



Herbert, Walter B. and John R. G. Jenkins (General Editors). **Public Relations in Canada: Some Perspectives**. Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited, 1984. 262 pages.

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For some people, public relations is simply a synonym for the age-old practice of propaganda. For others, public relations is a respected, reputable, and increasingly relevant profession in our modern society. This book was written by people who hold the latter view and are accredited practitioners of the profession. Their purpose is to provide students seeking to embark on a career in public relations with a practical handbook, one that offers a recipe for the creation of "good" public relations programmes for organizations and institutions be it the Government of Canada or a new non-profit organization seeking to fund AIDS research.

The book contains fifty-seven short one to seven page articles written by forty-two members of the Canadian Public Relations Society who work for a wide variety of consulting firms and organizations. It is broken into eleven sections dealing with the role of public relations in Canada, research, corporations, primary institutions, financial institutions, non-profit and professional organizations, governments, communication techniques, the role of the public relations consultant, and education and training. The articles in each section are written by experienced public relations practitioners almost all of whom impart to the reader a shopping list of do's and don'ts interspersed with insights regarding successful public relations programmes.

For those seeking a tried and tested outline for implementing a public relations programme this book is an excellent resource. Take, for example, the article on "Public Relations and Special Events" by Ronald J. Coulson, which seeks to inform the reader on how one should go about creating a public relations programme for the opening of the Toronto Eaton Centre, the CN Tower, or a Grey Cup game. The article provides a detailed checklist of things to do regarding timing, location, publicity with the press, radio and television, advertising and promotion, VIPs and guests, programme, entertainment, final arrangements, support services such as transportation, traffic and parking, public works, fire and safety, etc. In case you are thinking this is a rather detailed listing, think again. All of the above are subheadings; the actual check list covers over seven pages containing in excess of 160 items such as "Editors of Appropriate Trade and Business Journals contacted," or "Arrange for Use of Sound Trucks and Mobile Displays," under the subheading "Advertising and Promotion."

While the above article contains the most detailed checklist, it is a good example of the approach taken by almost all the authors. Even the articles which deal with public relation consultants generally contain extensive lists detailing services provided, questions clients should ask, etc. And, we are even told how public relations consultants fix their fees (e.g., given fifteen hundred chargeable hours per year, and an overhead charge factor of 2.5 to 3.0, the hourly rate charged a client for someone with an annual salary of \$35,000 is \$70.00 per hour).

The growth of the public relations function and the need for more public relations practitioners are found in the increasingly interdependent and complex society in which we live and the increase in size of government, business, labor, and even voluntary organizations. All these large enterprises have a need to communicate with a general public which is becoming increasingly apathetic and skeptical.

The goal of a public relations programme is straightforward: to inform and/or persuade the public in general, or a designated segment thereof, in a relevant, responsible and credible manner. The accomplishment of this goal is a complicated matter, however. Communication in our modern society takes place in an environment where the receiver of mass media messages have developed, for simple survival purposes, a very sophisticated perceptual screen which blocks out much of the incoming stimuli. A successful public relations programme must therefore entail more than the faithful application of a checklist; it also requires imagination, innovation, insight, and a keen sense of timing. The contributors provide numerous checklists, but they do not, and perhaps they cannot, provide all the necessary ingredients for a successful public relations campaign.

Hugh Morrison, the author of the concluding essay entitled, "Public Relations, Personal Attributes and Education," points out: "The ideal of public relations, in practice, is to bring the properly trained mind to use the most effective method to achieve the desired Result." Morrison goes on to conclude his article by noting: "Public Relations practitioners have only comparatively recently emerged from the seat-of-the-pants era of press agents and news reporters. Now they must have the capacity to analyze, advise, and evaluate as well as act." This collection of essays makes a contribution to this evolutionary process.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of this book, that will be used as a textbook for public relations, is the lack of a series of articles on ethics and public accountability. We currently live in a society where advocacy advertising is used and abused by private groups and government departments alike. Television viewers are often exposed to mindless, exploitative and degrading advertising. Given these realities, it isn't good enough to talk of social responsibility in general terms as though we all understand and accept what is meant by "social

responsibility." There is a need for careful reflection and extended discussion on the proper role and limits on many different elements of public relations programmes in our society.