

PRCA MONTGOMERY

November 2007

A report from the Montgomery Chapter of the Public Relations Council of Alabama

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT...

As PR professionals, I'm sure that every one of you reading this has had the same frustration: Have you ever wondered if our profession (or your place in it) will ever truly be understood by the other "professionals" that we work with and around on a daily basis?



Lori Quiller

A few weeks ago, fellow member **Anne Graham** sent me a link for the Opinions page of *The Dothan Eagle*. Since I'm from the Wiregrass area, I was delighted to see that someone in the area other than my father and I actually read this paper...until I read the article. It was very difficult to keep in mind that everyone is entitled to an opinion.

This particular editor was taking issue with the Dothan Personnel Board's decision to create a position called "Community Relations Specialist" to "help get the word out." Candidates for the Dothan City Commission apparently realized after campaigning this summer that some people didn't know what was happening with their own government.

The approved salary for this new position was set between \$40,000-\$60,000, "because getting the word out is expected to be strenuous work," and the supervisor would receive a pay bump, too.

By this point, I was so furious; it was difficult to keep reading. Then, I got

it! This guy not only doesn't understand what we do, but he had to knock our profession so he could pump up the local press. Ta-dah!

After all, as the editor went on to explain, there's *The Dothan Eagle*, two TV stations, websites and several radio stations to help disseminate the news.

And, there it was...the obligatory paragraph about how no matter how hard we as communicators try, there will always be those who simply don't care or make no effort to follow what's going on in their communities. Wait, there's more.

Then, he turned his pen to the public information officers. "While PR folks can get information out, they are often focused on doing so in a way that puts their employers in the best possible light. They are often an impediment to newsgatherers who aren't content to take the 'press release' as the last word on a matter of interest to the public."

How does that make YOU feel as a public relations professional?

I don't know about you, but I've worked hard to get where I am today, and I have no intent on allowing this guy to have the last word on MY profession.

We have a duty to our profession to change narrow-minded perceptions, such as this one. We aren't the "hacks" today that history once portrayed us, and our futures can only be as bright as the decisions we make today.

CHAPTER MEETING

PR Strategies for Recruiting Major Industries to Alabama

Monday, Nov. 5
RSA Plaza Terrace
11:45 a.m.

Guest Speaker:
JEFF EMERSON
Communications Director for the Office of the Governor

Members: \$12
Non-members: \$20

Please RSVP to:
Diane Christy at
dchristy@ascpa.org

RSVP Deadline:
Noon Friday, Nov. 2

SPECIAL NOTE

Members who make reservations for chapter luncheons but fail to cancel by noon the Friday prior to the meeting ARE responsible for payment. We will invoice you!

Are You Up-to-Date?

Membership dues notices were e-mailed in September and, to date, more than 30 percent of our members are current. Thank you to those members who have submitted their payment in a timely matter. **If you have not yet paid your dues, please do by Nov. 5.**

Any corrections indicated on your renewal invoice will be made to the Montgomery database. However, the local chapter is unable to make these corrections to the statewide online database. You must log in to the members-only section of www.prcaonline.com and make the corrections to your personal information yourself. Details on how to do this was in last month's newsletter.

If you have any questions, please contact **Belinda Bazinet**, vice president of membership, at 953-9482 or bazinetb@maxwell.af.mil.

Welcome New Members!

Please help us welcome our new members...

- ★ **Steve Cox**, public affairs coordinator for Civil Air Patrol
- ★ **E.J. Cooper**, assistant director of communications, Department of Postsecondary Education
- ★ **Martha Simmons**, communications director, Alabama College System
- ★ **Meg Lewis**, public relations manager, Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- ★ **Jeff Helms**, communications director, Alabama Farmer's Federation

Jobline...

Goodwill Industries of Central Alabama, Inc., is seeking candidates for its Montgomery office for the position of **Community Relations/Volunteer Coordinator**.

This position educates the public and stimulates support for Goodwill programs and objectives; represents Goodwill in the community; utilizes multimedia public relations campaigns; conducts donation drives; ensures volunteer program meets legal and organizational standards; and publishes the newsletter. A BS degree with course work in public relations, journalism or a related field or 3 years previous relevant experience is required.

Send resume to: Goodwill Industries of Central Alabama, Inc., Attn: Human Resources, 900 Air Base Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36108.

PRCA Member Profile...



William Whatley earned his bachelor's degree in communications from The University of Alabama in May 2006 where he majored in public relations. He is the publications and public relations specialist for the Alabama Hospital Association where he writes and edits newsletters for the association, as well as maintains the website and works on special projects as needed.

Do you have any tips to being a top PR practitioner?

William: Be willing to learn about new things outside the realm of PR, and be able to work well and communicate with others.

What are the top three skills needed in PR?

William: 1) writing 2) communication 3) willingness to adapt

From where did your interest in PR originate?

William: I've always enjoyed writing and producing materials like pamphlets and guides.

Why did you join PRCA?

William: I joined to network with other PR practitioners and to learn more about the profession.

What experience most shaped your career?

William: "Scale Back Alabama" in early 2007. I learned some new things and the program impacted a lot of people in a positive way.

What would you like to be doing in five years?

William: No clue.

What was the greatest lesson you learned through PR?

William: I'm learning things all the time.

What is your greatest achievement?

William: Having a job doing something I enjoy and getting to work with a lot of great people.

Alternatives to Saying ‘No Comment’

The two most dangerous words you can ever tell a reporter are “No comment.” Utter them, and you might as well scream, “We’re guilty!”

“No comment” renders you powerless over your own story. It invites reporters to talk to other people who might not hesitate to put their spin on your issue. Worse yet, it makes you look wimpy. See *How to Keep the Media Wolves at Bay* (http://www.publicityhound.com/publicity-products/marketing-tapes/media_wolves_atbay.htm).

How then, should you respond when a reporter asks a tough, angry or hostile question that you clearly cannot answer, or don’t want to answer? Here are alternatives to, “No comment.”

The Bridging Technique

Bridging is valuable because it helps you get your main point across when you’re asked a question you don’t want to answer. You “bridge” from the reporter’s question to your message as subtly as possible, by using one of several phrases.

Question: “Why is turnover so high on your management team?”

Answer: “I think that would be clearer if I first explained a little about the labor shortage here in the Detroit area, particularly in the high-tech industries...” Some reporters, particularly those with little experience, might forget about the original question they asked you.

Other bridges include:

“I don’t have all the facts to be able to answer that question accurately. But, I can tell you that...” Then continue with your key point.

“I agree we’ve got a problem, and I’d like to go directly to our solution.” Then state your key point.

“We have our share of challenges, just like everyone else does, but it’s important to remember that...” Then

state your key point.

“Actually, that relates to a more important concern...”

Tough, Hostile Questions

When a reporter asks a tough, angry, hostile question, here are some ways to respond:

“I wouldn’t use that choice of words. If you are asking whether (rephrase the question), I can tell you that...”



“Your question points out a common misconception we hear all the time. The real problem is...” Then, restate the problem.

“That question is insulting, and I’m not going to answer it.”

When the reporter’s question has nothing to do with your organization, here’s a good response:

“What you are asking about has nothing whatsoever to do with our organization. But, thank you anyway for giving us the opportunity to be a part of your story. Have you perhaps thought about calling...” Then, give the reporter the name of someone who you think can help – a good way to get a reporter off your back.

By the way, it’s surprising the number of people who tell a reporter, “No comment,” when what they really mean is “I don’t know.” Think about it. When was the last time you saw a reporter quote someone saying, “I don’t know?” Hardly ever. That’s because it’s a boring quote.

There’s nothing wrong with telling reporters you don’t know the answer to

a question, or that you need time to track down the information they need. Ask about their deadline, then return the call promptly. See *Dangerous Hidden Secrets of Print and Broadcast Reporters* (<http://www.publicityhound.com/publicity-products/marketing-tapes/printandbroadcastsecrets.htm>).

The Worst Question

In my media training workshops, I often give audience members the following exercise. Write down the worst question you could imagine being asked. It could be an embarrassing question about your management style, a tough question about your personal opinion on a controversial issue, or an out-of-bounds question about your nasty divorce or your three drunken-driving convictions, which might or might not be relevant to the story.

Then, take all the time you need to craft an intelligent answer to the question. Keep it succinct, and don’t ramble. Practice reciting the answer until you can say it smoothly and clearly. Ask friends and co-workers – or better yet, a public relations expert – how they think it sounds.

This will help you accomplish three things. It will prepare you in case a reporter asks the question. It will increase your confidence during the interview. And it will help you avoid the dreaded “no comment.” See *Special Report #1: Damage Control: How to Keep the Media from Making a Mess of Your Story* (<http://www.publicityhound.com/publicity-products/reports.html>).

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Sold Out PRCA/SPRF Conference a Success!

More than 270 PR professionals and students gathered at The Battle House Hotel in Mobile, Sept. 16-18, for the joint conference of the Public Relations Council of Alabama (PRCA) and the Southern Public Relations Federation (SPRF). Conference attendees traveled from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi. Among them were nearly 30 practitioners from Montgomery.

The conference was packed with great speakers, award ceremonies, networking events and lots of fun. It kicked off with preconference leadership training session and concluded with a stellar Medallion Awards ceremony. Highlights included a night at the Gulf Coast Exploreum Museum, a "PR Circus," brought in by the Emerald Coast PR Organization (ECPRO) to promote next year's SPRF conference in Florida, and a promo for PRCA's conference

here in Montgomery. The Montgomery Chapter shined in its skit of a nightly news program a la *Saturday Night Live*. Kudos to **Kay Yarbrough** and **Bill Cunningham** who played straight-laced news anchors when silliness abounded from the rest of the crew acting out the "news" stories (**Alicia Atcheson, Peggy Collins Lori Moneyham, Jim Plott, Anne Graham** and **Stacy Benefield**.) And, special thanks to **Bill, Nancy Dennis** and **Lori Quiller** for writing the hilarious skit. Conference attendees had good things to say about our production, and many are planning to attend Montgomery's conference.

And, what would a conference be without awards and recognitions? Montgomery's own **Holley Midgley, APR**, had the honor of presenting Suzanne Fornaro, APR, of Mobile, with PRCA's Grover Smith Lifetime

Achievement Award. Helen Todd, APR, of Birmingham, was the winner of the PRCA's Philip R. Forrest Professional Achievement Award, and the Sharon Heflin Chapter of the Year Award went to the West Alabama Chapter.

PRCA's Medallion Awards received 151 entries and were judged by seven professionals with more than 150 years of collective experience. Seventeen percent of entries were awarded a Medallion; 29 percent an Award of Excellence; and 21 percent a Merit Award. Montgomery chapter members walked away with a total of 19 awards.

SPRF recognized 21 members as Senior Practitioners, including PRCA-Montgomery's **Kathy Johnson** and **Kim Nix**. PRCA-Mobile's Denise D'Oliveira, APR, received SPRF's highest honor, the Professional Achievement Award.

Stacy Benefield, Past President

SPRF LANTERN AWARD WINNERS...

Receiving Awards of Merit: **Alicia Atcheson**, Montgomery County Commission; **Peggy Collins, Marilyn Stamps** and **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel; **Bill Cunningham**, Cunningham Group, two Awards of Merit; and **Julie DeBardelaben** and **Neil Probst**, Civil Air Patrol, three Awards of Merit

Receiving Awards of Excellence: **Peggy Collins, Marilyn Stamps** and **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel; **Bill Cunningham**, Cunningham Group; and **Julie DeBardelaben** and **Neil Probst**, Civil Air Patrol

Receiving Lantern Awards: **Rosemary Blackmon, APR**, Alabama Hospital Association; **Peggy Collins, Marilyn Stamps** and **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, two Lantern Awards; and **Julie DeBardelaben, APR**, Civil Air Patrol, Lantern Award

PRCA MEDALLION AWARD WINNERS...

Receiving Awards of Merit: **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel; **Diane Christy**, The Alabama Society of CPAs; **Lori Quiller**, Association of County Commissions of Alabama; **James Tynan**, Civil Air Patrol; two for **Neil Probst**, Civil Air Patrol; **Anna Buckelew**, Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce; and **Alicia Atcheson**, Montgomery County Commission

Receiving Awards of Excellence: **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel; **Rebecca Leigh White**, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; **Will Whatley**, Alabama Hospital Association; **Neil Probst**, Civil Air Patrol; **Nia Johnson**, Community Banker's Association of Alabama; and **Kay Yarbrough**, Jim Wilson & Associates, LLC

Receiving Medallion Awards: **Brian Jones**, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel; **James Tynan**, Civil Air Patrol; **Kay Yarbrough**, Jim Wilson & Associates, LLC; and **Kathy Johnson**, State of Alabama Department of Finance

PRCA Montgomery is a monthly publication for PRCA's Montgomery Chapter members. For the most up-to-date information, visit www.prcamontgomery.org. Please send all job announcements, news items, updates and comments to Neil Probst at nprobst@capnhq.gov and indicate "PRCA" in the subject line.