

Chapter 2

HOW PUBLIC RELATIONS DEALS WITH PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter is self-explanatory in that it deals in a straightforward way with the process of public relations. The chapter begins with the traditional “four-step process” popularized by Cutlip and Center. This process is the backbone of public relations practice; it covers the basic steps needed for any planned program of public relations to be successful.

The process includes:

- A. Fact-finding activities (research)
- B. Analysis, planning, and goal setting
- C. Actions and communication
- D. Evaluation

These overlapping steps give practitioners a framework for their efforts as well as a checklist to follow.

A second section of this chapter deals with the value of the theoretical approach. Many practitioners, especially those who come to the profession without formal education in the field, tend to discount a theoretical approach as being “too academic.” This chapter addresses those concerns and presents a good case for the use of theory in public relations

The remainder of the chapter looks at some of the theory applied to public relations. The first model is the “behavioral” model. This approach is predicated on the belief that public relations is all about creating positive behavior. Communication, alone, will not (and cannot) create the desired result of changed behaviors.

The five-step behavior model walks the reader through these steps:

- A. Awareness
- B. Latent desire to act
- C. Social trial

- D. Triggering events, and
- E. Positive actions or behavior

The “Persuasion” model explains the steps necessary to get people to change their minds and actions. First developed by San Diego practitioner Kerry Tucker, this model involves

- A. Creating dissatisfaction with existing behavior
- B. Offering the desired behavior as a substitute for the status quo
- C. Explaining the benefits of new behavior or the consequences of the old, and
- D. Modeling the desired results

Finally, this chapter explains the value of the two-way symmetrical approach to communication. Perhaps the most important academic model, this approach was developed by Dr. James Grunig at the University of Maryland. It holds that only by considering the wants and needs of the subject first can the public relations efforts meet those needs and be successful. This theory provides empirical support for Bernay’s “merging of public and private interests.”

The chapter concludes with “20 Great Truths of Public Relations,” a compilation that is designed to help lead the reader—student or professional—to a clearer understanding of the concepts being presented.

Exam Questions for Chapter 2:

- 1. The text suggests that public relations is inseparably linked with the democratic principle. Does this mean that an autocratic government or corporate management inherently cannot practice effective public relations?**
- 2. The four steps in public relations planning are overlapping. Does that mean that their sequence is unimportant?**
- 3. Why are individuals considered the most important messengers in conveying messages to key publics? If this is so, why are other means of communication employed?**