

LESSON 1

PUBLIC RELATIONS DEFINED

WHAT *IS* PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Before we get into the definition of public relations, let's debunk a favorite myth: public relations is not glamorous. It will not bring you fame, claim, or a big name, though if you're doing your job right it may bring all of these to the organization you're representing. So what's in it for you? A pat on the back. Satisfaction for a job well done. And maybe a raise and promotion.

Public relations is sometimes exciting, sometimes sheer drudgery, sometimes fun, often hard work, and at times exasperating. But it is almost always rewarding and will usually have you firing on all pistons which will make your workdays fly by.

Now for the textbook definition: PR types would like to have you believe public relations is some kind of specialized beast, but the truth is, public relations is all about *communicating*. Whenever you answer the phone, send a letter, attend a meeting or dash off an e-mail message, you're performing public relations functions. Communicating. One word. Sounds simple enough—let's pack up and go home, right? Well, hang in there with us for a little while longer, if you can. There is a *little*

more to it than that (you knew it!). Let's start by adding just one more word:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communications means that it conveys the intended information – information that is heard and understood by your (look out — here come two more words):

TARGET AUDIENCE

A *target audience* means those folks within earshot that you hope to convey information to.

Care for an example? Let's say you go to your favorite espresso shop and order a decaf, double-tall, nonfat, extra hot latté. The *barrista* delivers it and it is a picture of foamy perfection. Is that public relations? Yes — but on the *barrista's* part, not yours. The *barrista* effectively communicated with you by demonstrating that your business mattered by delivering what you wanted the way you wanted it. On your part, though, while you may enjoy your latté, you haven't yet performed a public relations activity. So let's add one more word, and we're done with the definition:

STRATEGIC

Don't worry. We're not going to make you draw a flow chart or don wingtips. Strategic means *pre-planned for a specific purpose that goes beyond the scope of the action taken*. Let's use an example.

We rewind back to the espresso shop. Let's say your company is a restaurant supplier, and the *barrista* is one of your company's best customers. You're at this coffee shop with the president of your company. Just as your president receives her latté, she and your client

both turn, smile, and get their picture taken by a journalist from the *Business Gazette* who's writing a story on local business cross-patronization. The reporter chose your company for the story because of the excellent relationship you've developed with her over the past several months (we show you how to do this in Lesson 8, Media Relations).

Not only do you get your president's photo in the local paper (a *target press vehicle*), which will be read by hundreds, even thousands of people desperately needing those little red stir straws (your company's *target audience*), but you've also cemented your relationships with the reporter who appreciated you being available on short notice, and your customer who just loves getting his picture in the paper.

So, heading back to our definition of public relations: It's:

STRATEGIC (this is all part of a master scheme to make your president Grand Viceroy of Napkins and Straws)

EFFECTIVE (got your message across: "Now she *is* the Grand Viceroy of Napkins and Straws)

COMMUNICATIONS (photo, caption with your president's name and business name spelled correctly)

TO A

TARGET AUDIENCE (in this case, your target audience is the reporter, your client, and the readers of the *Business Gazette*).

Not bad for 10 minutes' work, right? Well ... (you knew there was a catch!), it may have been 10 minutes work, but it was the result of months of planning. And because today's paper will be tomorrow's fly swatter, your work is not over. Public relations (strategic, effective communications to a target audience) is ongoing. Stop communicating, and they'll forget about you. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and for the rest of your company's [business] life ... which, if you're not communicating with your market, won't be that long.