

## **Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS)**

### **PRSA Chapter Ethics Programs 2003 Best Practices and Samples**

This booklet contains selected ethics activities carried out by PRSA chapters during 2003. We hope these examples are helpful to you as you plan Ethics Month 2004 and other chapter ethics education activities throughout the year. If we did not include your program, please let us know and we will include it in the online version of this booklet, which will be available on [prsa.org](http://prsa.org).

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with ideas and encouragement so that the PRSA ethics education program will better serve members and make a positive impact on the development of our Society and profession. One of the key benefits PRSA brings to its members, and to the profession of public relations as a whole, is the emphasis on the ethical practice of public relations – the responsibility for each member of PRSA to apply the PRSA Member Code of Ethics in our daily work lives.

Ethics is an area that is vital to our Society's ability to demonstrate the value of ethical public relations to the business community, government, education, nonprofits, news media and the general public. This booklet reflects dedication and creativity on the part of chapter ethics officers in developing education activities that help PRSA members understand and apply the guideposts contained in our Code.

We are encouraged by the number and variety of chapter ethics programs. They are interesting, challenging and fun. During 2003, many chapters integrated ethics programs or themes into monthly meetings and promoted them heavily, resulting in heavy turnouts. Ethics Month 2003 in October resulted in outstanding efforts at the chapter level with strong national and regional support from BEPS, College of Fellows Ethics Advisors, and the PRSA national staff. During 2003, PRSA also worked hard to expand professional development opportunities and resources in the ethics area.

Please let your district BEPS liaison know your plans, successes and challenges. Plan on participating in the quarterly Ethics Officers teleconferences conducted by BEPS, and take advantage of new ethics education opportunities provided by PRSA. Finally, let BEPS know what you need to do your job better. You plan a vital role in the PRSA ethics education program, and we appreciate your hard work and dedication.

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## **Alaska**

The Alaska Chapter of PRSA incorporated Ethics training into our twice-a-year new member orientation. In addition to basic information for new Chapter members, we emphasized how ethical behavior is the core of our profession, summarized the Code of Ethics, and provided contact names for when they had issues or questions about ethics. For Ethics Month in September, the Chapter Ethics Officer hosted the teleconference with Jim Lukaszewski conducting an ethical business simulation with a panel of participants. The 30 members who attended agreed it was an excellent panel discussion, with the actual topic straddling the line between an ethical situation and a crisis communication model. The program included an introduction by the Ethics Officer, as well as a member of the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards. Ideas we hoped to implement but didn't quite get off the ground included an Ethics Minute at each Chapter meeting, and table tents at luncheons with brief ethical case studies. We hope to make those ideas work for 2004.

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## **Austin, Texas**

PR practitioners explored ethical issues - from end-of-life issues to layoffs and contracts at the March meeting of the Austin PRSA chapter. The topic was the duty of a PR practitioner when faced with ethical dilemmas on issues such as compromises in product quality, straight talk in candidate selection, and end-of-life decisions. Winners from Austin's inaugural Ethics in Business Awards served as panelists. The director of St. Edward's University's Center for Ethics and Leadership, moderated. The consensus advice of the panelists for PR practitioners is to influence management to make the right decisions and then to follow a disciplined process for making your decisions such as the PRSA ethics decision making guide. The conclusion: the onus is on the PR practitioner to be informed, be prepared and be ethical.

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## **Bluegrass, Kentucky**

Go to Jail! Go Directly to Jail! was the theme of the chapter's Ethic's Month program. Subtitled "What You Need to Know About Public Relations Ethics," the noon program featured a panel and carried the advertised theme: "Should you pass Go? Should you collect \$200? What constitutes ethical behavior in public relations?" The panel shared ethical dilemmas they have faced as public relations practitioners. The PRSA code of ethics was stressed and the panel delved deep into three of the most common provisions public relations professionals face: safeguarding confidences, disclosure of information and conflicts of interest. Panelists included a former national PRSA president and a current member of the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards.

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### **Boston, Massachusetts**

A case team competition was held by the Boston Chapter in January. The program was built around crisis management, but the ethics component to each case was central in "grading" the teams. Boston University's Professor Otto Lerbinger, APR, Fellow PRSA, guided a room full of Boston-area PR pros through a highly interactive workshop and crisis "competition." The program combined audience participation, a case-study competition featuring four brave volunteers, and lessons drawn from Dr. Lerbinger's long experience as a crisis management consultant, author and teacher. Audience members observed and judged the real world simulations, put together - and torn apart - by Dr. Lerbinger. Two teams spent 30 minutes discussing a different anti-product campaign or boycott facing two corporate giants. They then returned to the room and presented recommendations. Guided by Dr. Lerbinger, the teams and audience were confronted with a series of difficult questions. Then the audience voted. Who won the competition? The audience, of course.

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### **Central Illinois**

The chapter covered ethics in the chapter newsletter, sent an ethic letter to chapter members/prospects in conjunction with Ethics Month (included PRSA ethics code cards), and conducted a table discussion of ethics topics during the Oct. chapter dinner meeting (included distribution of ethics code and all ethics scenarios posted on PRSA's Website).

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### **Central California**

On Friday, February 28, Fresno State, along with the Central California Chapter of PRSA, hosted an ethics symposium from 9-11:30 a.m. entitled, "Keeping it Real: Drawing the Lines in Public Relations Ethics." The symposium included two student presentations and a panel of experts. PRSSA students presented the major findings of existing PR ethics research and the results of an original research project – "How Ethical are Public Relations Practitioners? A California Media Perspective." Following the student research presentations, a panel of regional and national ethics experts, along with local media and business leaders, discussed the most common ethical challenges facing the modern communications practitioner. After comments, the panelists exchanged views with the audience, comprised of PRSA members, media representatives, college professors, and student members of PRSSA.

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### **Central New York**

Using the dramatic style of Socratic Dialogue presentations, the chapter observed

PRSA's ethics month on September 17, 2003, with a conference that took participants into the power circles where critical decisions are made and ethics battles won and lost. The daylong conference was unique, focusing on ethics and ethical decision-making using simulation, dialogue and discussion. The conference, *Ethics in Crisis & Crisis in Ethics*, featured "The Trouble at Global Industries," and was led by James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA. Mr. Lukaszewski was joined by seven role players from Connecticut, New York City, and Syracuse, New York who, with Mr. Lukaszewski's skillful direction, made the fictitious company, Global Industries, and its problems come alive. The fictitious scenario illustrated how "doing it wrong" looks and sounds, and the devastating consequences of inappropriate and unethical behaviors in an organization under threat and under pressure. The conference was designed to help participants avoid the ethical minefields, learn from experienced professionals, manage a real-world ethical challenge, recognize the warning signs of developing ethical problems, and understand and better manage the complexity of ethical decision making. Conference events included the Socratic Dialogue in the morning, a luncheon speaker and discussion, and a national teleconference – sponsored by the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards, in the early afternoon. A reprise of the Socratic Dialogue with PRSA students at Syracuse University followed the teleconference. Featured at the luncheon discussion, was Mark Golden President, Golden Artist Colors, Inc.—recipient of a Presidential citation for good business practices, who discussed applying ethical principles in the every day, work world of sales and profits, and employee and community relations, as well as private and public interests.

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### **Dallas, Texas**

The Dallas Chapter's September program, "Ethics in the Changing Public Relations Arena," featured a panel representing the media, corporations, education, and PR agencies. Panelists shared their organization's philosophy regarding ethics and shared case studies on their experiences regarding ethical practices. The panelists were Karen Blumenthal, Dallas Bureau Chief, Wall Street Journal; Brian Wenning, Ethics and Compliance Director, TXU; Rita Kirk Whillock, Professor and Chair of the Division of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, SMU and Richard Mullinex, General Manager, Fleishman-Hillard Dallas.

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### **Hampton Roads, Virginia**

Six ethical scenarios were developed using actual situations faced by some chapter members and/or suggested by events in the news. These were used at the monthly luncheon, with each table assigned a situation to discuss and report back to the group. Senior practitioners -- all APRs and either past presidents or board members, including two PRSA Fellows-- facilitated the discussion at each table. At each place was a copy of the Statement of Professional Values, the Code and the business-card-sized Ethics

Decision Making Guide. Before discussions started, the host gave a brief presentation on Statement and Code and discussed how to use the Guide. At the conclusion of the discussions, a rep from each table presented the decision and fielded questions.

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### **Minnesota**

At the annual fall one-day Skills Seminar, Ethics was a prominent topic. The opening Keynote was a Media Panel moderated by William Barhart of the Chicago Tribune on Ethics in the Newsroom. Paul Holmes of The Holmes Group talked a great deal about Ethics in his noon Keynote, and David Schoeneck, Chapter Ethics Officer, led an afternoon session titled "The Ethical Advocate: Everyday Issues for PR Practitioners." Jeremy Iggers, Minneapolis Star Tribune ethics columnist, also spoke at this presentation. In late September, the chapter conducted a two hour course on the PRSA Code of Ethics and PR Law for Chapter members preparing for the Accreditation Exam. In December, at the chapter's Annual Meeting, Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic, is scheduled to speak and discuss his new book, "Authentic Leadership." His views on corporate responsibility were featured in the Sept. 29 issue of Fortune.

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### **Northeast Wisconsin**

Six consecutive pieces about ethics is being published in the chapter's monthly e-newsletter, each dealing with one of PRSA's six values. Written in an upbeat, somewhat amusing manner, they involve examples of good behaviors for each value. The series started in July. Each piece is prefaced by a one-paragraph summary of PRSA's code, its purpose, and why we're promoting ethics. She also wrote an editorial for the local business biweekly paper, *The Business News*, about the fact that true PR people are not "spin" doctors, defining spin as a form of lying. Instead, the focus was on PR people being ethical and that PRSA is an ethics mentor for its members. It was published in September.

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### **Nashville, Tennessee**

The Nashville Chapter's ethics program will include roundtable discussions about specific ethical issues led by senior level APR members.

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### **New Jersey**

The New Jersey Chapter has one ethics program per year and works ethics questions into many of its programs. This year, for instance, the annual Public Relations Institute -- a daylong series of seminars for practitioners and non-practitioners who find themselves saddled with PR responsibilities -- will include a modified Socratic dialogue, in which a CEO and legal, public relations and financial counsel will grapple with an accusation of financial problems while a news reporter knocks at their door. Ethics will be a strong part of the session.

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### **New Mexico**

"Ethics in Business: Where's the Beef?" was the title of guest speaker John Ackerman at the monthly luncheon. He is an endowed professor at the University of New Mexico, where he teaches ethics to business students, and the former president and CEO of the state's public utility company. He discussed his work with students in conducting research of nominees for the annual New Mexico Ethics in Business Awards. He also spoke about his experience as a CEO in dealing with ethical concerns and the role public relations professionals should play in instilling ethical conduct in their companies and organizations.

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### **New York**

On January 15th 2003 the New York Chapter, in collaboration with the Ethics Officer Association, organized a Socratic Dialogue evening, a discussion on business, ethics, communications and crisis. Elizabeth Howard wrote a script that dealt with the problem of obesity and marketing to teen-agers. A real panel discussed this hypothetical situation. This Socratic Dialogue event demonstrated the value of interaction by bringing together a print journalist, public relations professional, attorney, ethics advisor and CEO, to work as a team to turn an ethical problem inside out and upside down, until its essence and the strategy for the implementation of a solution was clear. While the scenario was created, the interaction was real. It was like a war-game for professionals.

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### **Northwest Ohio**

The annual ethics program was held in February and featured a panel of seasoned professionals who talked about their corporate ethics. Included was a public utility, two Fortune 500 companies and a journalist.

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### **Oakland/ East Bay, California**

PRSA President Reed Bolton Byrum spoke at the chapter meeting in Jack London Square, and then the next day, visited University of the Pacific and spoke to PRSSA students. The chapter made the most of his time.

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### **Orlando Regional, Florida**

A monthly program featured a review of traditional ethics research by past president Roy Reid, APR (copy available from Roy@onmessage.com) and an interactive training session led by past president (and former PRSA Board member) Frank R. Stansberry, APR, Fellow PRSA. The pair also presented a similar program to the Volusia County (Daytona Beach) chapter, Florida Public Relations Association that month. The focus of the two-part program was to reinforce the importance of ethics in the professional setting, review ethical philosophy and to give members the opportunity to evaluate ethical problems in a professional setting. A second effort to instill ethical discussion into the conversation came with the APR training class currently being conducted. Stansberry met with the candidates from the Central Florida area to talk about ethics and laws applying to PR professionals. (Recommended reading: Legal and Ethical Restraints on Public Relations by Karla K. Gower, available on Amazon.com)

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### **Pikes Peak, Colorado**

During Ethics Month, the Pikes Peak chapter featured two ethics events. First, members participated in the national teleseminar, "Ethics in Crisis," by reviewing case materials, listening to the live seminar from Syracuse, and then discussing both crisis and ethical issues in the case. Second, ethics was the topic of the keynote address at the chapter's annual professional development workshop. BEPS chair Chuck Wood, APR, Fellow PRSA, focused on ethical issues in large corporations and the PR role in building ethical cultures. Handouts included Code booklets, Code cards, and articles from Strategist and Tactics.

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### **Puget Sound, Washington**

An Ethics Roundtable discussion will be conducted at the chapter's annual Seminar for Non-Profits. Two former chapter Ethics Officers, will be presenting an Ethics program to the University of Washington Extension program for Marketing and PR next month. Also in November, the chapter will present "Nowhere to Hide: The New Rules of Corporate Ethics and Liability." In response to the fall of Enron, Worldcom, and others, the U.S. government has enacted new regulations that require board members, executives, managers, audit committees, and other key employees to take on a much larger

responsibility for corporate liability. Because this responsibility extends to investor relations and public relations directors, taking the position of "I'm just the messenger" is no longer a valid defense. Criminal liability can now apply for distributing misleading or inaccurate company information, regardless of whether you're specifically involved in the decision-making process. A panel including Jane McCahon, a veteran investor relations consultant based in Boston; David Smith, a white collar crime attorney who represents company Board members and directors; and Neil Moir, Manager, Ethics and Business Conduct for Weyerhaeuser; will provide information on the new requirements for ethical practices and the role of investor relations and public relations practitioners in driving adoption of these practices by their organizations. Moderated by Leslie Larson, APR, current Puget Sound Chapter PRSA Ethics Officer, the panel will also cover the legal ramifications -- including personal and criminal liability -- of directors who participate in unethical practices in public and private companies.

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### **Sierra Nevada**

In February, Lynn Fielder, activist, national spokesperson and public figure for bioethics described the long term ethical consequences of crafting messages to 24 PRSA members. Fielder, who is living with Parkinson's, eloquently described how the anti-abortion PR team co-opted the term "cloning" for both reproductive ("bad") and therapeutic ("good") forms of research. The consequences include the public policy Congress voted for the following day banning all research and subsequently crippling the future of medicine and science to cure diseases such as Parkinson's. Few in the audience realized that the legislation would include jailing Fielder and fining her one million dollars if she left the country for a cure then returned. "I'd be cured from my body's imprisonment, only to be imprisoned by my country for seeking to save my life and try to be here for my daughter's next birthday," Fielder said. The thought-provoking speech compelled many members to contact their Congressmen. One APR Fellow described the program as the first original programming he'd seen in a long time---the program personalized the long-term effects of a brainstorming session around semantics.

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### **South Carolina**

The South Carolina PRSA Chapter used articles in its monthly newsletter about ethics and the PRSA Code of Ethics. In addition, a presentation will be made at the Chapter's annual professional development conference on Ethics Jeopardy, based on the popular TV game show.

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### **Southeastern New England**

The chapter highlighted its activity for the 2002 – 2003 year by sponsoring a very visible, distinguished speaker and high powered reactor panel discussion around the Ethical “norms” necessary in this period of economic downturn and fierce competition. Kathy Lewton, Past President of PRSA and prominent practitioner in our field, was joined on the panel by the Lt. Governor of the State of Rhode Island, the President of Salve Regina College [RI], the President/CEO of the Bank of Newport and District Director of the US Postal Services. The attendance for the meeting was “standing room only.” Feedback from attendees was most positive. The program focused directly on commonly shared dilemmas and different approaches toward ethical behavior by the PR practitioners.

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### **Spokane, Washington**

The Greater Spokane Chapter of PRSA celebrated Ethics month in September in two ways. Our chapter meets in conjunction with the Spokane Public Relations Council, so it was a great opportunity to share the ethics brochure and wallet card with this broader audience here in our community. We promoted ethics as "everyone's business" and cited the ethics material as a value-added from PRSA. There were approximately 80 people in attendance. Additionally, we posed an ethical dilemma in our September PRSA newsletter -- drawn from the Coca Cola-Burger King situation -- and asked readers to determine the ethics principle involved. We recapped the dilemma in the October newsletter and cited the ethics principle that was violated. We plan to do this "ethics couplet" newsletter article again in December/January and again in April/May. We have over 100 individuals on the PRSA mailing list.

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### **Tampa Bay, Florida**

The Tampa Bay Chapter has had an occasional "ethics moment" as part of monthly meetings. Sometimes this was nothing more than a reminder of who the chapter EO is and other times it was a comment on an issue of local significance. National PRSA board member Debbie Mason was the featured guest in September. She presented the latest ethics Power Point presentation and orchestrated table discussions.

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### **Tarheel, North Carolina**

During 2003 the Tarheel chapter's ethics vice president and four committee members looked for activities to increase chapter members' understanding of public relations ethics and what it means to be an ethical practitioner. We encouraged members to think about and talk about ethical practices. Early in the year we announced the formation of

the chapter's ethics committee and told the membership how to contact us if they needed advice. We distributed the Code of Ethics pocket card during our May membership meeting to build awareness prior to Ethics Awareness Month in September. We promoted ethics through a short article in the chapter's newsletter during September. The article encouraged attendance at the September monthly meeting, which featured Drs. Janice Pope and Kay Taylor, both public relations professors at Appalachian State University. The professors led us in a lively and insightful discussion about ethics best practices, using material from their recently published college textbook on ethics. Beginning in May, we also held an "ethics minute" at the start of each monthly meeting. These "minutes" used real (or hypothetical) examples to reinforce the values and provisions in the Code of Ethics.

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### **Tulsa, Oklahoma**

A public relations director from the telecommunications industry was the featured speaker at a monthly program. He challenged members to re-think their responsibilities to assure the information they disseminate is accurate, particularly in light of the recent corporate scandals. "Mini-roundtable" ethics discussions are conducted on a quarterly basis during our regularly scheduled programs. Two days in advance of our program, we send a case study on an ethical issue to all members. It is also passed out again at the program to each table (a board member is assigned to each table to help facilitate discussions) along with a copy of the PRSA code of ethics. Each table then has 15 minutes to discuss the issue. A spokesperson from each table then shares the highlights of their table discussion with the larger group. It makes for lively discussion, keeps people focused on their professional ethical responsibilities and also provides for interaction among the members and guests.

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### **Volunteer, Tennessee**

The Knoxville-based Volunteer Chapter observed Ethics Month in September by focusing on ethics in public relations and journalism in a joint meeting with PRSSA, the East Tennessee chapter of Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), and the University of Tennessee T student chapter of SPJ. The luncheon meeting and panel discussion were held at the new headquarters of the Knoxville News-Sentinel. Panelists were Jack McElroy, editor of the News-Sentinel and former editor of the Albuquerque Tribune and the Rocky Mountain News; Becky Huckaby, director of public relations for the Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority and president of the Volunteer Chapter; Georgiana Vines, associate editor of the News-Sentinel and former national president of SPJ; and Mary Beth West, APR, principal in her own consulting firm and a member of the PRSA national board. The panel was moderated by Bonnie Riechert, APR, of the public relations faculty at the University of Tennessee and chapter ethics officer. Huckaby reviewed the provisions of the PRSA Member Code of Ethics, copies of which

were distributed to each person attending. West discussed the increasing need for public relations practitioners to stride toward senior management in organizations so that they can be effectively influential as an advocate for ethical behavior by organizations. McElroy discussed examples of ethical dilemmas faced by journalists, and Vines discussed presentations focusing at the recent national SPJ convention. Copies of the SPJ Code of Ethics also were distributed.

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**PRSA Chapter Ethics Programs  
2003 Best Practices**

**PRSA International Conference  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**October 25-28  
2003**