7 principles of successful PR pros

If you keep your word, read a lot, and treat others with dignity, you're on your way to a long career in public relations.

By Frank Strong | Posted: August 7, 2012

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Forget strategy for a minute. Put tactics on pause. Forget leads, conversions and sales.

Let's consider principles. I can't say these will work for you. I can only say they have worked for me. I call them principles to succeed in PR, but they may be relevant for those in other industries.

My seven principles are:

1. Your word is everything. If we give our word, we must keep it. It's a choice. I tend avoid absolutes ("never," "always") in PR because there are almost always exceptions. But when it comes to our word, there are no exceptions. We either keep it or we do not—there's no in between.

2. Choose persuasion over manipulation. Critics might argue semantics, but I believe the contrast is stark. Aim to convince people your idea is so compelling it merits interest, rather than try to fool bloggers or reporters for a quick hit.

3. PR is a marathon, not a sprint. PR is not a quick hit. It usually doesn't happen fast. It happens over time, and snowballs with momentum. Whether you work for a corporation or an agency, we must manage expectations to allow time for us to persuade.

4. Strive to treat everyone with dignity. General officers have this quality. Some CEOs have this quality. I think Gini Dietrich has this quality. I'll be the first to admit, I often fall short here. We are all human. We get mad. We react. Flight or fight is instinctive to a degree beyond even a scientific understanding. But strive. Maslow's hierarchy is the same for everyone.

5. Intellectual curiosity is paramount. Beyond the weather or traffic, there's little in the news that will make us instantly smart. Rather, it is aggregation and reading over time that builds knowledge.

We should read everything we can get our hands on. Read about business to build competence. Read fiction to spark creativity. Read history for context. Sometimes the most successful entrepreneurs aren't students of business, but students of history because they understand context.

My iPhone is brimming with information. It has apps to bring me content, podcasts for news, and audiobooks for ideas. When we have a free minute, we can add ideas or play Angry Birds.

6. It's OK to make mistakes. When I learned to ski as a young boy, my father said, "You have to fall down 1,000 times before you're an expert." It's OK to make mistakes. Fall down. Break a leg. Reflect. Later, think though what went right and what went wrong—therein lies the key to improvement.

7. Do something you love. If going to work feels like a black cloud over your head, it's time to leave. If you don't believe in your product, service or cause—if your heart isn't in it—it's time to go.

Mark Twain once said (this is one of my favorite quotes), "Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than the things you did. So cast off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor. Let the trade winds catch your sales. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Frank Strong is the director of PR for Vocus. He blogs at Sword and the Script, where a version of this article originally appeared.

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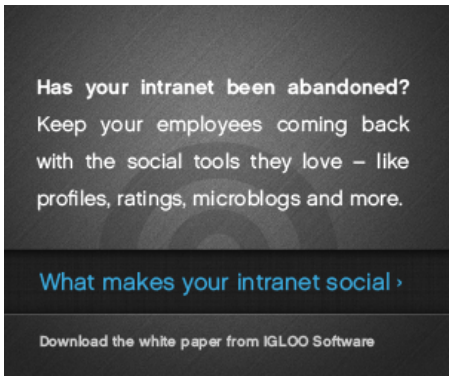

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