

Human Progress through Human Understanding

By Doris Fleischman Bernays

Address at the annual meeting of Theta Sigma Phi, National Organization for Women in Journalism and Communications, in Houston, Texas, October 7, 1972, accepting the 1972 National Headliner Award for distinguished service in the field of journalism and communications.

By Doris Fleischman Bernays
COUNSEL ON PUBLIC RELATIONS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Human Progress through Human Understanding

Most of the changes that have taken place so rapidly as this world approaches its twenty-first century have been technological in character. We move more quickly, we kill more quickly than any one ever dreamed of.

But in the areas of human relationships, in education, group accommodation, law, human understanding of all kinds, we have progressed tentatively, fearsomely and often faddishly. Humanity has retrogressed frighteningly towards non-accommodation of persons and groups to one another. This is true of the relationship between the sexes. This has retrogressed speedily and steadily since women won the vote. We have been driven back to the kitchen.

A bridge from savage anti-intellectualism to compassion, understanding and cooperation may possibly be built through the efforts of communications experts. If this great profession reaches its potential of professionalism, knowledge, wisdom and values, we may enjoy a happy and peaceful future. But this cannot be achieved without thorough, conscientious and effective application of the new discipline of public relations.

Every communicator, educator, group leader, opinion mold-er, lawyer, jurist, should know the philosophic goals, principles and practices of this discipline.

Especially women of good will whose training in the homely arts of human relations has spanned the centuries, should utilize this new profession to unite a frightened and combative world.

It was suggested that I talk with you about public relations because I've studied it for over half a century. I have known many women who practised public relations and with great aptitude and success. Through effective use of this discipline we may bring great benefit to our profession, to ourselves as individuals and to us as women in the multiple roles that fill our lives.

EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

In our country, luckily, we have no substitute for the French Academy to control the meaning of words. Public relations has so many definitions floating around that I shall try to define it as we see it.

The basic elements of public relations are as old as society — informing people, persuading people and adjusting activities to the needs of society. Society and technology have changed methods of accomplishing these.

It probably started in prehistoric days when the first man cared what another man did to anybody else. Only rulers had identities as deities, benevolent, sometimes malevolent. People were slaves or serfs, ruled by terror and force. In ancient Greece and Rome people gained a little power. Phrases such as *res publica*, *vox populi* and *Forum Romanum* paralleled a rise in public opinion. *Acta Diurna*, like many journals today, recorded the official line and activities.

In the dark ages the pathetically weak power of the people vanished into the murky gloom of non-intellectual anonymity.

The Renaissance must have been lovely for the beautiful people. They nurtured the glorious new aesthetics, art, philosophy, poetry, and an, unfortunately limited, delicacy of conduct. Nevertheless there was a new stirring of people's consciousness.

For a long while communications processes were limited and slow. Family farms, plantations and small communities had a hard time talking to one another.

In the nineteenth century technology expanded. Many social forces dabbled at the task of educating the public to act on behalf of society.

Robber barons were mighty and blind to public attitudes or needs, until populists, Christian Socialists, trade unionists started to foster the countervailing force of popular power.

In the early twentieth century, trusts, public utilities and railroad companies, to cite a few, acted as if public relations were designed to whitewash muckrakers' revelations about big business. So big business gave public relations a pejorative meaning that lingers on even today in the minds of some influential students of social patterns.

NO GUARANTY FOR DEMOCRACY

The world was stirred by Woodrow Wilson's appeal in World War I to make the world safe for democracy, and to make it the war to end all wars. These concepts were not

devised as slogans. These were great goals and seemed practicable. But they have not ended wars, they have not protected democracies. The power of the people was still too weak, ephemeral and vulnerable to conflicting forces.

My husband in 1918-1919 served as staff member of the United States Committee on Public Information here and at the Peace Conference in Paris. He assisted in the dissemination of Wilson's appeals and evaluated the public's frenzied response.

He decided that it was feasible to apply to constructive peacetime uses what he had learned about group psychology.

In 1919 he opened an office in New York and I was enthusiastic about joining his pioneering principles. I had had several years' experience as an editor and reporter on the old *New York Tribune* and after college had studied a little about group and individual psychology. Eddie was a good public relations teacher. He taught me that a story must state its message accurately and clearly. I wrote at a furious rate — on the reemployment of ex-servicemen for the War Department, on Lithuania's demand for ethnic independence, on housing, radium, Madame Curie. We became full partners in 1922.

We realized that the interplay of public and private interest had great importance. We analyzed our client's relationship with its public, and interpreted one to the other in a feedback effort. We recommended changes of attitudes and conduct to help clients meet their goals. This was an idea whose time had come. We soon had a variety of clients, commercial, non-profit, governmental.

The profession grew within a decade. Books, learned or practical, were written. A few universities gave courses on the subject.

CODES OF ETHICS

Professional societies were formed that helped establish standards and codes of ethics. Today throughout the free world effective profit and non-profit groups use this social instrument. The development of the social sciences gave depth and validity to our new discipline and in turn they recognized our value to their theories and application.

The recent revolution in communications, transportation and other technologies has miniaturized the world. A whisper in Afghanistan might well be heard here in Houston tonight. All students and practitioners in government, public education,

private industry, public health, science should learn the basics of communications and public relations. Our profession is an art applied to a science aiding group adjustments, alleviating maladjustments and presenting information.

But today there are still painful maladjustments; millions still fail to understand other millions. We still are loyal to innumerable false myths and stereotypes.

Public relations concerns us in 3 ways: 1) in the integrity of our profession, 2) in our own individual careers, and 3) in the special public relations problems of women in a masculine professional world.

ENDANGERED FREEDOM OF SPEECH

First, many of us are deeply worried about the vulnerability of public communications itself. Recent attacks on great local and national media have befuddled, misinformed and prejudiced many. Free communication is basic to a free society. All our communications media, electronic and printed, audio and visual, should unite immediately to fight this danger. I am disturbed that all our media have not combined to defend themselves against unwarranted attacks on our right to unfettered communication. Unless we maintain this constitutional principle, we will inevitably assist in the destruction of democracy for us all. You who are here tonight represent the present and future existence of communications.

Theta Sigma Phi can assume leadership in preserving the Bill of Rights promise to the United States. Our group can plan and lead a national public relations program to safeguard this freedom. This effort will require a carefully planned activity.

We must first set up goals for the immediate, intermediate, and longtime future.

Scientific research will show the areas of public ignorance, wisdom, apathy and dedication. When we know what public attitudes are, we can make broad and specific plans to get the American people to recognize what freedom of expression means to our life, our liberty and all our pursuits.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN IN COMMUNICATIONS

The second area of public relations I should like to discuss is the need of every communicator to practise good public relations on behalf of her goals. I have 3 philosophic commendments which I feel impelled to offer you.

THE THREE COMMENDMENTS

1. Aim high — the White House, the Supreme Court, the editor's desk, the policy board, the senior partnership.
2. Don't settle for a menial or clerical job unless you like it — or unless your husband has to eat what you earn.
3. Forget you are a woman in an androgynous world. Think of your job and what you can do to better your future.

Good work is too often hidden behind a curtain of anonymity. Careful study and planning are necessary to getting attention for our constructive ideas. If we have something we consider important, be sure it becomes known to the opinion molders and the group leaders concerned with this subject. Cooperate with constructive non-profit organizations. They will get the advantage of your good advice and you may be recognized as a thoughtful and able communicator.

I believe each of us, whether eighteen or forty, should develop a public relations plan for her own life. We can clarify our goals for the immediate, the intermediate and longtime future, and state our expectations as concretely as possible. What do we want to be doing or accomplishing 10 to 15 years from now? Remember, please, that goals are not immutable. They must change with circumstances, places, people.

A planned course of action always is better than depending on chance. Such an approach will increase the probability of fulfilling our desires, training and potential talents. Many good books wait on library shelves. How-to books outline methods of approach — *The Engineering of Consent*, for instance.

Our third public relations problem is the suppression of women in a male-oriented world.

When I was young, the great debate was home versus a career. Home usually won the argument. The debate still goes on as a moral issue. But the present solution for most women is home and a career. "Are women people?" Alice Duer Miller asked some 50 years ago. In some ways we are, but we still lack many vital rights and privileges of full citizens in a free society.

END AMATEURISM

Let me give some practical suggestions to meet these problems. We must be professional in our activity. Amateurs have no place in today's complex society. Every vocation demands

professionalism, gained through education, training and discipline.

Society's complexities produced by advanced technologies, in communication, and transportation, make it ridiculous for an amateur to understand or cope with the ramifications of professional procedures.

Amateurism is obsolete wherever we find it. We, as members of the communications world, understand that communication deserves and demands the professional approach in its practitioners, come by through continuous education, training and discipline.

Too often the affairs of business, politics and communications are directed by people without the necessary skills, knowledge, training or the broad values and ethical concepts inherent in true professionalism.

This is particularly applicable to women. For too long we have been assigned to the role of amateurs. We have accepted, in a kind of brainwashed befuddlement, the thesis that an amateur loves his job, and that this is sufficient in terms of wisdom, power to perform, empty honors and truncated compensatory pay.

There is a second job for us all. The ideal of feminism and its reality are ridiculously far apart. Ideally we want equality before the law, equal pay and opportunity for equal work, equal educational and career options. The fact is that women live in a trap; whether we are career workers or unpaid houseworkers, we have devised no way out to freedom.

The Chase Manhattan National Bank in a down-to-dust study determined recently that women spend 99.6 hours a week at household tasks. This I believe from numerous studies, is a low estimate for the majority of women, whose work, immemorially is never done. There is no hope for us as long as we continue to waste ourselves on tasks that are not genetically imposed on us.

Our astounding technology has done almost nothing for the mechanics or sociological aspects of running the home, which is still tied to the techniques of the dark ages. Walls should satisfy thermal needs, acoustics, cleaning and maintenance. Shelving should obviate hazards of reaching, crouching, searching, cleaning, and become an integral automatic function.

WOMEN ARE CART HORSES

With the world's alarming decrease in its fuel supply, we must provide substitutes for individual kitchenry. Most women

are cart horses, lugging pollutive packages around the town. We were born with electric and bristle brooms in our hands.

Most of our tasks are enforced by societal pressures, custom and miseducation. Theta Sigma Phi ought to be able to induce an academic institution to undertake a broad and even innovative non-commercial technological and sociological research into the habits and compulsions that assign to women anachronistic functions. Obviously I am not talking about the overprivileged few. I am talking about the huge percentage of women, married and unmarried, who work for a living outside the home and for no salary inside the prickly nest.

If we can devise miracles for temporary tourists to outer space, we ought to be able to devise windows which let in fresh air (if there is any) and eliminate the optical pastime of passersby. Our man-designed bed of Procrustes is equally uncomfortable for the other half.

We might be happier, more interesting, if we had appropriate options so that half of the world's population might be usefully and sensibly engaged.

I have tried to present in a few minutes approaches to some of our main public relations problems. I have tried to suggest a program for the development of our own profession and our critical need to fight for freedom of expression. I have touched on necessary public relations for us as individuals and have pointed to ways to approach some of the special problems of working women and how to meet them.

Remarks by Doris Fleischman Bernays, accepting the 1972 Headliner Award of Theta Sigma Phi, national organization for women in journalism and communications, for distinguished service in the field of journalism and communications at their annual meeting in Houston, Texas on October 7, 1972.

Doris Fleischman Bernays of Cambridge, Ma., one of the five winners of the 1972 Headliner Award, at 81 is a partner with her husband Edward L. Bernays in counsel on public relations. For more than half a century, the Bernays have advised many leading figures and organizations, profit and non profit, on their relations with the public.

She is a fourth generation New Yorker, a graduate of the Horace Mann School in New York and Barnard College, Columbia University.

*She started her career as a staff writer and editor of the old New York Tribune, has contributed to many periodicals and books and is the author of a memoir, *A Wife is Many Women*, a best seller of 1955.*

Mrs. Bernays is the mother of Doris Bernays Held, elementary school counselor in the Brookline school system and wife of Professor Richard Held of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and of Anne Bernays Kaplan, novelist and wife of Justin Kaplan, biographer.