The Evolution of Public Relations

Chapter 2
“PR” has been around a long time...

- While a 20th century development in terms of a profession, techniques used to persuade people to accept the authority of the government and religion have been used throughout time.
- Techniques (still in use today) such as: interpersonal communication, speeches, art, literature, staged events, and publicity.
- Not called public relations at the time but the purpose and effect were the same as today.
Evolution of PR’s three principal functions:

- **Press agentry**
- **Publicity**
- **Counseling**

- Hyping: the promotion of movie and television stars, books, magazines, etc. through shrewd use of the media and other devices.
- Press agent: is at the center of hyping and is defined as “a person whose work is to get publicity for an individual, organization, etc.”
PR’s Evolution (cont’d)

- Pseudoevent—a planned happening that occurs primarily for the purpose of being reported. Some of the more flamboyant and fun aspects of PR today trace their roots to the development of press agentry.

- Phineas T. Barnum—the great American showman of the 19th century was the master of the pseudoevent. Best remembered for his Barnum & Bailey three ring circuses.

- Publicity: consists mainly of the issuing of news releases to the media about the activities of an organization or an individual, is one of the earliest forms of PR. As far back as the Roman period, Julius Caesar ordered the posting of a news sheet outside the Forum to inform citizens of the actions of Roman legislators.
Key 20th century American figures who (indirectly) advanced public relations:

- Henry Ford—recognized as the first major industrialist to utilize two basic PR concepts: “positioning” – the idea that credit and publicity always go to those who do something first-- and ready accessibility to the press.

- Theodore Roosevelt: proved a master in generating publicity. He was the first president to make extensive use of news conferences and interviewing in drumming up support for his projects. And he knew the value of the presidential tour for publicity purposes.
20th Century figures (cont’d)

- Ivy Lee: the first public relations counselor
- Lee was a former business reporter at the New York World.
- Emergence of modern PR began in 1906 when Lee was hired by the coal industry, then embroiled in a strike. Miners leaders was talking to reporters, providing facts and figures, but coal owners leader had refused to talk to the press.
- Lee persuaded leaders to change their attitude. Lee issued a “Declaration of Principles” which signaled the end of the “public-be damned” attitude of business and the beginning of the “public-be-informed” era.
- Lee in 1914 was hired by industrialist John D. Rockefeller in the wake of the “Ludlow Massacre” in Colorado, a strike at Rockefeller’s fuel and iron plant. He got Rockefeller to talk to the press and the striking workers, staged events and portrayed the tycoon as seriously concerned about his workers
20th Century figures (cont’d)

- George Creel: brought in by President Woodrow Wilson to organize a comprehensive PR effort to advice him and his cabinet, to carry out programs, and to influence U.S. and world opinion.
- Persuaded newspapers and magazines to provide free space for promotion of war Liberty Bonds.
- The Creel Committee’s efforts had a profound effect on the development of PR by demonstrating the success of these full-blown techniques. It also awakened an awareness in Americans of the power of mediated information in changing public attitudes and behaviors.
20th Century figures (cont’d)

- Carl Byoir was on that Creel Committee. Byoir in 1930 founded a company that for more than 50 years was one of the largest PR firms in the U.S. He pioneered use of third-party endorsements to give products or policies credibility, legitimacy and newsworthiness. This involved having experts endorse products or having newspapers endorse candidates, for example.

- Elmer Davis: hired by FDR to head the Office of War Information during WWII. The former journalist and Rhoads Scholar orchestrated an even larger PR effort during this war. OWI was the forerunner of the U.S. Information Agency established by Eisenhower in 1953 to “tell America’s story abroad.”
Key PR figures (cont’d)

- Edward Bernays and his wife and business partner Doris Fleischman: helped define PR’s counseling role as advisers to corporate and institutional managements beginning in the 1920s.

- Bernays—widely acknowledged as the founder of modern public relations—wrote the influential 1923 book, “Crystallizing Public Opinion” that was the first to set down the broad principles that govern the new profession of ‘public relations counsel.’”

- Bernays called PR “the engineering of consent.”
PR’s Evolving Practice and Philosophy

- 1800s—press agentry model—best represented by the hype and exaggerations of P.T. Barnum and various land developers
- Early 20th Century—PR began to reinvent itself along journalistic lines, mainly because former newspaper reporters such as Ivy Lee started to do PR work and counseling—extension of the journalistic function focusing on the “dissemination of information or one-way communication models in which the quality of information was important but audience feedback had yet to be fully considered.”
1920s—thanks to the breakthroughs in social science research, the focus of PR shifted to the psychological and sociological effects of persuasive communication on target audiences. Rex Harlow, Edward Bernays and others believed any campaign should be based on feedback and an analysis of an audience’s disposition and value system so messages could be structured for maximum effect (i.e. scientific persuasion based on the research of the target audience)
PR’s Evolving Practice and Philosophy (cont’d)

- 1960s—Issues management was added to the job description of PR managers because of the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, the women’s movement, environmental concern growth. The idea that PR should be more than persuading people that corporate policy was correct. The idea emerged that perhaps it would be beneficial to have a dialogue with various publics and adapt corporate policy to their particular concerns.
PR’s Evolving Practice and Philosophy (cont’d)

- 1970s—era of reform in the stock market and investor relations. Companies must immediately disclose any information that may affect the value of its stock. The field of investor relations boomed.

- 1980s—the concept of PR as a management function is in full bloom. “Strategic” became a PR buzzword and MBO (management by objective) was heavily endorsed by PR practitioners.
PR’s Evolving Practice and Philosophy (cont’d)

- 1990s—Reputation or perception management were the buzz phrases—the idea of PR people working to maintain credibility, to build solid internal and external relationships, and to manage issues.

- 2000—the concept grows of PR as the practice of “relationship management.” PR people, the idea goes, are in the business of building and fostering relationships with an organization’s various publics.
Trends in PR

- Feminization of the Field—today women constitute 70 percent of PR practitioners. Reasons? (see page 65)
- But women still earn only about 75 cents for every dollar earned by men (overall, not just in PR)
The advent of “Transparency”—companies committed to being more open—the public is demanding more accountability from all of society’s institutions.

The Internet/Websites allow companies to share more “insider”-type information they may not have shared in the past.
Increased Emphasis on Evaluation—PR pros will continue to improve measurement techniques for showing management how their activities actually contribute to the bottom line.

Managing the 24/7 News Cycle—the need for PR people to constantly update information, answer journalists’ inquiries at all hours of the days, and be aware that any and all information is readily available to a worldwide audience.
Trends (cont’d)

- New Direction in Mass Media—Traditional media aren’t what they used to be.
- Circulation of U.S. daily newspapers down 11 percent since 1990 and network evening news ratings are down 34 percent since 1993. Local news share is down 16 percent since 1997. Even cable ratings have been flat since 2001.
- PR is now expanding communication tools to account for the fact that no single mass media, or combination of them, will be a good vehicle for reaching key publics. There is, for example, more electronic preparation of media materials. To many professionals, the printed news release and media kit are becoming artifacts of the past.

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