later executed.

As with Kendall, much of this early activity in public relations centered on individuals. William Seward, Lincoln's secretary of state, engaged in *media relations* by speaking frequently with newspaper editors. "They have a large audience and can repeat a thousand times what I want to impress on the public," he said.

Meanwhile in England Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, was an influential socialite a century before women achieved the right to vote. She was well known as a sort of *publicist*, *lobbyist* and *campaigner* for Charles James Fox, a Whig statesman in the late 1800s.

The opening of the American West provided opportunities for *persuasive messages* to influence migration. Many of the tactics were taken from the playbook of promoters such as P.T. Barnum who successfully publicized circuses, concerts, museums, theater and other entertainment venues.

Though exaggerated, many of the messages were effective. The legend of Daniel Boone and hyped stories of Buffalo Bill Cody, Wyatt Earp and Calamity Jane induced settlers to the territories west of the Mississippi. Railroads commissioned artists to paint romanticized pictures of the West, complete with peaceful-looking Indians and fertile lands.

As with the American experience, railroads became a prime business for doing public relations in other countries. The modern practice of the profession in India and Canada, for example, began with promotion of the railroads. The Great Indian Peninsular Railways developed a *communication campaign* directed toward England, then the occupying nation of the subcontinent. Attempting to attract tourists, the railroad's *publicity bureau* distributed *press releases* and purchased *advertising* in British newspapers. It introduced a traveling *film* for fairs and festivals.

Social reform in the second half of the 19th century also relied heavily on classic publicity techniques. Harriet Beecher Stowe *personalized* the issue of slavery with her influential novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Harriet Tubman

gave face and voice to the abolitionist movement. Both were part of a massive public relations movement involving *opinion leaders, public meetings, lectures, sermons, religious tracts, petitions* and other tactics all loosely coordinated to end slavery.

The temperance movement to abolish liquor and the suffrage movement to gain women the right to vote were other successful social reform movements that relied heavily on public relations strategies and tactics.

It was during this formative period that the term “public relations” came into use. Dorman Eaton seems to have first used the term in 1882 when he addressed Yale Law School graduates on “The Public Relations and Duties of the Legal Profession.” The Association of American Railroads apparently was the first organization to use the term in print, in the 1897 *Yearbook of Railway Literature*.

Public relations played a role in the “War of the Currents” between Westinghouse and General Electric over the relative merits of alternating current and direct current as the better technology for making electricity available to the masses.

Thomas Edison and his General Electric business associates supported DC by conducting a *scare campaign* against exaggerated dangers of AC. Edison used *mudslinging* and *false advertising* as he *lobbied* lawmakers. He wrote *letters to the editor* attacking his opponents and hired false “experts” to speak on behalf of his DC cause. Attempting to shock audiences, Edison used AC to electrocute hundreds of animals, including dogs and horses. He even created a *special event* by arranging for the electrocution of a convicted murderer, a tactic that turned out so gruesome that it effectively lost the case Edison was trying to make.

Meanwhile, Westinghouse countered with calm, logic and appeals to reason, winning the argument with what is generally considered a more *strategic public relations campaign*. Today Westinghouse’s AC is standard throughout the world. This war of the currents of the late 1880s and early 1890s is a prime example of the movement from the publicity model into the information era.

Information Era (Early 1900s)

- Focus: Honest & accurate dissemination of info
- Nature of Communication: One-way
- Ethics: Accuracy and truth considered important
- Research: Readability and comprehension
- Current Use: Government, nonprofit organizations and business organizations

The transition from the public-be-damned era into a public-be-informed approach centered on a new standard of honest and accurate dissemination of *newsworthy information*. Truth telling became a public virtue. This **information model** is prevalent today in many business organizations, nonprofits and government agencies.

This time period saw a maturing of public relations to add a stronger *ethical base* to public relations tactics. *News releases* were now expected to be *accurate*, and speeches *truthful*.

As Europe was discovering with its nobility, America was seeing parallel truths about business potentates: The public matters. Ex-journalist Ivy Ledbetter Lee, often called the “father of public relations,” bucked the prevailing business feeling associated with the empire builders and the Gilded Age, telling clients such as John D. Rockefeller, Walter Chrysler and George Westinghouse that the *public could no longer be ignored*.

Lee issued a Declaration of Principles calling for *honest communication* on behalf of clients and telling newspaper editors that he would offer them *newsworthy information* promptly, accurately and in the open. When one of his clients, the Pennsylvania Railroad, experienced a train crash, Lee advised the company to tell what had happened, bring reporters to the scene, and let them report the story first hand.

This era saw many “firsts”: the first public relations agencies, first university publicity bureau, first employee newsletter, first public relations journal and the first public relations departments for groups as disparate as churches, military, unions, charities, nonprofit organizations and corporations.

Public relations saw parallel growth around the world. In Canada, public relations departments and agencies also were developing, beginning with Bell Canada. Railroads, banks and other companies hired publicity specialists to create effective *government relations* programs at the beginning of World War I.

Government agencies were created in the UK, France and the US during World War I to manage the flow of information, looking for citizen support for the military efforts.

The Indian government set up a publicity board during World War I as a link between the government and the press. In monitoring media criticism of the government, the board provided *feedback* to government strategists. The board later morphed into the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which today coordinates public relations, publicity, advertising and film policy.

During the build-up to World War I, the German propaganda ministry produced *books* and *pamphlets*, *speeches*, even *children's books*. It established the German Information Bureau to influence Americans to remain neutral, a position supported by public opinion before April 1917, when the US entered the war.

One week after declaring war, President Wilson created the Committee on Public Information. The agency, headed by George Creel, sought to garner public opinion supporting a role for America in the war, *framing* it as a positive force for democracy.

Creel said that its purpose was to coordinate "not propaganda as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the 'propagation of faith'." The committee used all the tools at its disposal: *posters* and *newspapers*, *telegraph* and *radio*, *film* and *speeches*. Volunteers gave 7.5 million succinct four-minute speeches to audiences totaling 314 million people.

Meanwhile, England's theme was that it was a matter of duty to help France and Belgium threatened by Germany. *Posters* asked, "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" Recruiting *advertisements* asked women about their sons and husbands, "Is he to hang his head because you would not let him go?" Toward the war's end, the Ministry of Information pulled together the work of several different government agencies dealing with various aspects of media, news and public opinion.

In Australia, opponents to the government ban on drafting soldiers to fight in Europe mounted a national referendum as a sort of *public opinion poll*. The referendum was twice defeated, but publicity about the vote led 400,000 Australians to volunteer to help the Mother Country after England entered the war.

Not all public relations had good intentions. Two Atlanta publicists of this time, Edward Clarke and Bessie Tyler, gained a footnote in public relations history because of their immense success in *recruiting* and *fundraising*. They took a group from a few thousand members in 1920 to nearly 4 million in 1923. The group was the Ku Klux Klan, America's most notorious vigilante terrorist organization. This revival of the short-lived post-Civil War KKK reframed the klan as a patriotic nativist group and extended its traditional hostility toward blacks by adding Catholics, Jews and organized labor to its hate list.

Clarke and Tyler used many common public relations strategies and tactics: all kinds of *publications*, *speeches* and *symbols*, such as the burning cross. Most of the success was in the US, but the anti-Catholic message played in Canada as well.

The story of this second KKK shows the power of *negative strategy*, appeals to fear and hatred, and other divisive methods that can enjoy short-term success. But story isn't complete without noting that this klan fizzled and disbanded within 20 years, adding another lesson for public relations: *Hate groups inevitably implode from their inability to sustain rabid negativity*.

Advocacy Era (Mid-1900s)

- Focus: Modify attitudes and influence behavior
- Nature of Communication: Two-way
- Ethics: Transparent research and communication
- Research: Attitude and opinion
- Current Use: Competitive business organizations, causes and movements

By mid-20th century, people were attempting to reconcile new facts on the international social consciousness: genocide in Armenia and popular German support for the Holocaust, along with behavioral theories such as conditioned reflex, cognitive dissonance and scapegoat theory. The thinking was: If people could be induced to do evil things, how can they be persuaded to do good?

The focus of this **advocacy model** was on *modifying attitudes* and *influencing behavior*. It introduced social research into the practice of public relations, establishing a role for *demographics* and developing techniques for *surveys* and *opinion polls* as well as *focus groups* and *content analysis*.

These are aspects of public relations still used today in competitive business organizations promoting products and services, as well as in advocacy causes and movements such as public health, welfare and human rights. Perhaps the largest field for this has been that of electoral politics and public policy issues.

This era is associated with Edward Bernays, who with Ivy Lee is the second founding figure for public relations. An Austrian-American and the nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays gave public relations a base in *social psychology* as he engaged the profession on behalf of an international list of clients.

Among his achievements were assisting President Wilson with the Creel Committee to encourage public support for American involvement in World War I. He later promoted water fluoridation as a public health issue and helped introduce orange juice as a common breakfast beverage. One of his most noteworthy and controversial successes was a campaign on behalf of Lucky Strike cigarettes (which he labeled “torches of freedom”) to make it socially acceptable for women to smoke in public, something he later came to regret as health literacy increased.

Bernays also wrote the first book on public relations (*Crystallizing Public Opinion*) and taught the first university course (at New York University) in the new discipline. It was Bernays who introduced the term “public relations counsel.”

Bernays said public relations was about the “engineering of consent”—not by force or manipulation, but by carefully orchestrated strategies that were *based on theory* and *informed by research*, with a strong *ethical undertone*. Bernays remained a leading figure in public relations until he died in 1995 at the age of 103.

Doris Fleishman, Bernays’ wife and professional colleague, used her public relations skills for feminist causes. She became the first married American woman to receive a passport in her maiden name.

Another key figure in public relations during this time period was Arthur Page. He became the first known in-house corporate public relations strategist when he accepted a job as vice president of AT&T, after negotiating that he would be a corporate adviser and decision maker rather than a publicity voice. Page insisted that his staff observe on seven principles: Tell the truth; prove it with action; listen to the customer; manage for tomorrow; conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it; realize a company’s true character is expressed by its peoples; and remain calm, patient and good-humored.

During the middle and latter parts of the 20th century, much of public relations (both research and practice) was built on the advocacy model. Organizations tried to influence the *attitudes and behaviors* of their publics. Governments around the world tried to nurture support for the World War II, and *information as a weapon* (including *misinformation*; that is, lying and deception) became part of the Cold War, paralleling military might with communication-based campaigns to win the hearts and minds of people. Britain and the US used news and information to build support and later post-war propaganda campaigns. Other research was related to brainwashing and *social manipulation*.

Social reform movements continued to use public relations, attempting to change attitudes on issues such as child labor, worker rights, prostitution, food safety and regulation of big business.

Former journalist Elmer Davis headed the Office of War Information during World War II, coordinating public information from the military, mobilizing public support for the war effort and undermining enemy morale. Davis successfully campaigned against efforts to strip U.S.-born Japanese-Americans of their citizenship and intern them in camps for the duration of the war. He urged President Roosevelt to allow Japanese-Americans to enlist for military service, even while their parents were forcibly removed from their homes and placed under military internment. Davis has been acclaimed as one of the “unsung forefathers” of the all-Japanese 442nd Regimental Combat Team that became the most decorated infantry regiment in American history. After the war, Davis returned to his career in radio, using that as a platform to campaign against Senator Joseph McCarthy’s communist witch hunt.

It is interesting to note the language surrounding government and public relations. Totalitarian regimes often have used the *propaganda* label, such as Hitler’s Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, the Soviet Department for Agitation and Propaganda, and both the Office of Foreign Propaganda and the Communist Party Propaganda Department under China’s Chairman Mao.

Democratic countries, on the other hand, have been more likely to use the *information* title, as with ministries of information in Britain and Israel and the US Committee on Information and the US Information Agency. Today, most nations have abandoned the propaganda label for government agencies dealing with information, news and public relations.

Relationship Era (Late 1900s)

- Focus: Mutual understanding and conflict resolution
- Nature of Communication: Two-way
- Ethics: Balance and symmetry in relationships

- Research: Perception and values
- Current Use: Regulated business, government, nonprofit organizations and social movements

In recent decades, public relations has assumed a focus toward programming aimed at mutual understanding, organizational adaptation and conflict resolution.

This **relationship model** today often is associated with social movements, as well as with nonprofit organizations, government agencies and corporations (especially regulated businesses that often interact with both government and social advocates).

Consumer-rights groups have drawn attention to a variety of health and safety issues, such as automobiles, airplane travel safety, clean water and children's sleepwear. Much of this activity has been spurred by social advocates such as Rachel Carson, a marine biologist whose book *Silent Spring* spurred a global environmental movement, and Ralph Nader, whose book *Unsafe at Any Speed* focused attention on auto safety in North America and beyond. In each of these cases, government and industry responded to *public opinion* supporting oversight and quality reform. Regulations were put in place as consumers adopted many pro-environment and pro-safety habits, often with government encouragement through public relations campaigns.

Meanwhile, speeches such as "I Have a Dream" and "I've Been to the Mountain Top" by Martin Luther King Jr. led not only to legal guarantees of civil rights but also to the personal transformation of many individuals toward celebration of racial and ethnic diversity. President Obama's second inaugural address referenced themes precious to marginalized groups, including his reference to the Stonewall riots (foreshadowing the gay rights movement) with parallel icons such as Seneca Falls (women's rights) and Selma (civil rights).

The relationship model, whether it involves advocacy groups or the companies and agencies dealing with their issues, drives public relations strategists toward helping their organizations listen to consumers and adapt their products and services to meet their needs.

Sometimes this means researching consumer interests or communicating more with publics. Often it also means making internal changes to deliver a better product or service. Organizations of all types have come to realize that, in order to be successful, they need to listen to consumers and adapt their products and services to meet their needs.

Thus the hallmark of the relationship model is *adaptation*, or at least the corporate willingness to respond to publics and make meaningful change to create a *mutually beneficial* environment for both the publics and the organization.

This new relationship model is built on the principles of *communication as listening* and is focused on *conflict resolution* and the search for *mutual benefits* for both organizations and their publics.

Internationally, this relationship approach has been seen in concepts such as *détente* and *rapprochement*. In the business environment, *public-private partnerships* and the courting of consumers are becoming common.

In the religious world, the *ecumenical movement* and *interreligious dialogue* are examples of the relationship model. The documents from the Catholic Church's Vatican Council II in the 1960s—particularly the statements on the church's relationship with other Christian denominations, with Jews, and with non-Christian religions—show the application of the relationship model to interreligious matters.

In all of these situations, public relations has become *research based*. It is more a function of the management and leadership of an organization, rather than simply the implementation of communication tactics. Meanwhile, new technologies associated with the Internet allow organizations to communicate directly with their publics and to offer *information-on-demand* in an interactive consumer-driven environment. These technologies, combined with the *fragmentation* of the so-called *mass media*, are creating new opportunities for public relations practitioners.

It is important to remember that the relationship model complements earlier visions of public relations focused on publicity, information and advocacy.

Consider an analogy with media technology. As a new advancement is introduced, it may change but rarely replaces an earlier technology. Books and newspapers have survived well into the broadcast era. Television didn't spell the end of radio, just a change in its content. Cable and satellite haven't replaced broadcast TV. The Internet isn't killing television, though it both expanded the potential delivery of television and to some extent has influenced its content. Tablets and smart phones are not replacing desk-bound computers. Sirius and iPods are affecting radio but not supplanting it. And on it goes. The inevitable new communication technologies that will emerge undoubtedly will influence the existing tools, but we are likely always to have books and TV news networks and ever-smarter phones.

This also is true with the various approaches to public relations. Organizations will always need a publicity model for some of their public relations purposes, such as announcing new products and services and promoting upcoming events. Society will continue to use the information model that disseminates honest and reliable facts on which to base personal and civic decisions. The advocacy model will always be enshrouded as part of human nature, which frequently nudges us toward promoting a cause and fostering our beliefs. And the relationship model will continue to find favor wherever society values dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect toward win-win solutions that benefit everybody.

Public Relations Today

Why the history lesson? Because it gives a background into the development of a profession that is still evolving.

As noted in Chapter 1, much of the misperception about public relations is based on incorrect or outdated information. With the understanding of the development as outlined here, we can better appreciate where public relations is today and where it seems to be heading in the upcoming decades.

At the beginning of the 21st century, public relations is evolving in several ways:

- ... from *manipulation* to *adaptation*
- ... from *program* to *process*
- ... from *Band-Aid treatment* to *wellness programs*
- ... from *propaganda* to *information*
- ... from *external* to *internal*
- ... from *technician* to *manager*
- ... from *fire fighting* to *fire prevention*
- ... from *mass media* to *targeted media*
- ... from *isolation* to *integration*
- ... from *secret* to *transparent*
- ... from *closed* to *open*

When we look country-by-country, we see a clear link between social structure and public relations. The profession has an obvious connection with open government in which public opinion is needed for leaders to gain the consent of the citizenry and with an economic system based on competitive markets and voluntary exchange between buyer and seller. That is, public relations operates best in democracy and capitalism.

While many of the activities that today we associate with public relations have become nearly universal, scholars and historians around the world agree that the conscious practice of public relations as a profession began in the United States. It quickly spread to other English-speaking democratic societies, particularly Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, as noted in the previous section.

The discipline is so much rooted in North America that the English word “public relations” or direct translations (“relations publique,” “relaciones públicas”) are used almost universally rather than homegrown phrases. A German term “Öffentlichkeitsarbeit” sometimes translates as “publicity campaign” or “indoctrinated communication,” but the English term is more commonly used in German-speaking settings. In Japan, the common term is “pee-ah-roo” or sometimes “paburikku rishon.”

Though the name may be the same, the role of public relations is not uniform throughout the world. The understanding presented here is consistent with professional practice and self-awareness in North America and in English-rooted cultures around the world.

In much of Europe, the focus is more on promotion and communication but less on strategic management issues, and the relationship between advertising and public relations remains unsettled. In many Asian cultures, public relations is focused on international companies trying to maneuver domestic peculiarities in government and media. Arab culture sometimes equates public relations with social relations and hospitality.

Scholars have observed that public relations came late to totalitarian states, giving evidence to the observation by scholars that propaganda is a phase, a stepping-stone along the path toward open communication. In countries such as

Poland, Chile and the Philippines—until recently associated with totalitarian governments—public relations still has not been completely severed from propaganda. This isn't surprising. The US has had more than two centuries of practice with democracy. Canada, Australia the UK likewise have a long history with social and economic freedom. Yet even in these countries, there are remnants of deceptive propaganda.

Public relations by necessity requires literacy and higher levels of education. It is not surprising that countries with low literacy rates and education levels are ill equipped to generate a functional public relations profession. There is little opportunity to practice public relations in countries such as Mali, Ethiopia, South Sudan and several other African nations where less than 30 percent of adults are literate, or in Afghanistan where the literacy rate is only 38 percent.

Additionally, cultural differences come into play. In Japan, for example, it is considered impolite to ask questions at a press briefing; instead reporters hold their questions for follow-up one-on-one interviews. The International Communications Consultancy Organization has offered some observations on how public relations practitioners engage European journalists: Germans want small media briefings, but in the UK one-on-one interviews are preferred. Italian reporters like breakfast meetings, not too early. In Belgium, journalists prefer to get their news over lunch or dinner served with beer (well, who wouldn't?).

Here are some examples of the evolution and current status of public relations into other countries.

France: Public relations has a long history in France. Cardinal Richelieu in the 17th century had a press department and a minister of information. King Louis XIV in the 18th century likewise had media and image advisers, promoting himself through medals, statues and various print media. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens* (1789) positioned the leaders of the French Revolution as supporting the right of citizens to express themselves and communicate freely. France established a propaganda ministry in 1792, which subsidized editors and support efforts to create positive public opinion for the revolution. As in most other European countries, French public relations began as a profession following World War I and grew rapidly after World War II. In 1969, the government created The Ministry of Public Relations.

Japan: Public relations already being practiced in Japan before the post-war US occupation. When Japan created the South Manchuria Railroad Company in 1906, it established a public relations department to promote the railroad, impacting public opinion toward the eventual Japanese “encroachment” into China. Later the US occupation introduced public relations for corporate management. Today, public relations is an integral part of Japanese business and organizational life, though the Japanese cultural practice of not dealing publicly with controversial or negative information still exists. The main focus of Japanese public relations is media relations. Access to the media is gained through “press clubs” set up by each major industry and by government agencies, and it is the press club that decided whether to hold a news conference or issue news releases. Press clubs are generally not open to foreign reporters, and gift-giving practices sometimes conflict with ethical standards.

Middle East: Public relations did not develop in the Middle East until the 1980s. In the decades following its independence from the British colony in 1971, the United Arab Emirates has become one of the wealthiest countries in the world. It also has become a center of public relations activity in the Middle East, home to local and international agencies. The International Public Relations Association has a Gulf States chapter with practitioners in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. The UAE-based Middle Eastern Public Relations Associations (MEPRA) has chapters in cities throughout the Middle East and links with universities in Qatar, Egypt and the UAE. MEPRA sees public relations as marginalized in the Middle East, where it correlates with the degree of freedom, democracy and the role of public opinion in society. The organization has called on Arab governments to see public relations as an ethical element for the betterment of society rather than a tool for media manipulation and propaganda.

Finland: Public relations in Finland and its Scandinavian neighbors began during the middle of the last century. The Finnish Associate of Public Relations is the oldest in Europe, founded in 1947 (the same year that PRSA was created in the US). The organization was an outgrowth of Finnish efforts to promote the Olympics and handle propaganda tasks during World War II. One of the public relations successes of that time was the generation of international sympathy for Finland's David-and-Goliath resistance to Russia during the “Winter War” of 1939-40.

Vatican City: In 1948, the Vatican created the forerunner of its Pontifical Council on Social Communications, which coordinates the press office's work with film, newspapers, television and social media. The commission also works with communication advisers for the Vatican secretariat of state and other Vatican agencies. Additionally, the Vatican has exercised the church's educational role by issuing commentaries on ethical aspects of the news and entertainment media, advertising, and social media.

Africa. The African Public Relations Association includes 13 national groups in large nations such as South Africa and Egypt and smaller countries including Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Gambia. The Nigerian association alone has 7,000 members and 3,000 student members. More than 20 universities in South Africa teach public relations. Additionally, the Public Relations Association of Southern Africa involves practitioners in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

India: During World War I, the British government established a publicity board in India, and soon after its independence in 1947, India created a ministry of information and broadcasting. The Public Relations Society of India began in 1958 and was formalized eight years later. Since 1986, April 21 has been observed as National Public Relations Day. The purpose according to PRSI is “to focus attention on public relations function and public relations professionals in India who have increasingly important role in the development of the country.” Much of that focus is on media relations, though international practitioners, and a growing number of universities with public relations programs, are expanding the concept of the discipline.

Russia: When the Soviet Union existed, there was little need for public relations to promote goods or services to would-be consumers. The state provided both, generally only in one version, and consumer choice meant take it or leave it. There certainly wasn’t a role for civic discussion or public opinion. It was only after the union collapsed in 1991 that public relations became a necessity with the social and economic reforms that occurred in Russia and the 14 other former Soviet republics.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, public relations arrived in Russia as the new nation found that—in economic and political environment, both inside and outside the country—public opinion would play a key role.

Businesses introduced new products. Universities became more competitive by adding new areas of study, including public relations and strategic communication. Public relations agencies joined advertising and marketing agencies as newcomers to the Russian scene. The Russian Public Relations Society was founded, now with more than 600 members. In 2008, the Russian Communications Consultancies Association reported that, after only a 20-year history, the value of the Russian public relations market (the combined budgets of public relations agencies and in-house departments) had reached \$2.5 billion (£1.6 billion, €2 billion).

One of the biggest growth areas for public relations in Russia has been in government. When he was president, Boris Yeltsin approached Western public relations agencies to promote his trips to other countries, his domestic programs and later his re-election campaign.

China: In China, public relations had long been part of the economic scene in Hong Kong, which had been a Western enclave within China for nearly a century. Taiwan developed an effective public relations industry after it declared independence from mainland China.

But for most of China, modern public relations began only after the political, economic and social reforms of the late 1970s. Hill & Knowlton was the first international agency to establish an office in Beijing, quickly followed by the first domestic agency, Global Public Relations.

Today China has several thousand public relations agencies. More than 100 professional organizations have been created, including the China Public Relations Association and the China International Public Relations Association. More than 300 universities teach public relations, which is said to be one of the country’s top five professions.

Public relations in China began with basic publicity and media relations, later expanding into more strategic aspects of the profession, with a particular emphasis on government relations. Overall, public relations is a common element of business practice, especially as Chinese companies engage foreign markets.

China has put its newfound public relations skills to the test with dealing with opposition to the government’s plan for a high dam on the Yangtze River, the massive Sichuan earthquake, and international attention during the Beijing Olympics.

Cuba: Cuban public relations is still in its infancy. A few agencies are active as the country moves toward a market-oriented economy, working mainly in publicity, graphic design and similar nonstrategic areas. The government controls the news media and tries to suppress access toward newer social media.

But the belief is that public relations has a brighter future in Cuba amid expectations that government controls will ease and conservative media policies become less restrictive.