

A PACK OF CAREER TACTICS



PRSA Public
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ADVANCING THE PROFESSION
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PRSA: A Pack of Career Tactics

A Pack of Career Tactics contains select articles on career topics taken from the Public Relations Society of America's publications *Public Relations Tactics* and *The Public Relations Strategist*. The articles are organized into the following sections:

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We hope that you find this collection of articles to be a valuable tool in your career development.

Public Relations Society of America
Member Services Department

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I. Advice for PR Graduates

Advice for This Year's PR Graduates: Succinct Wisdom Useful to Novices and Everyone

Multiple Authors, May 2003, *Public Relations Tactic*, PRSA

Tactics asked Richard Weiner, APR, Fellow PRSA, senior consultant, Porter Novelli, and PRSA's 1990 Gold Anvil winner, to talk with PR leaders and collect advice for PR graduates (more than 2,500 Public Relations Student Society of America members graduate this spring) and other novices. Moreover, these pearls of wisdom can be useful to all PR practitioners.

At the end, Weiner summarizes the key points and offers his own advice.

Judith S. Bogart, APR, Fellow PRSA, PRSA's 1999 Paul M. Lund Public Service Award, 1983 National PRSA President:

Remember that you are a professional and are bound by ethical standards of conduct.

Never stop learning. Keep up with what's new and what others are doing and saying.

Read newspapers, magazines, the classics, books on psychology and sociology – everything to keep you current and informed. It's the only way to be a good counselor.

Pay attention to the people you admire. Learn from them about how to behave, how to attack a problem, how to interact with others in the organization.

Don't hesitate to ask for help or advice. You won't appear stupid. You'll be seen as honest. Besides, we old-timers love to be asked for advice.

Mary L. Cusick, APR, Senior Vice President, Investor Relations and Corporate Communications, Bob Evans Farms, Inc., 1998 National PRSA President:

After graduation, there will be pressure to get to work. Before you accept your first job, use your networking skills to get a feel for the environment. If a situation doesn't feel right, you don't connect with your future boss, or you can't find someone who sings their praises, don't take the job. This will be hard. Your parents might not totally understand. But if you don't work for someone who is highly regarded and well-respected, you won't be able to learn the right things and it will be tough to earn respect for yourself. Ultimately, you won't be as competitive in the marketplace. You never get a second chance at a first job.

Ofield Dukes, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, Ofield Dukes & Associates, PRSA's 2001 Gold Anvil winner:

Essentially, public relations is about communicating effectively. One inescapable fact is the multiculturalism of America and the rest of the world. In this new global economy, PR practitioners in this country must become knowledgeable about the demographics and psychographics of our highly diverse citizens and consumers and must also have the same type of knowledge and appreciation for the global community and marketplace. As one of the delegates representing PRSA at an international conference of public relations associations in South Africa last year, I gained insights into the challenges and problems of practicing public relations in different countries. That is an educational process yet to be clearly defined but it is an imperative for the next generation of effective PR practitioners.

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Daniel J. Edelman, APR, Fellow PRSA, Founder and Chairman, Edelman Public Relations Worldwide, PRSA's 1999 Gold Anvil winner.

Public relations is now recognized as an essential professional service. You are educated and have demonstrated superior qualifications for this work. You will need to continue to learn. Read the print media. Watch TV news. Attend industry meetings and hear lectures. Above all, work hard. A good start is the precursor of a successful career.

Lawrence G. Foster, (retired) Corporate Vice President of Public Relations, Johnson & Johnson, PRSA's 1989 Gold Anvil winner:

Public relations has changed radically over the years, but my views on ways to succeed have not. Some of them are:

- Become intimately familiar with the company's (or client's) business so you can better understand key issues.
- Earn a reputation for bringing good judgment to the decision-making process
- Don't be afraid to disagree. If justified, be the loyal opposition on important decisions, especially when the public interest is at stake.
- Don't be intimidated by the press. Never lie. You are not obliged to tell everything you know.
- Become recognized for your writing talent. It will set you apart from all others, even with mundane internal memos.
- Set your sights high, and to thine own self be true.

Thomas L. Harris, APR, Fellow PRSA, Managing Partner, Thomas L. Harris & Company, PRSA's 2000 Gold Anvil winner:

- Always put your employer or client first.
- Go the extra mile. For the client's sake and the satisfaction it gives you.
- Play it straight. Tell clients the truth, even when it's not what they want to hear.
- Don't have PR tunnel vision. Your client will rely on you as an advisor. Be an advice giver, not an order taker.
- Always tell the media the truth. Even when it hurts.
- Forget the jargon and the bull.
- Be a great team player.
- Give credit where it's due. Somebody else may have a better idea.
- Take the business seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.
- Nobody likes a know-it-all. Never cross the thin line between advocacy and arrogance.
- Keep your sense of humor and have some fun.

Sandra M. Hermanoff, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, Hermanoff & Associates:

Advice for graduating seniors (with internship experience, I hope):

- Information is gold. Ask questions during job interviews (interview them as much as you're being interviewed), on new assignments, during internal or external meetings, especially when you don't have adequate information to proceed. Admit you don't know how to complete a task rather than try "the muddle technique."

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- Ethics and integrity should never be compromised – no matter what. Footprints have a tendency to follow you everywhere.
- Admit mistakes and offer creative solutions to problems. Apologizing is never beneath anyone, especially if you can fix it.
- Choose mentors wisely and talk through your problems with them before proceeding.

Ed Menninger, APR, Fellow PRSA, Founding Partner, Communicating@Cultural Context

Congratulations on choosing a wonderful, thought-provoking profession in which there is seldom a dull moment. While you'll be learning every day, there's still a need to remember the importance of old fundamental verities — reading, writing and arithmetic.

Reading: You need to be on top of information and the cultural context in which it lives. Read the daily newspaper. Read books. Browse Web sites. You'll even need a dose of TV, which provides you with a look at the culture — where your product, service, candidate or idea must live.

Writing: If you want to be a superb communicator you must write well. Practice will help you to respect brevity.

Arithmetic: If you don't understand the numbers of your business, you just won't be taken seriously as a major player. Learn the balance sheet, understand cash flow and be comfortable in your business.

Debra A. Miller, Ed.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Vice President, Corporate Marketing and Communications, Bank of America, 1997 National PRSA President:

- Public relations is not for the weak or the faint-hearted.
- Make sure you understand how money is made and spent globally.
- Learn how to write for noncaptive audiences.
- Develop an appreciation for qualitative and quantitative research.
- Embrace diversity and learn how to communicate with multicultural audiences.
- Never stop learning about public relations and the world we live and work in.
- Get as many mentors, coaches and advocates as you can.
- Be flexible and mobile.
- Stay involved in PRSA.
- Always give back.
- If you don't have a sense of humor, get one.

Betsy Plank, APR, Fellow PRSA, Principal, Betsy Plank Public Relations, PRSA's 2001 Patrick Jackson Award, PRSA's 1989 Paul M. Lund Public Service Award, PRSA's 1977 Gold Anvil, 1974 National PRSA President:

Today's practice is legacy, not necessarily prophecy. While the profession's principles remain steady, the problems, directions and expectations are constantly evolving and changing. From Career Day One, today's smartest graduates become eternal students.

What's their core curriculum? Studying the corporate culture of clients – in all of its dimensions, not simply marketing. Reading, listening and learning about the issues and behaviors of client constituencies. Performing with integrity and disciplining results to corporate objectives. Joining PRSA — now, not sometime — to seize opportunities for continuing education, demonstrating leadership and cultivating collegial connections. And yes, all along the way, as legendary mentor Daniel J. Edelman, APR, Fellow PRSA, always insists, "Take notes."

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Joseph A. Vecchione, APR, Fellow PRSA, (retired) Corporate Vice President of Public Relations, Prudential Insurance Co., PRSA's 2002 Gold Anvil, PRSA's 2001 Paul M. Lund Public Service Award, 1994 National PRSA President:

This may seem like a no brainer, but it is more important than ever to be knowledgeable about the business or organization that you work for and what it does. Reporters are quick to pick up on spotty information and will treat it accordingly. Sure, we can get experts to handle specific media questions, but these very experts will be more comfortable with you if you have taken the time to find out what they are all about. A good working relationship with the media requires as much personal contact as possible. You cannot build and maintain credibility with a computer and a fax machine. Some of us find this out when there is a crisis and then it is too late.

Become a Student for Life

By Richard Weiner, APR, Fellow PRSA

The 12 PR leaders we talked with have been successful in a variety of fields, particularly major companies and PR agencies. It is delightful to note the repetition of several key points; in a few cases, almost the same words. The common threads are:

- Continue your education forever.
- Find and learn from mentors.
- Before your first job, and continuously, learn about your supervisors, the company or organization, the competitors, the industry and other dimensions of our global environment.

Of course, I agree. Following are a few specific details about these maxims.

- I currently subscribe to and read more than 30 publications, including The New York Times, PRSA publications (Tactics and The Strategist), other PR publications, trade and consumer newsletters and magazines in advertising, health care, journalism, media and other fields of personal interest. It's not a chore; it's a healthful habit that I enjoy.
- The area of greatest weakness among many college graduates, including communications majors, is writing. Reread and revise everything that you write, including e-mails, memos and other casual writing, as well as news releases and speeches. Pay special attention to grammar, spelling, clarity, succinctness and vigor. Avoid inappropriate clichés, hackneyed and unwieldy language.
- Before every meeting, ask yourself if you are prepared. Have you looked in the company's files, Web sites, case studies, PRSA Anvil entries and other research areas?
- Start a personal file of examples of superb writing, ideas, resources, booklets and other items that can be useful.
- Your college days of youthful idealism may be over, but you must maintain your integrity, study and work ethic, passion and sense of humor. I have been a PR consultant for several decades, and I am still a student.

Ten lessons that aren't in the textbooks: Helping students launch and succeed in their PR careers

Jacob C. Farbman, M.A., APR, October 2006, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

Over the last five years, I've enjoyed educating hundreds of students in Strategies of Public Relations, the lone PR course in The College of New Jersey's communication studies major. As an adjunct professor, I tell students that my job is to prepare them to succeed in their PR careers and in life. To that end, here are 10 lessons I've shared with my students that others should find helpful as they launch and advance their PR careers:

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1) Book informational interviews. You've decided. You want to be a PR practitioner. But you aren't sure what sector you want a career in. What are the day-to-day, real-world differences among agency, corporate, education, government, health care, hospitality, nonprofit, sports and travel public relations?

One way to find out is to contact PR practitioners and request informational interviews. Narrow your options down to five that interest you and book informational interviews with PR practitioners in those areas.

For example, spend about an hour asking an agency PR practitioner questions about the steps needed to take to start a career in agency public relations. Repeat the process for your other choices. You'll get great insights unavailable in any textbook.

2) While in college, work in as many internships as you can. Some PR practitioners say that you only need one internship to launch your PR career. I suggest students work in many internships to make themselves as marketable as possible. Experience gained in one internship will help create a portfolio for future job interviews; several internships will expand your résumé and help you decide which area of public relations you want to pursue.

3) Network with PR practitioners. You can graduate from any college or university and earn straight A's, but if you don't network with PR professionals, you will have a difficult time finding a job. The same holds true with advancing your career. In public relations, many positions are advertised word-of-mouth. By attending networking events — no matter how large or small — you get your name out there with working professionals looking for new talent.

4) Establish and maintain your reputation. Your reputation is the one thing that will set you apart from everyone else. Work hard every day to build and maintain your professional reputation.

5) When you go to your boss with a problem, always present possible solutions. There are two advantages to this. First, you won't be perceived as someone who dumps problems on others. Second, others in the organization will see you as a problem solver.

6) Don't be a "yes person." The last thing your organization needs is someone who agrees with every idea the boss has — even bad ones. PR practitioners have to counsel management by painting real-world scenarios so management can make decisions that mutually benefit the organization and its audiences.

No matter where you are on the organizational chart, if you do not agree with your boss's idea, counsel him or her with action/reaction examples such as "if we do A, it's possible that B, C or D will happen." This will help your boss solve problems, as well as help build your credibility as a strategic PR counselor.

7) Praise others in public. When someone you work with does a great job on a project, tell that person — in front of others. You'll leave that person feeling good about the work he or she did.

8) Criticize others behind closed doors. When someone you work with causes you "professional tension," talk to the person about it behind closed doors. The office won't benefit from a public confrontation. Remember to also put yourself in the other person's place as you tactfully work through the problem.

9) When in doubt, ask questions. While in graduate school, my mentor, Rich Bagin, APR, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association, gave me great advice: "Asking questions is a sign of strength, never weakness."

For example, if you don't understand why the PR director decided to create a brochure for an audience instead of creating a specialized Web site, ask why. It may turn out that the brochure is targeted to an audience that does not use the Internet to get information. By asking questions, you will strengthen your knowledge about strategic public relations.

10) Keep in touch with former professors and previous employers. You never know when you may need advice to solve a problem, a person to run an idea by or a reference for a new job. Former professors are also a good resource to turn to when looking for a new job. In many cases, PR professionals looking to fill a position reach out to PR professors to help them find the right person for the job. If your former professors know that you are looking to change jobs, your search will become much easier.

II. Getting the Job

Turning your summer job into your first PR job: How waiting tables or working retail pays off

Joanna Schroeder, APR, April 2005, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

What do a swimming and diving coach, bartender, food server, knives salesperson, floral designer, retail clerk, summer camp counselor and an admissions coordinator have in common? They are all recent graduates who used nonprofessional job skills to get their first PR job.

It's that time of year when many aspiring PR professionals are ready to secure their first job. As students hone their résumés, they often struggle to find enough relevant work experience to include.

Consequently, many skills a successful PR practitioner needs, including oral communications, multitasking, organization, crisis management, employee relations, relationship building, management, pitching, sales, meeting deadlines and teamwork, are developed during summer and part-time jobs. Although many veteran practitioners say that writing is the most important skill in public relations, many of these other abilities are underdeveloped in the college setting or during a brief internship, but have been strengthened through a summer job.

"PR people in general must have a warm personality. I think that working in industries like food service, where you have contacts with people, helps prepare you," says Jeff Trauring, account coordinator with Snow Communications based in Minneapolis.

Trauring graduated from Elon University in Elon, N.C., last May and has been with Snow Communications for several months. He capitalized on his experience as a waiter to help him land his first job.

"When you're just out of college and going through interviews, you must play to your strengths to make up for lack of agency experience," he says. "I believe that the jobs I took while in college are helping me to be successful in the real world. You must be able to draw comparisons from your old jobs and demonstrate these benefits to other types of work. I was a server for several years, so I like to believe I'm good at multitasking and maintaining a positive image when things may actually be crashing down."

Meanwhile, Alex Parker, assistant account executive at Dome HK in Chicago, leveraged his success selling Cutco knives while attending Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Parker, who graduated in 2003, was able to use his sales success to demonstrate his ability to quickly convey a message and get results.

"The cold-calling in sales is similar to calling a reporter, because, oftentimes, they don't want to hear from you. I learned how to communicate key messages about the knives, which is like pitching," he says.

Pitching ability is important, particularly in media relations, and many students who complete internships don't have the opportunity to pitch stories. When you are in the food industry, retail industry or in a sales position, you are honing the key benefits of a product (key messages) and pitching a customer on an item.

For job interviews, develop a concrete example of how you persuaded a customer to buy something or try something. Then parallel that to how this skill will help you become an effective media relations professional. Also, incorporate this example into your cover letter, résumé and during your interview.

There are some important skills learned on the job including time management, organization, teamwork, multitasking and prioritization. You learned to juggle classes, work and other responsibilities while achieving success academically and in the workplace. Demonstrate these skills during your interview.

Kristina Kennedy used this tip to help her land her first job as an associate in the Boston office of RF Binder Partners. While a student at Notre Dame, she was a varsity athlete who waited tables and coached swimming at summer camps. Her combined activities and occupations taught her about teamwork and leadership.

"Being a varsity athlete is a huge commitment and teaches you about time management if nothing else," says Kennedy. "You also learn about teamwork. You must not only be a good teammate, but you are pushed and challenged to work with people on a whole different level."

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This is applicable to what she does now. She typically works in small groups, and her college experience taught her how to play to others' strengths and weaknesses.

Through coaching, Kennedy learned how to manage to achieve the best result. "You learn how people will respond and adapt your coaching style to best fit their personality," she says. "Without coaching, I would have probably been at a loss when I had my first opportunity to manage an intern."

Aside from holding various jobs, Trauring, Parker and Kennedy also had PR internships — a crucial element for all students. These three know their part-time jobs and outside activities helped them develop other skills and to become well-rounded people, and a well-rounded person makes for a great employee.

Résumé and interview tips

Many students don't know where to begin, but internships, volunteer work and summer jobs are invaluable in helping you land your first professional job, says Julie Chendes, owner of Next Level Strategies, a human resources consultant. Chendes works with many entry-level students looking for their first job.

"The 'I'll do anything' attitude is important right out of school," says Chendes. "Don't be afraid to say that 'I want this job more than anything.' It is important, especially during the interview, to be able to project. If you have no confidence, then the interviewer will have no confidence that you can sell his clients' products and services."

Also demonstrate your ability to multitask, communicate in all forms, organize and work on a deadline, she says. These skills are developed through a combination of school, internship and a job, such as a server. When you are writing your cover letter and résumé as well as in your interview, demonstrate what you can do for them. The job is not about you, but what you can do for the company.

Here are several tips for your résumé and interviews:

- Always include a cover letter with your résumé, but don't send a form cover letter. Include five to six bullet points demonstrating your skills.
- Lead your résumé with a skills section; include nine to 12 words demonstrating those skills.
- Always have someone proofread your cover letter and résumé before sending it — a mistake can make a potential interview disappear.
- Practice for the interview. For example, prepare an answer for the question, "Tell me about a time when a customer was disgruntled."
- Research the company before you apply and ask questions that demonstrate that knowledge during the interview.
- Send thank-you notes afterwards to your interviewers.

Job Resources

There are many resources to help you discover what jobs are available. However, one of the best ways to find a job is to reach out. Call local companies and agencies in the area you would like to work and ask them if they have any positions available. If not, ask them for an informational interview. These can lead to a referral or a full-time position when the opportunity arises.

PRSSA (www.prssa.org)

PRSA (www.prsa.org)

PR Blogs (www.canuckflack.com; <http://prmachine.blogspot.com>)

Career Builder (www.careerbuilder.com)

Monster (www.monster.com)

HotJobs (<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com>)

Flipdog (<http://flipdog.monster.com/>)

Workinpr.com (www.workinpr.com)

Ask the Professor:

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A few mistakes often made by interviewees, regardless of experience

Professor Bill Adams, APR, Fellow PRSA, May 1999, *Public Relations Tactics*

Although we briefly touched on the necessity for job-interviewing “rehearsal” in our last column, it might be best to reiterate the mantra espoused by recruiters and human resources people alike: Be prepared. “For the interviewer, there are great benefits to having a candidate (who’s) well-prepared and can actively answer questions,” says Paul Green, author of “Get Hired,” a book designed to teach job candidates how to prepare for “behavior-based” interviews. Green, an industrial psychologist and president of Memphis-based Behavioral Technology, is an advocate of “structured or behavioral” interviewing, a technique designed to probe for information that can be easily compared with other candidates. Too many interviewers, he says, rely on their “gut feeling about the candidate’s personality, which doesn’t really focus on a person’s skills.” Thus, Green’s consulting firm teaches employers how to conduct performance-based interviews.

Interviewed recently by South Florida business writer Ellen Forman, Green suggests candidates be prepared for these interviews by taking a good look at their skills and accomplishments. “Summarize them concretely and package them into a series of skill-benefit statements,” he suggests. For example, practice succinctly explaining what you can do for the organization. This requires some self-examination, Green says, and requires practice in doing it with confidence. According to Green’s book, some of the biggest mistakes made by job candidates include:

- Deciding to “wing it.” If the competition is prepared and you’re not, guess who gets the job?
- Focusing on salary and benefits. While vacation policies and health plans are important in the long run, showing up front you’re interested in the job itself, rather than the rewards, impresses interviewers.
- Emphasizing your traits over your skills. Green says today’s performance-based interviewers are interested mainly in what you can do for the organization rather than in your hobbies and personality or whether you’d be a fun lunch partner.
- Failure to answer questions. This can be tricky, because there are questions interviewers ask that are considered illegal under today’s employment laws (“how old are you?” or “do you have children?” among them). Green calls these “killer questions,” and tactfully dispatching them and moving on is sometimes difficult. Try to defuse by again bridging to your skills and accomplishments.
- Asking for interview tips. By doing this, you’ve sent a strong signal you weren’t prepared and want the current interviewer to prepare you for your next one.

How To Land An Unadvertised Job

Shelli Ryan, APR, March 2000, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

A big problem today is people do not want to learn new job-seeking skills. Too many still hang on to the idea that the best way to find a job is to just jump in — respond to ads and hope for interviews. That day is over.

If you are monitoring want ads or surfing the Internet, that’s okay, but be aware that only about 20 percent of all available jobs are ever advertised. Seventy-five to 80 percent of all opportunities are never advertised publicly. These jobs make up the unadvertised or “proactive” job market.

Do you know how to effectively land an unadvertised job? The first step to break into the unadvertised job market is to locate and approach the appropriate decision-makers through networking.

Don’t Ask For A Job. Ask For Advice.

Networking is the thoughtful, effective and active use of contacts. It is never a straight-out request for employment. Networking is also asking for information and advice. Start by talking with people who you know, so that they can introduce you to people you don’t know. These people should include not only friends and professional associates, but also people who provide services to you – doctors, lawyers, accountants and vendors. Here are some steps to help land an unadvertised job through networking:

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- Build rapport with a person relevant to your career search. One word of advice: Bypass the HR department whenever possible. Target decision-makers — hiring managers, owners, CEOs and presidents.
- Reassure them by making it clear that you are not expecting them to know of a current opportunity. Tell them what you are expecting from your networking meeting (market intelligence, career path validation, relocation options).
- Present a clear, concise picture of yourself. State your career objective, a brief background summary, and a description of the options or industry sectors you are currently exploring. This will help them decide what type of information will be useful to you.
- Ask relevant questions. You can begin your conversation by discussing industry sectors, companies within them, typical or special problems or needs within those companies, or ways companies have tried dealing with them. You can then ask about people who can help you take the next steps in building your base of information and contacts.
- Do not pull out a résumé. Let any discussion of job openings happen naturally. A résumé screams that you are looking for a job, and this will turn off some of the people you most want to meet. Presenting a résumé at an informational networking meeting would lead some people to conclude that you did not really want information, you just wanted to know if the person had a job for you. You can always send your résumé with your thank-you letter the minute you get home.
- Networking. It is the fastest way to locate a good mechanic, a good doctor, and a good job in the unadvertised marketplace.

Becoming an Educated Job Seeker: Tips for Negotiating Salaries in Today's Market

Stacey Mandel, January 2002, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

In today's uncertain business climate, job seekers need to take a proactive approach in searching for new positions, as well as enlisting the support of industry recruiters to help them find jobs. In many cases, however, individuals are pursuing jobs on their own by submitting résumés to prospective employers, but do not necessarily understand how to negotiate an offer. To help individuals become educated job seekers, here are tips for negotiating salaries in today's market.

Consider Benefits

When you receive an offer, look at the whole benefits package and its value. Be sure to ask the Human Resource department or hiring manager about the monetary value of a benefit if you are unfamiliar with it. Also find out if the company matches investment programs and to what extent. Remember that each company's package will be different. Don't compare offers without evaluating all the information.

Make Concessions

Making the deal takes concessions, so be sure to know what you are willing to give up in advance. Think about what benefits (insurance packages, amount of vacation time, etc.) and perks (telecommuting, company car, etc.) are important for your lifestyle and those you can easily and comfortably live without.

Be Up-Front

When you receive an offer, take the necessary time to review it, and then sleep on it. Tell the prospective employer when they can expect to hear back from you. In order for a company to give you the best package possible, the Human Resource representative or hiring manager recruiting for the position will need to clearly know what you are looking for. If the offer is not what you want, be certain to state why it isn't and what it will take to get you there.

Don't Expect Picture-Perfect Deals

Companies are putting together the best offers they can within their corporate guidelines and based on current market conditions — they are not working against you. Sometimes they can give a little, and sometimes they

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can't. So, don't take it personally if a deal is not picture-perfect. Remember, you want to find the right job and be able to fit in comfortably with the corporate culture.

Conduct Face-to-Face Meetings

Wherever possible, try to negotiate and finalize the deal face to face. This forum will allow job seekers to discuss and evaluate the offer with the prospective employer and personally gauge reactions to the request. It also provides an opportunity to continue to build a relationship with them. If it is necessary to discuss some of the request over the phone, be sure to get the most important information worked out in person.

Get A Contract Or Letter Of Employment

If you are negotiating a contract, make sure you understand all of the terms. If the language is confusing, or if it does not reflect what you thought the arrangement would be, ask that it be changed. A letter of employment usually states the title, start date and salary and any special terms agreed upon. It does not list all the standard company benefits, policies, etc., that are in the company handbook.

Retain Agreements

After you have signed the agreement, make sure you keep a copy for your files.

III. Keeping the Job

Things I wish I'd known before I showed up on the job: A student's practical guide to surviving the first few weeks (and beyond) of your first job

Kelly Papinchak, April 2007, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

Congratulations — you've landed your first job out of college. All those hours of studying, networking and interning paid off. You're employed.

Here are 10 practical things you may not have thought to consider in those first critical weeks:

- Clean out your car. Spotless. Don't leave piles of papers and end-of-semester textbooks in the backseat. Don't leave the week's fast-food wrappers on the floorboard. You never know when a co-worker may ask you to drive to lunch. (Some offices even offer this as an initiation.) So always keep your car clean.
- Keep up with the maintenance on your car. Again, as the newest employee, you may be asked to drive. Keep the gas tank at least half full — how embarrassing is it to have to tell your new boss or co-workers that you can't drive because you don't have enough gas? If your car is in disrepair, get a new one. I'll never forget sitting on the side of the road with a co-worker waiting for my engine to cool down in 90-degree Houston weather.
- Always have cash available, especially at events. Again, it's embarrassing to have to ask your boss for cash in the valet line. Even if you'll be reimbursed, it's always helpful to have cash on hand.
- Keep stain remover in your desk drawer. You never know when you're going to spill something on your clothes. Be prepared and even keep an extra shirt or jacket in your car (in the trunk and not in plain sight.)
- Always knock before entering anyone's office. Maybe your co-worker's office doubles as a locker room. Always knock if the door is closed.
- Clean out the communal coffeepot. Even if you don't drink it, be sure to do your part and keep the office clean, especially if management is nice enough to supply you with caffeine.
- Call every number you place in a press release or in an ad before it's submitted. It's simple, but we take numbers for granted. Always call the numbers to make sure it's not your competitor's no matter how certain you are.
- Never forget your office alarm code. This is especially relevant if you happen to be the first one to arrive in the office. There's nothing like blaring alarms and flashing lights to say, "Happy Friday." And if you can't remember your code, that leads me to number nine:
- Program your boss' cell phone number into your phone. Do this on your first day. Ask for it. Have it handy.
- Keep business cards in your wallet, bag, purse and car. You never want to be caught without your business cards, especially if you're hosting the company booth at a 7 a.m. breakfast. Driving to the office at 5 a.m. is not fun.

OK, so I've gone beyond 10, but here are a few final thoughts.

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- Don't engage in office politics. No matter how tempting, avoid it. If someone tells you something about so-and-so, just file it away. And if so-and-so tells you it's the someone who's the real problem, file it away. Concentrate on your job and doing your best, and you'll be glad you did.
- Never stop networking. You're only just beginning, so don't think that because you've got a job, you don't need to network. You're now networking for your employer (and still for you, of course). Bringing in a sales lead or finding a potential account are all parts of your job, no matter what level you're at. (Editor's note: See Page 21 for more networking tips.)
- Keep up with the daily news and breaking news stories. As a PR professional, you should be the one informing your boss or staff if there's a blocked freeway, evacuation or other event taking place nearby. If your boss asks your opinion on a relevant news topic, you look so much better to not have to ask, "So, what exactly happened? I missed that."
- Always proofread. Check and re-check your work for spelling and grammatical errors before you send it to be reviewed.
- Don't get discouraged. Even if you're laid off twice in six months, make the most of the situation, and use this fabulous network that you've built to help you find another job.
- Clarify your roles and expectations. If you aren't given a clear job description, it's OK to ask, what you'll be accountable for, and what the measurements of success for this position are.
- Lastly, have fun, love what you do and give back to your profession. Always share what you have learned with others and offer them the same support you were given.

A View from the Cubicle: Ten Tips to Help You Tackle Your First Job

Allison Sloan Gillian Rubin, April 2002, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

We don't pretend to be experts, but we do know of what we speak. As recent graduates navigating the bumpy waters of our first "real" jobs, we thought it only fair to impart some of our newfound wisdom to those of you who will follow us. These tips may not unlock every secret of your new job, but they might help you survive it a little easier. Read on for our strategies on tackling your freshman year in the work world.

1. *Whosa-Whatsa-Huh? - How to Decipher Professional Jargon*

The first few weeks of a new job can feel like asking for directions in a foreign country. All of a sudden a simple instruction to research media coverage on trade-marking turns into "I need a 411 on MSNBC's coverage of the SEC, ASAP." No matter how much you think you know; you have to learn the language to communicate with the natives. If you don't pay close attention, a simple instruction can turn into a bad episode of "Mission Impossible."

What to remember: Most of these folks have been in the industry for some time and forget that this language, which is second nature to them, sounds like Swahili to you.

Our tip: Tell your managers that you want to make sure to do the project the way they want it done. Ask them if they will take five minutes to run through the language to make sure that you have not misunderstood anything. Bosses like to see initiative and you want to send the message that even though you may be new, you want to pull your weight around the office. If you invest the time to seek explanations now, you will reap the benefits in the long run.

2. *The Fall Of Ms. Know-It-All*

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Ok, so you graduated at the top of your class, held two summer internships in your field, and even served on the board of three major campus groups. Think you know it all? Think again. No matter what your background, all new employees start out on the same page. Respect within an organization is not like instant coffee - just add resume and stir - it will take hard work and dedication to prove your value.

What to remember: Your collegiate experiences were essential in getting you to where you are now, but they are not enough to keep you there. If you continually raise the bar of expectation for yourself, people will recognize and reward you for your hard work.

Our tip: Use that hard-earned knowledge to get the ball rolling, but continue to seek out new areas in which you can excel. Think of the stripes you earned in school as a dress rehearsal and remember that your best performance is yet to come.

3. *Time Management for the Scheduling Impaired*

Remember when you thought that starting a full-time job would really open up your schedule? That was a fun delusion, wasn't it? While it's true that your nights and weekends do become your own, you will find that the demands on your time, both professionally and socially, will leave you exhausted unless you learn to budget. Whether it's working late, going out drinking late or taking a weekend vacation so action-packed that it finds you falling asleep at your desk on Monday morning, you will soon learn that to be effective inside of the office, you have to learn how to live effectively outside of it.

What to remember: Companies will hire and fire you based on two things: the value of the product you produce and the time in which you produce it - period.

Our tip: Don't overbook your social calendar - make sure you set aside at least two nights a week to stay in and relax. It's not the end of the world if you miss a happy hour every now and then. Also, whenever possible, watch your diet and do a little exercise to increase your energy for those early mornings and late nights.

4. *Curb Those Champagne And Caviar Dreams*

Getting a regular paycheck is not an open invite to the champagne and caviar club. Don't get us wrong, we know you work hard for your money and deserve every penny, but it's time to learn the difference between "need" and "want."

What to remember: Rewarding yourself with treats is a must, but keep in mind that treats do not include hundreds of dollars in designer clothing, extravagant vacations, steak dinners every night or an apartment full of the newest and loudest stereo equipment.

Our tip: Save your receipts and keep a money log. Every week or so, empty out your wallet and jot down the things you are spending your money on. You'll be surprised to find out exactly how much those morning frappaccinos are running you. Once you become familiar with your spending habits, it will be easier to see where you need to cut corners and where you can afford to splurge.

5. *Showing Your Colors In A Black-And-White World*

The syllabus is a thing of the past - from here on out, you will get assigned a different urgent task every five to seven minutes, all of which you will be expected to complete by the close of business. Without a little organizational planning on your part, you will quickly get in over your head.

What to remember: No one expects you to be a superhero. The important thing is that you are always looking ahead. Set goals for yourself and try to reach a new one every month - like joining an organization in your field or implementing a new idea or program.

Our tip: Make lists and keep them. That way, when the time comes to ask for a raise or cover your back, you have a record of everything you've worked on. Also, know where you want to go and work backwards. For instance, if you want to ask for a raise or promotion, figure out well ahead of time what will distinguish you from others in your position and set goals to get there.

6. *The Almighty Business Card*

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You've already heard that who you know is important, but in the real world, it won't be enough. It's important to branch out and spread your wings - the more people you meet, the more people with the potential to help you down the road. Never underestimate your connections or burn bridges. Think of the business world like a giant college campus - try to fill your resume with lots of extracurricular activities.

What to remember: The business world is filled with people who aren't like you - so you have to move beyond your comfort zone if you want to get ahead.

Our tip: Make your business card your constant companion: Bring it to bars, concerts, and out to dinner - you never know who you might meet. A friend of a friend could land you your next job or bring in a new client. Keep your contacts organized and make an effort to stay in touch. And don't forget that doing favors for others can only help you in the long run.

7. *Softball Is A Job Skill*

You never thought to put your ability to sing, fly fish or hit a mean softball on your resume, but these are things that just might come in handy at your first job. It may not get you a promotion, but hitting the winning home run for your company's softball team will definitely not hurt your status at work. You will never know what you have in common with your co-workers outside of the office if you never go spend time with them outside of the office.

What to remember: Spending time with co-workers off the job can help you get ahead by allowing them to see you in a new light and vice versa.

Our tip: Find a non work-related interest that you share and make an effort to coordinate some after-hours plans. Just remember that even if the activity involves happy hour at your favorite bar, you are still unofficially on the clock - so be responsible.

8. *Wearing Sweatpants To Your 9 a.m. Meeting Is Not Acceptable*

It used to be that any event scheduled before noon was filed under the "what was I thinking" category and any class occurring before 9 a.m. was sweatpants-mandatory. At most companies today, business casual is the standard, but that still doesn't mean you can break out the cords and slap on a hat. Invest in some basic items that will allow you to mix and match until you can afford to buy more.

What to remember: When meeting clients, always wear a suit - period. And save the "Sex and the City" duds for after work - no one actually dresses like that in the business world.

Our tip: We've heard that you should dress like the person at the level you want to be, but if that person doesn't have an ounce of fashion sense, go your own way. Generally, the more creative the field, the more lax the dress code, but don't forget that a first impression goes a long way. Think about how you want to present yourself to the world.

9. *When the Workplace Feels Like "Melrose Place"*

So you thought you'd left drama behind when the curtains closed on your senior production of "Romeo and Juliet?" Think again. The business world is full of diverse personalities. This can really help when brainstorming new ideas for a client, but when it comes time to deal with each other, things can get sticky. Sometimes the office can feel like a war zone. Just remember that you don't need to win, or even fight, every battle.

What to remember: Everyone will not like you. Get over it. It's a hard lesson to learn, but a good one to learn early.

Our tip: Prepare to thicken your skin when it comes to the workplace. Remember that you are not defined only by your job. And try your best to stay out of the heat. It may feel good to play for awhile, but in the end you will only get burned.

10. *Gaining Respect From People Your Parents' Age*

The workplace may be an intimidating playground at first. After all, what could you possibly have in common with people who have kids and mortgages? However, if you expect others to treat you with respect, you need to be able to dole it out as well. Above all, professionalism will make you stand out from the rest and will give others no choice but to give you your due. Furthermore, you may eventually come to realize that you have more

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in common with the 50-year-old receptionist than with a majority of the people you threw your cap in the air with last year.

What to remember: No matter how good you are at your job, there will always be those who will dismiss you because of your age. Forget about them - you have better things to do than defend yourself to those personalities.

Our tip: Good work has no age requirement. Prove yourself by doing your best work, and by treating those around you the way you want to be treated. It may be old-fashioned, but it works.

IV. On the Job

Hello, my name is . . . Networking is an art that can be (painlessly) learned

Chuck Hester, APR, April 2007, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

Editor's note: The author contributes a monthly column, Forward 10, that appears in the young PR professionals blog, Forward Moving — www.forward-moving.com. This article was adapted from a post that originally appeared there in February.

If you are in any customer-oriented profession, whether it's public relations, marketing or practically any management position, networking is a necessity.

I'm good at relating to people. I have always been comfortable talking to people — at all levels. Even if it doesn't come naturally, networking is an art that can be learned. You don't have to be inherently gregarious and outgoing. Just have a genuine curiosity and interest in others. The result can be personally and professionally rewarding.

Here are a few tips on how to network effectively and painlessly.

1. Join a good networking site. My favorite is www.linkedin.com. It's a strong business-based site that allows you to find people from all over the world with similar interests that can be valuable in the future. I found my job through my LinkedIn connections. Perhaps more important, several good friends found me on the site. LinkedIn is only one example. You just need to decide what site will work best for you.
2. Practice. You read correctly: Practice networking. Talk to your friends, your co-workers, the postal carrier. Learn to listen and relate. Don't just say hello to others in the hallway, stop and chat for a minute, strike up a genuine conversation.
3. Listen, then talk. Take the time to hear what the other person is saying, add to their thoughts and relate it back to some of your experiences. If you have something in common, you'll know soon enough.
4. Take the opposite view of networking and watch your contacts grow. Instead of going into a potential networking relationship hoping to find out what's in it for you, do the opposite. Find out how you can be of service to the other person. I don't mean for you to buy every insurance policy from every salesperson you meet, but understand the other person and how you can help him or her in business — or even personal life.
5. Network in your interest areas first. Find networking groups that cater to your professional interests. If you're new, learn from senior members of these groups. The point is that you will probably feel more at ease with other professionals who have similar jobs to your own. It's a great way to start.

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6. Don't stop there. After a while, you need to branch out to other organizations that will help your overall business and professional development. Find a new media group or a chamber of commerce where you will be exposed to a cross section of industries and professions.
7. Embrace the mutually beneficial mantra. Enter into a networking relationship that is mutually beneficial. Take the initiative to develop that relationship. Many people who are networking will be more open to a connection when you start the conversation with "What can I do for you?"
8. Reserve the right to decline. While open networking is important to developing a network, it should also be a permission-based activity. You will not offend a potential contact if you say, with tact, that you are not open to the relationship because you don't know how it might be mutually beneficial. Wouldn't you rather have someone say no up front, as opposed to three months and 10 e-mails down the line? Networking is about being transparent and straightforward.
9. Keep it genuine. It's easier to be true to yourself and others because it feels so much better than being fake. This applies to networking too.
10. Use your online networks to develop key relationships. Join a professional community and a social community. Don't just lurk, engage. Comment on posts and offer direct contact information. Meet the people that you have an affinity for by exchanging ideas and information.

The well-balanced road warrior

How to get the most out of your job while traveling and still maintaining a work-life balance

Joanna Schroeder, APR, April 2006, *Public Relations Strategist*, PRSA

Restless and tired on a business trip shortly before the New Year, I grabbed the American Way Magazine and couldn't tear my eyes away from the cover story, "The Young & The Restless," an article celebrating the "ultimate road warriors."

After the initial shock that I wasn't a winner (okay, I'd never heard of the contest so it would be hard to win) I proceeded to read about, well, me. Last year I earned elite status on a few airlines and spent more than half the year in cities that were not home.

Many people go into public relations believing that it is going to be glitz, glamour and jet setting to exotic locations. The reality is that many PR professionals sit behind their desks for 12 hours a day. However, for those who travel for work, it can be a blessing and a curse. The locations and work can be interesting, but it can be difficult to manage your workload and work-life balance when you spend so much time as a road warrior. The first issue to address when your job requires this type of lifestyle is how to make the most of your time when you're away from the office.

Let me start by saying a common element of traveling is getting caught up in the grind of flight delays, long security lines, rental car lines (or worse, when you get to the front of the line and they tell you they've run out of cars) and sitting in planes on tarmacs and runways during delays. When you learn to let go of the frustration of all of this and realize that you can't manage this element of your travel schedule, you'll open yourself up to better manage yourself and the work you need to get finished.

Here are some tips for capitalizing on delays.

- Return phone calls. Just remember to be cognizant of other passengers. If you're in line, respectfully end your conversation when it's your turn in line.
- Break out the laptop when you're waiting between flights or stuck on the tarmac. This is a great time to catch up on work — even when you'd rather be reading a novel. If your battery runs out, move to a location near an outlet. Most airports have business centers or outlets in most gates, and some even have wireless Internet. You can even make copies and print PowerPoint presentations in airport business centers.

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- Don't skip meals. Drink plenty of water. When you get thirsty and hungry, you'll become less productive and efficient and have even more work to do when you finally get to where you need to be because you'll have to redo what you started.

Now that you've finally arrived at your destination, the real work begins. To capitalize on your time, try the following tips:

- If you need to entertain a client, go to dinner early. There is no need to go to dinner at 9 p.m. Your goal should be to be back in your hotel room by 9 p.m.
- If you have prep work left to do for an event and your boss or client wants to have dinner or drinks, politely decline and go back to your room to work. Your boss should understand and then you won't be burning the midnight oil to get the final details ready for the event.
- When you begin to get tired, go to bed and get up an hour or two early the next morning. You'll think more clearly with some rest and your productivity and efficiency will be greater.
- Pay for the Internet connections in your room. Oftentimes it can be a struggle to get on the Internet while you're traveling. Try staying at hotels that offer high-speed Internet connections or wireless whenever possible. This will allow you to stay connected while you travel and cause you less headaches, stress and catch-up in the long run.

This being said, you've improved your efficiency on the road, but your life is in flux. That brings me to the second important issue — how do you maintain a healthy work-life balance? I must admit that I struggle with this and if you have a go-get 'em personality, then you probably struggle as well. What makes this especially difficult is that when you're on the road and having difficulty getting work completed because you're at a trade show, media tour or running some type of community event, when you get home, you need to not only begin new projects, but catch up on all your other work. The cycle never seems to end.

My boss has a favorite saying in our small office, "There will always be enough work for today, tomorrow and forever." He says this when we're losing sight of our work-life balance and need to walk away. The work will still be there no matter how long we stay. If you don't walk away, you'll burn out, and this spells real trouble. You'll begin to hate your job, which will cause you to become inefficient and bitter because you'll have to work more hours to complete it. Ultimately, this could and often does lead to health problems.

Here are some suggestions for managing your work-life balance:

- 1) When you work on weekends or excessive hours ask your boss for comp time. Effective leaders will know that this will keep you happy, healthy and productive in the long run. In addition, it will keep you with the company. Take the comp time.
- 2) Use all your vacation — even if you stay home, sleep in and wear your pajamas all day. Your team will help pick up your workload while you're away. Just remember to do the same for them when their vacation time comes.
- 3) Exercise. You're probably thinking you don't have time. Make time. Try yoga or pilates for a more calming meditative effect. If this isn't your style, try running. This is something you can do even if the hotel doesn't have a gym. An added bonus is that you can see a little of the town you're visiting. This will improve your experience.
- 4) Make plans with your friends to have coffee or see a movie and don't cancel.
- 5) Make a date with your husband, wife or significant other and stick to it.
- 6) Make a play date with your children. If they're older, simply make plans to have dinner with them.
- 7) Get a massage every few weeks. This will reduce your stress and keep you healthier.
- 8) Take a mental health day.

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9) Say no. If you've been out on the road too much and you now have elite status on every airline that flies out of your local airport, consider saying no and sending another teammate on your next out-of-town assignment. Your boss will applaud you.

10) Learn to walk away. The project will still be waiting for you tomorrow.

My boss often jokes that we need to write social lives into our company business plan. When you've gotten to the point that your calendar is full of work and no play, then you need to get your work-life plan in check. If the company you work for balks at your reduced hours, then you should consider whether you thrive on the road warrior lifestyle or if you should find a job where your company's actions equal their words: work and life are equally important.

There is a way to be a well-balanced road warrior who capitalizes on his or her time while traveling. While not all of these tips will be right for you, experiment until you find what works best and then integrate these into your plan to help leverage your career success. And the next time you see a frazzled road warrior, pass along your insights. Who knows, the recipient of your wisdom could be me — the surefire winner of the 2006 ultimate road warrior award.

The Keys to Success in Public Relations

Martin Arnold, APR, September 2002, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

My friend John Hiltunen, former communications manager at Dictaphone, used to have a simple test for job candidates. Among other things, he would ask them if they knew what a gerund was. The few who knew would get further consideration. John passed away a few years ago, but his test lives on. I'll wager that if you are a successful PR practitioner today, you know the definition of a gerund.

John's test was a metaphor of sorts. He was really asking about the candidate's knowledge of the fundamentals, or what I call the blocking and tackling of the profession. So, what attributes and conditions lead to career success? Read on.

- **Solid Writing Skills.** Your writing skills are sound and are applied in a variety of ways: news releases, speeches, audio-video scripts, internal communications and annual reports. (Here's where knowing what a gerund is comes in handy.)
- **High Ethical Standards.** You have high ethical standards yourself and you work for those who have them as well or you don't work there.
- **High-Quality Work.** Sure, sometimes we all have to get work out in a hurry, and we seldom have the time to polish it to perfection, but our work products are accurate, on time, within budget, and fulfill the assignment.
- **Strong Work Ethic.** You work hard. Your staff, your peers and superiors can count on you. If you are out of the office, you stay in touch by e-mail and cell phone - and always return your phone calls.
- **Mentoring.** You are likely to have, or have had, a mentor, or you are one yourself. Someone has shown you the way over the course of your career; you are similarly willing to reach out to help others.
- **Job Knowledge/Technology Interface.** You know your job, its reach and its limitations. You are articulate enough one-on-one, in small groups, or even before large audiences, to express yourself in ways that demonstrate you know what you are talking about. Your job is probably becoming more technical due to rapid changes in software and the speed of information, but you are adjusting reasonably well.

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- Sound Judgment. You have sound judgment and management relies on you for decisions within your purview.

Beyond these fundamentals, here are my top-10 recommendations to help you succeed, based on my 30-plus years of experience.

10. Don't hide from technology, but don't rely too much on it either.

Technology is a tool, but it can also be a dead end, particularly for those new to the profession. Rapidly changing individual technologies, coupled with the convergence of technologies, forces all of us to garner more understanding of new techniques and possibilities. Powerful software tools, the Internet, and intranets are changing the face of every business in America and probably the rest of the world too. We have to understand the potentialities of these new tools.

Here's the rub: Keeping up with the changes is a full-time job, yet this is not what management pays us to do. New communications people may be brought in because of acquired technical skills. If they are not careful, they will remain in a box just keeping up with technology. Worse yet is that these new communications tools are hardly the purview of the PR organization. "Experts" throughout companies are communicating on their own. Because of this, our businesses will suffer from the lack of focused, professional communication.

9. Maintain a broad view of the world outside your area of expertise.

Good communicators have interests beyond their job or the business enterprise. At a recent social gathering of longtime PR pros in Connecticut, a wide range of topics was discussed over the course of a two-hour lunch, including: the Wright Brothers, the histories of Iran and Turkey, the importance of pro bono activism, the invention of ether, the history of surgery, Admiral Nelson and the HMS Victory, TV productions originating out of Australia and New Zealand, the invention of bourbon and the rise of the Muslim faith.

You do not need to qualify for "Jeopardy!" to be in public relations, but it helps. Our associates expect those they rely on for advice to know how such a recommendation will play in the real world. The more of the real world, in all its scope and history, you can experience, or learn of, the more sound your recommendations are likely to be. Of course, you will be a far more interesting person as well.

8. Recognize that over-dedication to the job can be a career killer.

Over-dedication is not to be confused with hard work. A solid work ethic is a fundamental. To be over-dedicated means putting so much time into the business to the exclusion of all else including family, friends, fitness, professional development, and time for reflection. But, as anyone who has ever produced an annual report knows, we all go through periods when we become workaholics. It's when this becomes the norm that you join the ranks of the over-dedicated.

If you are working all of the time, what more can you do in a crisis? There is nowhere to go; you can't possibly work harder. At that pace, you will soon burn out anyway, or maybe you already have. But here is the real killer: Management will not appreciate your efforts. Impossible deadlines will be the norm. But not to worry. Your pain won't last long. You will be replaced by someone who makes it look easy.

7. Be certain you have a recognized core competency.

Having a core competency means knowing more about a subject than others do. In fact, don't be afraid to think of yourself as an expert. Fortunately, communications is a broad enough discipline to accommodate a wide range of expertise. You can be an expert in everything from crisis communication, printing, video production, speechwriting, media relations, community relations, political affairs, contributions, annual reports and many other areas. A core competency gives you an edge; you may have to change it over time as the needs of the business change.

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6. Think strategically, like your CEO.

Thinking strategically means making those day-to-day decisions that your CEO might if he or she was in your shoes. It also means staying ahead of the game; you have to have a feeling for where the business is headed. One way to do this is through the annual report, quarterlies and analyst presentations and analyses. You will have to read between the lines because often what's not being said is more important, strategically, than what is being communicated. Thinking strategically also means being ready if you are asked to prepare something. This requires a network, because management may not turn to you until the deadline looms. Under the Securities and Exchange Commission disclosure rules, only those that need to know about a move are going to know about it in advance. If you or your boss are not on the advance team, you need to get there.

Fortunately, most announcements are routine so there is little reason to be caught off-guard. Eastman Kodak calls staying ahead of the curve "mapping." It is a way of gaining enough understanding to prepare a document. This may not be necessary if you stay on top of things.

5. Be aware of personal habits and style.

The most senior executives can have virtually any style they choose: Draconian or personable, it doesn't matter, they run the show. The rest of us still have to look the part. You won't find "charisma" or "aura" on a store shelf, except maybe in the fragrance department, but we all need some. One executive I know hires and promotes those he finds to be "larger than life." How he measures that particular quality I don't know, but it probably has something to do with the following traits:

- How you dress.
- How you phrase questions and answers.
- How you will react under pressure.
- Your listening abilities.
- An absence of distracting personal mannerisms.
- Your physical size.

It may not be politically correct to say this, but being competent isn't enough.

4. Know when (and how) to argue and when (and how) to back down.

You have to get your point across, but know when to step back too. Articulate your views forcefully when you feel strongly, but remember there are few things worth dying for in the corporate world.

A female MBA candidate who manages 50 employees for a major retailer once told me "nothing could make me cry at work." She meant that she did not become so emotionally involved in work issues that she could not take a step back and be objective.

Timing is a factor here: How do you know when to bring your idea forward and to whom? Mostly the answer depends on your corporate culture. However, after your boss returns from a two-week business trip around-the-world at 5 p.m. on a Friday is probably not the best time to unveil your new communications program.

3. Be flexible enough to learn new skills or activate dormant ones as business needs change.

Being flexible means learning new business skills and activating dormant ones. You may have been brought in to carry out specific responsibilities, but people change and the business changes. You have to be able to shift. If marketing communication is no longer being emphasized, shift to speechwriting, video, or become the webmaster. In one case a person was brought into a company to run a program that was later scrapped. This person was inflexible and, even though the program was eliminated, continued to function only in that role. You can guess how it ends.

2. Have an in-depth understanding of your company's business.

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Knowledge of your job, even though it may be changing to meet new technical requirements, is a fundamental. But if you also have in-depth knowledge of the business, as opposed to only your job, you'll have an edge. Understanding the business can mean the difference between your long-term success or lack thereof.

The challenge is that you have to continuously educate yourself. Businesses grow and change over time, sometimes they even shrink, but no matter which direction your business goes, it is your responsibility to keep up.

Cultivate a wide array of contacts within your organization, or among clients; take time to find out what is going on. It is important to know the business status of your company. The ones that are doing poorly may need more emphasis on communications, whether internal or external. Sometimes its best to concentrate on the more successful ones; it depends on your culture. Our resources are limited, we need to know where to employ them to best support company goals.

1. *Know your company's culture, but don't be a slave to it.*

This is the No.1 key to success. Many would say that in-depth business knowledge is the prime factor that determines future success, but I disagree. Culture rules. Recommendations two to 10 are learned behaviors. Culture is pure right brain: You have to feel it.

Want To Be In Public Relations?

The Top 10 Characteristics For Entry-Level Practitioners

John Milkereit, March 2001, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

Recently I had an opportunity to meet with a group of college students in an undergraduate class on communications and public relations. Most of them were unfamiliar with the PR field. As a member of a three-person panel of established professionals, I presented my personal list of what I believe are the most important qualities that a new-to-the-field PR practitioner should possess. In fact, they could be skills and attributes to shoot for in personal development at any level.

Here are my top-10 characteristics of outstanding entry-level PR practitioners:

10. *Experience in community service.*

A young person who has found the time to volunteer for community service probably has good time-management skills and developed a view of life that is less self-centered.

9. *A good manager of personal time.*

Someone who manages time well is organized, disciplined, focused, and willing to set personal priorities.

8. *Maturity in grooming and appearance.*

If the candidate is applying for work as a publicist for a heavy metal group, then oddly colored hair and visible body piercing are probably considered assets. Somewhere between grunge couture and conservative investment banking is a middle ground in style and grooming that most of us appreciate.

7. *Ability to organize and edit information.*

A typed resume is one of the best indicators of a candidate's ability to organize and edit. Clear and concise material with no typos or misspellings says more than just the usual personal information.

6. *Maturity in self-expression and oral skills.*

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The in-person or phone interview reveals strengths and weaknesses in a person's ability to speak, use of good grammar, and range of vocabulary. Delete the adverbs "like," "actually," and "basically" from descriptions of personal experiences, life goals, and world views.

5. *Skill in writing and a mastery of English usage.*

Writing is the most important tool we use in public relations. Good writing can make up for many other deficiencies; the lack of it is not usually overcome by numerous other strengths.

4. *Willingness to start at the bottom.*

Why this needs to be listed is puzzling, but some applicants with little or no experience believe they are qualified to start in management. Incompetent managers are so numerous, we don't need to hire new ones.

3. *Critical thinking skills.*

The ability to distinguish between good and bad workmanship — your own or work done by others — is a sign of maturity that comes with time and experience. Judgment begins to mature as early as the first assigned book report, requiring that you tell whether or not you liked the book and why.

2. *Being a good listener.*

A person who is a good listener is well along toward becoming a good problem-solver. One becomes a good listener by keeping one's mouth shut.

1. *Strong sense of empathy.*

The No. 1 strength is the ability to identify with others and understand them almost instinctively. This strength begins to develop with the loss of self-centeredness, a sincere concern about others, and an urge to help them overcome their problems.

Mentors and Inspiration

Debra A. Miller, Ed. D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Spring 2007, *Public Relations Strategist*, PRSA

When my daughter came home with another one of her mind-bending third-grade projects, I cringed at the thought of what we would be asked to do this time. She has new-school teachers and an old-school mom. While interviewing me for the project, she asked, "Who do you talk to for advice?" I answered, "I talk to my mentors." After explaining what a mentor does and who mine are, I realized that even with more than 25 years in the profession and double that of being on earth, there are a handful of people I still talk to first before I make a move professionally or personally.

As a member of, and leader in, PRSA, I know that I am not alone in this. Mentoring, as PRSA chair and CEO Rhoda Weiss, APR, Fellow PRSA, states, "is analogous to lifelong learning." I am convinced that had it not been for the counsel of my mentors, I would not have made some of the best decisions in my career and personal life. I know I would not have given any thought to becoming involved in PRSA, and most recently, allowing myself to be nominated for the Gold Anvil Award this past year. Over the years, my mentors have helped me take an exciting journey of self-discovery and development each time I speak with them. Among probing questions, mental stretching, words of encouragement, reminders that "I know you too well," the laughs and the wisdom, we all come away inspired and energized. Each of them challenges me to draw upon and develop hidden personal resources and qualities. The results are always more than I hoped for.

Improving your effectiveness

In this real-time, dynamic PR environment, experience is not enough. Whether you're beginning your career, hitting that mid-level stride, getting comfortable in the executive suite or cruising toward retirement, mentoring can improve your effectiveness in terms of leadership, decision-making, creativity, time management and career development.

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When one thinks about mentoring, the image of a seasoned corporate sage conversing with a naïve young student comes to mind. Although there is truth in this, real mentoring is simply when someone helps another person learn something that he or she would not learn if left alone. As we progress through life and our career needs change, our mentors change with them.

A mentor is not only a teacher or coach who focuses on tasks and results. Mentors focus on individuals and their development. They act as confidants willing to play the part of adversary, to listen and to question so their protégés can broaden their own view.

Mentors help assess our performance, provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses, and encourage us to learn new skills and behaviors. They even help us build a network of contacts. And if you're lucky, they'll help with challenging life decisions as well.

Words of wisdom

If you've been in this profession for any length of time, you've learned that mentors are a critical element in your career development. Whether your mentors are symbolic or multigenerational, choosing to have a mentor is one of the most important career decisions you can make.

To confirm my opinions, I reached out to my mentors and colleagues and asked them to share a few words about the value of mentoring at this stage in our lives and careers. To the letter, all of them have had long-term mentoring relationships that have lasted a minimum of 10 years. Here's what they said:

- Mentors are a necessity throughout one's career. "There's an obvious advantage to having a mentor at different stages of a person's professional development," says 2000 Gold Anvil Winner Ofield Dukes, APR, Fellow PRSA. "Having the advantage of prudent advice from a caring mentor on a regular basis is invaluable."
- Mentoring is focused on using your skills to achieve success. "When I changed career paths from practitioner to educator, Dr. Jim Grunig [professor emeritus at the University of Maryland] set my path and standards," says University of Florida professor Kathleen S. Kelly, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA. "Because he was my Ph.D. adviser and the leading theorist in public relations, Jim invisibly stood over my shoulder as I wrote scholarly articles and prepared class syllabi."
- The diversity of mentors is important. As we advance in our careers, the types of mentors and what we need from them vary as our roles, responsibilities and accomplishments change. "I have found great value in the mentor relationships I've had for more than 25 years with my peers in the profession," says Cheryl Procter-Rogers, APR, Fellow PRSA, PRSA's 2006 chair and CEO. "We have a unique bond, sharing best practices and learning from one another."
- Establishing mentoring relationships with peers, professionals in other disciplines and individuals who have fewer years of experience is invaluable. "At this stage in my career, mentors are part of the fabric that I have woven into who I am," says Robert S. Pritchard, APR, Fellow PRSA, Ball State University assistant professor and PR sequence coordinator. "Seek out mentors. They seldom come to you, but they are far too valuable to go without."
- Success would not have come as easily without mentors in their lives. "My mentor is responsible for helping me find every PR job I've held, beginning with my first internship," says Lori George Billingsley, director, community and multicultural communications, Coca-Cola North America. "She always tells me, 'You can do this,' and I believe her."
- Involvement in professional organizations such as PRSA has given them access to an array of mentor candidates that they wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. "I have had two particularly wonderful mentors early in my career — Hal Warner, APR, Fellow PRSA, and the late Davis Swanston — both of whom I met through the National Capital Chapter," says Katherine Hutt, APR, Fellow PRSA, president, Nautilus Communications, Inc. "They encouraged my involvement and leadership in PRSA and always were there when I needed them. David inspired me to start my own firm."

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- Diversity is key to maximizing mentor-mentee relationships. Not only is the multigenerational aspect important but so is diversity in backgrounds, ethnicities, professions, expertise, education and stations in life. “I was told early on in my career that I would need a minimum of four [mentors] to include African-American male, African-American female, White female and White male,” says Brenda Siler, national director, communications and marketing, of the United Negro College Fund. “My cadre of mentors has expanded over the years to include a variety of professionals as I have continued to grow.”
- Multigenerational mentoring relationships provide the wisdom of experience and a perspective that includes future trends. “There is a great deal of value to having multigenerational mentors,” says Mike Herman, APR, Fellow PRSA, vice chairman of the Catevo Group. “While most of mine have been older, now many are younger, especially as [the relationship] relates to technology and its uses and potential.”
- Mentors can help you work toward both immediate and long-range goals. “At this stage in my career, the type of mentor I’m looking for is someone to help me figure out how to become a published author of books,” says Angela Sinickas, ABC, president of Sinickas Communications. “I’ve considered Roger D’Aprix a philosophical mentor [through his writings and speeches] my entire career.”

Leaders turn to trusted mentors

As you climb the corporate ladder, move from employee to employer or change professions completely, the right mentoring relationship is essential. You will be faced with issues such as career satisfaction, professional development, critical life transitions, personal growth, work-life balance, and leadership and management skills. Each step of the way can be more bearable with a mentor who can provide the following:

- Safety. Mentors are confidants with whom you can share your personal frustrations, fears, uncertainties or even doubts without worrying about an adverse impact on your career or working relationships.
- Sounding board. Mentors are engaged, supportive listeners who pose insightful questions as you talk through tough leadership decisions, new ideas for your business or life choices outside your professional career.
- Perspective. A mentor can be a knowledgeable adviser who understands leadership and offers an outside point of view on your business and the dynamics within it.
- Counsel. A mentor helps you sort through difficult issues related to ethics, the direction of your career or life outside your professional career.
- Coaching. A mentor shows you how to sharpen the tools critical to your success.
- A guide. A mentor can be a probing questioner who helps you keep your values aligned, your priorities in order and your inner life in balance.

Partners in the journey

Wherever our life or career journey leads, it will require an excursion into the unknown. Along the way, we may confront a fear of success and, paradoxically, a fear of failure. We may have to cast aside long-held beliefs about who we are and what we are capable of. Having a mentor to share the journey can create new opportunities for personal fulfillment and achievement.

Corporate vs. Agency: The Good, The Bad And Unknown

Molly Badgett, APR, March 2000, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

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It happens at least once in every public relations career — the opportunity to make The Big Switch from agency to corporate, or vice versa. Besides, on any given day in the life of a PR program, agency counsels are working side-by-side with their corporate client counterparts, each professionally committed to their respective positions but, no doubt, wondering on a personal level what it's really like on the other side. Even though the professional objectives established are guided along a united course, they are approached from two different worlds. Is it any wonder, then, that when faced with the decision, "Do I go agency or corporate?" we find the familiar often breeds contempt, and yet the unknown makes us shake in our boots?

So what is this decision really all about? It has less to do with the day-to-day care and feeding of a public relations program than with the sheer logistics and support structure for implementing it. In short, it's not the work; it's the work environment. It's worth taking a candid look at a few key aspects of both positions if you find yourself pondering a change.

The Clientele

If a decision to leave the agency business for the corporate world might have anything to do with client relations, consider the following. While you're not likely to send monthly invoices to them, all of the department or division heads and the regional office managers in a corporate setting are, in fact, the "clients" and should be considered as such. It's not enough to get top management buy-in to a plan; it's communication from every operational level that presents the true image of the company to all its constituencies.

On the plus side, these "clients" are focused on a single industry and you get deep (deeper than even the best account executive gets) into their business. Their career becomes your adjunct career. Still, they are just as demanding as an agency's clientele. The challenge in this environment is to get them all on the same page when it comes to meeting public relations objectives. In a highly entrepreneurial firm, that's likely to be your biggest challenge — and the most rewarding. Maverick managers are used to doing things their way.

Because you are not in, say, accounting, you don't have specific numbers that add up correctly to illustrate your company wide effectiveness and value. In a discipline that appears highly subjective (and often incidental) to them, you have only results that are open to their interpretation. If you're fortunate, you also have senior managers and a supervisor (preferably the CEO) who stand behind your experience, dedication and determination, and who fully understand your value. Sooner than later, that understanding permeates the entire organization.

To reverse the situation, if you are considering a move from the corporate environment to the agency world, your understanding of this dynamic will give you an important edge in providing the most effective counsel. You'll know the importance of developing, as part of any comprehensive action plan, very specific strategies for ensuring that every department head or regional office manager is contributing to — and benefiting from — meeting your client's overall public relations objectives. Limiting the focus to your client contact and his or her company's top management means you're just working on the fringe.

The Day-To-Day

One of the most obvious differences between the agency world and the corporate world is the dreaded timesheet, that necessary agency evil. Yes, corporate staffs also have clients, presentations, meetings, deadlines and the occasional long days that eat into the nights, but they have no time sheets.

So what's the significance?

If conversations with colleagues about time sheets could represent informal research, I would report this tether as the No. 1 source of frustration among agency employees. It also appears to be the No. 1 reason why those who enjoy the freedom from time sheets in a corporate setting scoff at the thought of moving back to an agency environment. It has nothing to do with the importance and responsibility of getting the work done and

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within budget — corporate staffs must do the same (after all, their departments are largely overhead). It has, instead, everything to do with the notion of that leash and all it represents.

The more obsessive and over-dependent on time sheets an agency becomes, the more dysfunctional it becomes. Successful agencies learn ways to incorporate specific employee incentives — to put the “fun” back in dysfunctional — so that time sheets become a way to meet personal goals, not just agency profitability goals. After all, in some agencies the two are not always viewed as mutually inclusive.

The Big Picture

An agency role is a dual role: providing both service to the agency and service to the client while minimizing conflict among their ultimate objectives. In the corporate setting, it's a singular focus on implementing the most effective communications program possible while working with people who have varying degrees of attentiveness. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. What, then, becomes the deciding factor for choosing one vs. the other as a career step? There is no right or wrong answer, but there are additional perspectives.

One perspective I keep coming to? It's a “stage of life” issue, not unlike the “house vs. condo” debate. Priorities vary from one person to another, and even change during the course of one's life. The best scenario: Build your resume with experience in both. To draw more parallels to our nesting instincts, it also has much to do with a sense of belonging, of pride in ownership. An agency whose employees feel like nothing more than pawns in its profitability game is no more appealing (regardless of its exciting client base) than a company whose communications directives are laden with outdated and cemented bureaucracy. If you can't call it your own, call it somewhere else.

It might not come down to a decision between agency vs. corporate at all, but rather the right place vs. the wrong place for you.

Becoming an independent practitioner: Is it time?

Suzanne E. Jackson, March 2005, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

Opening one's own practice and becoming a self-employed PR professional is a dream shared by many. The independent PR community has grown at a rapid clip over the last few years, and the interest in how one makes the leap to free agency is growing, too.

Self-employed PR professionals enjoy a level of freedom that is enviable. In fact, freedom is the main reason most PR professionals go independent: freedom to take clients who inspire them, freedom to work when they want to, freedom to take off at 2 p.m. on Friday — any Friday. Or, is this freedom a myth? Yes and no. Becoming a free agent is filled with rewards, but it is also rife with challenges. IPs are responsible for their day. They are responsible for their income and their successes and failures. They are responsible, period.

With independent practice comes a certain lack of structure. Free agents must be self-motivated and able to create enough structure to be productive, which is the greatest concern about those considering free agency. “Will I be motivated to work? The freedom I crave could be my undoing,” they state. Yet, anecdotal evidence shows that independents rarely have trouble handling the work. Rather, most IPs don't know when to stop working. (Balance then becomes the issue. But that's another article.)

However, if a main reason one wishes to become a free agent is to escape having a boss, they should think again. IPs have more bosses than they probably ever imagined. They are called clients. Then again, when and how the clients are ser-vised is up to them (and their clients' requirements, of course).

Freedom exists, but how you manage it determines your level of success. You will need to be able to choose wisely — the gym or finish that press release? No one will tell you the answer but you.

Other questions frequently asked about what it takes to go solo include how much PR experience one should have before becoming an IP and how to find work.

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Before considering quitting your day job, you should ask yourself two important questions: Are you committed to the PR profession and do you have enough experience to be considered an expert in any one aspect of public relations? Because you must like what you do, you will need to be your primary source of inspiration throughout the day. You will need to inspire others to hire you, so you should have a skill that is marketable.

Finding work

Finding work means constant networking and applying your PR and marketing knowledge to your own practice. To be successful as an independent, you must be as comfortable with marketing your own practice as you are responsible for attracting the business. Finding this work means being visible. People should know who you are — from other PR professionals to potential clients. If the idea of having to network makes you cringe, you will need to find a partner to help you or rethink the idea of going solo.

Adjusting quickly to ever-changing circumstances is also a necessary skill. If you desire frequent change, being an IP could satisfy this craving. Clients will come and go at differing rates, accounts will require different skills, and you will be in charge of everything in the business. IPs are the administrative assistant, accountant, marketer, collections agency, office manager, creative brain, mailroom attendant and CEO. It is sink or swim time, which can be challenging or exciting depending on your perspective.

Being everything also means it is crucial to understand the rudiments of business. Having basic computer skills and knowing basic bookkeeping and tax rules is essential. One's profitability rests on this knowledge. Fortunately, these skills are easily learned.

The six areas

Six basic areas are recommended for a PR professional before making the leap to independent status:

- Application of the 533 rule
- Some financial reserves to cushion the shift
- At least two clients to begin servicing immediately
- Space/physical location to conduct work
- Knowledge and skill in the PR profession and basic business skills
- Mental and emotional support during the transition

The 533 rule was developed by independent practitioner Katherine Hutt of Nautilus Communications. The rule means having five years of assertive professional networking, 300 names in your Rolodex or Palm Pilot, and three months' net living and business expenses (not including startup funds for buying necessary equipment) in the bank. Since there are exceptions to every rule, some independents have launched successful ventures in violation of the 533 tenet. But, the odds of success rise considerably when applying this rule. Have two business clients already locked up, too. (One idea is to turn your current employer into your first client.)

You will need an office. Whether outside the home or inside the home, you must have a space to call your own, with a door (sorry, the dining room table does not count). Clients can be tolerant of dogs barking and children interrupting in the background, but why push it? Your professional image and productivity will improve with quiet, dedicated space in which to work.

Emotional support should also be explored. Do you have the support of family and friends? Do you have a backup plan should it not work out? If the answer is yes to both, then you are entering self-employment with your eyes wide open.

More business-specific research and actions to conduct include understanding your area's zoning laws and required business permits. You should also have an idea of what your company name will be and should prepare a logo and business card. From there it is also recommended that you launch at least a basic Web site. Open a separate bank account and be sure to have the necessary equipment, including a computer with broadband access, printer, and telephone set up. Other PR tools, such as media directory services, wire accounts and other tools, should be in place.

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It is important to launch your business as professionally as possible from the beginning. First impressions count.

Habits to develop

Free agency requires a certain level of self-motivation and self-discipline. This is particularly important when it comes to finances. You must have the ability to save money. There is nothing like having to file quarterly taxes and to suddenly lose a large client in the same month to make this piece of advice more apropos. Having reserves is key. If managing finances isn't your strong point, get help. Once on your own, this will be a crucial management function.

Other good habits to develop include resisting the urge to hibernate. Get out and socialize, network with peers and get a life outside work. As a free agent, people are hiring you personally as much as for your practice. People are more apt to hire interesting people, and nothing keeps you as interesting as being with others. Finally, know that an independent practice is a work in progress. It will be in constant evolution. But, as an IP, you are in charge of your business. If you are not having fun, then you can make changes. Remember, as an independent, you are the CEO. Now, what could be better than that?

Why did a 20-year PR pro make the jump to academia? How to know when the time is right

Susan Balcom Walton, October 2006, *Public Relations Tactics*, PRSA

With nearly two decades in public relations and corporate communications, it was my first week on campus as a college professor. I stood in the parking lot, surveying the sparse-but-stuffed spaces. A passing colleague called out a question I would hear many more times:

“So, have you found a spot for your motorcycle yet?”

I felt like Evel Knievel. There I was, alone with my bike, trying to leap the collegiate equivalent of the Snake River Canyon.

I came to academia following a career at Fortune 500 companies in three industries, including the motorcycle industry. At each job I had positive experiences and felt valued by my co-workers. So, why did I make such a radical career change and how did I know the time was right?

Finding a spot for my motorcycle, both literally and figuratively, has been a process — one that can be successfully navigated by any PR professional considering making the jump. The key is recognizing the personal and professional cues that may be tugging you toward a career in the classroom.

Cue No. 1: You find yourself focusing on specific interests but your job doesn't. One thing I've always liked about public relations is its daily variety. I was the consummate generalist — explaining public policy issues one day, managing special events the next. But, over time, I felt a growing desire to focus more on subjects that interested me.

My corporate opportunities for research and study were limited. After all, the primary job of corporate communications professionals is to advance their organization's business objectives — and rightly so. In my spare time, however, I began to ponder research studies and wistfully mull over descriptions of seminars I knew I'd never have time to attend. Increasingly, I felt a sense of loss when I had to turn my attention elsewhere.

Cue No. 2: You experience more personal fulfillment in one-on-one outcomes than in enterprisewide outcomes. While my companies' successes were always professionally meaningful, my one-on-one interactions with people were even more satisfying: solving a customer's problem, mentoring a new employee, coaching a work team.

While corporate PR practitioners do have these opportunities, our jobs often involve such broad audiences and so little execution time that mass communication, rather than individual interaction, is imperative.

Cue No. 3: You want more of your contributions to pass the test of time. In any organization, people and programs must change to fit changing business realities. I knew this from experience. As time went on, however, I found myself wanting to direct my energies where they would have the most permanence. Several months ago I reminisced with a former colleague about a project we had worked on together. The project had been demanding, requiring a year of 60-hour workweeks, but also fulfilling. However, as my friend

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went on to describe the organizational restructuring and change in business direction that had subsequently taken place, I realized that no remnant of our project had survived the transition.

Meanwhile, on a college campus 1,500 miles away, my daughter encountered a young woman I had mentored at the same time I was working on this project. This young woman spent several minutes describing the positive influence I'd had on her life. Although I had invested only a fraction of the time with that young woman that I had on my project, I knew the effects would be far more profound and lasting. I also realized I would likely have these experiences more often in a setting where I could directly influence a student's education and career path.

Cue No. 4: You can clearly see how you'll contribute in the academic world. Going into academia is not just a grown-up version of going to college. You will be expected to share, create and deliver. You will need to hold your own against people who have spent many years expanding their knowledge of your profession. Before you make the jump, you need to feel confident that you've learned enough to make a real contribution — not just for a one-hour professional seminar, but for the rest of your career.

One way to begin is to jump partway by contacting a local college and teaching a course part time. Whether you're contemplating a part-time or a full-time entry, ask yourself this question: Is there a place in that academic institution for someone with your particular skills? The fact that you have spent years being paid to deliver on these skills, rather than study or teach them, does not make them any less legitimate. However, you need to feel confident that your professional experience will be valued and put to use in an academic environment.

The good news is that PR professionals tend to have many traits that fit well with academia. We are, by nature, collaborators. We understand the demands and responsibilities of writing and publishing. We are good researchers, counselors and coaches. We tend to be self-starters. I had the privilege of honing these traits for nearly 20 years with three great companies, and I wouldn't trade a day of it. Those experiences have made me the professional that I am, and they will make me a better college professor.

On the afternoon that I finished this article, I thoughtfully headed home for the day. I stopped to pick up a book on my latest research interest; I congratulated a student on the publication of work she produced in my class. As I strolled across the parking lot, the silver gas tank of my bike glinted in the late afternoon sun. I had, indeed, found a spot for my motorcycle.

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