

## PR is Not Always Loved by Management; Here's How to Get the Romance Started.

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*Today's PR communicator needs more than the traditional skills that were acceptable in yesterday's business world. Today, a communicator has to be part lawyer, part MBA, part engineer, part social psychologist and part computer and social media expert.*

Public Relations is one of the most misunderstood professions that I know. Talk to three people and you'll get three *entirely different* views of what public relations practitioners do. Based on resumes I've reviewed, many people think they are fine candidates for entering the public relations field because they "like working with people." My answer to that is, if you like working with people, you should be a mortician.

Of course, one of the old standard definitions of PR is "building and maintaining two-way communications between a corporation and its targeted audiences for the benefit of all parties." And that's basically pretty good. But one I heard and really like is "true public relations is the art of satisfying the annoyed without annoying the satisfied."

But we all know the PR function is supposed to be deeper than that. In fact, PR should act as the social conscience of an organization, the Inspector General, so to speak, that provides honest PR counsel to top management.

To meet this challenge, today's PR communicator needs more than the traditional skills that were acceptable in yesterday's business world. Today, a communicator has to be part lawyer, part MBA, part engineer, part social psychologist and part computer and social media expert. We're entering a new era of the hyper-speed information age, and that's spawning huge changes in the way traditional news media and social media operate and how audiences are getting their news and information. The entire world is now engaged in a fast-changing communication process, and public relations needs to play a key role in that evolution.

For those companies and organizations that aren't looking forward and making change, it may be up to us – the good old public relations folks – to deliver the message to management in order to institute change. One of our strategic PR roles is to be an agent of change and I'd like to suggest: *don't wait to be asked.*

Today we must be positioned to help manage the organization and participate in making company policy, rather than issuing public apologies after the fact. To do this, however, we need to be a member of the senior management team.

One of the most frequent comments or complaints I hear from public relations people is “I had a terrific idea for dealing with the problem, but nobody asked me or nobody listened to me.” Quite frankly, we frequently aren’t asked because management doesn’t think we have anything to contribute. The sad fact is that many people who call themselves communications specialists actually don’t have anything to contribute. So we’ve got to work every day to earn our right to participate, to be heard, to be taken seriously. It’s time for us to stop complaining about not being asked, about not being given an audience by senior people, about *not being loved by management*. For the most part, those wounds are self-inflicted. Now let’s move forward *and get the romance started*.

Look at who’s already on the regular invitation list to the boardroom: the lawyers and accountants. Why them and not us? Because they regularly bring decision making information to the table, while we usually deliver last month’s monitoring reports of tweets, likes and shares. Accountants advise how tax reform will affect product pricing; lawyers monitor court decisions that may affect company operations. When we start to deliver this type of business-oriented information, we’ll be missed *and* called to sit at the management table. Economist Walter Heller’s counsel is appropriate here: “*Good advice creates its own demand.*”

There are times to tell management, “The Emperor has no clothes.” *NOBODY* else gets paid to do that but PR. It’s our *JOB*. We’re the Inspector General.

Climbing to the top of management doesn’t happen by accident. It happens through careful career planning and strategic actions. And planning is the key. We must decide where we want to go and know how to get there. A famous deer hunter with bow and arrow was once quoted as saying, “Unless you know your game’s feeding, sleeping and daily habits, unless you plan your hunt in great detail and follow your plan with great precision, you are not hunting at all. You’re just walking in the woods.”

If public relations professionals expect to rise to the top of their firm’s management, they must begin to study the deer’s habits and begin hunting, not just walk in the woods. That means, getting accepted by management. To do that, we need to start by making contributions to the business efforts that affect the company’s bottom line, just like the accountants and lawyers.

I’d like to suggest a few approaches that we may include in our plan to earn the coveted boardroom invitation.

## ***Ten Strategies to Earn a Position on the Executive Management Team.***

**1. Don’t wait to be asked.** The CEO won’t come to your office for help because they don’t understand the resources of the PR office, hence don’t know how PR can help. Education, examples and action must come proactively from us.

**2. Know what keeps the CEO up at night.** Understand what vexes the CEO, vexes the

organization. Focus your PR activities to support these issues and you'll align yourself with top management.

**3. Analyze the big picture not just the snapshot.** Present the CEO with tomorrow's issues, *not* yesterday's news hits and social media tallies. Anticipate and prepare for what's ahead that may affect the organization and how PR actions can factor into the solution.

**4. Get involved in the company's policy making process.** Help create or revise company policies, don't just apologize to your audience(s) after-the-fact for bad management decisions.

**5. Lead the function of "Environment Scanning"** to detect early signs of emerging issues/trends that may affect the organization. Bring the CEO solutions and corrective actions; do not burden them with additional problems or decisions.

**6. Serve as the conscience of the organization** to preserve established relationships and forge new public alliances. PR is the only department with the resources to protect the company's present position and reputation during crisis/conflict.

**7. Develop and present action-oriented "decision-making" information** and forward-looking strategy rather than past communication activity status reports. CEO's expect it and manage by it, i.e., the accountants and lawyers.

**8. Know everything you can about your company's operations.** We're the storytellers for the organization, if we don't know it, we can't communicate it nor can we develop strategic PR plans for it.

**9. Monitor the direct competition and the marketplace.** We can't develop strategic plans without factoring in the outside world and what direct competitors are doing.

**10. Focus all of your PR activities** with objectives that clearly support the organization's business plan and contribute to the bottom line. And I can assure you, the newsletter being late doesn't make the CEO lose a single wink of sleep.

So given all this, what's the real value of being a card-carrying member of the boardroom hierarchy? It gives you *five absolute advantages to excel at your job*:

**1. It gives you instant access to top management.** And that relationship is invaluable in crisis situations and need-for-speed situations.

**2. It gives you the opportunity to help create company policy** – tied directly to the company's business and community goals – thus avoiding hasty or "snap-shot" bad decisions or actions.

**3. It gives you credibility as a planner and strategic thinker** with top management, your co-workers and peers.

**4. It makes top management members of your PR support team** – a critical element for success and growth.

**5. It elevates the role of PR to the proper executive level** to allow PR to "do the right thing," and that benefits all the company stakeholder audiences.

Now it's up to you to take a proactive role in elevating your public relations career by creating a

personal plan to raise your value to upper management and thus earn a seat at the boardroom table. Now embark on a serious hunt and stop walking in the woods.

## About the Author



Joe has practiced public relations in Florida for more than 35 years and is now semi-retired. He was the co-founder and president of one of Florida's largest PR firms, Curley & Pynn Public Relations Management in Orlando, which he sold

in 2004. Currently a public relations and marketing consultant at his own firm Stingray Solutions, Inc., Joe is retained by Universal Studios Parks & Resorts as Senior Corporate Communications Counsel, international marketing & PR. He is directly involved in theme park projects in Singapore, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

He recently served for eight years on the Communications and Public Relations Advisory Board for the University of Florida, which he co-chaired for 2 years. He is a past multi-year national PRSA board member, past national president of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Foundation, and a past state president of Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA). In 1993, 2005 and again in 2009 he was honored with FPRA's highest statewide awards for outstanding professional leadership. He is a graduate of the Executive Management Program at Rollins College Graduate School of Business. In 2009, Joe was one of two alumni that were inducted into the Evergreen Park Community High School Hall of Fame (Chicago).

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