

**“Public Relations, A Global Profession
In An Inter-Connected World”**

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“Clearly, the seminal message is this: We can, and must, learn from each other.”

Good morning, colleagues. And thank you for that kind introduction.

I'm delighted to join with you today as we meet to advance the cause of international public relations.

Like the new President of my country, I bring greetings to this region – and, I hope, a timely new message of hope and encouragement for the beginning of a new era of cooperation.

Mr. Obama, of course, has a somewhat broader agenda than ours here today. But I believe that the spirit of this symposium is in complete accord with his objectives: Mutual respect, sharing experience and knowledge, and making progress toward societal harmony.

And so, here at the outset, let me offer the fundamental idea that I would like to leave with you today. It is this:

The many variations in public relations – in education and in the practice – that I have seen around the world represent a perfect analog for today's many different national political, economic, cultural traditions and systems.

Clearly, the seminal message is this: We can, and must, learn from each other.”

Furthermore, I think it is not too much to say that public relations can, indeed, help achieve harmony on the international level as well as on many other levels -- national, local and organizational. Mr. Obama’s refreshing new approach to American “public diplomacy” is surely a relevant example.

As you know, I’ve chosen to examine the topic of “Global Public Relations in an Inter-Connected World.” I’d like to start by briefly reflecting on just how “interconnected” the world has really become.

Rest easy, however, because I’ll not burden you with still more chatter on how the current global economic crisis dramatically illustrates global inter-connectedness. There is, and will for some time be, a surfeit of commentary on this topic.

I will only report that a few decades ago, a diplomat advised, “Let us make the world so economically-interdependent that war will go out of style.” File that under the category of, “Be careful what you wish for.”

Global Connections

Instead, for a few moments let's examine how people are connected the world over:

I suggest to you that a place to start is to reflect on some alarming global data provided by James Wolfensohn, formerly head of The World Bank:

Mr. Wolfensohn has estimated that the chasm between "Poor Countries" and "Rich Countries" is vast – and it is growing. World population, in rounded figures, is now a bit more than six billion. About five billion of those people live in the "Poor Countries" and one billion in the "Rich Countries."

However, in the projectable future, the "Poor Countries" are expected to add two billion people while "Rich Countries" will add only fifty *million* people.

Given current social and economic trends, we can easily see the likely effect on standard of living and quality of life in less-developed countries.

Moreover, "Poor" and "Rich" Countries – and their citizens -- are now linked by a host of international strands:

- . Trade
- . Capital flows
- . Immigration
- . Foreign Aid and Development
- . Tourism
- . Information technology

and, unfortunately,

- . Disease
- . Natural Disasters
- . Drug Trafficking
- . Crime
- . Terrorism and
- . War

We have a silly aphorism in America these days: It says: “What happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas.”

Not only is that not true of Las Vegas, but because of current information technology, what happens anywhere in the world, can be known – momentarily – wherever there is a cell phone or a computer screen. Meaning everywhere.

It's not surprising, therefore, that a new world order is now being formed.

Here is just some selected evidence of this epochal change in the world order:

- Earlier this month in Istanbul, the United Nations convened the Second Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, billed as the world's premier event aimed at advancing intercultural understanding.

The Alliance seeks to develop a series of online clearinghouses on its main concentrations: youth, education, media and migration.

- On a longer term basis , the United Nations recently held a special meeting at U.N. headquarters in New York to update progress on meeting its 2015 Millennium Development Goals. I was impressed with once, again, the chasm between poor and rich countries but also the efforts by companies, governments and NGOs to close that tremendous gap.

- Two weeks ago, it was the leaders of the G20 -- not the G8 -- nations that met in London to address what was called a “Global New Deal.” This, a recognition that there are now far more nations that determine world economics than a few decades ago.

- Of course, global cooperation is also vitally needed to solve macro environmental problems such as climate change. So planning is underway for the coming international meeting to update the Kyoto protocols.

- Transparency is now increasingly demanded of companies and governments around the world. Re-building trust in these and other institutions will require wise counsel over a long period of time.

Mission and Progress

Clearly, we in public relations education and practice have a lot of work to do. As public relations professionals, it should fall largely on us to build the communication bridges that will facilitate progress in all of these endeavors.

Happily, we are well underway in learning from each other in the interest of greater understanding and collaboration in both public relations how public relations can contribute to international understanding and cooperation.

And, in tribute to the many academics here today, I must point out that it is you who have been the pioneers in this service.

For several decades, members of public relations faculty have been traveling from their home countries to various parts of the world, near and far, to exchange concepts and experiences with peers and students in “partner” colleges and universities. Now, many public relations students are taking advantage of such international study opportunities.

Public relations faculty members have also greatly stimulated international intellectual discourse by their many research projects and publications – books, reports, theses, etc.

Public relations practitioners as well have long been involved in building international bridges of understanding and collaboration. Working at multinational companies, multi-lateral organizations and a host of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these professionals

have contributed to globalization which, although still imperfect, has raised the standard of living and the quality of life for millions of people around the world.

The “Profession Debate”

Now, before we spend a few moments examining more recent manifestations of the effects of the international public relations profession, let’s agree that public relations is, indeed, a profession. This is a discussion that often takes place in my country and perhaps in your countries as well.

I would argue that public relations meets the relevant criteria for a profession.

First, we do operate in the public interest in that we pursue mutual understanding and cooperation. And we have a code of ethics and a body of knowledge – that knowledge continually expanding through widespread social and communications research which many of you have undertaken.

Although many of our professional societies don’t have a formal entry-level credential, the fine work being done on outcomes assessment at our universities will lead us in that direction.

Recent Developments

Let's now move on to some of the more recent bridge-building developments in international public relations;

(Because this abbreviated list is somewhat Western-centric, I'm sure that you can add to it substantially.)

(1.) Just last month, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, established the Global Center for Public Relations, a home base for advanced research, data collection, publishing and symposia.

(2.) A global research project, just undertaken under the auspices of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, seeks to identify the many ways in which public relations is being taught in some 180 academic institutions outside of North America (where that information has already been compiled).

GA, headquartered at the University of Lugano, in Switzerland, expects to publish an analysis of this data, perhaps teasing out common approaches to such education, early next year. The GA mantra is "One Profession, One Voice".

(3.) The Commission on Public Relations Education, which periodically brings North American educators and practitioners together to develop suggestions for undergraduate and graduate education, recently translated its most recent report, “The Professional Bond” into five additional languages – Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese and Arabic.

(4.) The Public Relations Student International Coalition was recently formed to “educate, share knowledge and create awareness of the expanding scope of public relations among public relations students worldwide. Formed by the Public Relations Student Society of America, the coalition has established a website with pages on initial research by task force members in Russia, The Netherlands and Mexico. The coalition will, of course, coordinate with EUPRERA and other student associations.

(5.) And our professional societies have been hard at work as well.

The Institute for Public Relations has expanded its work internationally by publishing a new compendium entitled “Global Public Relations”, an addition to its Essential Knowledge Project. This compendium “summarizes the primary lessons or findings of academic research on global public relations.”

In a few moments, we will hear in some detail about the activities of the International Public Relations Association when Madame Maria Gergova, distinguished president of IPRA, come to the podium. I will simply draw your attention to the fact that at its recent symposium in Beijing IPRA's discussed its latest Gold Paper entitled, "Public Relations and Collaboration: The Role of Public Relations and Communications Supporting Collaboration in a Complex, Converging World".

And the Public Relations Society of America's International Section sponsors conferences, some at United Nations headquarters, on compelling global communications issues, often reprising these subjects in the society's "Strategist" and "Tactics" publications.

The Task Before Us

With all this progress in international public relations, I must point out what seem to me to be the three most important challenges, or more accurately, opportunities facing our international public relations profession.

So I have a short list of the fascinating, overarching *opportunities* – actually three such connected *opportunities* -- that come to mind

when I contemplate the global public relations profession moving forward in this century. They are: transparency, collaboration and public service.

Transparency

The first overarching opportunity for the public relations profession today is the growing demand for transparency in institutions of all kinds here and around the world.

I need not remind you of the vast transparency deficit that has plunged global society into economic distress.

The core of transparency issue is its effect on public trust and confidence.

It's encouraging to note that public relations professionals are already addressing this issue, witness initiatives such as The Arthur Page Society's "The Authentic Enterprise" program and the Edelman Trust Barometer.

Of course, when I refer to the need for greater transparency, I'm not suggesting that an organization should make everything public. There is valuable proprietary information — and, in the case of national security, intelligence information — that warrants protection.

But public relations counsel should rank with legal counsel in helping management make the necessary distinctions between disclosure and non-disclosure.

In this connection, many years ago, Justice Louis Brandeis offered us a valuable piece of advice when he said, “sunshine is the best disinfectant.”

My friends, all these things being said, “transparency” is largely our turf. How we handle it in the many organizations in which we toil may well define how public relations prospers around the world in this century.

Collaboration/Partnering

The second seminal opportunity international public relations professionals can, and must, now address is the increasing need for collaboration at the many levels of society.

Of course, we might profitably consider an observation made by the great American philosopher, Woody Allen. He has told us that, “Yes, the lamb may lie down with the lion, but one of them is going to spend a sleepless night.”

The opportunity here is for international public relations professionals to bring their training and experience to the formation of

collaborative, effective partnerships – win-win partnerships that contribute to mutual progress. As Harold Burson has so wisely observed, public relations has evolved to the point where today we often deliver counsel on policy and performance as well as communications per se.

And many years ago, Allan Center told us that as a profession public relations has as its fundamental mission in society ... *harmony*.

Public Service

The third stimulating opportunity facing the international public relations profession is that of expanded public service.

Yes, many public relations educators and practitioners have long been involved in pro bono efforts with non-profit organizations at the local, and even the national, levels. And more of such efforts certainly are encouraged.

But for a moment, let's take public relations public service to the macro level and reflect on the opportunity that history has now given us to make a significant contribution on the world stage by helping our countries mount truly effective "public diplomacy" programs.

"Public diplomacy", in essence, should also be our turf.

After all, where is it written that some of the most informed, experienced and articulate communications professionals around the world should not play a role in the “global marketplace of ideas”?

Where is that stone tablet that says that well-prepared and motivated communicators – that is, international public relations professionals – should not help in the vital development of our nation’s coming “soft power” initiatives?

Fortunately, there is good news here. The parade is forming to support establishment of genuine, robust “public diplomacy” programs in several countries. -- and several public relations professionals and organizations are at, or near, the head of that parade.

In the U.S., one such organization is Business for Diplomatic Action. BDA -- composed of leaders from public relations, advertising, academia, government, think tanks and civil society – is organizing a special task force to keep “public diplomacy” high on the Obama Administration’s agenda. Yes, even with all the complex, existential economic issues now facing the country and the world.

The BDA effort is somewhat analogous to the U.S.I.A.’s private sector advisory group Harold Burson chaired during the Reagan

Administration. Harold's committee offered that administration counsel on people-to-people diplomacy based largely on a series of meetings we held with high-level Soviet communicators in Moscow and Washington D.C. A few in this room today may remember "glasnost" and "perestroika".

Mutual Respect

Now I will simply conclude by confessing to you that with such opportunities – such exciting prospects for applying public relations to the inter-connected 21st-century world -- I do have one regret:

I wish I were starting in public relations all over again.

I look forward to hearing today's papers on both strategic and tactical progress in our profession and, as time allows, exchanging views with the professional mutual respect that must mark all of our endeavors.

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