

PRWeek

OP-ED

PR should continue to assert its case

A segment on the *CBS Sunday Morning* program several weeks ago – little noticed by anyone outside our profession – rocked the public relations world, causing many of us to question how far we have come in educating key opinion leaders about what public relations is, and what public relations professionals truly stand for.

We've made great strides, we thought; but reality smacked us in the face over our Sunday morning coffee. A venerable program, beloved by many in our profession, shattered the morning air with a deeply offensive tirade against PR professionals by a legal analyst commenting on the Scott McClellan affair. "Show me a PR person who is 'accurate' and 'truthful,'" he said, "and I'll show you a PR person who is unemployed."

Many of our colleagues responded quickly and the commentator replied in a blog that his comments were permissible because they were meant as hyperbole. However, little can be gained from getting into a tit-for-tat with this one commentator.

The larger issue is that an otherwise respectable news program could provide a forum for such a vicious and inaccurate portrayal of our profession. Arthur W. Page Society member Harold

Burson said afterward, shame on us that we have failed to educate key stakeholders about PR and the evolution of our role in corporations.

The Page Society has been deeply engaged in this process for more than two decades, starting with the Page Principles – the first being, tell the truth – and continuing this year with the develop-

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ment of a seminal white paper on PR's role, and the evolving role of the chief communications officer in a modern corporation, "The Authentic Enterprise." In this paper, available at www.awpagesociety.com, a task force of top communications pros shows why reputation is more critical than ever in today's globally networked

world, in which trust, transparency, and engagement are essential to success. They articulate a clear mandate for corporate leaders: "Authenticity will be the coin of the realm for successful corporations and those who lead them."

Those of us who serve in positions of responsibility in PR are making solid progress inside many corporations, educating our fellow C-suite executives and other stakeholders. But we have a long way to go. Each of the major PR organizations – the Page Society, the Institute for Public Relations, the Public Relations Society of America, and the Council of Public Relations Firms – have dedicated at least part of their agendas to educating a wider base of stakeholders about what we do (and what we don't do).

These efforts are commendable, but each of us must take responsibility for moving this objective forward. One Page Principle holds that 90% of the public's perception of a company results from its actions, as opposed to its words. It's time to ensure we continue to apply that formula to our profession. ■

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