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Public Relations as a Career

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MEN AND WOMEN regard most of the activities of the world which they hear about or read about as being the result of more or less fortuitous action. As a matter of fact, this is not always so. Many of the events and circumstances which are most important and which affect our lives most powerfully are the result of the conscious planning and the conscious advising of a group of professional men and women counsels on public relations who have developed to fill an important need in our present complicated, every-day life.

Necessity for making the acts of one part of the public understandable to other parts of the public has resulted in recent growth and mounting importance of the profession of public relations. Public opinion is the unacknowledged partner in most activities today.

Universities, railroads, public utilities, banks, hotels, manufacturers, radio, the stage, motion picture producers, trade associations, social service groups—in fact practically every kind of organization interested in furthering objects or ideas or in providing for maintenance and growth through approving public opinion, has a counsel on public relations, known as such, or whose activities are carried on by someone within the organization not so

designated. Every effective group leader has practiced sound public relations.

The function of the counsel on public relations is to appraise and then to deal with the group—and individual—mind and action. Development of the social sciences has laid a scientific foundation for the relatively new profession. The public relations practitioner understands the underlying motives which impel people and groups of people to thought and to action.

Only within the last few decades have these techniques of leadership been turned over

to the professional counsel on public relations for handling. Then there are, of course, counsels on public relations retained by individual clients just as are lawyers.

The counsel on public relations has a distinctive approach to a particular problem: First, he analyzes the relationship of the public to his client. He applies the methods of public opinion measurement. He surveys the whole field of contacts of the public with his client.

Second, he analyzes his client and his client's objectives on the basis of the knowledge he has gained from a study of the relationships of client to public. The counsel on public relations examines

■ *The continued substantial growth of public relations activities in recent years, especially during the past decades, prompted the Editors of Occupations to seek the story of occupational opportunities existing in the field from two of its leading authorities. It is a relatively new and ever-expanding profession in which high type qualifications are essential. Remuneration is in keeping with the ability of the individual.*

every function of his client, studies every element of his client's activity.

Third, he formulates policies to govern the practices of his client toward the public, based on these studies, and attempts to relate the interests of the two.

Fourth, he interprets the client, his product, or his service to the public. At the same time he interprets the public to the client so that there may be a coincidence of the public interest and the private interest.

THE AVENUES OF APPROACH

In reaching a new and enlarged public for his client, the public relations counsel applies a technique which includes a knowledge of all the avenues by which that public may be approached: printed matter—books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, letters; motion pictures, photographs, lectures, radio, the drama, the schoolroom; events which shape or symbolize the activities of his client and by which the client may be known to the public. His function must not be confused with that of advertising, which is the work of another specialist. He frequently suggests the use of advertising, however, and cooperates with advertising agencies in the interests of his client. Recently the installation of a cooperating public relations department in various advertising agencies was announced.

Press agent and publicity man are not synonymous, and are only partial clues to the functions of the public relations counsel. He is a propagandist in the sense that he is a special pleader. He is constantly on the watch for indications of public opinion.

There is an increased demand for professionals in the public relations field by organizations which have contact with the public, in keeping with the trend towards

specialization in all important aspects of present-day life.

The young man or woman entering this profession faces possibilities for influence that are limited only by his or her own ability. Competition should not be a serious career factor if the individual is very efficient.

IDEALS AND ETHICS

The ideal of the profession is a pragmatic one. It is to make the producer understand what the public wants, and to make the public understand the objectives of the producer. It is to make the producer—using this word in its broadest sense—and the consumer meet on the highest possible point between them for the greatest good. It is to bring about a harmony of understanding between nation and nation, between government and people, between group and public which it serves or upon whose good will it is dependent.

The ethics that have grown laboriously around the practice of law and medicine and other professions have gone tacitly into the code of practice in this newest profession. Integrity is inherent in the honorable practice of all professions today.

The public relations counsel maintains faith with his public, his client, and his media of distribution to the public. He cannot accept clients whose cases are mutually antagonistic. He does not accept a cause which is anti-social.

All activity that deviates from the highest ethical standards of business, of law, or the other professions is eschewed by the public relations counsel.

ABILITIES REQUIRED

There are many fundamental characteristics essential for the public relations counsel. He must have strength of char-

acter, broad general culture, a logical and objective mind. He must have discretion, the ability to convince others, and possess more than ordinary qualities of imagination. He must have the ability to express himself through written and spoken words. He must have absolute integrity, and he must have an active desire to understand and to help people.

It is not necessary to have a college degree in order to become a counsel on public relations; it is wise to have the equivalent of a college education. Courses in public opinion are offered today by thirty-one colleges and universities,* and a journal, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, is published by the School of Public Affairs of Princeton University.

ENTERING THE PROFESSION

One entrance to this profession is through work on a daily newspaper. Such experience ultimately develops a sense of values, trains one to look for important facts and how to present them logically and clearly. Other entering wedges include experience with an advertising firm, or in the promotion department of a business firm, or in the office of a press agent who handles theatrical, motion picture, or musical publicity. It is possible, too, to start in the firm of a public relations counsel, or in the public relations department of a business or public utility organization, or in the publicity department of a university or a social service bureau.

Progress will depend on ability to focus on broad matters of policy and to regard necessary mechanics (which must be mastered) merely as a means to accomplish broad objectives.

The salary of the beginner varies. It depends on the demand for his services, on his ability, on his power to sell himself,

and on the budget of the group or individual for whom he works. Twenty-five dollars a week for a beginner is a fair start.

The earning power of the entrant will increase rapidly if he has marked ability. The income of a counsel on public relations is comparable to that of an attorney. His fees will be limited only by his ability to make his services of actual value to his clients. If he is successful and has many clients, his income may eventually be several hundred thousand dollars a year.

The young public relations counsel must work hard. His hours are long and indefinite. He must be alert to new ideas and new methods. In his early years he must spend a great deal of time at the mechanics of his work. Later he will devote much of his time to analyzing, reading, digesting reports, making plans, discussing and helping to decide on questions of policy.

His work then becomes less that of the man who works with the accomplished fact than that of the man who devises and modifies circumstances before they materialize in word or action.

There is nothing in this profession that a man can do that a woman cannot do. Women have achieved comparable standing with men. A woman is limited mainly by her personal ability to make the individual or group she deals with realize that she is capable. She must overcome initial inertia on this question.

The public relations counsel, at his best, is a person of enormous power for good. It is a pursuit that leaves no room for boredom, that leaves no room for drudgery or for unenlightened imitateness.

The public relations counsel is constantly going on to new ideas and to new audiences. With ability and enthusiasm, he can make his road lead where he wants it to.

*See *Universities-Pathfinders in Public Opinion*. A Survey by Edward L. Bernays in collaboration with Doris E. Fleischman.

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