APRIL 2026
Volume 9, Number 4

PRSA

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Career Moves That Matter

UPCOMING PRSA WORKSHOPS

April 21–22 | 3–5 p.m. ET

Beyond Prompts: Building Trusted AI Workflows

This two-day, hands-on workshop equips PR and communications professionals with proven strategic methods to build consistent, future-ready AI-supported workflows that remain effective as technology evolves.

April 29 – May 1

APR Virtual Boot Camp

This course is designed to provide a setting for busy professionals to focus on final preparations. We strongly recommend that candidates complete previous preparations through their local chapter, on their own or by taking the APR Online Course.

May 5, 7 & 12 | 2–4 p.m. ET

3 Essential Stories Every PR Pro Needs To Succeed

This three-part workshop takes a deep dive into crafting compelling narratives on behalf of the organizations we represent, the leaders and clients we serve, and ourselves.

VIEW ALL PROGRAMS AND REGISTER AT
PRSA.ORG/PD

Editor's Corner

April is APR Month at PRSA — a time when we highlight the importance of Accreditation in Public Relations and recognize the professionals dedicated to earning it.

Earning the APR is an important milestone for communicators at all stages of their careers. For PRSA CEO Matthew Marcial, CAE, APR, the goal of pursuing the credential was simple: to understand the profession from within.

In a January LinkedIn interview with PRSA Chair Heide Harrell, APR, MBA, Marcial explained why he decided to take on the challenge himself.

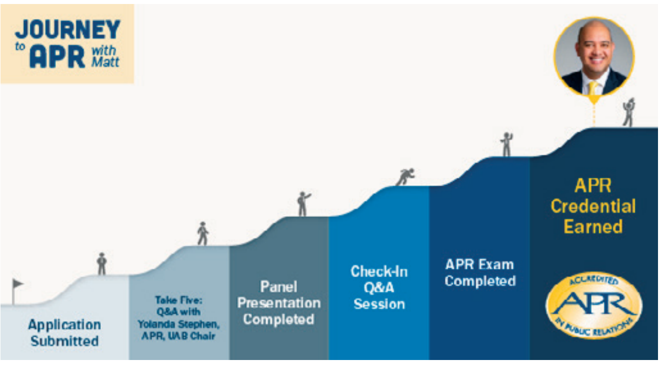
"Coming in as CEO of PRSA, it was important to me to understand the profession from a practitioner's standpoint, and to lead by example," said Marcial, who joined PRSA in March 2025.

Marcial already held other professional certifications — Certified Association Executive and Certified Meeting Professional — but said the APR process stands apart, particularly the panel presentation candidates complete before taking the exam.

Some candidates initially find that step intimidating, he acknowledged. However, the panel is designed to help candidates succeed.

"It's not meant to poke holes in your presentation," he said. "It's meant to support you."

Preparing for the exam also means revisiting the foundations of PR strategy — particularly the RPIE model: research, planning, implementation and evaluation.



Marcial began studying even before completing his panel presentation, reviewing PRSA's study guide, attending an APR boot camp and using online resources such as flashcards, practice tests and video modules.

The exam itself is no small task. It runs three-and-a-half hours and focuses on scenario-based questions.

"It's intense," Marcial said. "Make sure you're well rested and ready."

Still, he emphasizes that the process matters more than the test itself. Studying with colleagues, working with mentors, and making time for preparation help practitioners sharpen the strategic thinking that defines strong public relations leadership.

For those considering the credential, Marcial offers a few reminders:

➲ You don't need to rush — candidates have a full year to complete the exam after applying.

➲ The exam focuses on applying knowledge, not memorizing facts.

➲ If you don't pass the first time, you can try again — many Accredited professionals took the exam more than once.

Marcial passed the exam on Dec. 11, but he says the real value came from the journey.

The APR remains the profession's gold standard — demonstrating strategic expertise, ethical practice and a commitment to lifelong learning. APR Month is a great time to reflect on what the credential can mean for your own professional growth.

— John Elsasser
@JohnElsasser

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

April 2026 Periodical Vol. 9, No. 4 $15

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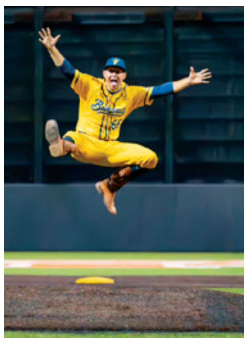
Strategies & Tactics (ISSN 2576-2028) is published 10 times per year by the Public Relations Society of America, 120 Wall Street, Floor 21, New York, NY 10005. April 2026. Volume 9, Number 4.

Cover Art: jozefmicic

Inside PRSA

Savannah Bananas Coach Named First ICON 2026 Keynote



PRSA is bringing the Savannah Bananas' high-energy leadership philosophy to the ICON stage.

Known for encouraging others to "bet on yourself," Tyler Gillum, head coach of the Savannah Bananas, will share leadership lessons drawn from the Bananas' unconventional approach to culture, performance and fan engagement.

He will deliver his keynote during a General Session at ICON 2026, PRSA's flagship event for public relations and communications professionals, which attracts thousands of practitioners, leaders and students from across the industry.

Gillum has inspired audiences in sports and business with his focus on resilience, vision and creating experiences that extend beyond wins and losses. Since becoming head coach of the Savannah Bananas in 2018, he has helped lead the rise of Banana Ball — a fast, fan-focused spin on baseball built around the philosophy of putting fans first. Often compared to the Harlem Globetrotters, the Bananas have sold out stadiums nationwide and expanded into tours, cruises and large-scale live events.

"Tyler Gillum knows how to build belief, momentum and community," said PRSA CEO Matthew Marcial, CAE, APR. "Whether he's leading a team, energizing fans, or speaking to a room of professionals, Tyler connects with people. His message about betting on yourself and serving others is just the kind of inspiration we're looking forward to bringing to ICON 2026."

In addition to his work with the Bananas, Gillum built a successful career coaching collegiate baseball, developing athletes while fostering cultures rooted in trust, accountability and purpose.

Nomination Process for the 2027 Board Commences

The application process for the 2027 Board of Directors is underway.

PRSA is seeking candidates to fill three officer positions, five district director positions and one director-at-large position.

Officer (one-year term)
➲ Chair-elect
➲ Treasurer
➲ Secretary

Director (two-year term)
➲ East Central District Director
➲ Mid-Atlantic District Director
➲ Northeast District Director
➲ Tri-State District Director
➲ Western District Director
➲ Director At-Large (1 position)

Board members:
➲ Serve as ambassadors and advocates for the organization
➲ Provide strategic and financial oversight
➲ Monitor emerging trends and issues affecting the profession
➲ Collaborate with leaders across the country and internationally
➲ Help guide the long-term direction of PRSA

"Board service is one of the most meaningful ways to shape the future of our profession," said Joseph Abreu, APR, CPRC, nominating committee chair. "At this stage in PRSA's evolution, leadership is not simply about oversight; it's about vision, stewardship, and ensuring we continue to elevate the standards, credibility and impact of public relations and the communications field. The Board's decisions influence our members, our chapters, and the broader communications community."

Applications are due April 17.

Please visit the PRSA website to apply.

Highlighting Accreditation in April

April is Accreditation Month at PRSA. It's a time to learn about how becoming Accredited in Public Relations can help advance your career.

Look for social media posts, webinars and articles on the PRsay blog and in *The Pinnacle*, PRSA's monthly newsletter offering insights on Accreditation.

Meanwhile, PRSA recently introduced the APR Virtual Study Course, designed to prepare professionals for the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) process.

The modules are self-paced and focus on Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs), including research, planning, implementation and evaluation of public relations programs, public relations ethics and law, managing relationships, issues management, crisis communication and more.

What's Trending

What people were talking about on social media this past month…

Pleased to serve as a judge for the 2026 PRSA Anvil Awards. It's been a privilege to review so many impressive entries that are a great reminder of the thoughtful work PR and communications teams are doing every day to inform, connect, and make a difference. Best of luck to all of this year's participants! — *Jillian Davidson, M.S., APR*

Attended my first PRSA Detroit event ... and left with a room full of new connections. There's something about being in a room full of people who love this work as much as you do that reminds you why you chose this field. — *Milcah Solomon*

It was a pleasure to join PRSA Los Angeles for their first meeting of the year. The Edelman office in #LosAngeles was the perfect setting for a candid conversation about the importance of communication in a period of rapid change, disruption and misinformation. Businesses rely on their communication professionals to distill fast-moving information and help navigate complexities.
— *Maria S. Salinas*

I completed the PRSA AI in Action: Practical Tools and Techniques for the Modern Communicator certificate program. A core takeaway and important reminder: AI is a tool. And like any tool, it works best when paired with experience, judgment and a clear point of view.
— *Amy Collins*

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santacruzpr1 Thank you to PRSA-Los Angeles for the opportunity to participate in The State of PR panel.
In a conversation centered on grounding a year of rapid change in practical communications leadership, we explored how communicators can lead proactively in an era shaped by AI acceleration, misinformation, and heightened public scrutiny.
Grateful to share perspectives and learn alongside such thoughtful industry leaders.
#PRSALA #StateOfPR

MyPRSA COMMUNITY

Recent popular topics from MyPRSA's Open Forum, one of many PRSA member benefits:

- Starting an intranet refresh project
- Engagement ideas for executive video podcast
- Working with freelance graphic designers
- Is TikTok Live the next big opportunity for PR?
- Ideas for building a targeted list of reporters/publications

In Brief

Is Olympic Skater Alysa Liu's Carefree Manner a New Path to Success?

When figure skater Alysa Liu became the first American woman to earn an individual figure skating gold medal at the Olympics in 24 years in February, the 20-year-old demonstrated that success can come from joy, *Inc. Magazine* writes.


@nbcolympics via instagram

The adage "no pain, no gain" is especially true for Olympic skaters, who endure grueling rounds of training and competition before reaching the games. But when Liu decided to start skating again after retiring from the sport four years ago, she set her own training schedule. Her approach paid off.

Professional skaters make it look easy, but Liu's attitude and happy expression as she skated suggested she was free of the pressure that weighs upon most Olympic athletes, especially those favored to win medals. While skating and spinning on the ice, Liu appeared relaxed and ready to enjoy the moment, whether she would win a medal or not.

Liu invites us to be ourselves and to relish the performance itself more than the results, *Inc.* writes.

Podcasts Overtake Radio as Popular Medium for Spoken-Word Audio

When video versions are included, podcasts have overtaken AM/FM talk radio as the more popular medium for spoken-word audio, a survey by Edison Research finds.


misa

As TechCrunch reports, this year podcasts eclipsed spoken-word radio for the first time at 40% of listening time, compared to 39% for radio. The comparison does not include listening to music.

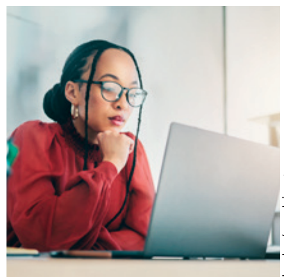
In the study, "podcasts" include video versions on YouTube and Spotify. YouTube said viewers watched 700 million hours of podcasts on living-room TVs each month in 2025, up from 400 million in 2024. Netflix is partnering with iHeartMedia and Barstool Sports to show video podcasts on the streaming service.

Some 80% of consumers over the age of 18 tune into both audio and video podcasts, according to a report from Triton Digital. Listening preferences vary among podcast genres. Conversations on topics like music, sports, comedy and news are more popular on video. Science, history, art, fiction and true crime are more popular on audio.

> TikTok is becoming a search destination: 49% of U.S. consumers now use the platform to find information — a nearly 20% jump in two years.
> — *Adobe*

For Some Readers, Email Newsletters Provide Distinct Format for News

Email newsletters have become a familiar, if not widely read, format for news, Pew Research Center finds. In a survey, 30% of U.S. adult respondents say they get news from newsletters at least sometimes. But a majority don't end up reading them.


Jacob a/ peopleimages.com

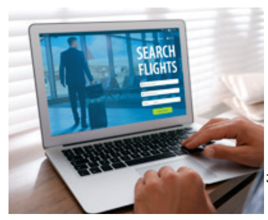
Websites, search engines and social media are all more common pathways to news, but newsletters offer a distinct format for briefings, opinions and deep dives. As of last year, 6% of U.S. adults said they often get news from email newsletters, while 24% said they do sometimes. The majority either rarely (26%) or never (43%) receive news from email newsletters.

In Pew's August 2025 survey, just 3% of Americans named newsletters as their preferred way to get news, far behind television (34%), news websites/apps (21%) and other formats. A slightly larger share (7%) said they have paid or given money to a news-oriented email newsletter in the past year, whether by subscribing, donating or becoming a member.

Expedia Analysis Shows Best Times to Fly, Book Flights

Friday is now the cheapest day of the week to fly and book flights, thanks to reduced business travel on Fridays, says Expedia's "2026 Air Hacks Report."

"New opportunities are opening up for leisure travelers to save by choosing smarter travel days," said Melanie Fish, who heads public relations for the travel-booking service. Fares for flights in July and October are priced at least 20% lower than the norm, Fish said.



new africa

August is the most affordable month to travel, according to Expedia's analysis, with international destinations such as Honduras, Morelia and Tokyo seeing some of the largest drops in airfares. Flights in August are 29% cheaper on average than in December, saving travelers roughly $120 per ticket.

January is the least expensive month to fly domestically, due to lower demand after the holidays. Flying on Friday instead of Sunday can save travelers up to 8%, while Tuesday is the cheapest day to fly domestically, averaging 14% less than Sunday departures.

— *Greg Beaubien*

Connect With Us Online

- Read the online version of *Strategies & Tactics* and view the digital flipbook: **prsa.org/SandT**
- Read the latest posts on our *PRsay* blog: **prsay.prsa.org**
- Follow us on X: **@PRSAtactics**
- Sign up for our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter, and the e-version of *Strategies & Tactics*, via your communications preferences: **prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile**
- Become a PRSA member: **prsa.org/JoinUs**
- Change your address and update your contact information: **prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile**
- Learn how to become a corporate or university sponsor: **prsa.org/Network/Partnerships**

The Explainer

Tips for Building Team Culture

Corporate culture isn't built by mission statements, policies, or perfectly executed retreats. It's shaped by shared moments — the unscripted experiences that shape how people feel about their work and about one another.

zinkeych

In *Fast Company*, Tony Martignetti, chief illumination officer at Inspired Purpose Partners, argues that many traditional "culture-building" efforts amount to productivity theater: well-organized, information-heavy and ultimately forgettable.

Despite the time and resources organizations devote to culture, employees often feel disconnected from it. Deloitte reports that fewer than a quarter of organizations believe employees are strongly aligned with corporate purpose. Gallup finds that only about two in 10 employees feel connected to their company's culture on a daily basis. The issue isn't a lack of messaging. It's a lack of meaningful experience.

Culture doesn't live in a values deck. It lives in the stories employees tell about what it feels like to work there. It shows up in whether people leave a meeting feeling seen or merely informed. Martignetti suggests leaders shift their focus from managing culture to designing experiences that foster trust, belonging and courage.

In his work with organizations, he has found that durable culture shifts are rooted in three human elements that predate modern workplaces: art, ritual and awe.

Creative collaboration can unlock perspectives that structured discussions cannot. When teams create something together, hierarchies soften and unspoken dynamics surface.

Ritual, even in small doses, signals significance. A pause at the beginning of a meeting, a closing reflection, or a shared check-in question can transform routine interactions into meaningful touchpoints.

Awe — moments that expand perspective — can also reset overstimulated teams. When colleagues share personal stories or reflect on formative experiences, they see one another beyond job titles. That shift fosters empathy and risk-taking that information alone cannot.

Culture doesn't shift because leaders deliver better slides. It shifts when people share experiences that change how they see each other.

If you're planning your next team gathering, consider:

STEP 1 Start with a feeling goal, not an agenda goal.

STEP 2 Replace one presentation with a shared creative exercise.

STEP 3 Build in a brief ritual to open or close the meeting.

STEP 4 Invite personal stories, not just professional updates.

PRsay

BRIEFING

A recent insight from PRSA's PRsay blog:

During PRSA's Feb. 24 webinar, "The Next Era of Leadership: Black Voices Shaping the Future of PR," panelists discussed how communications leadership must evolve to reflect increasingly complex identities and audience expectations.

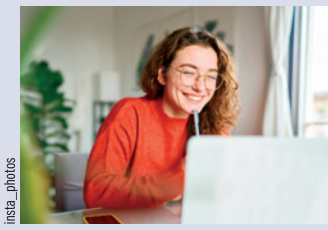
Monique Soriano-Foreman, an account director at Burson in New York, said communicators can no longer rely on broad audience categories. Effective campaigns must recognize intersectionality and approach strategy with greater nuance and cultural awareness.

Speakers also emphasized stronger media literacy and influencer vetting as audiences — especially Gen Z — expect brands to align with their values.

Panelists noted the difference between mentorship and sponsorship, explaining that sponsorship involves actively advocating for emerging professionals and opening doors to opportunities — a critical step in expanding access for the next generation of PR leaders.

Read more at www.prsay.prsa.org

By the Numbers

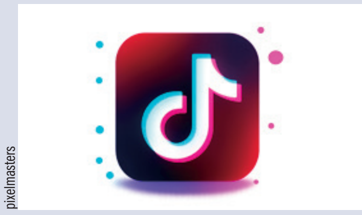


insta_photos

Remote roles are four times more competitive than in-office or hybrid positions, based on an analysis of 600,000-plus job applications by JobHire.AI.

Nearly two-thirds of CMOs expect AI to dramatically reshape their role within two years — yet only 32% believe the CMO profile requires major change, Gartner reports.

ebbe



pixelmasters

21% of U.S. teens say they are on TikTok "almost constantly." Meanwhile, 37% of U.S. adults now use the platform — up from 21% in 2021.

Issues + Trends

These were the most popular topics from our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter in the past month.

- Why CEOs dive into political controversies
- About the "Silent Middle" burnout crisis
- Is a workaholic culture good for business?
- Burger brands beef over viral video
- How to manage criticism at work
- Top hacks for AirPod users

INSIGHTS FROM PRSA STRATEGIES & TACTICS LIVE

Strategies & Tactics Live, our monthly LinkedIn Live Q&A, includes a post-episode video interview for PRSA members. Here's a highlight from this past month:

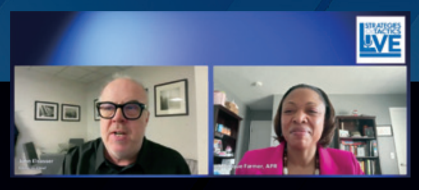
Monique Farmer, APR, had advice for busy PR professionals who would like to write a book: "Don't go alone."

Before Farmer, a consultant, educator and entrepreneur, wrote her 2024 book "Chart Your Path: A 9-Step Method to Getting Unstuck," a life coach had told her: "When we try to go at a challenge solo, we have an 8% chance of success. When we do it in a group, we have a 92% chance of being successful."

Farmer wrote her book as part of a curriculum from a publishing services company, "with a group of other aspiring authors," she said. "If I would have gone at that alone, I would probably still be working on it."

In a writing group, "You can encourage one another and get to the finish line," she said.

Don't obsess that your book has to be perfect, she said. "You just need to get it all dumped out of your brain for the first iteration. That's what we pay editors for — to clean it up and make it cohesive."



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In Defense of the Endangered Humanities Major

accogliente

By Rob Biesenbach

Back in college, I felt like an endangered species. I was an English lit and political science major, seemingly surrounded by engineering, pre-med, and business school students.

I can't imagine what it must be like on campuses today, with the drastic cuts to liberal arts and humanities programs.

Yes, I get it. The high cost of tuition and the changing job market are driving students toward more "practical" degrees. But I can personally attest to the real-world value of a liberal arts education and the many important — and *marketable* — skills it can equip you with.

So, for my liberal arts brethren — students, recent grads and their worried parents — I've put together this defense of the humanities major (with a little help from my friends).

The practical benefits

Here is what I've found a humanities education can teach you:

➲ **Critical thinking.** In high school and college, we would analyze literature, identifying motifs, symbols, and themes that offered clues to the text's larger meaning. I use this skill every day to make sense of the world around me.

➲ **Open-mindedness.** Very often in these disciplines there is no single "right" answer. As long as you could support your point with textual evidence, it was valid.

➲ **Empathy.** In literature, as in life, few villains are motivated purely by evil. The best ones are complicated. This helped me see things from others' point of view and try to understand their motivations.

➲ **Creativity.** There is nothing like sitting in front of a blank screen and having to fill it with words and ideas and viewpoints — and to make it all fit together.

➲ **Storytelling and communication.** Finally, of course, learning the patterns and rhythms of great stories, debating in the classroom and writing essays were an excellent training ground for, well, *everything*.

Wisdom from the trenches

All of this may be easy for me to say because I went to college way back in the last century! So I sought a reality check from parents of college kids, current students and the people hiring them.

Marketing and communication veteran and father of two college grads Pete Brace says, "Can certain skills/majors help? Yes, but I'd hire curiosity, drive and ambition over degree any day."

Editorial and creative director John Hubbell says, "Degrees that will 'get you hired so you can pay your mortgage' don't build the empathy, storytelling, and emotional intelligence skills that one needs to be a good peer, let alone a good leader."

Sadie Jenkins, a political science and English writing student, says that "these fields have shaped who I am in profound ways. They've taught me how to think critically, communicate effectively, and understand the world with nuance and empathy."

Finally, a word of warning: A humanities degree is going to make the job hunt a little more challenging. As communication strategist and mother of a classical vocal performance grad Melinda Brunell puts it, your liberal arts degree "is not going to get you in the door," echoing the thoughts of several parents.

Magazine editor Christine Barakat added that her son worked to "build a portfolio and connections" and "thoughtfully curated his LinkedIn profile, which is where a recruiter found him."

Timeless skills for the AI age

All of these skills are critical in any setting and age. But especially in the AI era, they constitute key differentiators.

Just listen to Anthropic co-founder and president Daniela Amodei, herself a literature major. "Studying the humanities is going to be more important than ever," she says, pointing to the value of "the things that make us human."

That includes "understanding ourselves, understanding history ...what makes us tick ... critical thinking skills" and the ability to "interact with other people."

So to my fellow liberal arts/humanities majors, take heart. Be confident in the knowledge that you bring genuine, practical value to the workplace and the marketplace. And be prepared to vigorously make the case for your chosen path. ❖

Rob Biesenbach helps leaders break free from death by PowerPoint, tell their story and communicate like humans should. He's an in-demand speaker, workshop leader and coach, an award-winning communicator and a bestselling author. He's worked with great organizations including AARP, Allstate, Caterpillar, Coca-Cola and Lockheed Martin.

cultural strategy

Events Should Educate and Inspire

By Melissa Vela-Williamson, M.A., APR, Fellow PRSA

For PR pros, education should be a career-long commitment because what we know fuels what we can accomplish. Many working professionals pursue professional development by attending conferences and other industry events.

I owe much of my professional education to what I learned early in my career at local PRSA luncheons, career days, and the annual Gift of Guidance events. When it was financially and time-wise feasible, I expanded my mind and PR toolkit by applying the takeaways I gathered at regional and national conferences.

Now, I'm honored to share what I've learned with others at events, which deepens my understanding of any topic I cover.

I know firsthand that experiential learning can fill skill gaps, confidence gaps, and help people accelerate learning through experience. But stale lectures in hotel ballrooms won't expand our knowledge and skill set in meaningful ways.

To deepen learning, events should engage our minds, move our hearts, and inspire us to practice a skill that quickens our understanding. Stellar events can also reignite our passion for our profession and make us want to come back year after year.

Since we learn from events, and many pros also manage events, I interviewed Event Manager and Producer Larell Rodriguez of Dynamic Events. She shares about how to enhance our approach to attending and producing events. (Fun fact: Larell is also my niece!)

Many communication pros dabble in event planning as "other duties as assigned" in their jobs. How did you come to specialize in event planning?

I've always known from a young age that I wanted to focus on event planning. I pursued related roles starting in high school, like organizing prom and leading retreats, and took college courses on events, including the inaugural TEDx Texas State.

I often turned down paid opportunities if they didn't align with my career goals. Although my vision wasn't always clear to others, I recognized the importance of gaining experience in this industry, so I took every opportunity to expand my knowledge and tool kit.

What do you love about creating events or experiences? What do you loathe about it?

I *love* the excitement and thrill of creating something with my own hands and ideas, and seeing it take shape. It's truly special to watch a vision turn into reality. However, I *loathe* the common misconceptions and stereotypes about this industry.

Many people reduce my work to simply "planning parties," but my role involves organizing conferences, award ceremonies, galas, keynotes, and memorable experiences...events that require careful logistics, data analysis, and ROI considerations. Without that data, an event is just a party.

What types of events do you produce most often?

I've always been interested in larger conferences and events. My experience began in college, working at festivals and trade shows, which led me to focus on bigger events. Through these opportunities, I developed my skills in production, speaker management, and content.

I didn't start out with weddings or smaller events like showers or parties, so I haven't pursued those types of functions professionally — only for my friends and family.

Larell Rodriguez

How can PR professionals create experiences that educate and inspire people?

It is important to put yourself in the attendees' mindset and ask yourself:

➲ What would inspire THEM at this event?

➲ What is the goal to educate them on?

➲ What is the purpose?

➲ How can this be done that can achieve these goals?

The most meaningful events I have executed prioritized the attendee experience and mindset. Rather than think about what YOU want, what would THEY want? ❖

Melissa Vela-Williamson, APR, Fellow PRSA, specializes in integrating public relations with cultural strategy and compassion principles. She is an industry author, podcast host and boutique firm owner. Connect with her at MVW Communications.

workplace wellness

Build Lasting Mentorships

drazen

By Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA

No matter your level of experience, from PRSSA member to PRSA Fellow, you might feel pressure to know "everything" in our profession. I'm here to tell you 1) you don't, and 2) it's OK that you don't!

In a profession where reputation is paramount, it can feel risky to admit to a manager or a direct report that you don't have all the answers and need help.

That's why having mentors is important at all career stages, as they serve as a hidden safety net.

External mentorship provides a neutral ground where you can focus on your professional challenges without fear of retribution (though I'd strongly argue that any leader who doesn't allow this is a true red flag).

A factor for success

Finding impactful mentors is a critical success factor for your career and well-being. People with external mentors are twice as likely to be engaged at work (Gallup, 2025), and 89% of mentored employees say their mentoring relationship makes them feel more connected to their company (MentorcliQ, 2024).

Here are a few ways to maximize a mentor-mentee relationship.

1. Identify one personal career education gap. As you start looking for external mentors, focus on asking for advice on one specific area. For instance, do you need help with:

- Mastering Agentic AI?
- Learning how to say "no" to demanding bosses?
- Moving from an agency role to in-house (or vice versa)?

2. Look for someone who has solved that specific problem. One way to identify this is to look for people who have led workshops. MyPRSA has a wealth of information from those who have led virtual sessions on a seemingly infinite number of topics.

Implement what I call a "3-2-1 Warm-Up" approach. Spend a couple of weeks engaging with them online:

- Three meaningful comments on their LinkedIn/industry posts.
- Two "Shares" of their content with your own added insight.
- One direct message or email introducing yourself and referencing a specific point they made.

3. Offer to share your own insights. Today, mentorship is a two-way street. Senior leaders are often desperate for insights from people of all ages and experiences. Offer value in return:

- AI beta-testing: Offer to show them a new tool you're using.
- Trendspotting: Give them a perspective on a new social platform.
- Data sharing: Share an insight from a recent report you read.

Ask for a short 15-minute "Low-Friction" conversation. For example, "Hi, I've been following your work on Agentic AI and loved your PRSA webinar. I'm currently navigating how to use AI at work ethically and seeking an external perspective beyond my company. Are you open to a 15-minute conversation to discuss how you handled the ethical use of Agentic AI?"

After they accept (and they will), and you have your initial 15-minute meeting, please follow up promptly, thank them, and offer to serve as a resource.

As you learn and progress, please keep your mentor(s) updated.

A list of resources

A great resource to check out is PRSA's wonderful mentorship opportunities, including Mentor Connect, APR/APR+M planning, Champions for PRSSA, and Chapter-level programs. There are literally thousands of PR professionals willing and eager to share their thoughts.

Once you build confidence in working with mentors, consider expanding your network. Forward-thinking public relations professionals even build a full personal "Board of Directors" outside their company.

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hire and seek

What's Changed in Entry-Level PR Hiring

By Christina Withey

In public relations, the entry-level candidate hiring managers are looking for today looks a bit different from the one sought just five years ago.

The fundamentals of PR haven't changed, but the landscape these early career professionals are entering has shifted dramatically. What does "ready for the workplace" mean today?

Where AI fits into foundational skills

As AI tools become more pervasive in PR workflows, I have noted a shift toward seeking candidates with stronger foundational writing and research skills.

AI is not a replacement for strategic thinking. It certainly helps with efficiency and speed. A well-prompted AI can generate draft social copy, summarize research, or suggest angles, but it cannot replace the human judgment that distinguishes good PR from great PR. It doesn't understand nuance, client relationships, or the cultural moment we're operating in.

Transparency about AI use matters, particularly in application materials and portfolio pieces. If you've used AI tools in your work samples, be upfront about it. Explain your process and what value you added.

noah

Entry-level professionals need to build their foundation on solid ground by learning to write tight, strategic copy, understanding what makes a story newsworthy, and developing their research instincts. Once those fundamentals are rock-solid, AI becomes an amplifier of capabilities rather than a crutch that compensates for gaps.

Beyond writing skills

Early-career pros need sharp critical thinking and sound news literacy. In an era of misinformation, content farms, and algorithmically driven media, the ability to evaluate sources is non-negotiable. Can you distinguish credible journalism from branded content? Do you understand the difference between a press release and actual reporting? Can you identify bias?

For PR professionals who monitor media, identify story opportunities, and pitch journalists, this is reality. If you can't critically evaluate the media landscape, you can't effectively navigate it. You need to understand what's being said, who's saying it, why they're saying it, and whether it's trustworthy.

Strong critical thinking also means being able to ask better questions, challenge assumptions, and think several steps ahead. What are the potential implications of this messaging? Who might push back and why? These instincts develop over time, but they start with intellectual curiosity and healthy skepticism.

Professional presence and coachability

A growing number of otherwise talented candidates seem uncomfortable with basic professional interactions, particularly in person. The post-pandemic generation of graduates completed significant portions of their education and early work experience remotely, and sometimes, that shows. This isn't about minor nervousness, which is normal and expected.

Professional preparedness and workplace etiquette aren't optional skills. A recent graduate should feel comfortable introducing themselves to a CEO, contributing appropriately in meetings, and navigating office dynamics.

Teams are also assessing coachability, your willingness to learn, ability to pivot and adapt, and comfort with receiving feedback. Entry-level positions are, by definition, learning roles. You will make mistakes. You will receive edits on your writing. Your ideas will be challenged and refined. Your first draft will rarely be the final draft.

Can you hear constructive criticism without becoming defensive? Can you admit when you don't know something? Believing your skills are static and that feedback is personal criticism will stall your growth quickly. A growth mindset will accelerate your development.

Preparing the next gen

I have noticed many universities and internship programs making strides to address some of these early career talent needs by incorporating mock client meetings, professional development workshops, structured networking opportunities, and feedback-intensive assignments into their curriculum. This is essential preparation for the communications profession.

The entry-level candidate the industry needs has strong fundamentals, professional polish, critical thinking skills, and coachability. Becoming workplace-ready extends beyond traditional coursework, yet the fundamentals still matter, perhaps now more than ever.

Christina Withey is the senior vice president and director of talent acquisition at Rubenstein. She is passionate about refining and enhancing employee engagement, company culture, and diversity and inclusion efforts. Twitter: @NewYorkRoses.

Chart Your Course

How to Grow in PR Without Losing Yourself

By Monique Farmer, APR

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In early January, I had the opportunity to meet with a group of eager learners who met via a virtual webinar early in the morning. All were ready to dig into their 2026 goals and hit the ground running at the very start of this year.

Let's talk about your career for a minute. Whether you're just breaking into public relations or you've been at it for a while, there comes a point when you start asking yourself: *Am I growing? Am I fulfilled? Where am I even headed?*

Trust me, I've been there.

Years ago, I was leading communications for Nebraska's largest school district. It was a 24/7 role, and I mean *literally* 24/7. Media calls at all hours. Issue after issue. Constant demands. From the outside, it likely looked like I was always steady and ready. But on the inside? I was exhausted. And something had to change.

That shift didn't come overnight. It started with a question from my life coach, Julie Landi:

"What would your *perfect* workday look like? Not a vacation day, but a *real*, fulfilling workday?"

That question changed everything for me. And now, I want to pass that pivotal moment on to you.

Step 1: Figure out where you are

Before you can decide where you want to go, let's pause and figure out where you actually *are*.

Here's a quick gut-check:

➲ What part of your work lights you up?

➲ What part drains the life out of you?

➲ What are people always coming to you for?

➲ Is that the thing you *want* to be known for?

Take stock. Because when you can name where you are you can start mapping out your next step, not someone else's step, but yours.

Step 2: Create your 'perfect day' vision

Yes, I'm serious. Write it down.

Where are you working? What kind of clients or projects are you tackling? Who's on your team? How are you spending your time? How do you *feel* at the end of the day?

When I wrote mine, I didn't realize it would lead to a total pivot. But within a year, I made the decision to work in my PR firm full-time versus part-time, published a book, pared down my teaching load to one course and aligned my life with the impact I wanted to make.

That vision didn't just live in my journal. It became my compass.

So go ahead. Write yours. No filters. No "what-ifs." Just envision.

> "Before you can decide where you want to go, let's pause and figure out where you actually *are*."

Step 3: Choose the lens that fits right now

Not everyone's in the same place. Your growth plan shouldn't be either.

Here are four ways to look at your career path, depending on where you're standing:

1. The Builder Lens. You're in learning mode. Maybe you're early in your career or switching industries. This is your time to build core skills, soak up knowledge and figure out what kind of communicator you really want to be.

2. The Explorer Lens. You've got some experience, but things feel… stale. This is your permission slip to try something new. Volunteer for a different kind of project. Take on a new sector. See what sticks.

3. The Strategist Lens. You're ready to lead. Not just do the work but influence it. It's time to build your reputation, mentor others or maybe even speak, teach or publish.

4. The Harmonizer Lens. You're tired. You've been doing the most for a long time, and you're ready to work smarter, not harder. It's time to reclaim your time and design a career that honors your *life*, too.

There's no "best" lens. There's only the one that fits your season. So ask yourself: *Which one feels most like me right now?*

Step 4: Let tech work for you, not overwhelm you

Look, the tech is here. AI tools, writing assistants, media monitoring bots. It's all evolving fast. But don't let that intimidate you.

Think of AI like an enthusiastic intern. It can help you brainstorm, organize your thoughts or speed up research. But it still needs your eyes, your judgment and your voice.

You're the strategist. The creative. The human who brings the *why* to the *what*.

Use the tools that make your job easier. Ignore the hype. And don't forget to gut-check everything with your professional integrity.

Step 5: Build your career GPS

Here's a quick system I use when I'm feeling stuck:

➲ **Gaps.** Where do you need to grow? Is it in writing, leadership, crisis comms, pitching? Be honest. No shame here.

➲ **People.** Who's in your corner? Who's mentoring you, challenging you, opening doors for you? Build a "personal board of directors," even if it starts with just one person.

➲ **Steps.** What's one small action you can take this week? Maybe it's signing up for a course. Maybe it's scheduling a coffee chat with someone you admire. Small steps move mountains.

Step 6: Advocate for yourself with receipts

Want that promotion? Need to push back on unrealistic workloads? Don't just feel it. *Show* it.

Track your wins. Document the results you're driving. Create visual dashboards or simple bullet-point reports. The more clearly you show your value, the easier it is to advocate for yourself and for others.

Step 7: Redefine what success looks like (for you)

Let's be real: Success in PR used to be defined by how busy you were. How fast you responded. How many press hits you got.

But real success? That's impact. Alignment. Peace.

Maybe your next big move isn't about climbing higher. It could be about stepping into a role that fits your season or finally saying no to work that doesn't serve you. Maybe it's about believing you're worth more — because you are.

Final thought: You're not stuck. You're becoming

Your path doesn't have to look like anyone else's.

You don't need permission to pivot. You don't need a title to lead. And you don't need to have it all figured out to take the next right step.

Just start where you are. Write your perfect day. Pick your growth lens. Take one bold step. Then another.

Your path is yours and you get to chart it.

Monique Farmer, APR, runs an award-winning PR/Communication Consultancy, Avant Solutions, and is the creator of Anvil Ready. She has taught at the University of Texas, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Farmer spent 12 years working in the federal government before her time in corporate communications at ConAgra Foods (now ConAgra Brands), then leading communication strategy for Nebraska's largest school district. In March 2024, she published her first book, "Chart Your Path: A 9-step Method to Getting Unstuck."

Measuring What Matters

Choosing Your Career KPIs for What's Next

smile studio ap

By Cheryl Procter-Rogers, APR, Fellow PRSA

Are you ready now?

In a previous article, I introduced my Four C framework for career agility. This is a reminder that a well-designed career path is rooted in your values, aligned with your passions, strengthened by your personal cabinet, and elevated by continually building your capabilities. I'm going to assume you've begun that work.

For this issue, I want to create a sense of urgency for those just starting out, those growing through their careers, those who have been displaced, and those nearing the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next.

Consider this a wake-up call if you are still on the sidelines waiting to see what unfolds rather than actively shaping what comes next.

Here's what the research tells us:

- Most executives don't fall short because they lack technical expertise. They struggle because of gaps in their leadership capabilities. Expertise may open doors, but sustained influence comes from continuously expanding that expertise beyond the core skills that got you in the room in the first place.
- Executives are far more likely to derail because of challenges related to interpersonal effectiveness, strategic thinking, and the ability to read the room and adapt, according to the Center for Creative Leadership
- Only a small percentage of leaders are seen as strong strategic thinkers. Let that sink in.
- Only about one in 10 leaders demonstrate strong strategic thinking capability, a global leadership study by Development Dimensions International (DDI) found. This is a striking reminder that advancement requires more than functional excellence.
- The good news? Communication remains one of the most in-demand leadership capabilities. In our profession, we are trained to be excellent communicators, which means many of us are already part of the way there.

LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends consistently ranks communication, adaptability, and strategic thinking among the most critical skills for navigating today's workplace. Our opportunity and responsibility is to build on that strength by expanding our perspective, deepening our strategic thinking, and connecting our expertise to organizational outcomes.

The question isn't whether expertise matters. It absolutely does. A better question is whether you are balancing expertise with the broader capabilities required to lead and influence at higher levels. Leadership isn't only about title. Many professionals create meaningful impact without formal authority.

Balancing expertise with capabilities

So how do you continue expanding your expertise while strengthening the broader capabilities that elevate your impact?

- **Stay current on trends in your discipline and industry.** Read trade and business journals and books, follow relevant media, and listen to podcasts that expand your understanding of the broader landscape. Attend conferences and workshops not just to learn, but to understand how your field or discipline is evolving.

> "Leadership isn't only about title. Many professionals create meaningful impact without formal authority."

- **Create an investment fund for your own development.** Consider certifications, advanced education, or specialized learning experiences. Lean on your personal cabinet to help you decide how to invest those resources each year.
- **Move beyond sharing what you know to explaining why it matters.** For example, instead of saying, "There are five steps in the product roll-out process," a more strategic statement might be, "If we accelerate steps two and three, we can reduce time to market and improve competitive positioning." Connecting expertise to outcomes elevates your contribution.
- **Work across the organization.** Do this to understand how your expertise can support opportunities, reduce pain points, and advance strategic priorities. Build relationships with colleagues in finance, legal, operations, and other key functions to broaden your understanding and perspective.

Indicators you are building capabilities

As you begin to expand your expertise and perspective, the shift often shows up before you fully recognize it yourself. The way others engage with you changes. You're invited into different conversations, asked different questions, and relied upon in new ways.

These are often the earliest indicators that you are building capabilities and closing the gap between expertise and broader leadership impact without any change in title or formal authority.

One of the clearest signals is when you are invited into conversations not just for your expertise, but for your perspective. You are asked to connect dots, interpret implications, and encourage deeper thinking. Over time, you become known as a valued thought partner.

That reputation doesn't happen by accident. It comes from investing in conversations, listening deeply, and developing a broader understanding of the organizational landscape. It also comes from being willing to ask provocative questions that help others see issues from new angles and often prompting responses like, "I hadn't thought of that."

Peers begin to assess your strategic thinking through your ability to synthesize information, offer clear insights, and frame choices rather than simply provide answers.

Strengthening your strategic thinking muscle

The brain is an organ, but it functions like a muscle. Like going to the gym regularly, it strengthens with intentional use. Developing strategic thinking requires a shift in mindset and in how you observe the world around you.

You listen differently. You look for patterns, connections, and second-order implications. Your perspective brings clarity to complexity and helps others think more broadly about options and implications.

What changes when you strengthen this capability? You become more comfortable with ambiguity. You prepare differently for meetings. You think beyond today's meeting agenda and take a longer-term view. You weigh trade-offs more effectively, and you develop the confidence to offer perspective even when the path forward isn't fully clear.

When things are going well, we rarely focus on building these capabilities. But when we step into a new role, face layoffs or other disruptors, or transition to our final career chapter, we often find ourselves scrambling to catch up in order to position ourselves for what comes next.

That often means reconnecting with our network or personal cabinet, reassessing our capabilities, and taking a more intentional look at how we want to move forward. The good news is that it's never too late to begin building these habits and doing so can strengthen how we navigate whatever comes next.

Begin building these habits now, not because you're behind, but because intentional action strengthens both your confidence and your impact. Invest not only in what you know, but in how you think, how you communicate your ideas, and how you see the horizon.

Careers today are shaped by our ability to adapt, expand our perspective, and continually strengthen the capabilities that allow us to influence beyond the boundaries of our expertise or scope of work.

The leaders who thrive are not just experts. They are learners, connectors, communicators and strategic thinkers who understand how their work fits into a larger system.

So I'll ask again: Are you ready now?

Cheryl Procter-Rogers, APR, Fellow PRSA, MCC, is president and CEO of A Step Ahead Consulting & Coaching LLC, an executive coaching and strategic communications firm she established in 1986. For more than 40 years, she has designed and implemented public relations strategies for corporate, university, government and nonprofit entities and coaches senior executives. She served as the 2006 PRSA national president and CEO and received the profession's highest honor, the PRSA Gold Anvil, in 2011

Rethinking Career Progression

How Non-Linear Moves Can Expand Your Impact

By Leah Gladu

master1305

When professionals talk about career growth, the conversation commonly centers around one question: *What's my next title?*

However, in today's workplace, where roles shift quickly, priorities evolve and titles can disappear overnight, the better question may be: *What will this next move teach me?*

Titles still hold power. They can open doors and signal readiness. But if your goal is long-term growth and leadership impact, your next role doesn't have to be a step up to be a meaningful step forward.

In fact, some of the most powerful career development comes from moves that look lateral on paper, because a pause on the ladder can create space for more intentional decisions to better prepare for what comes next.

I've also seen this play out for many people who were forced into change. More than a few colleagues and friends have lost jobs unexpectedly and, after the initial shock, emerged from that moment with far more clarity about the kind of work they wanted to do, the kind of leaders they wanted to become and the kind of growth that genuinely mattered to them.

Whether you're actively considering your next opportunity or simply thinking more intentionally about where you want to grow, here are a few practical ways to evaluate your next career move and create meaningful growth even when a promotion is not attached.

1. Start with learning, not level.

Growth accelerates when your next role intentionally fills a learning gap. Before focusing on job titles or reporting structures, identify how you want to grow.

Ask yourself:

➲ What types of problems energize me the most?

➲ What capabilities do I want to build over the next one to two years?

➲ What parts of the business do I want to understand better?

Real-life insight: At one point in my career, I realized that I didn't actually dislike working – I disliked the type of work I was doing. A role change that allowed me to learn a different side of the business renewed my sense of purpose. That ability to learn something new that I enjoyed, not the title, became a true driver of growth for me.

2. Look for influence opportunities, not just ownership.

Ownership of work matters. Influence over outcomes matters more. Those are the experiences that help build leadership readiness.

Ask yourself:

➲ Will I be expected to build alignment across teams?

➲ Will I have opportunities to influence stakeholders who do not report to me?

➲ Will my work create influence that meaningfully supports company goals?

> "Non-linear career moves often provide something promotions do not: space to expand, experiment and build versatility."

Real-life insight: Working in an environment without formal titles taught me to lead through influence rather than hierarchy. I learned how to listen more carefully, delegate more effectively, understand different stakeholder motivations, and frame ideas in ways that helped people move forward together. Those skills turned out to be far more valuable than simply owning deliverables.

3. Don't discount the power of a lateral move.

Non-linear career moves often provide something promotions do not: space to expand, experiment and build versatility.

Ask yourself:

➲ Will this role allow me to stretch in a new direction?

➲ Will I be exposed to a different culture, function or leadership style?

➲ Will this role give me access to decisions, challenges or perspectives I don't have in my current role?

Real-life insight: Moving into an agency environment for the first time, in a role comparable in scope and responsibility to my previous position, took me off a traditional corporate path and sharpened my communication skills, stakeholder management and adaptability in ways that prepared me to lead through change far more than staying on a predictable track likely would have.

4. Let mentorship help inform your next move.

Mentors can help you see both risks and opportunities that may be difficult to recognize on your own.

Ask your mentor:

➲ What would you focus on if you were in my position?

➲ Where do you think I could grow most right now?

➲ What might I be underestimating about this move?

Real-life insight: I have been fortunate to have mentors who have encouraged me to take risks by giving me room to grow and reminding me that I could ask for help if something went sideways and I needed them to step in. Having that trust empowered me to take risks and made it easier to step into leadership opportunities I might otherwise have avoided.

5. Understand what growth looks like beyond compensation and title.

When evaluating your next opportunity, look beyond what is visible on paper.

Ask yourself:

➲ Will I work well with the people on this team?

➲ Are there leaders I can genuinely learn from?

➲ Will this role help me build credibility in new ways?

Real-life insight: Some of the most meaningful growth in my career came from relationships and exposure, meeting people outside of my immediate circle, learning different working styles and understanding how different teams contribute to results. Those experiences shaped how I think about leadership and collaboration more than a title ever could.

When the path forward isn't obvious, start with these three questions.

1. What does my gut say – after removing fear, imposter syndrome and outside expectations?

2. Do the benefits outweigh the trade-offs? (Benefits include learning, people and purpose, not just pay or title.)

3. Would I regret not trying?

Lateral and unconventional career moves can become powerful when you can clearly articulate why you took the role and what it gave you. Translating any kind of learning and career growth into impact is what turns a non-linear path into a leadership story.

In today's world, I believe the most well-rounded professionals are not the ones who climb the fastest. They are the ones who keep learning intentionally, build influence across their organizations and use every move — whether it's up, sideways or unexpected — as a chance to strengthen their skills and leadership capability.

Leah Gladu has led communications for global companies, mentored some of today's most promising young leaders and served first as president and now as CEO of KWI, a communications and management consulting agency based in Atlanta. To continue the conversation, connect with Gladu on LinkedIn.

Lead by Example

Is Your 2026 Mentorship Just Performance Art?

By Dan Farkas

I hope everyone has a Greg Farkas in their life.

Greg is my brother. He is a successful attorney, a father to two brilliant children, a husband who married up, a relentless advocate for those in need, and a weary handler of two animated dogs.

PR leaders spend a lot of time discussing "talent retention," "Gen Z relations" and "What is up with Gen Alpha worries." As I look at my brother's career, I realize our profession's approach to mentorship is often backward. We treat it like a press release with too much polish and too little substance.

To reach the next generation of practitioners, consider this:

Are we actually living the mentorship lessons we try to teach others?

Using my brother's favorite bands, let's identify more intentional mentorship.

The R.E.M. Rule: *"The time to rise has been engaged."*

My brother's favorite band captures a sentiment we often ignore in the C-suite: The "time to rise" is constant.

Mentorship isn't just a scheduled coffee chat or a "thought leadership" post on LinkedIn. Your mentees are looking at you 24/7/365. That speech you give at the annual meeting isn't nearly as important as their observations of you during a crisis.

Stacey Hanke, a brilliant voice in leadership, often asks people if they are the same person Monday to Monday. That degree of consistency in our mission, vision and values is vital. We cannot just tell the next generation how to be professionals; we must live it in mind, body and spirit. If your "Monday-self" is a champion for ethics, but your "Thursday-self" cuts corners to meet a KPI, good luck.

Van Halen and vacuum cleaners

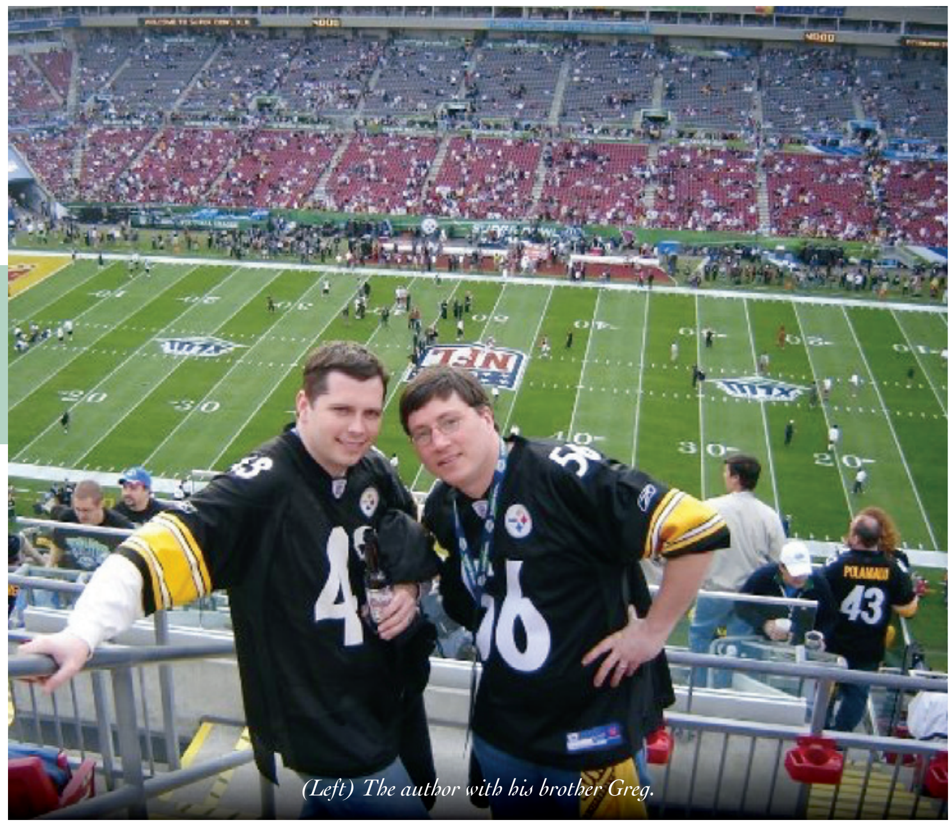
"You got it tough
I've seen the toughest around
And I know just how you feel
You've got to roll with the punches
To get to what's real."

Van Halen's 1984 album was an "Ah Ha…" experience I will never forget. So too is this story from my brother's law school days. It involved the Pittsburgh Steelers, a gut-wrenching loss, and an "unfortunate accident" involving a broken vacuum. Details are spotty and closely guarded. Here's what I know: My brother was seen carrying a vacuum cleaner down the street to get it fixed himself.

> "Mentorship isn't just a scheduled coffee chat or a 'thought leadership' post on LinkedIn."

Bad things happen to good people. Great practitioners face setbacks. Too often, we shield our mentees from uncomfortable feedback or, worse, hide our own failures.

The best mentorship happens when new professionals see us roll with the punches. They need to see the walk to the repair shop. They need to know that when we offer direct feedback, it's because we want them to succeed. Success isn't the absence of mistakes; it's the result of doing the uncomfortable work to fix them.



(Left) The author with his brother Greg.

The Buffett Shift: Meeting them where they are

"It's those changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes
Nothing remains quite the same"

Greg took me to my first concert. Jimmy Buffett's genius was his ability to adjust to the times while staying true to his core.

The way we were mentored back in the day needs to evolve. To bridge the gap, we must ask:

1. Are we engaging all five senses? We need to find ways to make people understand with sight, sound, touch, taste and smell when able. This is particularly true in online settings when it's easy to zone out.

2. Are we explaining the "Why" behind the "What"? Gen Z and Gen Alpha value context with the content.

3. Where does our mentorship fit into their social and emotional wellness? Young people face a crisis of trust in traditional institutions and seek faith and confidence in their work community. That makes you a mentor whether you signed up for it or not.

This isn't about one generation being better or worse. We're different. Our willingness to meet them where they are helps mentorship stick.

The silent appreciation

Here is the strange thing about my brother: He probably has no idea how much I appreciate his mentorship and support. Maybe he'll find out when he reads this column.

The people who value your leadership the most often never say a word. But they are watching. They are learning. When we are our intentional best selves, we can support our next generation of practitioners.

Dan Farkas is a professor of strategic communication at Ohio University and owner of Pass PR. He's a proud executive committee member of PRSA's Counselors Academy.

lustre art group

The Comeback Playbook

Bouncing Back From a Layoff

By Katie Neal

At a recent PRSA Thoroughbred Chapter networking event, one of our members shared that he had been laid off the week before.

The unfortunate victim of a corporate restructuring, he'd done nothing wrong. In fact, his performance reviews had all been stellar. And yet, after an esteemed 30-year career in journalism and public relations, he found himself without a job for the first time.

Soon, stories of shared experience — some fresh, others decades old — began circling the table. Reassurances quickly emerged. It's not your fault. You're not alone. I just went through this, too. Let me introduce you to so-and-so.

As a longtime PR professional turned executive coach, I've seen firsthand how layoffs can strip accomplished professionals of their confidence, clarity and sense of purpose.

The good news? While you can't control what happened, you can control your response. The following 10 strategies can help you regain your footing and move forward with intention.

1. Feel your feelings.

Losing your job sucks. It's OK to be shocked, angry, sad and scared. While your former employer may have *said* it's not personal, that doesn't usually ring true for people who have *experienced* a layoff. Take some time to grieve or feel whatever you feel, and lean on those you trust during the initial transition phase.

2. Get clear on your severance package.

Typically, you'll be asked to sign a severance agreement that details any salary or PTO payouts, health coverage options, and a non-disparagement clause within a week or two.

Depending on the size of your company and the circumstances of your reduction in force, there may be some wiggle room for negotiation. It doesn't hurt to ask, but be aware that larger corporations and agencies are more likely to be in the "take it or leave it" camp. Consult an employment attorney licensed in your state if you have questions.

3. Resist the urge to spout off.

Surely this seems obvious to a bunch of PR pros — after all, most of us have likely dealt with publicly disgruntled employees in our roles — but it's worth repeating.

If writing would be cathartic, by all means, journal or make notes. But please don't post or publish anything negative. It almost always backfires.

> "Losing your job sucks. It's OK to be shocked, angry, sad and scared."

4. Pause and reflect.

Take a beat to consider what you actually want and need in your next role. What circumstances allow you to do your best work? When do you feel most energized? How values-aligned have your past roles been? In what ways are you looking to contribute more, or differently, in your next position?

Depending on your financial situation, how quickly do you need to find a new job, and what salary range would you be willing to consider for the right one?

5. Engage your network.

As I've written in these pages before, PR is a relational industry, so investing in connections when you don't have an immediate need is a smart and timeless strategy.

But even if you have some ground to make up, it's never too late. Four out of five jobs come through personal connections, so your best approach to networking is to prioritize genuine relationship building. (Note: Extroverts often thrive here, while introverts may find it draining. Think of it as strength training for your career — and plan recovery time accordingly.)

6. Post thoughtfully on LinkedIn.

In the absence of the information, people will create their own narratives (or worse, jump to conclusions).

For communications professionals in particular, your job search demonstrates your judgment, messaging and brand. Posting thoughtfully allows you to frame your situation — not as a failure, but as a transition. It gives people language to advocate for you. And, it signals professionalism and forward momentum.

I often get questions about the timing of *when* to post on LinkedIn. When you're part of a sweeping layoff (think: Amazon, Omnicom, Washington Post, etc.), I generally advise doing this within the first few days, but only if you can handle two things.

First, there's the mental health aspect (if you need more time emotionally, take it!). Second, be ready to promptly engage with every supportive comment and graciously accept every helpful invitation.

7. Apply your experience purposefully.

Volunteering, mentoring and networking aren't just résumé fillers. They showcase motivation, resilience and humanity — while paying it forward. Similarly, upskilling and reskilling on topics like AI, ethics and leadership show that you are committed to continual personal and professional development.

8. Invest in a résumé glow-up.

Think of your résumé as a highlight reel, not a laundry list of everything you've ever done. In today's world of automated tracking systems (ATS), you need tailored substance to make it through the AI bots most employers now use to screen candidates.

Sometimes it takes an outside perspective to see your strengths clearly, and a knowledgeable career coach or résumé writer can help you fine-tune your strengths. Highlighting the impact of your work (read: metrics!) and leadership helps you stand out to the right employers.

9. Sharpen your interviewing skills.

Brooke Kruger, CEO of recruiting firm KC Partners, recently wrote that many communications candidates are underperforming in interviews because they fail to go beyond surface-level prep, can't answer why they are the ideal candidate or demonstrate expertise in strategy and execution.

Whether it's a phone screen, one-way video, Zoom panel or on-site meet-and-greet, you need to nail your key points every single time.

10. Do something you love.

How many times did you work during a vacation? Answer emails on the weekend? Prepare strategy documents at night? While the circumstances aren't ideal and you wouldn't have chosen them, a career pause can give you the space to do something creative, try something new, or take care of yourself in ways you've been wanting to for a while.

If you've been laid off, please know it's not the setback itself that defines you, but how you choose to move forward. I sincerely hope you never need these tips. But if you do, may they serve as a steady road map as you navigate the uncertainty of what comes next — and remind you that this chapter is a transition, not a conclusion.

Katie Neal, ACC, is principal & CEO of Katie Neal Coaching & Consulting. As a certified executive coach, she helps high-achieving PR professionals lead with intention, reconnect with their values and build careers that fulfill them — personally and professionally. She is a longtime board member and past president of the PRSA Thoroughbred Chapter in Lexington, Ky. Connect with her on LinkedIn or at katienealconsulting.com.

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Innovation Meets Integrity

Designing Learning in the AI Era

By Pam Fultz, M.S., APR

Academia has long been characterized by a slow, deliberate sharing of knowledge, though the advent of virtual learning altered that perception. With the emergence of artificial intelligence, however, the landscape has shifted further, becoming increasingly high-tech.

AI is now commonplace in both in-person and online classrooms. As universities embrace tools such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot, higher education faces a pivotal moment in which innovation meets new ethical challenges.

For this article, I spoke with Evan Kropp, Ph.D., executive director of the Division of Distance Education at the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. He offers insight into how AI's influence is growing in teaching, learning, and student support at institutions of higher education.

How can students effectively use AI as a learning aid without becoming overly dependent on it, which might hinder their understanding of essential concepts?

Students can use AI as a learning aid without weakening their understanding, but they need structure and clear expectations. The frame I use with my faculty is simple: AI should function as a tutor or a coach, not as a substitute for thinking. Our job is to teach students how to use it to strengthen learning behaviors, not bypass them.

A practical start is helping students identify "no short-cuts" zones in an academic workflow. Certain moments require heavy mental effort: solving problems, outlining, interpreting data, or drafting responses based on course concepts. Students should be encouraged to complete these steps first, even if rough, then use AI to identify gaps, challenge assumptions, and refine. Sequence matters; using AI first can lead to copying competence without developing it.

Verification is the next essential habit. AI can be fluent yet wrong, and students do not always recognize the difference. Faculty can normalize a "trust but verify" approach by requiring students to cross-check AI output against course readings, lecture content, data, or credible sources.

We can reduce dependency by adding "AI off" checkpoints into course design. After studying with AI, students should close it and show understanding through a summary, problem, recording, or application. AI then becomes a feedback tool, not a thinking generator.

If we communicate these expectations clearly, students learn to use AI to accelerate practice, increase feedback frequency, and strengthen self-assessment, while keeping essential concepts grounded in their own reasoning and ability.

How do faculty members foresee the evolving role of human instructors as AI becomes more embedded in teaching and learning processes?

As AI integration grows, the instructor's role sharpens rather than disappears. Faculty shift from being the main information source to designing learning, coaching, thinking and safeguarding standards. This requires two skills: practical AI literacy and improved teaching craft.

Faculty on the AI side need sufficient fluency to make informed decisions, not to become engineers. They must understand tool capabilities, hallucinations, prompt effects, responsible use and data risks. Without this, policies are reactive and assignments fragile.

With it, activities can integrate AI while fostering authentic learning through process visibility — drafts, logs, reflections and explanations. AI complicates assessment but shifts focus to evaluating thinking, not just text.

At the same time, the human side of teaching becomes more important, not less. In a digital learning environment, students can access information instantly, but they still struggle with motivation, confidence, confusion and transferring knowledge to new situations. This is where instructors differentiate. The best faculty will be those who can create meaningful learning sequences, ask better questions, diagnose misconceptions, and provide feedback that changes behavior.

If AI accelerates drafting and practice, then faculty time can shift toward higher-value coaching: helping students build arguments, evaluate evidence, make ethical decisions, and connect course concepts to real contexts.

> "Students can use AI as a learning aid without weakening their understanding, but they need structure and clear expectations."

Evan Kropp, Ph.D.

The future instructor becomes a learning architect, not just a content broadcaster. Upskilling in AI allows faculty to use technology to enhance rigor, feedback, and human focus on judgment, mentorship and professional growth.

What is the relationship between AI use in the classroom and the expectations graduates will face in the workplace?

AI in higher education cannot be treated as a classroom-only issue, because it is not a classroom-only tool. For programs rooted in professional preparation, the question is not whether students will use AI after graduation. The question is whether they will be prepared to use it responsibly and strategically, in ways that protect quality, ethics and human judgment.

AI adoption across industries aims to drive speed, efficiency and scale, enabling faster teamwork without compromising standards. In public relations, marketing, journalism and communications, AI is used for drafting, summarizing, formatting, transcription, social media content, audience-specific rewrites and quick research. Juniors might convert meeting notes into pitches, repurpose reports into multi-channel content, draft press releases, or create headline options. AI dramatically speeds up these tasks.

AI doesn't replace the judgment about whether work should exist. Students should be clear: AI can help draft, but humans decide if a press release is needed, define its purpose, identify stakeholders, assess risks, determine timing, approval and consequences. Strategy, ethics and accountability are human roles. AI speeds tasks but doesn't make decisions.

This is why higher education must intentionally integrate AI, not just permit or ban it. Our job is to prepare students for the realities of modern professional practice, and AI is quickly becoming part of that practice.

The right posture is preparation with guardrails. In classrooms, we teach where AI helps and harms, require transparency, create assignments that assess reasoning, and train students to verify outputs, protect confidential info, and avoid hallucinated facts. The goal isn't tool dependence but professional competence: using AI to work faster while maintaining human skills like judgment, ethics and strategy.

Pam Fultz, M.S., APR, is senior community-relations manager at Vi at Bentley Village, a retirement community in Naples, Fla. She is also an adjunct instructor at the University of Florida and at Northeastern University in Boston. She holds a Master of Science degree in corporate and organizational communications from Northeastern University. She is a former president of PRSA's Gulf Coast Chapter.

Know Your Worth

Compensation Conversations in Turbulent Times

By Lorra Brown

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Public relations, advertising, and corporate communication professionals at every career stage face a complex and rapidly evolving job market.

Artificial intelligence has fundamentally reshaped the profession, driving agency consolidation, fueling the rise of independent specialty firms, and necessitating new competencies. Rapid technological change, geopolitical instability, misinformation, and a fragmented media landscape have created a volatile environment that tests even the most seasoned pros.

As outsourcing grows and roles continue to shift and expand, professionals find it increasingly difficult to benchmark their value, making compensation conversations more challenging than ever.

Still, with the right preparation, professionalism and timing, you can approach salary discussions with clarity and confidence, no matter where you are in your career journey. Here's how:

1. Arm yourself with salary and benefits data.

Research typical salary ranges for your position, industry, experience level and qualifications using resources like Glassdoor, LinkedIn Salary, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and professional organizations like PRSA.

It's perfectly acceptable to ask about compensation and bonus structures when you're hired. Know the market value for your role and be prepared to negotiate for additional benefits such as 401(k) matching, remote work options, performance bonuses, cost-of-living adjustments, remote options or additional vacation time.

2. Define your career road map from day one.

Understand the performance review and salary increase cycle as early as possible. If you're unsatisfied with your starting salary and initial negotiations didn't succeed, request a six-month evaluation and performance-based salary review.

Even if this wasn't discussed during onboarding, it's reasonable to ask for a review at the six-month mark. Be aware, raises are typically considered only after a year, unless you have evidence that your starting salary was inequitable.

3. Leverage job descriptions strategically.

Document how your experience and contributions qualify you for a more senior, better-paying role. Entry-level professionals should include internships, campus club leadership, specific skills and relevant part-time jobs.

Demonstrating that you're already operating at a higher level is one of the most effective ways to build a persuasive case for a more senior title, promotion and increased compensation.

Further along in your career? Highlight leadership roles, supervisory responsibilities, project management, or specialized skills (like analytics, crisis comms, public affairs, or AI tools). Demonstrating you're already exceeding expectations strengthens your ask.

> "The ability to negotiate with clarity and professionalism is essential in today's evolving communication landscape.

4. Generate innovative ideas and skills beyond your job description.

Be a proactive, strategic thinker who adds measurable value to your team. Stay current on industry trends, sharpen your skills (did I mention AI proficiency?), suggest and implement efficiencies and improvements.

Always submit client-ready work, even for routine assignments. Initiative, strategic thinking, tech proficiency and creativity are qualities that set you apart in competitive environments.

5. Be your own agent.

Don't assume your supervisors and clients are fully aware of your impact. Share your achievements, new certifications and project successes. When you exceed goals or contribute meaningfully, send a brief update to highlight your results.

Keep a file of client praise, kudos emails, performance data and project wins. Tangible results, like increases in site traffic, media placements, engagement, new business wins, campaign metrics or sales leads strengthen your request when it's time to negotiate.

6. Practice self-awareness and reflection.

Ask yourself: Do I truly deserve a raise or promotion right now? Am I consistently meeting deadlines, producing high-quality work, and collaborating well with others? Is my work praised, published, posted and client-ready with minimal edits? Am I a good collaborator and teammate?

Seek feedback and be open to constructive criticism. Understanding your strengths and identifying areas for growth will help you make an informed and realistic case. It's essential to understand how you're perceived at your agency, otherwise, any other arguments may fall flat.

7. Schedule a formal meeting with decision-makers.

Don't rely on hallway conversations or casual performance reviews. Schedule a dedicated meeting with your supervisor and relevant decision-makers to discuss your performance, goals and compensation.

Early on, identify and cultivate a mentor or advocate within your organization. And as your career grows, remember to do the same for others.

8. Prepare a written request.

Bring a formal memo, or at least detailed bullet points, to your meeting. This document should outline your accomplishments, key contributions, and future goals within the organization.

Acknowledge your colleagues and mentors, and present a clear, professional case for why you deserve a raise. Have a trusted peer or mentor review it beforehand for tone, clarity and completeness; they might even back you up behind the scenes (see point 7).

9. Be confident and gracious.

Approach the conversation with positivity and professionalism. Express appreciation for the opportunities you've had and share your commitment to continued growth within the company.

After the meeting, follow up with a thank-you note and a written summary of the discussion or the promises made.

10. Know when to stay and when to move on.

Sometimes, even after doing everything right, the answer remains "no." If the company is facing layoffs or financial strain, this may not be personal.

But if you're consistently exceeding expectations, generating results, and still not recognized or paid competitively, it may be time to explore new opportunities and make your exit plan.

Whether you're entering the profession or stepping into leadership, the ability to negotiate with clarity and professionalism is essential in today's evolving communication landscape. It positions you not only for promotions and higher compensation, but also for a stronger presence at the table, with clients, colleagues and decision-makers.

Advocating for yourself is a vital part of being an effective communicator, and a skill you'll rely on throughout every stage of your personal and professional life.

Shout out to my employer's most famous alum, Michael Jordan, who often repeated hockey great Wayne Gretzky's famous quote: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

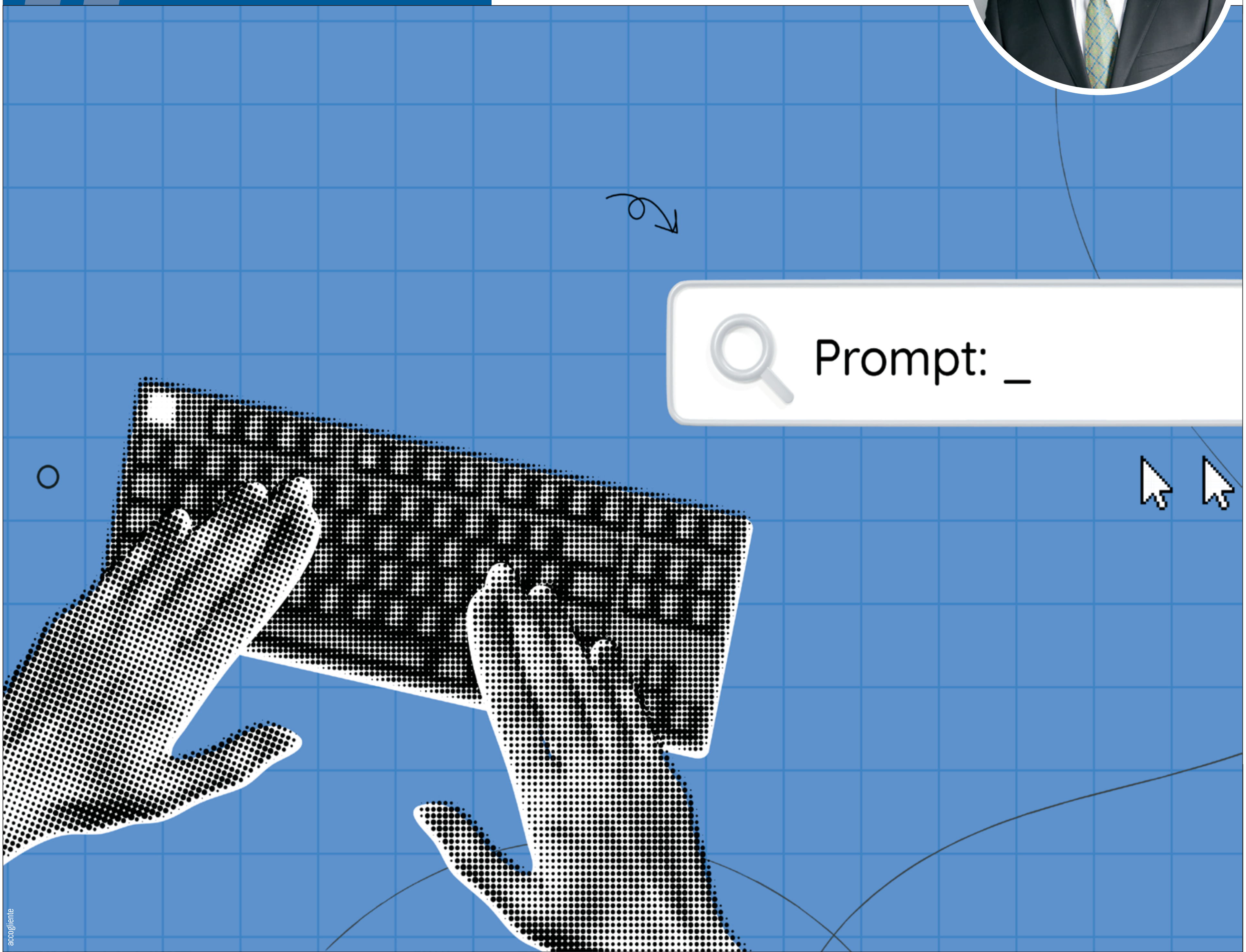
Career truth? "You'll get 0% of the raise you don't ask for."

What are you waiting for? Take your shot!

Lorra Brown brings more than 30 years of experience in higher education, public relations, and integrated marketing to her faculty role at the University of North Carolina. She teaches in the advertising and PR area at the Hussman School of Journalism and Media and serves as director of online graduate certificates. Previously, she developed and led the B.A. in Public Relations and M.A. in Integrated Marketing Communication programs at William Paterson University, N.J., and was a senior executive at Ogilvy and Weber Shandwick..

Insights

- Workplace Culture
- AI
- Profiles in PR



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Which Signs of AI Writing Disengage People Most?

Content marketing that appears to be AI-written puts people off but doesn't always undermine engagement, an analysis by the news site Search Engine Land finds.

Readers most often called out AI writing "tics" in phrases such as:

- "In today's fast-paced digital landscape…"
- It's important to note that…"
- Not only… but also"
- "In conclusion" (even when nothing has been concluded)

The "not only… but also" construction appears frequently, often as "Not only does X do Y, but it also does Z." Sentences written by AI also start with "then," "this," or "that," as in "Then you should," "This shows," or "This means…"

Other telltale signs that artificial intelligence has generated a text include filler introductions such as "In this article," "We'll explore," and "Let's take a look." At the end, an AI text might say "In conclusion," before summarizing its points.

Em dashes — the length of a capital letter M — are still the punctuation in content marketing that readers most often view as evidence that AI has written the text. But in a "tic counter" for the analysis, the Shakespeare play "Hamlet" raised more AI alarms than many AI-generated blog posts, because of its frequent em dashes.

According to the data, most AI "tells" don't strongly affect the performance of marketing content. Phrases built around "not only…" or "not only…but also" had a more negative effect on user engagement. When used occasionally, such constructions can add emphasis, but using them frequently is associated with high user "bounce" rates.

Posts with "Conclusion" headers had the largest negative correlation on engagement, the study found. — *Greg Beaubien*

Lessons in Workplace Culture From My Daughter's Preschool

By Elizabeth Candello, Ph.D.

Last fall, I walked into my daughter's preschool classroom for the first time. The coat hooks hung at her height, no stretching, no help. The sinks didn't require a step stool. Even the bathroom stalls had doors she could reach and lock herself. She didn't have to ask adults to make things work for her. The space just worked.

I watched her teachers move through the room, constantly adjusting: lowering a book, repositioning a chair, restating instructions with a visual. They had designed the entire environment for her and her peers from the start.

Think about your own work environment: Have you ever sent a dense email assuming everyone had time to read it carefully? Scheduled a late meeting without considering who it might exclude? Used jargon that made sense to you but lost half your audience? We knew how to make adjustments for three-year-olds. What happened to us as adults?

True inclusion isn't about diversity statements. It's about whether your workplace is designed so everyone can actually participate, not just the imagined "default" worker: young, able-bodied, native English speaker, no caregiving responsibilities, quiet home office with high-speed internet.

Building genuinely inclusive workplaces requires attending to five elements most organizations overlook, five elements my daughter's preschool teachers practice every day.

Accessibility: Can everyone actually get in?

Preschool lesson: My daughter's teacher redesigned the reading corner after noticing one child couldn't reach the books. She didn't wait for a request or create a "special accommodation." She just moved the shelf.

Workplace reality: We post job openings requiring high-speed internet and 24/7 availability. We schedule "mandatory" meetings during caregiving hours. We create onboarding materials assuming everyone reads English fluently and works from a quiet office.

According to Pew Research Center's 2023 report, one in four Americans has a disability that impacts daily activities, yet only 3% of business websites are accessible to people using assistive technologies. When we design workplace communications without accessibility in mind, we're excluding a significant portion of our workforce from the start.

The fix: Before releasing any communication, ask: What barriers did we build without realizing it? Universal design principles help everyone. Captions on videos assist Deaf employees, but also help people in noisy environments, second-language learners, and anyone who processes information better through reading. As disability rights advocate Angela Glover Blackwell reminds us, when you design for the margins, everyone benefits. She calls this "the curb-cut effect." It's an idea that our own PRSA guest Tracey Lam, APR, brought to life for my students in our Workplace Communication course.

Modality: Are we offering multiple ways to engage?

Preschool lesson: During circle time, my daughter's teacher doesn't just *tell* children what to do. She shows pictures, demonstrates with her body, uses songs and hand motions, lets them touch objects. She offers multiple pathways because children learn differently.

Workplace reality: Corporate America defaults to email. Or Slack. Or a 47-slide deck at 2 p.m. Wednesday. Each works brilliantly for some people and fails completely for others.

A 2024 survey of 880 employees at large corporations found that 60% felt their workplaces were inadequately adapted for neurodivergent colleagues. We know cognitive differences exist, we just keep designing communications as if they don't.

> "I've never heard my daughter's teacher say 'utilize' when 'use' works fine."

The fix: Major announcements should be available in multiple formats: a written memo, a video message, a live Q&A session, a visual summary, and asynchronous options. Let people engage in the way that works for their brain, schedule and life.

Language: Whose words are we using?

Preschool lesson: I've never heard my daughter's teacher say "utilize" when "use" works fine. She speaks in short sentences and simple words. Not because 3-year-olds are less intelligent, but because clarity is respect.

Workplace reality: Here's a real sentence from a recent "inclusion" initiative: *"We are committed to fostering a culture of belonging where all stakeholders can leverage synergies to optimize their professional development trajectories."*

I have a graduate degree, and I still don't know what that means. Research shows that 54% of American adults read below a sixth-grade level. Plain language increases comprehension by up to 60% across all education levels — including those with advanced degrees who are simply tired or distracted.

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The fix: Run your communications through readability tests and aim for eighth-grade level, not because employees lack intelligence, but because cognitive overload is real. If your inclusion message excludes people through inaccessible language, you've failed before you've started.

Pre-testing: Did we ask before we assumed?

Preschool lesson: Last month, my daughter's teacher introduced a new activity. Halfway through, she noticed the children were confused. She didn't power through. She stopped, adjusted her approach, and tried again.

Workplace reality: Most workplace communications get drafted, reviewed by leadership, and launched without ever asking: *Will this actually work for the people it's intended to reach?*

McKinsey found that 70% of organizational change efforts fail, often because of poor communication. Effective organizations involve end-users in communication design *before* launch, not after implementation fails.

The fix: Run major communications past diverse employees: different departments, levels, backgrounds, work arrangements. Then actually revise based on what you hear. When one Fortune 500 company pre-tested their return-to-office announcement, frontline workers flagged that 25% lacked regular email access. The company revised to include text message notifications and manager briefings. Pre-testing revealed what leadership never saw from their desks.

Intent vs. Impact: The gap that destroys trust

Preschool lesson: One morning, a music activity with loud instruments overwhelmed a child with sensory sensitivities who covered their ears and retreated. The teacher didn't insist the child "just try." She offered quieter shakers and moved the child to the edge of the circle where the volume was manageable. The child rejoined. Impact was the measure that mattered.

Workplace reality: When communications fail, we defend our intent. "But we spent months on this!" "We meant well!"

Research shows that only 40% of workers believe their company's stated values match their actual experience. The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer found that 60% of employees don't trust their employer to tell the truth. When organizations defend intent rather than address impact, they compound the trust problem.

The fix: Listen to the impact. If employees say an announcement was confusing, revise it. If a meeting time excluded people, find alternatives. Create feedback loops that prioritize impact over ego.

My daughter's preschool teachers have all the power. They use their power to center the children.

That's what inclusive workplace communication requires: people with institutional power using that power to dismantle the barriers they built. Inclusive practices aren't just ethical, they're effective.

If we can design preschool classrooms where every child can reach the sink, we can design workplace communications where every employee can access critical information. ❖

Elizabeth Candello, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University, where she teaches strategic communication and workplace culture. Her research focuses on inclusive communication practices, health communication and well being.

The Future of B2B Thought Leadership in a Zero-Click Era

By Heidi Modarelli-Frank, APR, and Cami Clarke

The Zero-Click search phenomenon brought about by AI-generated search results now accounts for about 80% of all Google searches — and that percentage continues to grow.

This lopsided trend would seem to spell the end for many content-based endeavors, including B2B thought leadership. After all, if most users are reading only the AI summary, why should any company invest in creating content?

These would be hasty and unfortunate conclusions for B2B companies, however, because their audience is a distinctive subset defined by the depth of content they seek when researching products and solving problems. For the most part, they are not part of the larger Zero-Click audience.

If anything, AI-generated search is creating more opportunity for thought leadership, not less, but it is also placing more demands on content creators.

B2B audiences are still the same

What you instinctively know about B2B audiences is still true. B2B readers, like everyone else, are taking advantage of new tools and AI-generated search Overviews. But their underlying tendencies remain the same.

B2B readers tend to:

➲**Use More Channels:** McKinsey's 2024 B2B Pulse finds that B2B buyers use about 10 different interaction channels in a typical journey.

➲**Spend More Time Reading:** B2B decision-makers spend an hour or more weekly reading thought leadership pieces, and nearly three-quarters find this content to be more trustworthy than marketing materials, according to a 2024 LinkedIn and Edelman study.

➲**Click More:** According to 2025 research by TrustRadius, 90% of B2B readers click through to the sources or citations behind AI Overviews.

➲**Value High-Quality Thought Leadership:** B2B readers are discriminating. They rate most thought leadership as good but only 15% as good or excellent, according to the LinkedIn and Edelman study.

These findings leave no doubt as to the importance of high-quality thought leadership in the age of Google AI Overviews and AI tools like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Perplexity. The chief question for B2B companies is not whether to give up on thought leadership, but how to ensure AI search engines are finding and serving up their thought leadership content.

Anatomy of search results

Before delving further into how AI Large Language Models (LLMs) work, we need to understand the anatomy of a browser-based B2B search results page.

That page will look different depending on your browser and search engine and whether you're logged in or not, but for most informational inquiries, you'll find four categories of content:

1. Google AI Overviews. Typically, these appear at the top of the page and provide a summary response to your search inquiry, drawing on many sources across the internet.

2. Citations. These are the sources on which the Google AI Overview is based. They show up in two forms: as hyperlinks in the Overview and in a list below or to the right of the Overview.

3. Sponsored Content. These paid placements (or ads) show up based on keyword bidding, relevance and the quality of content and have a subtle "Sponsored" label.

> "If anything, AI-generated search is creating more opportunity for thought leadership, not less, but it is also placing more demands on content creators."

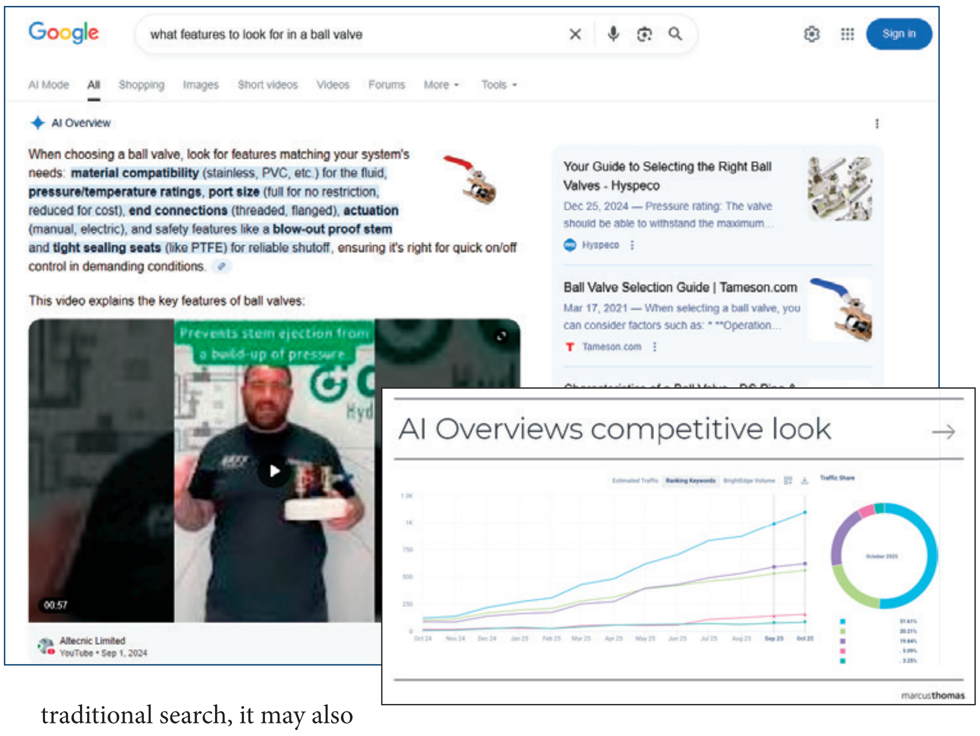
4. Organic Content. Traditional non-paid search listings also appear as they always have, in a list following any sponsored content – and now also below or above Google AI Overviews.

In addition, B2B readers can perform the same searches using stand-alone AI platforms. They'll get similarly structured summaries with clickable citations, but without traditional organic search results.

Search rankings then and now: What's changed exactly

The LLMs that generate AI summaries and citations do not operate in the same way as Google algorithms that generate sponsored and organic content rankings. There is an air of mystery around both LLMs and Google algorithms, but we can compare the results they produce.

For example, if a page ranks well in traditional search, it may also rank well with LLMs. For example, LLMs cite pages in organic search positions 1 to 5 more often than pages ranked in organic search positions 6 to 20, according to a Semrush study.



However, that study also finds that *most* LLM citations come from pages with organic search positions of 21 and greater. In fact, ChatGPT draws 90% of its citations from pages in these low-ranking positions. Why is this?

Simply put, LLMs and Google algorithms are evaluating sources using different criteria, even if there is some overlap. LLMs are searching for specific pieces of information, whereas traditional search algorithms are evaluating whole webpages. LLMs venture beyond websites in the highest organic search positions because they need to draw on the largest pool of data possible.

What you can do now

In response to this complex and rapidly changing search environment, here are five things you can do to ensure your thought leadership content is being seen and cited:

1. Stick with traditional SEO best practices. Traditional search rankings help you earn citations in Google AI Overviews. So, continue to match your content and keywords to search intent, maintain proper HTML practices and publish fresh stories.

2. Publish widely. LinkedIn and YouTube are among the top domains cited in Google AI Overviews. Publish your content there, on social media and in trade publications to raise your visibility, credibility and authority in the eyes of LLMs.

3. Write with search queries in mind. Because LLMs are searching for discrete pieces of information, allow your content to be specific, detailed and in-depth. Anticipate the questions your buyers may ask and address them with specific use cases.

4. Practice content proliferation. Content proliferation is the art of creating many pieces of content addressing the same locus of information. If you have a longer white paper, break up the same content into a blog; create videos or slides; and develop checklists, FAQs or charts comparing key benefits.

5. Obsess about structure. Publish content with concise summaries and a clear hierarchy of headings and subheadings. Whenever possible, use bulleted or enumerated lists and short paragraphs. As a check, scan your content pages to ensure the structure advertises a clear, logical flow.

Staying on the AI shortlist

Thought leadership is here to stay — and may be in its golden era because its role is so central to AI summaries. AI magnifies its importance and provides B2B readers with a clear index of which companies are providing the expertise. The list of citations associated with AI summaries is essentially a road map to those who know the most.

As you build and reconfigure your content program to accommodate AI search, you can monitor your progress through integrated SEO tools with AI visibility features, such as BrightEdge and Semrush. For example, these tools can provide estimated traffic from AI-mediated searches, AI Overview citation rankings vis-à-vis your competitors, and brand sentiment relating to AI tools. As part of your content team, it's helpful to have someone who understands the intersection between SEO and AI and can assist you in evaluating your progress in gaining prominence in AI search results. ✣

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PRSA Learning

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MEASUREMENT & ROI, TECHNIQUES & TACTICS

April 14; 3–4 p.m. ET, Live Webinar

Tying Communications Outputs to Business Outcomes

Rob Stillwell, director of corporate communications, Pacific Gas & Electric Company; and Azhar Unwala, vice president of analytics, PublicRelay

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April 21-22; 3–5 p.m. ET, Virtual Workshop

Beyond Prompts: Building Trusted AI Workflows

Kami Watson Huyse, APR, CEO, Zoetica

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY, TECHNIQUES & TACTICS

May 5, 7, 12; 2–4 p.m. ET, Virtual Workshop

The 3 Essential Stories Every PR Pro Needs to Succeed

Rob Biesenbach, communication coach, Connect | Captivate | Compel

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

May 6; 3–4 p.m. ET, Live Webinar

From Uncertainty to Clarity: How to Lead Through Tumultuous Times

Ken Jacobs, PCC, CPC, ELI-MP, principal, Jacobs Consulting & Executive Coaching

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"Tyler Gillum knows how to build belief, momentum, and community," said PRSA CEO Matthew Marcial, CAE, APR. "Whether he's leading a team, energizing fans, or speaking to a room of professionals, Tyler connects with people. His message about betting on yourself and serving others is just the kind of inspiration we need at ICON 2026."

Learn more and register at prsa.org/icon

PROFILES IN PR

A Global Perspective on the APR

In recognition of APR Month, *Strategies & Tactics* spoke with Eric Kwame Adae, Ph.D., APR, an assistant professor of public relations at Drake University whose career spans consulting in Ghana and academia in the United States.

Before entering academia, he spent more than 15 years working across strategic communication, PR consultancies, advertising and branding agencies, and international development systems in West Africa. He recently achieved his Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) from PRSA. He is an Accredited member of the Institute of Public Relations (Ghana).

Here, he shares why he pursued the APR and what the credential represents in a rapidly evolving global profession.

Q You were already accredited internationally. What motivated you to pursue the PRSA APR?

A I was a media and communication consultant in Ghana for more than 15 years. My professional experience spans diverse contexts, including in-house strategic communication departments, PR consultancies, advertising and branding agencies, Ghana's private and public sectors, and USAID and World Bank systems in the West African subregion.

In 2013, I became an accredited member of the Institute of Public Relations (Ghana), so my recent PRSA APR marks my second professional certification in Public Relations. My journey from Ghana's consulting scene to the halls of the University of Oregon, where I earned a doctorate in media and communication, and now to the tenure track at Drake University has reinforced one truth: To effectively mentor the next generation, I must consistently demonstrate mastery of the highest professional standards.

Pursuing the APR was about localizing my global expertise and ensuring that my pedagogy is grounded in contemporary U.S. practice. As a scholar-practitioner, I often tell my students that theory without practice is blind, but practice without theory is aimless.

By earning this APR, I ensure that my teaching is not just based on abstract texts but on a gold standard I have mastered. While I am proud of my international credentials, as a PR educator in the United States, I also know that I must lead by example. So, obtaining the PRSA APR is also about signaling to my students that this is the way to go.

Q How did the APR process challenge or stretch you differently than your previous Accreditation experience?

A The APR is unique in its surgical focus on the RPIE process — the heart of contemporary PR. The APR required a pivot toward a higher strategic mindset. The panel presentation was a healthy stretch; I had to defend my strategic choices for the 2025 Absa Black Star Marathon (of which I am founder and president) through the lens of formal communication theory, demanding ethical decision-making, and cutting-edge PR processes and strategy.

This event, endorsed by Ghana's current president, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, as Ghana's national marathon, served as my case study. The process reminded me that even with 15 years of experience, there is always room to sharpen one's focus on research and evaluation — the critical bookends often overlooked in the rush to produce communication tactics.

Q You describe earning the APR as the start of a new chapter. What shifts for you professionally now?

A I am a firm believer that public relations is one of the most relevant fields for humanity, especially at this critical point in history. Earning the APR marks my transition from a practitioner who teaches to a doubly certified PR strategist.

> "While I am proud of my international credentials, as a PR educator in the United States, I also know that I must lead by example.

This is a foundational pillar of my "Colossus Project" — a mission to build myself into a world-class scholar-practitioner of African descent standing at the intersection of the Global North and the Global South. I am now a verified bridge-builder capable of translating high-level theory into the measurable, street-smart RPIE applications organizations need. It gives me the competence and credentials to lead complex, multi-stakeholder campaigns with a heightened sense of professional and academic confidence.

Q You've emphasized that APR represents mastery of strategy, management and ethics. In today's environment, why does that distinction matter more than ever?

A In a post-truth era of misinformation, disinformation and declining trust, the APR is a beacon of credibility. Anyone can post content, but few can manage its ethical implications strategically. The APR signals that we are not just tactical experts; we are absolute stewards of truth and veritable oracles of ethics. It is the difference between a technician and a physician; one fixes an immediate problem, while the other understands the entire system, from thought to finish.

In a world where one tweet can destroy a decade of reputation, having an APR-certified professional — someone bound by a rigorous ethical code — is an indispensable safeguard.

Q You've said PR is, at its core, a vital management function. What must practitioners do to consistently demonstrate that?

A It is undeniable that PR is an essential management function. However, like other professionals, PR practitioners must consistently justify their seat at the big table. We must speak the language of the C-suite. We must move beyond what one of my former colleagues labels "the vanity metrics" and focus on outcomes that impact the mission and drive desirable organizational outcomes. This means using research to inform decisions and evaluation to prove the value of our work. I often compare this to maintaining a high-performance automobile. You don't wait for the engine to fail before checking the oil level; you use research and data to maintain a constant listening post, proactively perform preventive maintenance, and keep things in tip-top shape.

Contemporary PR is the preventive maintenance of organizational reputation because PR professionals are the true image engineers for organizations. If we bring data and risk-mitigation strategies to the table, management will listen. We must move beyond reporting on communication outputs, such as the number of releases issued and outtakes, and focus more on communication outcomes, such as how we changed behavior, on the road to palpably contributing to measurable business results. When we become more purposeful and intentional about reporting on outcomes, we would be singing from the same song sheet as other management specialists; we would be speaking their language, and they would better appreciate the value we provide because they can see and understand the return on investment we produce.

Q How does the APR reinforce your belief that public relations must sit at the decision-making table, not just execute messaging?

A The APR curriculum underscores that PR is about action as much as it is about communication. It teaches, for instance, that communication cannot fix a bad corporate policy. By mastering the management and leadership components of the APR program, we prove that we belong at the big table, helping shape those policies before they are enacted. We serve as the ethical conscience and insider activists, holding management to account and constantly guiding our organizations to stay on the path of righteousness.

If you want a seat at the decision-making table and to keep it, you must bring a map (solid research) and a scorecard (empirical evaluation/measurement).

Q Does holding both U.S. and Ghanaian Accreditation give you a unique lens on how standards are evolving globally?

A Absolutely. It offers an uncommon stereoscopic view of our profession. By mastering the APR in both Western and non-Western contexts, I am living proof that excellence in communication is a universal language spoken through diverse cultural dialects. It allows me to see what my Ghanaian mentor, David Ampofo, calls "the global soul" of public relations.

This dual accreditation is the heartbeat of my Colossus Project. It equips me to advocate for a more inclusive global standard — one that respects Western strategic rigor while embracing the profound philosophical depth of the African continent. It reminds us that as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for a global standard of excellence, such as the APR, becomes even more critical for building cross-cultural trust, respect, integrity, honesty, and public relations that support social responsibility.

Q How do credentials like the APR help strengthen trust in the profession at a time when trust in institutions is fragile?

A It is really a big question of trust. In the current trust-deficient era we find ourselves in, the APR is a public-facing avowed commitment to the PRSA Code of Ethics; it tells stakeholders we have a professional North Star.

By voluntarily submitting to these standards, we provide a safety net for the public. Trust is rebuilt one ethical decision at a time, and the APR provides the blueprint that ensures we are accountable to something higher than a client's immediate whim. ❖

PRSA

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 14
FUTURECON
NEW YORK

MAY 14
ANVIL AWARDS
NEW YORK

JUNE 7–10
TRAVEL & TOURISM CONFERENCE
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.
**Saver Rate Ends April 17*

JUNE 24–26
PUBLIC AFFAIRS & GOVERNMENT SUMMIT
COVINGTON, K.Y.

Oct. 5 & 17
EDUCATORS ACADEMY SUMMIT
OCT. 5: VIRTUAL / OCT. 17: ORLANDO, FLA.

OCT. 17–18
HEALTH & LIFE SCIENCES CONFERENCE
ORLANDO, FLA.

OCT 18–20
ICON 2026
ORLANDO, FLA.

More events coming soon!

In the meantime, reserve your spot at the above events by scanning the QR code or visiting: **prsa.org/conferences-and-awards**