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Editor's Corner

Our summer season got underway in (AP) style on May 23. That day, we were pleased to find a box with the 57th edition of The AP Stylebook waiting for us at the PRSA office.

AP publishes the spiral-bound guide every other year in the spring. (And we have a collection of photos of Managing Editor Amy Jacques happily showing off the latest Stylebooks through the years!)

The big news of this edition is that The AP Stylebook has made its first primary dictionary change in decades, now adopting Merriam-Webster as its official reference for terms not listed in the guide.

The Stylebook has also introduced several updates:

➔ **Climate change terminology:** Expanded guidance includes the term “climate crisis” and new entries such as community solar, geothermal, lithium ion, energy transition and hydrogen.

➔ **Bulleted lists:** Revised rules to omit periods after single words or phrases in bulleted lists but to include periods at the end of complete sentences.

➔ **Prefixes and suffixes:** Consolidated entries for commonly used prefixes and suffixes. No hyphens are generally used with the prefixes out-, post-, pre- and re-.

By the way, PRSA members receive a 20% discount on one single-user subscription to The AP Stylebook Online each year and one registration for The AP Stylebook Workshop. Find more details here: apstylebook.com/prsa

Learning more about the new Burson agency

This past Jan. 25, WPP announced the merger of its two largest communications agencies, Hill & Knowlton and BCW, to form Burson. The new consultancy will have more than 6,000 employees in 43 markets worldwide.



The name honors Harold Burson, APR, Fellow PRSA, a pioneer and founding figure of modern public relations and strategic communications. Burson, a PRSA member for over 70 years, died in January 2020 at age 98.

Corey duBrowa, currently CEO of BCW, will serve as global CEO of Burson, which begins operations on July 1.

In July, Corey will also be my guest on *Strategies & Tactics* Live on LinkedIn. Save the date for July 25 at 1 p.m. ET.

Commemorating Pride Month

During June, PRSA is providing a variety of professional development and educational resources to honor and support the LGBTQ+ community within and outside the communications profession.

These resources, available on the PRSA website, include webinars, presentations, toolkits and editorial content. Follow PRSA's social media platforms throughout the month to stay updated and explore new features.

Starting your day with *Issues & Trends*

As a summertime reminder: Don't forget to open the *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter delivered to your inbox each weekday morning. PRSA's award-winning editorial team curates this collection of the latest headlines, information and best practices for communicators.

Start your day with this must-read PRSA member benefit. Please update your email preferences at MyPRSA to ensure receipt.

In addition, the online edition of *Strategies & Tactics* includes some bonus content you won't find in the paper, including video interviews. Visit prsa.org/SandT for more.

Meanwhile, enjoy your summer — we'll see you back with our August issue. ❖



PRSA STRATEGIES & TACTICS

June/July 2024 Periodical Vol. 7, No. 6 \$15

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Strategies & Tactics (ISSN 2576-2028) is published 10 times per year by the Public Relations Society of America, 120 Wall Street, Floor 21, New York, NY 10005. June/July 2024. Volume 7, Number 6.

Nonmember domestic subscription rate: \$125 a year. One-year rate for Canada \$175. Subscriptions must be paid in U.S. funds with the check drawn on a U.S. bank. Single copies \$15 each. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PRSA, *Strategies & Tactics*, 120 Wall Street, Floor 21, New York, NY 10005. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing office. Copyright 2024 by Public Relations Society of America.

Cover Art: bubaone


@JohnElsasser

Atlas Award Renamed for Longtime PRSA Leader John L. Paluszek

PRSA has renamed its Atlas Award to The John L. Paluszek Atlas Award for Lifetime Achievement in International Public Relations to honor the longtime PRSA member and celebrated PR practitioner.

The Atlas Award recognizes a PR practitioner who has made extraordinary contributions to the practice and profession of public relations in an international environment throughout their career.



“I am greatly honored and grateful to PRSA for associating my name with its annual Atlas Award for lifetime achievement in international public relations,” said Paluszek, APR, Fellow PRSA. “I hope that this will be a repeated reminder that public relations is now a global profession serving many in our vastly interconnected global society.”

Currently executive editor of *Business in Society*, Paluszek served as PRSA's president in 1989 and chair of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management in 2009.

He has been a member of PRSA for more than 50 years and has received numerous honors, including the Atlas Award in 2010, the Patrick Jackson Award in 2002, and the Gold Anvil in 1994. His counseling career includes three decades as an executive at Ketchum.

University of Florida Wins PRSSA's Bateman Case Study Competition

The University of Florida took top honors in the 2024 Bateman Case Study Competition.

PRSSA teamed up with *Culturs*, the global multicultural magazine, for this year's edition.

Students were tasked with creating awareness of the publication on college campuses and its mission to enhance community and foster human connection of culturally fluid communities of multiethnic, multicultural, mixed-race, and geographically mobile people.

Through its “Embrace the Hyphen” campaign, the University of Florida's CommuniGATORS reached



the homes of more than 65,000 residents, inspired 44 ambassadors, and partnered with 56 organizations to embrace *Culturs* and its mission.

Montclair State University earned second place, with Brigham Young University taking third place. The finalists were among 45 entries from colleges and universities across the nation.

The Bateman Competition allows PRSSA members to showcase the analytical skills required for PR problem-solving. It is named to honor the memory of the late J. Carroll Bateman, APR, a past president of PRSA who was instrumental in founding the student organization.

PRNEWS Honors Linda Thomas Brooks

PRSA CEO Linda Thomas Brooks was named to PRNEWS' 2024 Class of Top Women.



During a ceremony on June 4 in New York, PRNEWS recognized her in the Industry Champions category, which honors women “who've had an exceptional impact on the direction and advancement of the PR and communications industry beyond the impact at their own companies.”

As PRSA CEO, she is responsible for all program, financial and operational aspects of the organization. Reporting to and collaborating closely with PRSA's Board of Directors, she guides the development and

implementation of PRSA's strategic vision and plan, and the programs and policy positions necessary to support the membership.

Before joining PRSA in January 2021, she served as president/CEO of the Association of Magazine Media. Her other roles included president of Ingenuity Media at The Martin Agency and EVP, managing director of General Motors Mediaworks.

In addition, PRNEWS honored 17 PRSA members, including Board member Teresa Valerio Parrot, Ed.D., APR, during the ceremony.

Visit our online edition or the PRSA Newsroom for the full list.

What's Trending

What people were talking about on social media this past month...



@prsa Congratulations to longtime member and former PRSA Chair Anthony D'Angelo for being appointed Chair of the Public Relations Department at Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications! He joined the school in 2015 and served as interim chair of the Department.

@prsa bluegrass the 150th @KentuckyDerby! There are so many comms pros in our city that make today's event so successful — @KyDerbyFestival, @ChurchillDowns, @derbymuseum, @gotolouisville, @FlyLouisville — the list goes on! Thank you for putting our city in the winner's circle

@ConsultDIS We are honored to have won the #SilverAnvil Award for Integrated Comms (Gov), and the @PRSA Best of the Anvil Award for our work with @DeptVetAffairs Million Veteran Program. This highest recognition is a testament to our mission to serve Veterans. Congrats to the team!



69 likes

adambitely It was very rewarding work to support the Michigan EITC Coalition. Even more rewarding when the legislation was passed and signed into law last year, helping to lift tens of thousands of Michigan families up and out of poverty. Honored to be part of the @martin_waymire team that received a @prsanational Silver Anvil for that effort.



#QOTM: What practices help you find well-being inside and outside the workplace?

"Family time, running, quiet time and connecting with my students and co-workers on topics other than school/work! The world feels so hectic these days, and it's important to try to pause and disconnect, even for a few minutes daily."
— Wahiba Chair, MBA

"Balance is impossible; therefore, finding a way to integrate various parts of life is the key. Sometimes there's more time for family and self-care and sometimes there's not. Yoga is my go-to release! As a coach, however, I try to remind people that trying to find the perfect balance will only lead to frustration. No one can do that."
— Ellen Crane, APR, Fellow PRSA

In Brief

Feeling Misinformed, More Americans Avoid News Altogether, Study Finds

A recent University of Michigan study finds that Americans are more likely to avoid the news altogether because they perceive news sources as untrustworthy.



"For a lot of people, public discussion about misinformation ... and the amount of information that comes out from so many different sources, drives them away

from news," said Ariel Hasell, the study's lead author and an assistant professor of communication and media. Paradoxically, the more information that's available, "the more people just opt out because it becomes too hard for them to make sense of it."

Besides turning people away from news outlets, "News avoidance also includes people avoiding discussing politics with others," Hasell said. Some people are "stepping out of the conversation completely."

News avoidance and fatigue increased leading up to the 2020 presidential election, the researchers found.

"Ten years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we had a higher trust environment" in general, Hasell said. But today, "trust in mainstream news is declining."

Bystanders Increasingly Use Smartphones to Livestream Dangerous Situations

When four police officers were killed attempting to serve a warrant in Charlotte, N.C. on April 30, Saing Chhoeun was in his garage next door and used his



smartphone to livestream the standoff between officials and a wanted man.

As the Associated Press reports, the deadly shootout also illustrated how bystanders increasingly try to livestream their perspectives of

dangerous situations on social media.

In the digital age, the "new responsibility of the bystander" is to record what's happening on their phones, said Karen North, a professor of social media at the University of Southern California's Anenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

Rather than fleeing from danger, shooting a cellphone video has "become sort of a social norm," she said. "It used to be, 'If you see something, say something.' Now, it's, 'If you see something, start recording.'"

Survey: Most Members of Gen Z Say They're Happy

About three-quarters of Gen Z Americans — the children and young adults born between 1997 and 2012 — say they're "very happy" (25%) or "somewhat happy" (48%), new research from the Gallup-Walton Family Foundation finds. In a survey of 12- to 26-year-olds, about half always feel that their life matters, while an additional 28% often feel that way.



About a quarter of respondents say they are not happy. Roughly another quarter of Gen Zers surveyed do not consistently feel that their life matters. About half often feel anxious and approximately 20% often feel depressed.

Among Gen Z respondents who report being happy, a majority (60%) engage in something interesting every day. This data suggests that finding and participating in daily activities that are stimulating, motivating or important could be a reliable path to happiness for Gen Z.

However, a substantial portion of survey respondents (42% to 49%) report not feeling purpose in their daily activities or getting enough sleep or relaxation, indicating areas for potential improvement.

Livestream Video Game Platform Twitch Becoming Novel Source for News

Twitch, a popular app for livestreaming video games, is becoming a source for news, researchers at the University of Oregon have found.

Established news organizations and digital-age influencers are finding creative ways to draw users who expect to participate in news coverage, said Maxwell Foxman, an assistant professor at the univer-



sity's School of Journalism and Communication. Foxman and his co-researchers discovered "novel relationships between live-streaming, entertainment and reporting" on Twitch that require unusual journalistic methods but might help content creators engage audiences and earn revenue through donations.

The researchers said Twitch users relish communicating with one another via a text-based chatroom. Thus, content producers and audiences analyze news together in real-time, as both sides contribute content or sources.

Besides being popular with viewers, host-audience interplay also helps content producers and news providers build public trust on social media. "Games and the news may seem like they are disconnected, but often economically, socially or culturally, they interact," Foxman said. — Greg Beaubien

Two-thirds of U.S. smartphone users will use shopping/retail apps by 2025.
— eMarketer

Connect With Us Online

- Read the online version of *Strategies & Tactics* and view the digital flipbook: prsa.org/SandT
- Sign up for our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter, and the e-version of *Strategies & Tactics*, via your communications preferences: prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile
- Change your address and update your contact information: prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile
- Read the latest posts on our PRsay blog: prsay.prsa.org
- Become a PRSA member: prsa.org/JoinUs
- Learn how to become a corporate or university sponsor: prsa.org/Network/Partnerships
- Follow us on X: @PRSAactics



The Explainer

6 Principles for a Healthier and Happier Workforce

The documentary series "Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones" with Dan Buettner helped show how people can live longer, healthier lives with a focus on nutrition, movement, purpose and strong social networks within intergenerational communities.

These health and well-being tips can also be applied to the workplace, according to *Entrepreneur*.

When you have a healthy workforce, there is higher morale, greater productivity, more employee satisfaction, and increased levels of retention and loyalty, the article says. Beyond the regions referred to as Blue Zones, these values are relevant to workplace communities where people can age in healthy way and have their own cultures and rituals that can boost well-being and longevity, or negatively impact health.

Many companies provide meals and refreshments as employee benefits, but these are commonly processed snacks and junk food. Instead, the article says, "workplaces can encourage healthy eating habits by providing healthier food options and by getting creative with nutrition education and food that brings people together in workplace cafés and business meetings," like enjoying juices or smoothies together.

Another important principle is integrating purpose into your work, strategy and company culture. Many Blue Zone inhabitants focus on their local community, living and working with people of all ages, often in a multigenerational home.

As the workforce currently spans five generations, there's an opportunity to connect and learn from each other in this space too — sharing institutional knowledge while practicing new ways of thinking. When employees work together, focus on healthy habits and learn to manage stress, they are usually more positive and productive.

Beyond practicing mindfulness and exercising, employers can support their staff by offering workplace wellness programs and health benefits and encouraging work-life balance. Here are six principles for nurturing a healthier, happier workforce inspired by the Blue Zones, via *Entrepreneur*. — Amy Jacques



simona



1 Provide nutritious food options.



3 Foster inter-generational connections.



5 Provide stress management resources.



2 Instill a sense of purpose in the work.



4 Encourage community building and collaboration.



6 Model healthy behavior.



semparaphoto

Dispatch From Florida

POSTCARD

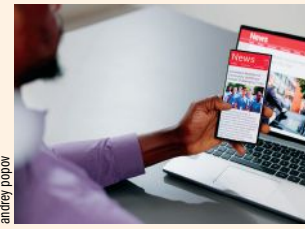


"2024 is all about AI-driven content taking over our timelines, helping brainstorm and plan our communication strategies. But there's a downside: If everyone jumps on board, creativity might suffer, and our messages could start sounding the same. We must strike a balance, using AI's strengths while keeping our messages fresh and unique."

-Morgan Biggs
Manager of Website and Communications
CareerSource Palm Beach County
President, PRSA Palm Beach Chapter



By the Numbers



andrey popov

25% of Americans today consider themselves "news junkies," 23% "sports junkies" and 17% "entertainment junkies," Stawell's "Future of News" study finds.

Gallup reveals that 71% of Americans say they have given "quite a lot" of thought to the upcoming presidential election. This is on par with election-year readings at similar points in the 2008 and 2020 campaigns but higher than in 2000, 2004 and 2012.



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prestock-studio

84% of marketing leaders and employees report experiencing high levels of 'collaboration drag' when working with other functions, according to a survey by Gartner, Inc.

Aggregate Facebook traffic to news and media sites shows that referrals have plunged by 58% in the last six years from 1.3 billion in March 2018 to 561 million in April, a Chartbeat analysis shows.



denphoto



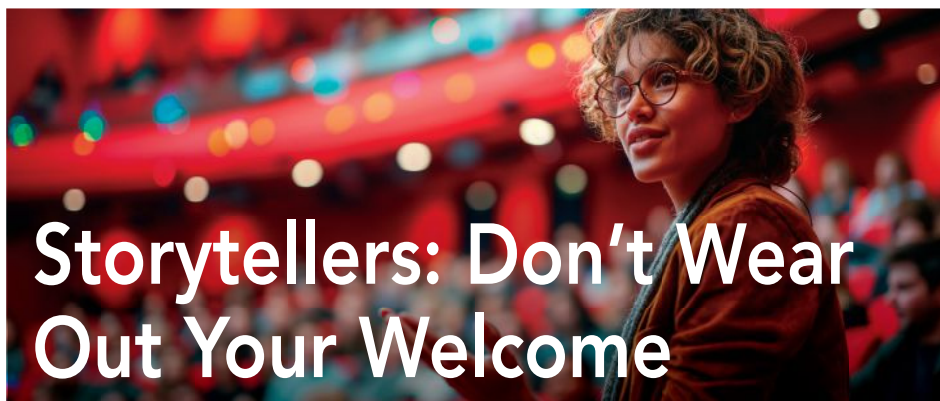
janislar estakhov

Pew Research Center reports that 85% of U.S. teens report playing video games, while 40% identify as gamers.

Issues Trends

These were the most popular topics from our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter in the past month.

- ▶▶ CEOs prepare for possible employee protests
- ▶▶ America's jarring generation gap
- ▶▶ Millennials are 'quiet-vacationing' instead of asking for PTO
- ▶▶ The American hotel is in recovery
- ▶▶ The words that show AI wrote a document
- ▶▶ Why 'love bombing' drives skilled talent away
- ▶▶ Evolving your social media strategy
- ▶▶ The most misunderstood emojis



Storytellers: Don't Wear Out Your Welcome

By Rob Biesenbach



Picture this: You're at a party or networking event, engaged in conversation, telling a story that you think is going great... and it happens. Your listener steals a glance over your shoulder.

Ouch. Maybe it's simply a moment of innocent distraction. Or perhaps they've spotted — or are desperately searching for — someone else to talk to!

As a recovering blabbermouth, this happens to be one of my worst nightmares. So here are my tips to avoid wearing out your welcome when telling a story.

Tune in to your audience.

First, congratulations! The fact that you're even concerned about this suggests you possess the emotional intelligence necessary to be sensitive to other people's needs.

Monitoring your listener's expression and body language is one of the best ways to gauge their interest. If you sense they're restless, then you can adjust course, speeding up or condensing as necessary.

But it starts before you even open your mouth. As we all know, audience targeting is critical to any communication. So think about your existing relationship with this person along with their interests, needs and knowledge level.

If you don't have a history together and don't know these answers, then you're taking a risk in embarking on a grand tale. Better to learn a bit more and find some common ground before sharing that story.

Adjust to the environment.

Where are you? A big, crowded, noisy roomful of people on their feet? That's not conducive to delivering a stemwinder. Save that longish story for when you've got a quiet, comfortable moment together.

Stay on track.

I compare storytelling to a tree: You want to follow the trunk in a relatively straight line from the base to the top. Venturing out onto those branches (or, God help us, the twigs) puts you in danger of losing your audience or even getting lost yourself.

For a realistic, if not strictly real, example of this phenomenon, take this scene from the American version of "The Office." The company's founder, Robert Dunder, recounts his early days with business partner Robert Mifflin:

I started this company in 1949. I knew Mifflin through the Rotary Club. And he was at dinner with Beverly and her husband. What was his name? Umm... uhh... Jerry. Jerry Trupiano from, from South Jersey... and he was tall. Both he and Mifflin were tall guys...

All those details from the third sentence on? Unnecessary. Unless it's directly relevant to the story, we don't need the names and relationships (not to mention the height!) of all the bit players.

Plot like a screenwriter.

Here's a clue that your story may not be quite as compelling as you wish it was. Do you find yourself saying "and then" over and over again? As in, this happened, and then this happened, and then that happened?

If so, then what you have may not be an actual story, but instead a series of random, vaguely connected events.

Stories are about cause and effect: This happened, *so* that happened; this happened, *but* that happened. As legendary screenwriting expert Robert McKee emphasizes, stories are driven by causality, not coincidence.

Edit like a filmmaker.

Have you ever watched the deleted scenes of a favorite movie? You might think, "I love that scene! They should have kept it!"

But here's what filmmakers know that the rest of us may not: For the sake of the story, you have to be willing to "kill your darlings."

That means even a perfectly captivating scene is ripe for cutting if it repeats a point that's already established, interrupts the pacing or diverts from the film's premise.

This all leads to the inevitable question: How long should your story be? Answer: as long as it needs to be to do the job — no more, no less.

That's vague, I know. But *generally*, I find that in a world of easy distraction, it's safer to err on the shorter side — especially in a challenging environment with a listener who you don't know well. ❖

Rob Biesenbach helps leaders break free from death by PowerPoint, tell their story and communicate like humans should. He's an in-demand speaker, workshop leader and coach, an award-winning communicator and a bestselling author. He's worked with great organizations including AARP, Allstate, Caterpillar, Coca-Cola and Lockheed Martin.

A 'Star Wars' Approach to Addressing Ageism

By Melissa Vela-Williamson, APR

I recently met fellow PR consultancy and agency owners from around the world at the PRSA Counselors Academy 2024 Section Conference. It was a homecoming for many Counselors members. For me, it was the first time I had met many of my online peers in person.

I was more than just a conference attendee at this experience. My topic was selected for a special IGNITE presentation during the conference. IGNITE presentations energize the crowd with fun and actionable tips in just 10 minutes. I agreed I was up for the challenge and then realized — wait, that's like a TED talk! Making an impactful point in just 10 minutes was a feat — but I guess the force was with me. My talk on "How to Fight Ageism like Yoda" was a hit. Here are the top points I shared with the crowd.

I'm not a huge "Star Wars" fan, but I wanted to tie creating a timeless brand to something relatable. Legendary Jedi Master Yoda is a symbol of aging well because his wisdom transcended his body in the first "Star Wars" movies.

Then, his image was reinvigorated and reimagined in the next series of films. And who hasn't seen Baby Yoda — or Grogu, the younger character's actual name — on merch lately? Analyzing Yoda can show us how we can proactively shape (and evolve) our personal brands.

Change with your brain.

Our brains are said to be built for fluid intelligence in the beginning phase of our lives. The brain is great at acquiring lots of information. Think about what a sponge you were in the first decade or so of your career. Then, as we age into midlife and beyond, that aspect of our brain intelligence declines.

However, our crystallized intelligence continues to increase and can increase from then on. This means we're better at picking up patterns and "seeing the big picture." The good news is that, like Yoda, we can be master planners, teachers, trainers and advisers as we age.

Evolve your image.

There's an unspoken pressure to be the right age, have the right look or come from the right place in certain careers. For PR pros, we can rise above superficial biases if we project a wise, timeless



brand. Dispute irrelevancy with wisdom. Our bodies *will* change as we age, but the wisest person in the room grows in value over time. But we can't get stuck in our ways.

Author Chip Conley says we should be "modern elders" and go deep in some areas but be curious and willing to learn new skills. We can mentor those coming after us and learn from them, too. Consider updating your vocabulary and even your attire as time passes.

Demonstrate your strength.

Those who stay calm during chaos and lead the way can earn great money and respect. Experience is a benefit during crises, and crisis communications and reputation management are specialties we



can show Jedi strength in as we age.

Evaluate all; adopt few.

I polled what pros wanted to hear about during this talk and most asked how to keep up with all the changes in public relations. Keep up by sharing that responsibility! Delegate monitoring for changes in the media, industry tools and what's new in the communication landscape to your team. Have those in the informational stage of their careers report back a summary of highlights — which helps them better synthesize information. Evaluate all the new shiny tools — but be strategic about what you adopt. Over 100 years old, the Page Principles of PR still hold value today.

As PR counselors, we shouldn't drop the fundamentals of practice for something that may be trending today but gone tomorrow. Our ability to decipher what's important and what's not will be priceless as life gets noisier. ❖

Melissa Vela-Williamson, M.A., APR, specializes in integrating public relations with DEI principles. She is an author, podcast host and boutique firm owner. Connect with her at MVW Communications.



On Learning and Our Mental Health

By Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA

“Ugh, I have a training I need to sit through.”

Ever felt like this?

Training and development can often solicit eyerolls and comments like, “Is this required?”

Something we may not have considered until recently, however, is the positive impact learning has on our brains.

Did you know workplace learning can be important for our mental well-being?

Brand-new research says, “People with a history of cognitively stimulating occupations during their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s had a lower risk of Mild Cognitive Impairment and dementia older than 70 years, highlighting the importance of occupational cognitive stimulation during midlife for maintaining cognitive function in old age.”

The good news is, in the PR profession, no two days are ever the same. The opportunity to take on new projects, work with new clients and in new practice areas is almost infinite. Add on the influence of artificial intelligence, and it’s an imperative for us to constantly learn.

But broad messages don’t mean anything if you can’t take intentional action on next steps.

What this means for you:

1. Make a commitment to learn something previously unknown to you in the business world at least once per quarter.

PRSA is the perfect start for members and offers a multitude of resources available. And if there’s a topic not covered, use the PRSA Open Forums and Member Directory to ask. You will receive quality responses!

2. Learn something new outside of our profession at least once per quarter.

One of my favorite offsite exercises to lead involves team members understanding not only what they want to learn professionally, but also learning skills for their personal life. Instead of cheesy ice breakers, discover what you can learn from one



another, and schedule some internal team development sessions and share tips on how to cook, garden, find cheap flights or whatever your passion may be outside of work. You’ll learn from one another and bond in a practical way and will feel good by learning and impacting others.

3. Add addendums to “must do” trainings.

The perception of training and development can often feel like, “Check the box, and just get it done.” This is typical of compliance training, for example. Rarely is the content designed exclusively for the organization, so if you can, then consider adding in an additional component that invokes discussion across your workstream to contextualize what you learned.

4. Identify a career path in leading and development.

If you have responsibility or influence on training and development in your organization, then this is a great way to impact the well-being of your employees. One of the biggest challenges of leadership and development is simply the communication of its existence, its relevance to the company and, most important, the relevance to employees. This is where our strengths in designing and executing strategic PR plans separate us as trusted advisors.

Above all else, make sure that these are experiences you enjoy, and ones that make you feel positive and accomplished.

What new activities are you trying out this summer, and how is it going for you? Please send me a note and let me know.

In the meantime, have a wonderful summer! ❖

Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA, is a senior communications executive and employee well-being consultant. His company, Chasing the Sun, empowers PR professionals to prioritize their well-being so they can shine in the family room and the boardroom. Before launching Chasing the Sun, Mark was an executive at Weber Shandwick and Edelman, leading award-winning campaigns for Adobe, Microsoft, Samsung and the U.S. Army. Mark served as president of the PRSA Oregon Chapter in 2016.

Tackling Ageism in PR as a Job Seeker

By Christina Stokes



Ageism is a widespread issue in the PR profession that does not typically get too much attention in DEI talks. Age discrimination involves treating an applicant or employee less favorably because of age. A 2022 index survey by Global Women in PR of over 400 women in 35 countries revealed that discrimination on the grounds of ageism is almost as widespread as gender discrimination.

So, while there has been an industry-wide effort to prioritize inclusion and diversity in recruitment, hiring and talent initiatives over the past few years in particular, is ageism still being overlooked? In short, yes.

In addition to having to justify a higher salary margin, the older jobseeker may face other complications and biases, unconscious and otherwise, from potential employers. At times, instead of simply valuing your many years of experience, questions are raised as to your ability to do the job, how up to date you are with technology, and even how long you plan to work before retirement.

There are laws in place to protect you. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) forbids age discrimination against people age 40 or older. Data on layoffs by age group is harder to come by, but statistics suggest workers targeted most frequently are at the youngest and oldest ends of the spectrum.

Ageism in the workplace can be subtle, but prevalent. In your PR job search, how can you avoid being the victim of ageism?

➤ Proactively add new things to your résumé and professional portfolio by taking courses on innovative technologies, platforms and tools available to PR practitioners. Read books, attend workshops and join relevant professional organizations. Talk about your learnings on LinkedIn with your peers. In interviews, be prepared to answer questions about how you remain current about rising trends in the industry.

➤ Target companies that are clear about how they value their diverse staffers, specifically their maturing workforce. It is important to pinpoint their work toward championing high-performing workers of all ages, providing opportunities to them, reskilling them and respecting their contributions. Pay attention if you notice

that the focus appears exclusive to emerging talent.

➤ As you move onward and upward in your career, continue to build and maintain your relationships with the press, in addition to evolving into more strategic roles. Think of it as diversifying and enhancing your skills instead of growing out of them. This showcases your agility as a professional, and also, this sort of continuous networking will keep you informed, inspired and well-connected within the media landscape.

➤ Position yourself as a mentor to the upcoming generation of talent, while still being receptive to their differing experiences, values and interests. As an industry veteran, you can find creative ways to showcase your knowledge as a thought leader. Speak on panels, join a podcast or write articles that will go out to the PR community. Sharing your expertise in complex communications issues and media strategies can both shape the next generation and boost the trust of your peers.



There is incredible value to be gleaned from the seasoned players of the PR industry: their professional experiences, leadership skills, media relations prowess, commitment to the organization and the sheer wealth of knowledge they possess. This segment of the workforce plays a critical role in shaping the reputation (and success) of their clients and organization.

I hope that — amid retention challenges, labor shortages and economic upheaval — employers and organizations begin to think more strategically about their aging workforce. ❖

Christina Stokes is the senior vice president and director of talent acquisition at Rubenstein. She is passionate about refining and enhancing employee engagement, company culture, and diversity and inclusion efforts. Twitter: @NewYorkRoses.



Overcoming Burnout

New Research Points to What Employees Need to Thrive

By David Grossman, APR Fellow PRSA

If you've felt that the pace of change has only accelerated since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, then you're not alone. Businesses were forced to pivot overnight to navigate regulatory upheavals, disrupted supply chains and shifting consumer behaviors. These adaptations, driven by necessity, transformed years of projected changes into immediate actions.

While changes during the pandemic were necessary to meet the needs of the moment, the reality is organizations have been pushing more changes to employees for almost a decade. In fact, Gartner research shows that in 2022 alone, the average employee experienced 10 planned enterprise changes.

This pace of rapid change has put tremendous pressure on employees, leaving a palpable “hangover” effect in its wake. In our work with clients today, we often hear how their workforce is burned out, fatigued from change and unable to catch their breath — but the path to addressing the root causes to ultimately improve employee well-being is unclear.

And so, at the beginning of this year, we set out to better understand the state of employee well-being in the U.S., seeking to uncover the main drivers of burnout (and conversely, what leads to a state of thriving), barriers to employee well-being and what we as communicators can do about it.

Our research, conducted in partnership with The Harris Poll, revealed three critical findings:

1. Widespread burnout is real.

76% of employees and 63% of managers feel burned out or ambivalent in their current position. However, while managers report their own high level of burnout and ambivalence, they're doing a poor job of recognizing burnout in their own employees — 89% of managers say their employees are thriving, while just 24% of employees feel a sense of thriving (a more

than 3-to-1 discrepancy).

2. Constant change is the primary reason for burnout for both employees (43%) and managers (50%).

For employees, other drivers of burnout include unnecessary work from leadership, high turnover and limited mental health benefits.

3. Managers play a critical role moving employees from burnout to a state of thriving. For employees who say they are thriving, the top indicator is a manager who is “invested in their success” followed by having an empathetic manager and senior leadership that respects work/life boundaries.

“This alarming rate of burnout should be a wake-up call for all employers. Why? Because the cost of burnout is simply too high to ignore.”

This alarming rate of burnout should be a wake-up call for all employers. Why? Because the cost of burnout is simply too high to ignore. Additional research from The Harris Poll indicates that 33% of U.S. hiring managers predict employee turnover will increase at their company this year. Multiple studies find turnover often costs companies 50%-200% of an employee's annual salary in lost productivity and rehiring costs.

In contrast, the ripple effects from focusing on employee well-being are profound and far greater than just about anything else leadership can do to build a thriving culture. When well-being is prioritized, employees are simply happier and just about everyone who encounters the organization — customers, business partners, prospective employees — feels that.

Sustained burnout and ambivalence come at a high cost for organizations, and

it's a problem that needs to be addressed on many levels. So, what can we as communicators do to help move our organizations from a state of burnout to create a thriving corporate culture?

I recommend starting by focusing on the following three areas in our control as strategic advisors to our organizations:

First, enable senior leaders and managers to be successful communicators. Put a strategic plan in place to elevate the voice of senior leaders to provide ongoing clarity and context to employees. Arm next-level leaders with resources, such as a communication toolkit, that they can customize to cascade consistent messaging across the organization and support them with ongoing training. Most leaders are put in a role because they've demonstrated the chops to successfully perform at a high level. But as we know, communication is a skill that must be honed, as well.

Second, work with senior leaders to help plan for and manage change fatigue. One of the superpowers of internal communications is having a bird's-eye view of everything happening across the business. With this view, it's imperative to help leaders prioritize what's most important for teams to focus on, as not all updates can carry the same level of importance. Pull the pieces and right stakeholders together to help make decisions about what happens when, while keeping in mind the impact that the changes taken together will have.

Above all, don't rush bringing employees along the change journey. Remind leaders that they have been digesting the change long before employees are exposed to it. Planned communication must incorporate change management principles — emphasizing the end-state, new behaviors needed, clarity of path and strategies to create readiness — to drive awareness, understanding and, ultimately, the desired change. Effective communication is your strongest tool to compress

the change curve for employees.

Third, make it a priority to communicate about well-being and create an environment for feedback. Most organizations have robust well-being resources, but they don't often get talked about enough. It's important to let employees know there's a place to turn to if they need help and that resources are available — both in the day-to-day and when major change occurs. At a leader level, encourage managers to conduct regular well-being check-ins with their employees. Simply asking how an employee is doing and demonstrating empathy goes a long way in positively impacting employee well-being.

At an organizational level, put mechanisms in place for ongoing feedback with clear actions to demonstrate the company is listening and acting. Traditionally, this is done through an annual employee survey. However, an important watch-out must be avoided: communicating survey results and an action plan once, and then putting it away until the following year — which leads to a sense for employees of being duped.

As communication professionals, your role is pivotal in transforming workplace culture from one of burnout to one of thriving. By effectively bringing together key stakeholders, you'll not only enhance employee well-being but also drive the organization toward its broader goals.

Embrace your power as strategic advisors: You have significant influence to shape outcomes and lead change. Move forward with confidence, leveraging your unique perspective and skills to make a meaningful difference. ■■



David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA is founder and CEO of The Grossman Group, a leading internal, leadership and change communications consultancy.

Prioritizing Mental Health

Tips for Communicators to Combat Stress and Enhance Well-Being

By Pam Fultz, M.S., APR

The summer season is often when many in the communications profession schedule vacations.

As communications professionals, we often schedule vacations during the summer season. While these breaks are intended for rest and relaxation, both physically and mentally, they may not always turn out that way.

Our busy lives, managing careers, homes and families, often make it challenging to slow down and truly unwind. This is where the importance of mental health comes into play, especially during our downtime.

Getting in a long run or intense

workout will support our physical health, but what about our mental health?

Making priorities

Tom Hofman, director of behavioral health training and education at Lee Health in Fort Myers, Fla., told me that it is vital to prioritize mental health because it affects many other areas of life.

“When a person has an overall sense of well-being, they have a life that is more satisfying,” he says. “They are more content with their family relationships, with their friends, with their careers and with their lives.”

We may thrive on stress in the



“Getting in a long run or intense workout will support our physical health, but what about our mental health?”

workplace, such as tight deadlines, crisis situations or last-minute projects, as they push us to achieve our goals and surpass organizational objectives. Just like pretty much anything, though, too much of it can produce negative instead of positive results.

“Stress can be productive and even healthy and helpful to the human body up to a certain point,” Hofman explains. “But if we start to go beyond that point for a long period of time, it starts to affect not only our mental health but also our physical health.”

Combating stress

To combat the effects of consistent stress and anxiety, Hofman recommends both short- and long-term stress reduction methods. If you do not have time for a weeklong vacation, then even quick one-to-five-minute brain reboots can be helpful to lessen tension and worry and to help you think more clearly.

Meditation and deep breathing techniques are effective ways to focus internally and calm your emotions. If you are not interested in slower-paced relaxation methods, then there are other options. Even participation in enjoyable

activities is helpful. Hofman says intense physical actions such as running change the chemistry in your body and lead to an antidepressive effect.

It sounds easy enough, right? Slow down, take some time for yourself and relax. Not so fast! Hofman says the brain will try to talk you out of relaxation exercises, so it is vital to recognize this internal battle when it starts and understand how to combat it.

Hofman notes, if we know that the urge to stop the relaxing activity is a natural way for the brain to retain control, then we can counter that the brain will be more alert and efficient when we are done.

If you still struggle to alleviate high levels of stress and anxiety in your life, then Hofman says do not hesitate to ask for professional help if you need it. ■

In Brief



Americans More Stressed, Sleeping Less, Research Finds

American adults are sleeping less and feeling less satisfied with the amount of sleep they get, a new Gallup poll finds.

The majority of U.S. adults, 57%, say they would feel better if they got more sleep, while 42% say they get as much sleep as they need. The findings reverse the Gallup figures last measured

in 2013, when 56% of Americans got the sleep they needed and 43% did not.

A quarter of adults surveyed say they get eight-plus hours of sleep per night, but the percentage sleeping five or fewer hours has risen to 20%. Just 36% of women say they get the sleep they need, versus 48% of men. Both figures are the lowest Gallup has measured for each group to date. Only 27% of younger women report getting the sleep they need.

Recent data shows that nearly half of all Americans, 49%, report frequently experiencing stress. Research suggests a strong connection between stress, sleep and overall health. In a vicious circle, people who sleep less are more stressed, and those who are more stressed sleep less. — Greg Beaubien



Pam Fultz, M.S., APR, is the senior community relations manager of Vi at Bentley Village, a retirement community in Naples, Fla. She also is an adjunct instructor at the University of Florida and Northeastern University. She serves on the APR Committee for PRSA and is a past president of PRSA's Gulf Coast Chapter.

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Catch the Sun

How Is Your Office Beating the Summertime Blues?

By Kelly Brockman

Summertime is here and your employees are most likely itching to be by the nearest pool. Or they just want to be outside to get much-needed vitamin D.

If they told you they were going to take their laptops and work remotely at one of these places, would you let them? These are the thoughts that go through agency owners' heads as we fight our own summertime blues.

Agency culture is a hot topic these days. The term "post-COVID" often annoys me, but the truth is, we are still living in that world. Giving employees flexibility and trusting them with it is something we've all adapted to — especially in the warm summer months when everyone is eager to be outside.

But what if you emailed your team and said pick four days this month, or every Friday, to work in a lounge chair by a pool or on a hillside in the sunshine. Would they think you were crazy? Disclaimers would be to put on a shirt, find shade and maybe turn down

the tunes for client calls. Also, make it clear that while they're enjoying this time, they need to be working.

The truth is, we all need to take care of ourselves. Communicators are often overstressed, overwhelmed and overworked. It's in our blood to work hard, and we thrive on it. But we can't do our best work or have a positive agency culture if we don't ever take a minute to slow down.

“Giving employees flexibility and trusting them with it is something we've all adapted to — especially in the warm summer months when everyone is eager to be outside.”

It is our job to make it clear to our employees that it's OK to take these breaks and to work while relaxing on a pool noodle if they're getting things done. Here are a few ideas to jump-start your summer and turn your company

culture up a few decibels:

➔ **Go on team outings.** Find a local baseball or soccer game and treat your team and their plus-one or family to the game, a hotdog and two drinks of their choice. Our team did this last year and had such a fun time that I personally don't even remember watching the game.

➔ **Give out a hall pass.** Pick Fridays or give employees a certain number of remote workdays for the summer months. Have your team send in photos and post whereabouts on your company social pages. Trust me, your job applicant pool will grow and, if your clients are getting the love they need and deserve, they'll cheer you on for being such a great employer.

➔ **Encourage bringing kids or pets to the office.** If you're hybrid, then let your team know they're welcome to bring kids and pets (if allowed) to work. It's hard during the summer with camps and child care, and this will help parents who may be in a bind since school is out.

➔ **Walk to lunch.** We all get busy and it's sometimes easier to bring lunch or get something delivered. But how awesome is it to get out, get steps and walk to a cool, local lunch spot? Go with your team. Don't stay behind.

➔ **Host impromptu happy hours.** Who doesn't want a fruity cocktail or mocktail after a long day? Or just a cold beer. The only negative to this is people may have plans, but the positive is that it's "impromptu" for a reason.

In short, just be flexible and have fun. We learn at an early age that this is what summer is all about, so keep that memory alive with your team. 🏖️



Kelly Brockman is a partner at McNeely Brockman Public Relations in Nashville, Tenn., and a member of the PRSA Counselor's Academy Executive Committee. Brockman has more than 20 years of experience in the corporate, non-profit, government and PR sectors.

A Nashville native, she enjoys cheering for her kids at their school and sports functions, spending time on the city's greenways and connecting old friends with new.

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Define Success

Demystifying Workplace Culture and Building a Strong Foundation

By Leah Gladu

I believe well-being is the outcome of a strong culture. Research from Gallup backs this idea, showing that employees who feel valued and supported are more engaged, which not only bolsters company culture; it contributes to increased company profitability.

But all too often, I see companies get caught up in what culture means as they try to build or change it. Culture is an abstract concept, and many conflate it with tactics like team lunches, group outings and book clubs. While these activities certainly contribute to a sense of camaraderie, they aren't culture.

Culture is not a set of activities; rather, it's a shared set of values. Tangibly, this shows up as workplace norms — how teams communicate, collaborate and resolve conflict on a day-to-day basis. These norms are the building blocks of an organization's culture, permeating employees' approach to work and, ultimately, how they feel about their workplace. For example, meetings where honesty is embedded in the culture are going to look different than meetings where polite deference is the norm.

Everyone helps shape and is responsible for culture — from executives defining company values to individual contributors offering ideas and solutions. Regardless of your position, though, building a strong culture starts with recognizing it's not separate from the work you do, but it's an integral part of it.

Consider how company culture influences your approach to daily activities

- ➔ Engaging stakeholders
- ➔ Setting and meeting expectations — and practicing accountability
- ➔ Delegating work
- ➔ Expressing opinions and solutions
- ➔ Scheduling and participating in meetings
- ➔ Rallying around one another during difficult times

“Culture is a journey that requires ongoing focus and investment from everyone.”

A strong, healthy company culture — where people come to work motivated, engaged and driven to effect positive change — will ultimately support a strong, healthy company.

While we're hearing more open conversations about workplace well-being and mental health, the fact is that well-being in the workplace is declining. Some recent studies highlight this:

- ➔ In Mind Share Partners' 2023 Mental Health at Work Report, U.S. workers' ratings have shown a continuous decline since 2019. Participants were asked to rate their overall mental health out of 10 in the past year. In 2023, 61% of participants gave ratings between seven and 10, a decline from 2021's 67% and 2019's 78%. To add to the decline, the most recent participants reported that



work has the greatest negative impact on their mental health.

- ➔ Deloitte's Well-being at Work Survey showed that less than two-thirds of workers say their physical and mental well-being are “excellent” or “good,” and only around one out of three employees feel their job has a positive impact on their physical (33%), mental (32%) and social (31%) well-being. The survey goes on to show an increase in participants who say they would consider leaving their current job for another company that would better support their well-being.

Why not be that company? Workplace well-being is more important than ever. It's a direct reflection of a company's culture and, when not prioritized, can negatively impact the bottom line.

How can you support workplace culture and well-being in your workplace? Start with building and reinforcing the foundation:

1. **Anchor in core values.** Identify the values and behaviors that are important to your company or team. They will serve as your cultural North Star.
2. **Show, not tell.** You know the age-old saying, “actions speak louder

than words.” Demonstrate the above values and behaviors in your own work and encourage others to do the same.

3. Integrate into daily practices. Culture isn't built on grand gestures, but in the smaller moments of work life. Find ways to tie your workplace values into your daily routines, whether individually or in your team.

4. Secure leadership buy-in. Help leaders recognize that culture and well-being have a strategic advantage. By educating leaders and having their understanding and support, it will be easier to influence policies and practices that enhance culture and promote well-being.

5. Be consistent. Culture and well-being aren't one-off campaigns or efforts to be recognized when convenient. They must be ongoing priorities that permeate how your company operates. Apply these steps one through four regularly and with purpose.

Culture and well-being may feel intangible and too big to tackle, but with intentional effort and collective participation, a company can foster a workplace where employees feel engaged, motivated and fulfilled.

When done right, your organization will reap the benefits, from employee satisfaction and higher retention to a positive reputation and increased profitability. Remember: Culture is a journey that requires ongoing focus and investment from everyone. ■■

In Brief



Employees Less Engaged Than Leaders Think, Research Finds

A May report from career management company Right Management finds that company leaders tend to overestimate employee engagement and loyalty.

The report found that 83% of leaders surveyed believe their workforce is fully engaged in their jobs, but only 48% of employees consider themselves engaged.

Three-quarters of employees surveyed said they'd like to stay at their organizations for the “foreseeable future,” but half were open to taking a job elsewhere. Highly engaged

employees were more likely to remain at their organizations.

To help retain employees and keep them engaged in their work, leaders should invest in developing the employees' talents and careers, particularly for mid-career and middle-layer workers, said Karel van der Mandele, senior vice president of Right Management North America. Mid-career and middle-layer workers were among the least engaged of those surveyed.

Only half of employer respondents said they had conducted an in-depth survey of employee engagement during the past two years. The resulting lack of awareness could contribute to the discrepancy in perceptions between management and workers regarding engagement, the report concluded. — Greg Beaubien



Leah Gladu is a dynamic communications executive with more than 20 years of experience in a constantly evolving industry. She has led communications for global companies, mentored some of today's most promising young leaders and served first as president and now CEO of KWI, a communications and management consulting agency based in Atlanta, where she's overseen exponential growth of the agency and its clients. To continue the conversation, connect with her on LinkedIn.

Remote Control

Leadership Strategies Adopted During Pandemic Endure Today

By Tim Johnson

tanakvason

In April 2020, like many owners of small PR agencies facing the pandemic, I was in a state of shock. There were so many unknowns. Would clients cut their budgets as the economy ground to a halt? How would my team react? What was I going to do about my hyper-expensive San Francisco office space, as people began working from home?

After it became apparent that the pandemic wasn't going away anytime soon, we saw that we had an opportunity to rethink how we operated UPRAISE, our PR and marketing firm, to make the agency stronger. Over time, we organized the strategies we learned during the pandemic into what we call the "4 T's" — techniques, tools, training and trust.

Techniques

Since we couldn't meet in-person during the pandemic shutdowns, we created new opportunities for our staff to

collaborate online. We continue this collaborative approach today, for example by pairing people to work on projects, rather than assigning those jobs to individual team members.

To make sure people understood their assignments and deadlines, we also encouraged everyone on the staff to overcommunicate with one another, in both top-down and bottom-up interactions. We still use this approach today. We also provide monthly check-ins to gauge the sentiments of our team.

Tools

Even before the pandemic struck, we were using work-management technology such as Asana, Google Drive and Slack to help us organize our assignments and meet our deadlines. But these tools became even more important once our staff started working remotely full

time. Communicating through these platforms remains the norm for us today.

In the post-pandemic era, we have come to view artificial intelligence as a valuable tool that can summarize complex issues, turn lengthy documents into easily digestible briefs and create first drafts.

“Training has always been an important way to retain employees, boost morale and maximize work quality.”

But for our agency, AI is just one way that we strategize and execute work for clients. We never put AI-generated content in front of clients without significantly reworking it first. We liken AI to an account coordinator who's just out of school — a lot of raw talent, but little experience.

Training

Another result of the pandemic and moving to an all-remote team was that our pool of potential employees expanded from the San Francisco Bay Area to the entire western United States. However, competition to attract and retain team members also grew accordingly.

Training has always been an important way to retain employees, boost morale and maximize work quality. For us, training our people is more important today than ever, since it helps bind our team together.

Small agencies often lack the resources to develop professional training programs. To overcome that obstacle, we've tried a few different approaches. For example, once a month we ask a team member to view a relevant webinar and then summarize it for the rest of us. In addition to helping the entire staff grow

professionally, our employees also hone their presentation skills.

Another way that we train our people is by assigning each employee a mentor from our senior-level team. Mentors and mentees meet once a month to discuss personal and professional goals.

We also involve every member of our staff in our weekly client calls. That way, even junior associates gain practice that will help them handle client situations later in their careers.

Trust

It's always been important for teams to trust their leaders and vice versa, but in today's remote-work environments, trust has become even more vital. Employees who might work with company leaders in person just once or twice a year have to trust them to make decisions that are in the best interest of the team.

To maintain that trust, leaders need to create situations where the team can win, sometimes in spite of what the client wants. Leaders must demonstrate how they've supported their employees when a client is displeased, for example. At the same time, building trust requires leaders to clearly explain bad news.

During the pandemic, we witnessed 20 years of change in only two or three years. The lessons that PR leaders learned will continue, but so will the need to continuously evolve our leadership styles, regardless of what's coming around the next corner. ■■

In Brief



delmaine denison

Research: Working Together in Office Sparks Collaboration, Creativity

Since employees in hybrid-work arrangements have some choice over when they come into the office, company leaders should offer a "workplace value proposition" that extols the benefits of working on-site, new Gallup research suggests.

Working in the office with colleagues helps people connect and collaborate, while also improving creativity and culture, Gallup finds. Giving employees compelling reasons for coming into the office is a strategy to make organizations more productive.

And while technology delivers some productivity benefits, it restricts the flow of communication and people's ability to sustain the focus and energy they get working in the office with others. Remote work can complicate tasks when people work interdependently. Some collaborations are better in person.

Being together also sparks creative thinking, Gallup finds. The report recommends that companies schedule time for people to gather and work together creatively. — Greg Beaubien



For more than 30 years, **Tim Johnson** has helped companies ranging from startups to the Fortune 500 in industries as diverse as agriculture, consumer electronics, financial services, many shades of tech and more. Prior to starting UPRAISE, Tim was the managing

director of Golin, Inc.'s San Francisco office and director of its worldwide tech practice.

A Time to Grieve

Creating Strong Family Leave and Bereavement Policies

By Joy Portella

My father recently died after a long life and a brief illness. In January, I made a trip from Seattle, where I live, to see him in New Jersey for what I knew would be our final visit.

Months earlier, I had tentatively planned to facilitate a workshop in New York City with a colleague during the same trip — not realizing how dire my dad's situation would be. I found myself mildly panicked on the way to the East Coast. I figured that if I got there on Wednesday and he passed away on Thursday or Friday, I could facilitate the workshop the following Monday — no problem.

It was as ridiculous as it sounds. The days and weeks after my dad's death were a blur of sorrow, nostalgia, family bonding and the odd minutiae of post-death planning. My mind was abruptly rendered foggy and flaccid. For weeks, I could barely hold or articulate a thought.

Needless to say, I did not make it to New York to facilitate that workshop. Once I communicated what was happening to my colleague, she immediately took it on as a solo act and insisted that I not think about it. Our client was understanding. Work-wise, I was incapacitated for a solid week. Once I reengaged, I was not my best self.

The whole episode forced me to think about how we deal with death and bereavement in the workplace, and how we can do a better job.

Have a strong policy.

First, check your employee handbooks right now and make sure that your company has a bereavement policy. If you don't, then create one and tell your team members about it. You don't need to start with an intimidatingly blank piece of paper. PRSA friends and colleagues can usually provide helpful examples and resources.

No matter the size or complexity of your organization, you don't want to be stuck doing guesswork about a leave policy when someone on your team is grieving. Most policies will detail how

much time team members can take to mourn parents, siblings, children and extended family.

Build in flexibility.

Every family looks different, and bereavement leave policies should be built to account for the intricate webs that constitute modern families. Some aunts or grandmothers act as moms, some cousins or close friends are like siblings, and some pets are like family members. (Before you roll your eyes at this last suggestion, think about the day your dog died.)

While a strong bereavement policy should be specific, it should also leave room for conversation with HR and leadership if team members need more time or different working arrangements during and after a loss.

“Employers that make bereavement time and benefits clear to their team members will have more healthy work relationships and stronger cultures.”

Recognize death as a process.

Sometimes death happens suddenly, but often it is preceded by a period of health decline that can take weeks, months or even years. Decline involves its own kind of grieving and, for many people, caregiver responsibilities.

That's why a strong bereavement leave policy should be complemented by a strong family medical leave policy. The latter is often equated with parental leave, but federal law mandates that it encompasses time off to care for a loved one.

Companies with strong cultures — even small companies that fall below the government's threshold to offer mandatory family leave — have bereavement and family leave policies that are mutually reinforcing.

Both policies need to be clearly spelled out, with a healthy dose of

flexibility, and team members should be encouraged to take the time they need. In my own situation, taking days off to take care of my dad while he was alive was as important — if not more so — than taking time off after he passed away.

Get real with yourself.

In the workplace, everyone needs to be realistic about what they can and cannot do after a loved one dies. Your focus should be on healing, not working. Being realistic doesn't mean you're failing or being lazy; it means you're human.

It also allows you and your colleagues to plan so that work can get re-located and done in a timely manner. The more real you are with yourself, the less stress there will be for your colleagues, clients and business overall.

Model good behavior.

For those of you who are managers or senior leaders, it's your job to model good behavior for others. If you play the hero and try to work through grief — and trust me, you won't do a good job — then it sets the precedent that your team members should do the same. That's bad for company culture and morale, and ultimately, it will be bad for business.

Be human.

The best policies are undone by poor implementation. For bereavement and family leave policies, HR and leadership must remember that our policies are built for human beings with complex emotional lives and deep interpersonal connec-

tions. Grieving is hard. It's not linear. You may be fine one day and a mess the next. In short: Grief knocks you on your ass. All organizations — including communication agencies — should recognize this complexity and confront it head-on.

Talk to your team members who are hurting, see what they need, figure out how you can support them, be patient, and then rinse and repeat. I was so touched during my dad's illness when colleagues reached out to send sympathies or just to talk. And I was immensely relieved to have strong family leave and bereavement policies that we implemented with conversation and care.

Our society hates to talk about death. It's unpleasant. It reminds us of our own mortality. We avoid it to the point where, when death finally happens, it feels aberrant or shocking.

But death is a normal part of life. We all need to take time to prepare for it, mourn loved ones, and celebrate their memories. Employers that make bereavement time and benefits clear to their team members will have more healthy work relationships and stronger cultures. That's good for everyone in an organization — during good times and bad. ■■



Joy Portella is the founding partner and president at Minerva Strategies LLC. She has more than 25 years of experience helping organizations communicate with media, donors, policymakers and other key audiences. Connect with her at Joy@minervastrategies.com.



Fran Rodriguez

PRSA Honors Top Campaigns at Glittering Anvil Awards Gala

On May 9, PRSA announced the 2024 Anvil Awards winners during a gala dinner at the Edison Ballroom in New York City, marking the 80th anniversary of the Silver Anvils.

PRSA Chair Joseph Abreu, APR, and PRSA CEO Linda Thomas Brooks welcomed attendees, who also heard from guest speaker Molly McPherson, APR.

"This year, we celebrate 80 years of honoring the top PR campaigns and tactics across the country," said Abreu. "Congratulations to all of our Anvil recipients and thank you for consistently demonstrating the vital role of public relations in uplifting our greater communities."

The winning entries covered various critical topics and causes, from campaigns to advocate organ donation in multicultural communities to initiatives designed to reduce opioid overdose deaths and promote climate-smart agriculture practices globally.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Best of Silver Anvil Award, which went to Dynamic Integrated Services (DIS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs Million Veteran Program (MVP) for their "Million Milestone by Veterans Day" campaign.

In 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched MVP to enroll 1 million veterans in its genetic research program. The program aims to enhance the understanding of how genes, lifestyle, military experiences, and exposures impact health and wellness.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, MVP had nearly 750,000 in-person enrollments. The pandemic, however, severely disrupted these efforts. In response, MVP and DIS leveraged a new online enrollment website and developed a comprehensive communications strategy to promote the digital portal.

DIS undertook a brand refresh, launched a stakeholder engagement network, expanded the direct email strategy, initiated MVP's first digital advertising campaign, and employed data-driven approaches to continuously evaluate and optimize their efforts.

On Nov. 8, 2023, just three days before Veterans Day, MVP enrolled its one-millionth veteran, achieving its goal and marking a significant milestone as the most extensive research program at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the world's most diverse genetic research program within a health care system. The campaign saw remarkable results, including a 621% increase in enrollments, an 857% rise in online users and an 80% surge in social media impressions compared to the previous year.

"As a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, winning the Best of the Silver Anvils is a true testament to the caliber of our team, the quality of our work and to the mission of VA's Million Veteran Program," said Nicole Carey, chief strategy officer of Dynamic Integrated Services.

During the evening, PRSA presented 47 Silver Anvil Awards, 22 Bronze Anvil Awards, 48 Awards of Excellence and 18 Awards of Commendation. Visit the PRSA website for the complete list of recipients, including agencies Finn Partners, FleishmanHillard and Ketchum, as well as leading brands such as Planned Parenthood, Delta and United Airlines, Aflac, McDonald's, 7-Eleven and The Library of Congress.



All photos by Albert Chau





imani kadir photography

What Reporters Want From PR Pitches

Press releases are what most journalists (72%) prefer to receive from PR professionals, Cision's latest "State of the Media Report" finds. When asked to describe the perfect PR pitch, relevance was the factor that reporters cited most often.

In the PR software company's 15th annual survey of more than 3,000 media professionals around the world, most journalists also want to receive direct pitches, story exclusives, original research and access to industry experts. Just 2% wish to receive telephone pitches. A majority of reporters surveyed, 64%, said PR pros should only follow up once after making a pitch.

Some 87% of reporters use the multimedia assets (images, data visualizations, videos, etc.) that PR pros include with their pitches.

To build strong media relationships, PR practitioners need to understand the challenges that journalists face. Among reporters surveyed, 42%

said their biggest challenge is maintaining credibility as a trusted news source and combating accusations of fake news.

Other challenges journalists face include a lack of staffing and resources, declining circulation and falling ad revenue. Reporters also cite decreased website traffic due to changes in Google's algorithms.

Despite industry buzz about artificial intelligence, fewer than half of the journalists who responded to Cision's survey said they use AI regularly. Some 26% cited the emergence of artificial intelligence as a top challenge for their industry.

A third of the reporters surveyed said that competing with online misinformation is a top challenge, while 22% named politicization of the press. Social media clicks and shares often seem to take precedence over keeping the public informed, the reporters said. Journalists also find themselves competing with content created by advertisers. — *Greg Beaubien*

Journalists used social media in 2023 to:

Promote or publish content
71%

Source information
67%

Interact with readers
63%

Sabrina Browne on Overcoming Health Challenges, Remembering What Matters Most

By Ken Jacobs

Sabrina N. Browne is a senior vice president in the public affairs division at Citigroup. She is also co-vice chair of PRSA's DEI Committee and co-lead of PRSA's Black Voices Affinity Group.

Prior to joining Citi in February, Browne was a vice president at BCW, where she advised Fortune 500 clients on earned media relations, strategic communications, executive visibility, product launches and campaigns, celebrity and talent relations, and DEI. In her philanthropic endeavors, she works with different organizations to advance menstrual health.

Here, she discusses creating a diverse environment, overcoming "DEI exhaustion" and surviving a brain aneurysm.



Taking the Lead

to diversity, equity and inclusion from companies and brands nationwide.

As co-chair of PRSA's Black Voices Affinity Group, I believe this collective awakening heralded a new era of social responsibility and inclusivity. However, as we stand in 2024, there is a concerning trend of some entities rolling back their DEI commitments.

In speaking with our affinity group members, we have learned how a diverse workforce brings varied perspectives and fosters creativity and problem-solving. Organizations seen as inclusive attract a broader consumer base.

Ultimately, we all have a role in shaping societal norms and values. By advocating for DEI, we hope to influence public attitudes and contribute to a more equitable society now and in the future.

How can any organization create a diverse environment?

I believe that sustained organizational commitments are essential for DEI to be successful from the classroom to the boardroom. Organizations should move beyond performative actions and work to embed DEI into their core strategies.

This includes long-term investment in DEI training and community engagement. Organizations can also develop strategic partnerships and programs that specifically target the needs of the communities they're trying to reach and engage.

With PRSA and the PRSA Black Voices Affinity Group, we regularly engage with communities to understand their needs and identify solutions for their challenges.

Some people say they're feeling "DEI exhaustion." How do you respond?

In 2020, the United States witnessed an unprecedented surge in commitments

Who are your leadership heroes or heroines, and why?

I am inspired by remarkable women leaders including Dr. Kathleen Rennie, APR, Fellow PRSA, chair of the clinical faculty of integrated marketing and communications at NYU's School of Professional Studies; Judith Harrison, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer at Weber Shandwick; and Kori Marchisotto, chief marketing officer at e.l.f. Beauty.

In the face of adversity, each of these remarkable female leaders has risen above challenges, broken barriers and redefined what it means to be an industry leader. Their influence extends far beyond the workplace, touching lives and inspiring countless others to pursue their dreams with courage and conviction.

You've been upfront about having had a brain aneurysm. How did that experience affect your leadership



“Self-care isn't selfish. When we invest in ourselves, we can better contribute to the people and things that matter most in our lives.”

approach and your life?

Surviving my brain aneurysm in the fall of 2007 instilled in me the traits of tenacity, hope and faith, which continue to fuel my career today. I learned that our lives are not just stories of career success; they are tales of courage, endurance and an unrelenting belief in the power of dreams.

Through my medical team, family and faith, I was able to navigate tumultuous waters and today serve as a beacon of hope and pillar of strength for other brain aneurysm survivors. There is life after your aneurysm, and I hope my story continues to inspire people in and outside the PR profession.

In addition to your communications career, you're a leader in a campaign to address "period poverty," which the National Institutes of Health defines as women having "insufficient access to menstrual products, education and sanitation facilities." What are the campaign's goals, and why is this issue important to you?

Nationwide, lack of access to menstrual-health products has prevented people from attending work and school and contributing to society at large. This is known as period poverty, and it impacts millions of Americans each day. Despite several U.S. states having

increased action to help end period poverty, which they've communicated on social media with the hashtag #EndPeriodPoverty," 56% of society believes the government should do

more to provide free products to those who need them, according to Always.

I have been committed to helping end period poverty since 2019. Through The Flow Initiative, we have distributed more than 1.3 million menstrual health products nationwide.

I enjoy giving back to my community. I grew up watching my parents help those in need, so that trait was instilled in me from a young age.

You're also a luxury content creator and an influencer. How do you find time to do so much?

Beyond the workplace and serving those in my community, I enjoy traveling abroad and sharing my adventures as a luxury content creator. I balance my priorities and passions by blocking off my calendar in advance. With apps like Motion, I can stay organized and prioritize my well-being and mental health.

Self-care isn't selfish. When we invest in ourselves, we can better contribute to the people and things that matter most in our lives. ❖

Ken Jacobs is the principal of Jacobs Consulting & Executive Coaching, which empowers PR and communications leaders and executives to breakthrough results via executive coaching, and helps communications agencies achieve their business development, profitability and client service goals, via consulting and training. Please find him at www.jacobscomm.com ken@jacobscomm.com @KensViews, or on LinkedIn.

Learn More

For more insights from communications executives, search the "Taking the Lead" archives at the PRSA website. Recent interviews include:



Soon Mee Kim, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, Omnicom Public Relations Group



Catherine Hernandez-Blades, global advisory board member, the World Communications Forum Davos



Ben Finzel, president, RENEWPR

What You Need to Achieve Your Professional Goals

By Monique Farmer, APR

Take a minute and think about some goals you have for your career. If you're just starting out, then maybe you want to earn your first promotion or prove yourself by flawlessly managing a new project.



If you're an industry veteran, then your goals may be more personal or aspirational — the desire to finally go out on your own and open a boutique firm, harness your extensive experience as a PR consultant, or create something meaningful and lasting.

Regardless of where you are in your career, before you can truly grow and move forward, you need something vital, but often elusive: self-confidence. You need to believe that you can achieve the goal in front of you, and you need the tools to overcome the fear of embracing a new challenge.

Putting in the work to achieve a professional goal can be scary. It requires us to think differently, take risks and potentially fail along the way. However, the moment we begin to identify what frightens us, pinpoint the obstacles in our way and take deliberate steps to overcome them, the realm of possibilities widens remarkably. This isn't just theory; it's a reality I've lived.

Take a leap of faith.

My personal journey is a testament to the fulfillment that comes from overcoming long-held fears and finally achieving a professional goal. For me, this involved a long-awaited move into entrepreneurship — and achieving my years-long goal of writing a book.

I had always wanted to start my own PR practice, but fear of the unknown and the uncertainty of independence kept me tied to more predictable career paths. By taking small, actionable steps toward my



goal and seeking out mentors who had once been in my shoes, as well as a community of supportive, like-minded people, I was finally able to realize my dream of owning my own firm that designs customized communications strategies.

But my professional dreams didn't stop there. For years, I harbored the desire to write a book — a dream that remained unfulfilled due to a blend of fear, procrastination and self-doubt. What propelled me to finally go for it was the decision to join a cohort led by Julie Landi at Live Your Vision, a company dedicated to elevating and empowering women.

It was in that cohort, made up of a group of amazing professional women, that I spent a year sharing my hopes, listening to the stories of others and learning the importance of taking that first, often scary, step forward.

“My personal journey is a testament to the fulfillment that comes from overcoming long-held fears and finally achieving a professional goal.”

During my time in Julie's cohort, I gained the confidence I needed to finally write “Chart Your Path: A 9-Step Method to Getting Unstuck” — a book that addresses the very challenges I faced. Through a combination of personal stories, others' stories and insightful observations and practical tools, “Chart Your Path” aims to guide readers through life's hurdles, helping them find their purpose and create the life they've always dreamed of. This supportive guidance applies to both personal goals and professional endeavors, helping readers apply practical tools and shared wisdom to their own unique paths.

Find the support you need to stay accountable.

Let's get back to that goal I asked you to think about earlier. What's holding you back? What's keeping you from going from “I've always wanted to...” to actually doing, achieving and enjoying the results of realizing your vision?

Now that I've made it from point A to point B, the first piece of advice I'd share is this: Seek out a support system, whether it's a cohort of fellow professionals or a mentor, someone who has walked this path before and can help guide you. Surrounding yourself with people who understand your aspirations and want to hear about your progress provides the en-

couragement and accountability you need to move forward. Every little, small step by every little, small step.

Harness this success story and make it happen.

While our dreams for professional growth and success may vary, we all have them. And while no one wants to settle for the status quo, so many of us do — simply because we feel scared and stuck.

Give yourself grace for what you haven't done yet, and then give yourself permission to go for it. Think about your dreams, reflect on what's in your way and then find the support you need to come up with a plan and stick to it.

I spent years wanting to open my own firm and wanting to write a book, and now that I'm on the other side of these goals, I know that they're possible. I finally made a long-held professional dream a reality, and so can you. ❖



Monique Farmer, APR, runs a PR/Communication Consultancy, Avant Solutions, and is the creator of Anvil Ready, an online communication strategy builder that aids the communication professional in creating communication plans. She teaches at the University of Texas at Austin.

Farmer previously spent 12 years working in the federal government. She also served as the director of communications for Nebraska's largest school district and in corporate communications for ConAgra Foods (now ConAgra Brands).

In Brief



Post-Pandemic, More Employees Want to Volunteer

More workplaces are offering employees volunteer programs to meet their desires for in-person connections and professional growth, the Associated Press reports.

Employee interest in volunteering surged after the pandemic-era shutdowns, as Americans reevaluated commitments to their communities.

In a survey by the Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals, more than 60% of respondents said they had increased their participation in employee volunteer activities last year. Employees are proud to work for a socially conscious company, said Jessica Rodell, a University of Georgia management professor who studies worker psychology.

“Volunteering can be one tool in a company's toolbox to help employees invest of themselves enough in the company to perform well, and then want to stay there instead of go somewhere else,” she said. — Greg Beaubien

PRSA Learning

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Virtual Workshop, June 4-5; 1-2 p.m. ET

Feature Writing Workshop

Ann Wylie, president, Wylie Communications Inc.

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, June 13, 3-4 p.m. ET

From Here to Sobriety: The Softer Side of Leadership

Leonard Greenberger, vice president, AKCG – Public Relations Counselors



CRISIS & REPUTATION ▶▶▶

Virtual Workshop, June 11, 13 and 18; 3-5 p.m. ET

Crisis Communications Workshop

Multiple speakers

WRITING ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, July 11, 3-4 p.m. ET

6 Ways to Reach More Readers

Ann Wylie, president, Wylie Communications Inc.

STORYTELLING ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, Aug. 15, 3-4 p.m. ET

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2024

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Jennifer Kramer, APR, Advocates for Mental Health Awareness and Impactful Comms

Jennifer Kramer, APR, is the senior PR manager for AMPP: Association for Materials Protection and Performance.

A longtime PRSA member, Kramer has served in leadership roles for PRSA's Akron Chapter and is the 2024 Chair of the East Central District.

In this Q&A with Editor-in-Chief John Elsasser, Kramer shares insights on her passion for PR, the multifaceted nature of her current role, and her courageous journey of opening up about mental health to inspire and support others in the profession.

Q You were a PRSSA member at Kent State University. Were you always interested in a career in PR/comms?

A My passion for PR and communications was ignited early in high school when I was deeply involved with the school newspaper, eventually serving as editor-in-chief. This experience fueled my love for storytelling and strategic communication.

Although I began at Kent State University as a journalism major, my trajectory shifted when I took an introductory mass communication course that featured public relations. I was captivated by how PR seamlessly integrates media, communication and strategy.

Joining PRSSA felt like a natural progression. The community at Kent State refined my skills and cemented my ambition to pursue a career in PR, driven by the power to craft impactful narratives and forge meaningful connections.

Q You've had the opportunity to work in various sectors — corporate, nonprofit, agency, county government and higher education. What do you enjoy most about your PR/comms work, regardless of the industry?

A I deeply value the role of PR and communications in facilitating understanding and fostering relationships across various sectors — be it corporate, nonprofit, agency, government or academia. My work consistently bridges

communication gaps between organizations and their diverse audiences, which is incredibly rewarding.

Additionally, my love for writing intertwines with my professional duties; crafting compelling narratives fulfills a lifelong passion and makes each project immensely enjoyable.

Furthermore, assisting individuals and organizations in advocating for meaningful causes greatly amplifies the impact of our efforts, adding a profound sense of fulfillment and purpose to my work.

Q What does your role entail today at AMPP?

A At the Association for Materials Protection and Performance, I lead external communications and public relations to elevate the materials protection and coatings industries and underscore AMPP's key priorities.

My role involves enhancing our organizational reputation through targeted outreach to members, media, policymakers and industry leaders. I manage strategic initiatives, PR and social media campaigns, and media relations while developing our spokespersons' media skills, managing crisis communications, and supporting our CEO and officers at public events.

These efforts aim to strategically shape public opinion and increase awareness of AMPP's brand and its critical missions.

The transition has posed challenges regarding remote work, particularly in maintaining the immediacy and spontaneity of team interactions crucial for swift decision-making and team cohesion. However, it also offers considerable rewards, including increased flexibility and the opportunity to connect with global colleagues and stakeholders. This enhances our collective perspective and allows us to be more inclusive and responsive in our communication strategies.

Moreover, working from various locations supports a work-life balance, leading to greater productivity and job satisfaction, which is essential for long-term commitment and success in our demanding field.

Q May was Mental Health Awareness Month. As chair of PRSA's East Central District, you opened up about your journey with depression and anxiety in your monthly letter to members. What inspired you to take the bold step of sharing your personal story?

A The decision to open up about my struggles with depression and anxiety in my monthly letter to PRSA members was deeply influenced by a desire to destigmatize mental health issues within our professional community.

My inspiration was twofold: first, to convey that experiencing mental health challenges does not diminish one's professional capabilities or personal value. More important, I wanted to share a message of hope and resilience, underscored by my daughter's journey as a suicide survivor.

Her experience has profoundly shown that there is light and success even after the darkest times. By sharing our stories, I hoped to emphasize the importance of support, understanding, and professional mental health care, reassuring others that recovery is possible and empowering.

This openness, I believe, can foster a more compassionate and supportive workplace where people feel safe to speak about their struggles and seek help without fear of judgment.

Q Your letter also cited statistics highlighting the prevalence of mental health issues within the PR profession. In your opinion, what are some of the underlying factors contributing to such high levels of mental health issues among PR professionals?

A The PR profession often involves high stress, tight deadlines, and constantly adapting to new technologies and shifting media landscapes, which can contribute to mental health challenges. Additionally, the expectation to always be "on" and professionally polished can prevent individuals from seeking help or expressing vulnerabilities.



Q Your call to action includes promoting open conversations about mental health in the workplace. How do you envision these conversations taking place, and what barriers might need to be overcome to facilitate them effectively?

A Open conversations about mental health in the workplace begin with leadership. Leaders need to create a judgment-free environment that encourages these discussions. Effective measures might include regular mental health check-ins, wellness training, and clear support channels. Overcoming stigma and fear of professional repercussions demands ongoing effort and education.

Q What messages would you like to convey to PR professionals who may be struggling with their mental health but feel unable to speak up or seek support?

A To those struggling, know that your health is paramount, and it's okay to seek support. You are not alone; your struggles do not define your professional worth or capabilities. Many have walked this path and found ways to manage their conditions successfully. Encourage dialogue, seek professional help, and utilize available resources. There is strength in vulnerability, and your well-being is worth advocating for. ❖

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Thought Leadership

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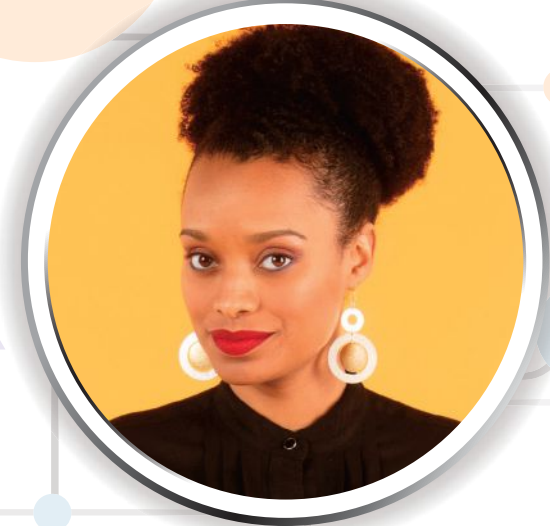
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