

PRSA
**STRATEGIES
& TACTICS**

**Writing in the
Age of AI**



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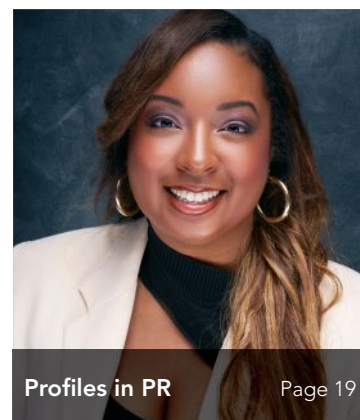
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Editor's Corner

For years, I've subscribed to *The New Yorker* and have done my best to stay current with the latest issues. But they will accumulate. I often promise to catch up during a beach vacation I never take. Alternatively, I use a system of placing Post-it notes on articles I intend to read. With so many yellow stickies, I contemplate whether marking pieces I *don't* want to read would be more effective.

Regardless of whether I have one or 12 copies on my coffee table, *The New Yorker* remains my go-to source for writing and creative inspiration — especially when I'm feeling tapped out. In my view, the magazine consistently delivers the finest journalism, criticism and writing all in one convenient place.

Our #QOTM on Page 4 involves a query posted on PRSA's LinkedIn page. For this annual writing and storytelling issue, we asked: "How do you overcome writer's block or moments of creative stagnation?"

Your responses surpassed those of any previous question, and while space limitations prevent us from including all of them, I wanted to share a selection here to inspire you:

"I've found ChatGPT to be a great new resource to help get the juices flowing. I feed it a couple of prompts related to a certain problem, and that usually helps get me started." — *Stephanie L. Graham, APR*

"I stop and completely get away from my electronics. Surfing or being with friends and loved ones and focusing on the moment has often provided me the most fluency when I am in the midst of writer's block. It's uncanny how, the moment I get back in my car, ideas freely flow. I used to think taking time off was setting me behind, and now I know it makes me more creative and efficient." — *Marisa Vallbona, APR, Fellow PRSA*

"I find the only way to cure my writer's block is to keep writing. If I'm writing for a client, I will stop and start writing for myself. In my journal, on a new Word doc. And I'll just start writing whatever is in my head. Once I do that for a bit, the other writing begins to come through because I stopped

focusing so much on one topic." — *Dana Stone*

"As an extrovert, I need to get out of my head when I'm creatively stuck. That was relatively easy to do when I had co-workers. Now, as a solopreneur, I've started using ChatGPT. It's what I use the tool for most frequently. It's a great brainstorming partner and can help me out of my creative ruts." — *Jessica Graham, APR, Fellow PRSA*

"Complete enough research on the topic at hand. A lot of times that I run out of ways to creatively explain or market something, it might be because I run out of things to say. Sometimes the best way to write about a topic is to first understand it the best that you can." — *Rebecca Roush*

"Another trick is to use my nondominant hand to do routine things like brushing my teeth, brushing my hair, eating... It's been shown to increase neural connections and spark creativity." — *Michelle Johnson, APR*

"When I was an advertising copywriter working under tight deadlines, I would copy and paste notes from my research or just basic ideas into the new document — anything to keep from looking at a blank page! It helped me to avoid writer's block, and it still works for me today." — *Jennifer Gwaltney*

Story time

Last month, we started posting a short video interview with one of our contributors with my editor's note online. In February, we'll hear from Jason Carlton, APR, marketing and communications manager with Intermountain Healthcare in Salt Lake City, who'll talk more about the power of storytelling that he shared with us on Page 11. ❖



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@PRSA tactics

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Tips for Creating Your Anvil Entries

The final entry date for Anvils submissions is Feb. 15.

Before the last deadline, Ann Andrews Morris, chair of PRSA's Honors and Awards Committee and longtime senior Anvil judge, offered these tips for entries (*this is an excerpt from a post that first appeared on PRsay on Jan. 11*):

- ➔ Study the list of Anvil Categories and don't miss new categories added for 2024, including Best Use of AI, Best AI Integration and Digital Innovations, and Best Solution Provider/Vendor.
- ➔ Avoid last-minute rushes; give yourself ample time to review your work and rediscover forgotten accomplishments.



- ➔ Adhere to all the guidelines, including font size and page length.
- ➔ Use the two-page summary to compellingly narrate your story, breaking it down by each section required in the Silver or Bronze categories.
- ➔ Always include your communications plan.
- ➔ Access PRSA's database of Anvil

Award-winning case studies in the categories you wish to enter to use as a benchmark.

- ➔ Collaborate closely with the person crafting the entry, ensuring they have all the necessary information.
- ➔ Thoroughly proofread your work; ideally, have someone not involved in its creation review it for any omissions.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of PRSA's Anvil Awards, the pinnacle of recognition for outstanding achievements in public relations.

Find entry information on the PRSA website.

Celebrating Black History Month

In February, PRSA recognizes Black History Month — a time to reflect upon and celebrate the rich history, culture and contributions made by the pioneers who have shaped American history as well as the PR and communications profession. The PRSA website provides a variety of resources, including webinars, tool kits and editorial content related to Black History Month and DEI.

Visit prsa.org and our social media platforms for more details and updates throughout the month.

Looking Back at 2023

On Dec. 20, PRSA published its 2023 Year in Review on prsa.org, showcasing the collective achievements and strength of PRSA and the profession.

The review includes updates on all areas of PRSA, including DEI, professional development, and member support, and offers highlights from marquee events such as ICON and the Anvils.

"During 2023, we focused on harnessing the power of all the PRSA constituencies. We built additional tools in our reporting portal, so Chapters and Districts have insight into more timely data," PRSA CEO Linda Thomas Brooks said in her introductory letter. "We also added to our library of on-demand professional development programming, allowing members to access the learning and information they need, whenever they need it."

The result? Member growth and increased engagement. Thomas Brooks reported that the professional membership number is at a two-year high, and over half of PRSA Chapters have strengthened their membership rosters.



PRSA Welcomes New CMO

Anna Yudina has joined the

PRSA team as chief marketing officer. She will provide strategic leadership for marketing PRSA's growing lineup of products and services and developing campaigns that drive increased brand awareness and membership.

Yudina was previously the senior director of marketing initiatives at The Toy Association, where she worked on member programs and public-facing initiatives like The Genius of Play, the national movement to raise awareness of the importance of play in child development. She previously worked as digital marketing manager at Sherwin-Williams.

Her expertise includes marketing strategy and execution, social media, website management and analytics, and marketing partnerships.

Yudina has a BA in literature from Ramapo College of New Jersey and an MBA in marketing from the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College in New York.



What's Trending

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



@PRSABluegrass We're thrilled to announce our 2024 board of directors. Through this team of committed communications professionals, we know 2024 will be a great year for our Chapter...

@PRSAMem Cheers to starting off the year with a productive 2024 Executive Board Retreat! Everyone came prepared with fresh ideas, positive energy and a solid plan of action. We are so excited to get things rolling, so stay tuned for more information in the weeks to come!

@PRSA We're thrilled to introduce Joseph Abreu, APR, CPRC, as 2024 PRSA chair. Joseph has been in PRSA leadership roles since 2006 and is committed to the organization's success. Please join us in welcoming him to this new role.



41 likes

kerrieleebrown Working for a global media company is extremely gratifying and certainly fills my cup - knowing that every word we etch or article we pen or snippets we post leave an imprint on lives near and far. However, there is also something about being asked to lend my experience on a more local level.

Thank you, @prsa, for inviting me to be on your latest panel of distinguished Denver journalists; where we discussed controversial and mainstream topics facing imminent members of the press today.

Denver is a melting pot of diverse, talented, and eclectic people from all walks of life who believe in heartfelt collaboration and community. In other words, it's the culmination of creativity and comradery in the most meaningful way.



#QOTM: How do you overcome writer's block or moments of creative stagnation?

"Take a walk and listen to some music. Walking can help spark creativity. Music takes your mind someplace else." — Kelley Chunn

"I read content that is related to the topic I'm writing about and that usually ignites an original idea or unique angle I can write from." — Melissa Chesmore

"Take a break and switch tasks. Lightbulb moments happen when you least expect them to." — Tricia B.

"Start with a stretch, seek out the sunshine and then take a lap around the block. Breathe in that fresh air for a fresh start." — Allison M. Mackey, APR

"I watch a new documentary. Sometimes learning something new sparks an idea. Sometimes your brain needs to change directions." — Michelle Johnson, APR

In Brief

Amid Backlash, Corporate ESG Efforts Fade or Rebrand

After years of investor backlash, political pressure and legal threats, corporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives are waning or being described differently, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. Many business leaders now avoid the abbreviation "ESG," which has become derided as "woke capitalism."

Advisers are proposing new ways to name such efforts, with phrases like "responsible business." Many CEOs continue to follow their companies' sustainability commitments, even when no longer discussing them publicly.

The ESG movement became more politicized after a spat in 2022 between The Walt Disney Company and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, which led to more than a dozen other state officials criticizing ESG initiatives.

As interest fades, some Wall Street firms are closing once-popular ESG funds. Investors pulled more than \$14 billion from ESG funds in the first nine months of 2023, according to Morningstar.

Companies Using Less Office Space, and Less Efficiently, Report Finds

Sixty-two percent of organizations have reduced their office portfolios since January 2020, with an additional 63% expecting to make further reductions by 2026, a new report from commercial real estate services firm CBRE finds. The report also finds that just 29% of survey respondents plan to expand their office portfolios in the next three years.

According to CBRE, 43% of organizations said they plan to decrease their office portfolios by more than 30% in the next three years. The reductions in office space will continue a trend that began during the pandemic.

In 2023, office-utilization rates, which measure how efficiently office spaces are being used, averaged 31%, compared to 64% before the pandemic. Hybrid work and underutilized office space have caused that disparity, CBRE says.

The imbalance of office space will not be resolved without "well-communicated changes" to hybrid policies, further reductions in portfolio size or improvements in workplace experiences that attract more employees to the office, the report says.



anthony weber



petitions

Job Ads With Wide Pay Ranges Give Bad Impression, Study Finds

As more states require employers to list the pay on job ads, companies that cite a wide range of salaries could undermine their recruitment, a study by Washington State University finds.

In experiments, participants were less likely to consider employers trustworthy when their job ads listed wide pay ranges. Prior surveys have found that people trust organizations that include pay ranges in their job postings more than organizations that do not.

In Washington State University's experiments, employers whose ads listed large pay ranges were seen less favorably than employers whose postings cited narrower ranges. Participants had even worse impressions of companies that listed wide salary ranges and said the pay would depend on the candidate's qualifications. Listings that said the offer would depend on the candidate's geographic location tended to evoke more favorable impressions of the employer.

Some participants viewed large pay ranges as positive, believing the top number indicated room for earnings growth without needing a promotion.



tonshik

On TikTok, Influencers Convincing Gen Z to Buy

"TikTok Made Me Buy It" is the new catchphrase for people making purchases after seeing viral videos on the social media app. As *Fast Company* reports, Instagram still drives more direct sales, but TikTok is helping brands sell to Gen Z consumers.

In surveys from Morning Consult, Kraft ranked first among members of Gen Z, who've shown an interest in nostalgia. Kraft's parent company, Kraft Heinz, is keeping century-old brands such as Heinz, Oscar Mayer and Jell-O relevant for young shoppers.

Brands are also benefiting from Gen Z using TikTok as a search engine, says Vickie Segar, founder of Village Marketing, an influencer-marketing agency. This past holiday season was the first during which brands could take advantage of TikTok Shop, its new e-commerce feature.

Amy Lanzi, CEO of the agency Digitas, says brands must devise authentic, organic social media strategies before paying for ads on TikTok. Says Lanzi, "You can't spend your way into TikTok."



alex rull

83% of job seekers say that it's more important to have a meaningful position than a high-level title.
— Harris Poll with Express Employment Professionals

Connect With Us Online

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



The Explainer

How to Upgrade Your Home Office

Now, more than ever before, home offices must be equipped for our professional lives. For many, these are the main spaces for their work; for others, these are part-time or hybrid workspaces. No matter their work schedule, anyone should be able to log on and work from home in a productive and comfortable place equipped with the right tools.

“Many home offices sprang up as a swift response to the pandemic, often cobbled together hastily,” according to an article in *Forbes*. “Now is the perfect moment to address those small annoyances, the ‘tolerations,’ which subtly sap your energy.”

To revamp your workspace, look around and identify the “nuisances” that you’ve likely grown accustomed to over the past few years — maybe it’s the stack of books elevating your computer monitor, the uncomfortable seat cushion in your chair or the weird buzzing noise from your old fan.

If something regularly bothers you or affects your workflow or mood, focus on that first — especially if it is a quick fix. For example, try a weighted cord holder to remove wires cluttering your space. Make the space work for you, and make it look and feel how you want it to be.

Also, think about your space as it relates to video and audio calls. Since you must be able to broadcast from home at any time, for any number of reasons, you should make your office Zoom-ready.

“Your backdrop during video calls should complement and enhance your personal brand,” the article says. So, make sure the area behind you is clean and is not distracting. You can also opt for a green screen or other digital effects so that your background fits with each meeting.

Additionally, ensure that you can take your office on the road. This means making your tools, files and workspace accessible no matter where you are, and also having the proper equipment.

Look for useful items that are high-quality, portable and will help you quickly and comfortably do your best work. With the proper setup and tools, you can reflect your personal brand and be your most productive self.

Whether you have a dedicated space for work or a makeshift remote area, try these tips from *Forbes* to help elevate your work-from-home experience. — *Amy Jacques*



1 Identify nuisances in your home office.



2 Prioritize and execute on what you’d like to fix.



3 Improve the quality of your lighting and sound.



4 Ensure that you have a solid background.



5 Make your office portable and accessible from anywhere.



Dispatch From Missouri

POSTCARD

“Small organizations want communicators with broad skill sets. They want to accomplish the same wide array of communications and marketing goals as big organizations but using fewer people. Strategic communicators who can do a little of everything will have job security in the age of AI.”

—Drew Douglas

Director of Communications, City of Nixa, Mo.
President, PRSA Southwest Missouri Chapter



By the Numbers



80% of companies plan to track office attendance in 2024, a Resume Builder poll shows. In addition, 95% of respondents said employees will see consequences if they don’t comply with the attendance policy.

By 2026, 80% of advanced creative roles will be tasked with harnessing generative AI to achieve differentiated results, requiring CMOs to spend more on this talent, Gartner finds.



Nearly 80% of Americans surveyed in a December *U.S. News-Harris* Poll survey say that higher education institutions are more worried about their endowment than creating leaders of tomorrow, and more than 60% believe they are prioritizing donors, press and other external factors over students.

The iPhone continues to be Apple’s chief moneymaker, contributing 52% of total revenue, per an analysis of full-year SEC filings by Visa Capitalist.



About 65% of employees said they suffered from burnout last year, a report from isolved, an HR management system, reveals. Employee burnout decreased by 7% compared to 2022, though it’s still affecting productivity isolved says.

Issues Trends

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

- ▶▶ Comms trends for 2024
- ▶▶ Executives say they’re still committed to DEI
- ▶▶ Boeing’s reputation takes another hit
- ▶▶ Harvard looks to move on after president resigns
- ▶▶ Welcome to the Gen AI election era
- ▶▶ Getting your employees AI ready
- ▶▶ How to have difficult conversations
- ▶▶ Office vacancy rate hits record high

The 3 Stories Every Professional Needs

By Rob Biesenbach



As PR pros, we're skilled at telling stories on behalf of our organizations, brands and clients. But it's just as important to tell *our* story — who we are, *why* we are and what we bring to the table.

In fact, we need multiple stories for multiple occasions and audiences. Especially since so few people really “get” what we do! Here are the top three.

1. The Snapshot Story

When you bump into someone at work or at a networking event and they ask what you do, you need to be quick and concise.

Instead of giving them your job title or listing your responsibilities, start with this simple value statement: “I [do what] for [whom] so they can [what].” As in:

- ☞ “I help companies communicate responsibly in a crisis so they can preserve their reputation and protect their business.”
- ☞ “I work with senior executives on their speeches so they can win over employees, customers and others.”
- ☞ “I work with the media to help ensure our story is told as fully, accurately and fairly as possible.”

If you sense they're interested and want to know more, you can expand on that opening statement with an example:

- ☞ “Did you hear about the product recall at XYZ Company? No? That's because we got ahead of the situation and communicated to consumers quickly and proactively.”
- ☞ “I recently worked with a CEO who had to face shareholders after a year of dismal performance. We crafted remarks that helped bolster investor confidence by showing that we understand the roots of the problem and have a credible plan for getting back on track.”
- ☞ “Right now, I'm preparing information and lining up sources for a reporter doing a piece on corporate environmental responsibility initiatives.”

These examples are stories. They have a character, problem and solution.

2. The Origin Story

This is a longer story you might share when you have the time to deepen a connection — perhaps over dinner with a client or when you're stuck at the airport with a colleague.

Start by positioning your career and

life in a broader, thematic framework: “From an early age, I was always fascinated by the news and current events...”

Build your narrative in a linear fashion, avoiding the “zigs and zags” that don't support the theme: “I worked on my high school paper, majored in broadcast journalism in college and went on to a successful career in television news ...”

Locate the key turning points and use detail to bring those moments to life: “It was fulfilling, but the night and weekend hours were killing me. The last straw was when I had to miss a dear friend's wedding. So, I went into corporate public affairs. The hours are more normal, and I still get to feed my appetite for the news — only shaping it instead of reporting it.”

3. The Skill Showcase Story

When you're interviewing for a job or pitching new business, it's important to “thin-slice” your experience with stories that are laser-focused on your audience. To use myself as an example, I have multiple stories tuned to different prospects' interests:



☞ If they're looking for help with presentation skills, I tell the story of how I was a longtime executive speechwriter who decided to practice what I preach by getting on stage myself. So, all my advice is road-tested.

☞ If it's storytelling, then I tell them how I honed my skills at Second City's training center, where every week for three years we'd create and workshop scenes in class.

☞ If their people are technical types, then I describe my work helping hundreds of lawyers communicate in a more natural way.

So, take an inventory of the interests and needs of the people you most want to influence, find a match with your skills and scour your experience for stories that meet the moment.

By preparing a variety of stories, you'll be better able to package your capabilities in an engaging and compelling way and position yourself for greater success. ❖

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.

Mattel Missteps With Cherokee Barbie

By Melissa Vela-Williamson, M.A., APR



Mattel, who seemingly made all the right marketing moves with the blockbuster Barbie film last summer, overlooked key details on a recent product launch.

The company made a new Cherokee Barbie but did not involve Cherokee tribes in the development of the doll. According to *The New York Times*, Mattel created the Barbie to represent Wilma Mankiller, the first woman to be elected chief of the Cherokee Nation.

While tribal citizens were excited about the effort, the inaccuracies of the portrayal marred the toy's release in December, drawing criticism from several members of the Cherokee Nation. For starters, the doll's packaging included the wrong set of Cherokee language symbols, which resulted in the package syllabary reading “Chicken Nation” instead of “Cherokee Nation.”

Angela Lot'oydaatno Gonzalez, a writer, bead artist and communications manager at Chugachmiut, a nonprofit that serves the seven Native tribes in the Chugach Region of Alaska, knows how a representative Barbie can uplift others.

Here, she shares her thoughts on Mattel's missteps and her Barbie creation.

Tell us about “Fish Camp Barbie.”

I grew up in Huslia, a small Alaskan village along the Koyukuk River. Our family fish camp, located 16 miles downriver, was the highlight of every summer. My fondest memories include playing with Barbie dolls alongside the river, where my creative mom and late Grandma Lydia made miniature fish camps using twigs, willows and diamond willow leaves.

Using what was around us as inspiration, Grandma Lydia crafted mini *thaabaas* [knives] from salt container pourers, and we eagerly awaited finishing a salt package to gift our Barbie's new *thaabaas*. We were instilled with the value of resourcefulness and cultural continuity.

In adulthood, I carried on this tradition by creating Fish Camp Barbies for my daughter and later for fundraisers supporting Native nonprofits. Despite some of Barbie's problematic aspects as far as cultural representation, I saw an opportunity to share Athabascan and Alaska Native culture with a broader audience, providing a representation of our way of life.

What can we glean from your creation of Fish Camp Barbie?

As we say to our leadership and clients, a goal of going “viral” doesn't always

mean what they think it means or have the desired outcomes. However, some things can help get your message out.

Being available and responsive to media inquiries was also key. I made sure to give accurate information and descriptions of each item, and I also gave my daughter credit for her contributions. I shared the photos and videos and gave the media permission to share. It was picked by local, statewide and a couple of national Native media outlets.

What PR lessons do you take away from the Cherokee Barbie mistakes?

Consultation is key. Go beyond “checking the box.” Pay for an authentic language speaker when using American Indian/Alaska Native languages. If you wish to honor a person, culture, tribe or language, take those extra steps to double-check what you are putting out there.

Be transparent when you make a mistake, apologize and outline how you will fix it. Overall, I am very encouraged to see Mattel making more Indigenous Barbies. It is important for children to see themselves represented in toys.

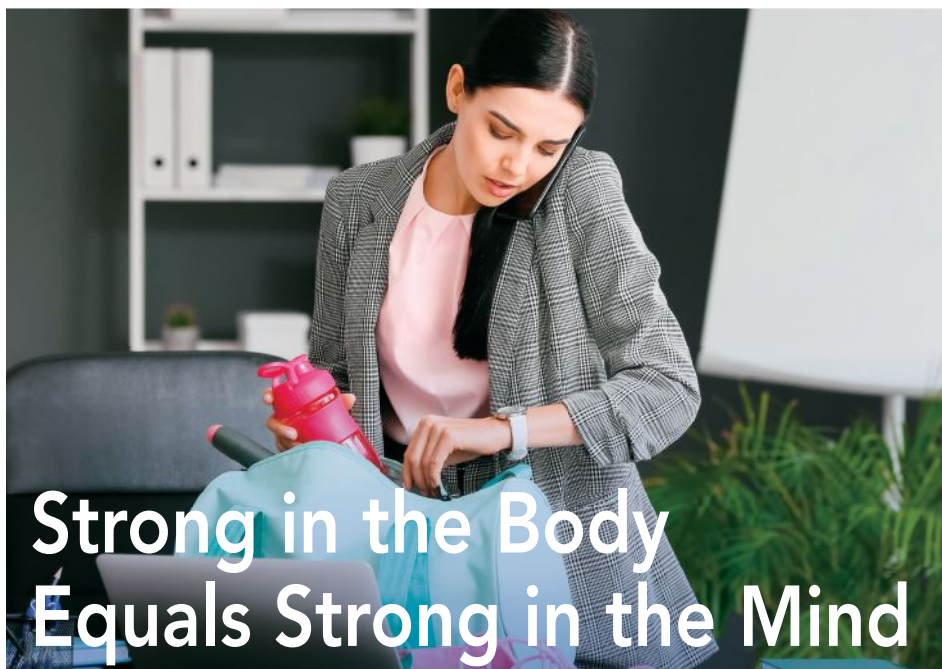


How can PR pros best work to honor Native groups or cultures?

Reach out to Alaska Native/Native American people to uplift their stories. Create a space for stories and Indigenous representation. Learn about the harmful effects of cultural appropriation. Learn about land acknowledgment and take steps that go beyond that.

Ask more than one Native group/culture when you are doing something. We are not a monolith. I am a Koyukon Athabascan Den'a, and I cannot speak for other tribes, cultures and languages. While we have some similarities, we have different cultures, ways of life and languages. It could be like asking a Chinese person to speak on Japanese culture. ❖

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 MWW Communications.



Strong in the Body Equals Strong in the Mind

By Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA

The amount of wellness marketing we receive at the start of every year focuses greatly on cardio and diet. As you wake up in February and look for more inspiration to help your mind and body, I want you to consider something different: strength training.

A consistent strength training regimen is essential to keep our bones healthier and our joints stronger. My sleep quality improves at least 30% when I do consistent strength training in the morning. My mood is better. My focus is sharper.

And these are just the short-term benefits.

Researchers have found a 10 to 20% reduction in the risk of early death from all causes — and from cancer and heart disease specifically — occurred when people did approximately 30 to 60 minutes of muscle-building workouts per week.

If you're interested in some ideas to incorporate strength training for minutes a day, then there are three things I want you to buy. As a collective, these items can cost under \$100. And yet, when used consistently, it will give you priceless benefits to your health.

➡ The first is a weighted jump rope. Jump ropes are tremendous cardiovascular tools, and when combined with weights, they are incredibly powerful. Starting with a one-pound weighted jump rope — which is *a lot* heavier than you may think — will do wonders for your arms and core. If you're a frequent traveler, then there are even ropeless weighted jump rope options to pack in your luggage and use in your hotel room or gym.

➡ The second is a weighted vest. These are wonderful, low-impact options to help burn more calories by adding resistance. As we head into springtime soon, use a weighted vest while working from home during your walk-and-talk calls! These vests come in various colors and sizes and have scalable weight op-



tions. Ensure you're adjusting the vest and feel comfortable wearing one before long walks.

➡ The third is a kettlebell. Kettlebells are magical devices for the best all-around strength and cardio workout. Ten to 15 minutes with a kettlebell two to three times weekly will work wonders for you. Kettlebells also come in various weight sizes and colors, so start with lower weight and adjust as needed; there are even kettlebells with adjustable weights. I highly recommend speaking with a certified kettlebell coach who can help you with the proper form and technique.

And, again, if you're a frequent traveler, sometimes hotel gyms don't have kettlebells. Don't fear! You can purchase attachments to pack so you can use regular dumbbells as kettlebells.

Before starting any strength training program, please ensure that you use the proper form and techniques. Find a local personal trainer or resource online to learn how to use these products. Ensure that you're spending at least 5 to 10 minutes per exercise to properly warm up and cool down. Also, make sure that you boost your protein intake to repair your muscles faster.

Finally, when starting your strength training, give yourself a few days to overcome those early-onset aches and pains. Your muscles are waking up and it will take some time to recover. They will!

In no time, you will not only see the changes to your mood and sleep, but you will also notice that you feel better in your clothes.

Please let me know what steps you're taking in your physical health journey! ❖

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.

5 Things Job Seekers Want to See

By Christina Stokes



In the complex dance of job hunting, where candidates must tiptoe through a maze of opportunities, even the earliest encounter with a potential employer sets the rhythm for the entire journey. From the first glance at your job listing to the pivotal moments of the interview process, certain elements shine as beacons of appeal for those in pursuit of more than just a 9-to-5.

After the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's clear that job seekers aren't just chasing a paycheck. Expectations today pivot toward more than just the role itself, and every step of the process is meaningful. They are looking for career advancement, greater flexibility, better company culture and authentic leadership.

Let's unpack the key elements that top the wish list for talent today.

1. A tailored, pleasant candidate experience: Going through multiple rounds of interviews, assessments and résumé revamps is exhausting for a job seeker. It's sadly common for candidates to be ghosted, subjected to poorly managed processes and worse. It's unfair, and ultimately, a waste of everyone's time.

When communication between the company and the applicant is personalized, clear and quick, and when information is easy to find, it sets a very positive tone. Candidates appreciate being treated with respect, and a little bit of kindness goes a long way, too.

2. An application process that is seamless: When you post an open job online, apply to it yourself. Is your career portal mobile optimized for applicants on the go? How long does it take to complete the application?

Slow processes, a lack of transparency and poor communication will hurt your talent acquisition efforts. Candidates want to feel seen and have their efforts valued by a potential employer. If the application process is too complicated or takes too long to complete, then you might be losing talented job seekers.

3. Easy to schedule interviews with critical team members: I recently said to a colleague, "We're all out of time." Being mindful of this, it's important to be thoughtful and fair when scheduling interviews with candidates.

Also, only include critical team members (i.e., key decision makers) in the process, and make sure that they are trained on conducting inclusive and targeted interviews. This will create a better overall experience both for the applicant and for the internal hiring team.

4. Flexibility across the board: In our post-pandemic working world, flexibility is still top of mind to job seekers.

Flexibility in terms of where we work, for sure (i.e., on-site, virtual, or hybrid), but also flexibility on where and how interviews are conducted. If someone is working full time, then stepping away for interviews that will last for a few hours might not be possible during the workday. Utilize virtual interviews when possible and consider reserving in-person meetings for the last round. Virtual interviews are a time and cost saver for everyone, and they can create more inclusivity and diversity in your talent pool.

5. Clear feedback at each stage of the process, from application to hire: This tip is directed at the person (most likely the talent acquisition lead, human resources executive or recruiter) who is primarily responsible for candidate communications.

It's so important to follow up with candidates after every completed step in an interview process, to gather and deliver feedback, to provide updates on timing and to offer a sense of what might be next if they are selected to advance in consideration. If they're not selected to move forward, then this is still valuable. You have still fostered a positive experience, built a strong relationship and represented your organization in the best possible light.



Encourage your team to focus on acknowledging and prioritizing the elements that matter most to applicants. Be it transparent communication, a glimpse into company culture or opportunities for growth, employers will improve their hiring processes and increase their ability to attract the top talent out there.

Here's to more interviews that feel like conversations, opportunities that spark excitement and career paths that leave everyone saying, "This is where I want to be." ❖

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.



AI Action Steps

Writing Effective ChatGPT Prompts

By Sharon Kerr

If you're feeling a bit stumped when it comes to getting the most out of large language models like ChatGPT and Google Bard — you're not alone. In fact, about 6,600 Americans Google "ChatGPT prompts" every month in their quest to generate more useful results.

Rather than endlessly hunting for a prompt to copy and paste, master writing these five prompt patterns to gain better control over ChatGPT's responses and make its outputs more consistent.

Prompt formulas are effective because they tap into the data, words and question patterns that ChatGPT has already mastered.

1. Leverage a persona.

A persona prompt is one of the most basic and useful patterns because it enables us to interact with ChatGPT the way we seek advice in the real world — ask an expert.

The pattern is simple: "Take on the persona of [insert role] and [insert task]." Examples include:

👉 "Take on the persona of a plastic surgeon and discuss how the launch of [insert product and its value proposition] will impact your clinical practice."

👉 "Take on the persona of an investigative tech reporter well-versed in cybersecurity. Ask me 15 thoughtful, difficult questions about [insert topics] to help me prepare for an interview."

👉 "Take on the persona of a financial analyst well-versed in biotechnology and advise how you would cover [insert company name] after receiving the following earnings release [attach earnings release draft]."

A persona prompt can also be used as a rule to create a brainstorming partner, such as: "Take on the persona of a public relations guru who is well-versed in product launches. When I ask you questions, provide strategic, creative and detailed responses."

2. Focus on your audience.

If you're looking for ideas to appeal to a specific target audience, then use this modified version of the persona pattern: "Generate [deliverables, e.g. ideas, taglines, etc.] for X that appeals to [insert persona]."

Examples include:

👉 "Generate 10 creative taglines for a disease awareness campaign about seborrheic dermatitis, which is often mistaken for extreme dandruff, that appeals to women between the ages of 25-45 in the U.S. The tone should be colloquial, but serious."

👉 "Generate five product launch PR campaign ideas for a new line of men's grooming products that appeals to athletes."

👉 "Generate a six-paragraph press release for an AI-focused product launch that appeals to national/consumer tech reporters and bloggers."

For some of these prompts, such as producing a press release, providing additional context will help ChatGPT to provide a more useful output. Consider providing key messages or attaching existing documents to the prompt such as a fact sheet.

“Prompt formulas are effective because they tap into the data, words and question patterns that ChatGPT has already mastered.”

3. Give ChatGPT rules.

Rules can be useful to help ChatGPT to generate more considered answers as well as constraining answers for companies/brands that require outputs in a specific style.

Even with effective, prompt patterns, it's crucial to shift your mindset from transactional to conversational.

Just as you wouldn't anticipate receiving a client-ready answer every time you ask a colleague a question, ChatGPT benefits from collaborative conversations.

Therefore, mastering the art of posing follow-up questions to refine the initial response is essential.

To aid with follow-up questions, use this prompt after you've received the first output from ChatGPT: "Whenever I ask a question, recommend a better question and ask if I'd like to use it instead."

This can also be applied to generating better images, such as: "Whenever I request an image, recommend a better prompt to generate the image and ask if I'd like to use it instead."

To constrain answers for companies/brands that require specific styles, formulate a rule: "Whenever I request X, do Y." Examples include:

👉 "Whenever I ask you to generate content, use a friendly, but professional tone."

👉 "Whenever I request a press release, use as little jargon as possible and refer to 'patients' as 'people with X disease' instead."

Rules can be used in ChatGPT's window for one-off chats or to customize a GPT that can be used repeatedly.

4. Use examples.

You can train ChatGPT by instructing it to produce a specific output with prompts or you can show it how to produce the output you want. This is particularly helpful if you're looking for it to follow a specific line of thinking or have a repetitive task that you would like it to finish.

A good rule of thumb is to give it three specific examples that show a clear pattern. Use prefixes to help ChatGPT to learn the pattern.

Say you've conducted a horizon scanning workshop to identify potential PR issues and you're now putting together an issues preparation play-

book. You'd like to include risk mitigation strategies for each potential issue identified.

Potential PR issue: An influencer posts a negative opinion about another drug in the company's portfolio.

Risk mitigation strategy:
👉 Only engage brand-friendly influencers.

👉 Include a clause in the influencer contract prohibiting negative commentary on any drugs within the company's portfolio and include a list of the drugs by brand and scientific name.

👉 Highlight this parameter in the influencer brief and during the influencer's onboarding call.

👉 Monitor the influencer's feed for mentions of other drugs within the company's portfolio.

Potential PR issue: An influencer promotes a competitor's product.

Risk mitigation strategy:
👉 Only engage influencers who are not in active contracts with competitors.

👉 Include a clause in the influencer contract prohibiting promotion of a direct competitor five posts before or after the contracted posts. Include a list of direct competitors' drugs.

👉 Highlight this parameter in the influencer brief and during the influencer's onboarding call.

👉 Monitor the influencer's feed for mentions of competitors' drugs.

Potential PR issue: An influencer posts controversial content in their feed.

Risk mitigation strategy:
👉 Only engage influencers who do not post about political, religious or socioeconomic topics.

👉 Include a clause in the influencer contract requiring the influencer to act professionally and that the company is allowed to cancel the contract with

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Unlock the Art of Creative Harmony

5 Ways to Elevate Your Next Writing Project

By Monique Farmer, APR

If I were to guess, then I would bet that one of the key strengths that drew you to a career in public relations is a talent for writing. Working in PR gives us the opportunity to put our writing skills to work in really interesting ways — telling important stories, creating compelling narratives, and connecting with the media and our audiences through the written word, whether we're writing pitch emails, articles or social media posts.

There's no doubt that PR writing is a strategic process. After all, we need to be able to craft content that moves the needle and gets our clients or organizations measurable results. But it also requires a high level of creativity. We need to think big, think differently and try new approaches in order to be heard.

I've always loved to write, but before I was penning press releases, I spent a large part of my childhood writing original songs. Not only was songwriting fun, but it was also a really satisfying creative process. After I put in the hard work of writing, I could step back and see all of my creativity — and all of the individual pieces and parts — come together to make something really unique and engaging.

At their core, PR writing and songwriting aren't very different from one another. And if you look at the songwriting

process, you can find ways to enhance your day-to-day work with a new level of creativity.

Here five helpful ways to infuse some rhythm, harmony and creativity into your next PR writing assignment:

1. Find your creative roots.

In PR writing, it's easy to get so focused on the end goal (what do we need to say? What do we need to sell?) that we fail to give ourselves room to truly be creative. For your next project, get into

“At their core, PR writing and songwriting aren't very different from one another.”

songwriter mode and approach your writing with an open mind.

2. Create your melody.

What is the tone of your piece? What do you want the reader to feel? By think-

ing about your audience and deciding first if your piece should be humorous, informative, emotionally compelling, etc., you'll be able to move forward confidently and write with a more consistent approach.

ing about your audience and deciding first if your piece should be humorous, informative, emotionally compelling, etc., you'll be able to move forward confidently and write with a more consistent approach.

3. Choose your hook.

What is the key takeaway of your piece? What compelling core message do you want stuck in the reader's head? Whether you're writing a 500-word release or a 50-character social post, ensuring that you have a clear, compelling and actionable message at the heart of your piece is essential.

4. Write the verses.

What is the story that supports your hook? What are the essential details readers need to know? This is where your story can unfold with strategy and creativity, as you assemble the essential details in a logical, engaging way.

5. Finally, add your title.

Step back, look at what you've written and find a phrase that sums it all up — communicating your key takeaway in a

memorable way. Your title is the first thing your reader will see (and in some cases, if they're scrolling quickly, it's the only thing they'll see), so this is your chance to be creative, concise and informative.

Our favorite songs stick with us, and good PR messaging should too. As PR pros, we are communicators, connectors, creators and composers. It's our job to take the information our audience needs to hear and package it up in a creative, memorable way. This isn't always an easy task, but if you approach your next project as a songwriter, then you just might find that all the pieces come together beautifully. ■■



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

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immediate notice if they perceive the content to reflect poorly on their brand.

➔ Highlight this parameter in the influencer brief and during the influencer's onboarding call.

➔ Monitor the influencer's feed for controversial content. If any controversial content is posted, then immediately ask the influencer to remove it.

Potential PR issue: Influencer deletes a contracted post prematurely before the contract period ends.

Risk mitigation strategy: From here, ChatGPT will fill in the risk mitigation strategy that follows the pattern of in-

fluencer criteria, contract clause, onboarding and monitoring/action protocol.

5. Let ChatGPT ask the questions.

If you want ChatGPT to do the heavy lifting in the conversation to generate a deliverable, then this can be a really helpful pattern: "Ask me questions about [insert topic] until you have enough information to suggest [insert output goal]. Ask me the first question."

Here's an example: "Ask me questions to create a three-pronged communications strategy and tactical plan to launch [insert product]. You should ask questions until you have enough information about the key messages, audience, goals,

key performance indicators, etc. Ask me the first question."

This pattern is also helpful for interactions that require training such as spokesperson preparation before an earned media interview. Pair a persona pattern with this flipped interaction pattern to create a mock Q&A.

Another example is: "Act as an investigative tech reporter well-versed in cybersecurity. Ask me 20 difficult questions about [insert topic(s)]. After I answer each question, act as a media trainer and provide suggestions as to how I could have answered each question more eloquently and on-message (messaging attached) [upload message document]. Ask me the first question."

Mastering these five prompt patterns empowers communicators to harness the full potential of ChatGPT and similar LLMs. By tailoring inquiries, setting rules, and providing clear examples, you can enhance your interactions and generate more valuable deliverables. Happy prompting. ■■



Shalon Kerr (née Roth) is an award-winning author and regular contributor to PRSA's publications. In 2018, she founded PR-it, a health care PR firm powered by a global collective of independent experts who are curated into virtual dream teams to help biotech, pharma and

healthcare companies/brands reach their goals through strategic public relations, health care communications and marketing magic.



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Acting Out

Using Theater Techniques in Business Writing

By Ken Scudder

Few professional business writers have refrained from attempting more “creative” forms of content. Novels, screenplays, short stories, operas, plays — you name it, we’ve probably started it, made it about a third of the way through it, became discouraged and put it aside for “more pressing matters.”

In fact, for most of us, our first love was writing creatively. We “fell into” business writing until we could finish our personal masterpieces. As Joseph Heller wryly asked in “Closing Time,” “Whoever starts out with a dream to succeed in public relations?”

But succeed we must — and do. This doesn’t mean, however, that we can’t use the tips and techniques from our more creative endeavors in our livelihoods.

For decades, I tried to keep these two worlds apart. I would “bang out” my “work,” and “hone” my “art.” I was being ridiculous. Once I got past this ignorance, I realized that using my creative brain at the office not only produced better copy, but it also made it more fun.

And I started putting more and more of what I learned and observed in the office into my creative work (which, sadly, led to my writing too many comedy sketches about TV interviews, but I digress).

The trick is deciding on what tips and techniques to use from your various creative pursuits. I’ve found the theater to have the most relevance in my work, albeit with one caveat. In theater, we build from a beginning to an end.

In business, we value getting to the point quickly. Despite this, there are ways to use theatrical flair in business writing. To wit...

Conflict

We are told early in English class that all writing is based on conflict. Man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. ma-

chine — this is the basis of storytelling that predates Aristophanes. Conflict is essential in theater — Hamlet would not have lasted five centuries if the Prince simply came home, said hi to his mom and uncle, and married Ophelia.

Conflict is also helpful in business writing. While you should get to the bottom line quickly, you can explain the conflict that led to any decision you are explaining. Don’t just tell your reader: “We’re opening a new factory in Switzerland.” Explain how your team overcame challenges setting up a facility so far from your current operations, and then why you believe that this is your best decision.

“When you write, whether for yourself or someone else, you must know what you want that writing to make an audience do, say, think or feel.”

Character arc

In the best traditional plays, all the main characters are on a journey. They start the play in one situation or mindset and find themselves in a different one by the end. The best writers show that journey throughout the work. In business writing, this can be very effective, especially in a speech.

Start your speech with an announcement. Then, explain how you got to this point, especially if it represents a 180 degree turn from where you were.

Of course, you don’t want this to be the bulk of your talk — I have spent much of my career advising corporate speakers not to tell me the process but, instead, tell me the result. You can include some of the process, as long as it is interesting and relevant to your audience.

Objective

In every play, in every scene, in every line on a stage, an actor must know what

they want in that line, scene and play. They must know what they hope to gain from saying that line or doing the action in the stage directions. All business writing should work the same way.

When you write, whether for yourself or someone else, you must know what you want that writing to make an audience do, say, think or feel. Do you want the listeners of this talk to change how they are working? Do you want your readers to call their member of Congress and demand action? Until you know what you want them to do, you cannot write your best copy.

What’s my motivation?

Ah, the cliched actor question. In every scene, an actor must know why they are doing what they are doing. Obviously, this is related to objective — most likely they are taking a specific action because they believe it will help get closer to their objective. But why do they want that objective?

Similarly, in our professional writing, we need to know why we, or more likely the person we are writing for, want the audience to do what this piece will get them to do.

Most often in business, the reason is simple — the bottom line. As “Monday Night Football” producer Don Ohlmeyer said, “the answer to all your questions is money.” But there are other motivations, including greater efficiency, improved staff morale, and dealing with a situation before it becomes a problem or a crisis.

‘Birdseye’

One of the most pernicious and self-defeating tendencies in corporate America and government is revising things right up to the deadline. We seem to think if someone is giving a speech at 4 p.m. on Friday we should be rewriting it until 3:55 p.m. that day.

While revisions right before the talk can and will be necessary based on

changing circumstances, 90% of the time these last-minute edits could have been, and should have been, done much earlier. In theater, the term “Birdseye” means the show is “frozen.”

The script is what it is, the blocking is what it is, the sets, lights and sound are done — now it’s time to perfect the delivery of it. You should do the same with your business writing. And the way to do that is...

Rehearsal

Almost everyone “practices” their speeches. Hardly anyone “rehearses” them. What’s the difference? Rehearsing is a deeper dive into the delivery. It’s not just standing where you’re going to stand, reading the words and then saying, “OK, we’re good.”

It’s figuring out the best way to deliver the talk. It’s trying different ways and hearing which works best. It’s asking questions about the script: “Should I sound concerned in this part, or confident?” This is only possible if you get enough time to rehearse, which means finalizing the content earlier and only changing things that *absolutely must* be changed.

It is highly unlikely that your intro to an annual report will be performed by Viola Davis and Sir Ian McKellen at the Old Vic Theatre. That doesn’t mean you can’t use some of the same style and structure you used in your dramatic exploration of your subjects in that report.

The goal, as always, is to keep your audience engaged so they feel what you want them to feel — the same goal as every playwright. Use these techniques and then take your bow. *Exeunt.* ■



Ken Scudder has provided media training, presentation training, crisis-communications training and consulting, as well as writing and editing, to business leaders, celebrities and politicians for more than 20 years. Contact him at mail@kenscudder.com or kenscudder.com.

The Power of Stories

How to Bring People Together and Motivate Action



By Jason Carlton, APR

“You want to shove *what* down my throat while I’m awake?” I asked my doctor, more loudly than intended. A few minutes earlier I had been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, or an abnormal heart rhythm. The shape of my heart was irregular; one of my heart valves wasn’t closing properly and the muscle was weak.

What was worse, however, was that I was at an increased risk of a blood clot forming in my heart, breaking loose, making its way to my brain and causing a stroke. Yikes!

The solution for me was to swallow a long, pinkie-sized tube, while coherent and talking, so the doctor could check my heart for clots. If I was clot free, they would fully sedate me and shoot electricity through my chest to kick my heart back into a normal rhythm.

I was nervous, and YouTube searches to better understand the procedure didn’t calm my fears. I found a distinct lack of patient stories outlining the procedure.

A year later, my heart was out of rhythm again and I needed to undergo the same procedure. So, this time — being the

communicator that I am — I allowed my procedure to be shared live on Twitter as 1.21 gigawatts shot through my chest. OK, so it was only 200 joules of electricity — after all, I wasn’t a DeLorean trying to travel through time.

My story was picked up by cardiologists at hospitals throughout the United States, with many sharing it with their patients to help them understand the Transesophageal Echocardiogram (TEE) and subsequent cardioversion procedure.

Why does storytelling work?

As you read through my story, what went through your mind? Were you standing next to my bedside watching the procedure happen? Were you thinking about yourself or someone close to you who underwent a challenging medical

procedure?

You likely became part of my story.

In the book, “Master Storytelling,” the authors explain, “When you tell a story with a plotline and characters I can relate to, I respond on multiple levels. Not only do I understand what you’re telling me (cognitive level), I place myself within your story and feel it (emotional level). I access my own storehouse of experiences and my mirror neurons make your story mine, pretty vividly, if not literally.”

What makes a great story?

In your communication efforts, are you using stories to connect people? Or are you appealing to their logic with facts and figures? While data can persuade people, it’s the story connection that can inspire them to act. According to the late

“Stories bring people closer together. They offer insights into others’ lives that help us relate to one another and discover what we all have in common.”

Steve Jobs, “The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller.”

Our English teachers taught us that all stories need a beginning, a middle and an end. While true, a great story needs a few more ingredients if it’s going to build a connection with your stakeholders.

According to author Jerry Borrowman, a great story must:

- ➔ Raise curiosity
- ➔ Create suspense
- ➔ Involve a conflict (a moral issue or solving a problem)
- ➔ Resolve the problem in unexpected ways to relieve the tension (people like resolution)
- ➔ Be believable
- ➔ Be relevant

A great story, told correctly with the right details — and leaving the wrong details out — can increase the odds of your information being digested and move your audience to action.

How to tell a story

One of my favorite stories is from the Disney movie, “Up.” Why? Because it tells an incredible love story without a single word. A young, introverted boy meets an outgoing young girl. They marry and the movie dialogue goes by the wayside. You see visual snippets of their life together — sharing joys, tragedies and heartaches — which sets the premise for the whole movie. It’s a great example of how to show, not tell, a story.

One of my mentors often shared the requirements for telling a good story. He said, stories must...

- ➔ Have an objective and not bury the lead
- ➔ Start by telling the story, not telling *about* the story
- ➔ Share the right details, but not the wrong ones
- ➔ Oh, and have a conclusion

Since audiences have short attention spans — and they’re getting shorter by the minute — the third point above is crucial. If you include the wrong details — those things not important to the progression of the story — the story will get easily lost.

How to find the stories

As communicators, we most likely feel comfortable telling stories. The biggest challenge is finding them. While many organizations and industries are different, here are six ways you can find stories worth telling:

1. Remember that stories beget stories. As you start telling stories about your organization, other stories will surface.

2. Ask for specific stories. For example, talk with people and let them know, “I need a story about someone who has worked here more than 10 years.”

3. Listen for good stories in meetings. You’re the storyteller, so pay attention for those small comments that could lead to big stories.

4. Wander the halls. Those impromptu water-cooler conversations can tune you into stories that you may not have heard about.

5. Read thank you/comment cards. Does your organization provide a way for people to provide feedback? Look through those to identify potential stories.

6. Watch social media channels and read online reviews.

Conclusion

Stories bring people closer together. They offer insight into others’ lives that help us relate to one another and discover what we all have in common. But as communicators, we must be more than storytellers — we have to be great storytellers. That ability will connect your messages with your audiences and drive you toward achieving your goals and objectives. ■■



Jason Carlton, APR, is a marketing manager with Intermountain Health in Salt Lake City, and loves telling stories to connect with people. He’s passionate about PRSA and serves on the PRSA Health Academy Executive Committee and PRSA Utah Chapter board.

Lesson Plan



Learn About Writing by Teaching Others

By Michelle Franzen Martin, APR

About 25 years ago, just after I had completed a master's program, a college called and invited me to campus to learn about an opportunity to teach a writing course there. I thought it was a job interview. Instead, they handed me a book and a syllabus and told me the class I would teach was starting that night.

At the time, I was writing for an advertising agency. I had previously been a newspaper reporter. I thought I knew a lot about writing. But then my students started asking *why* different forms of writing are written a certain way. They taught me that I was still learning about writing, too.

During the 10 years that I taught others how to write, I became a better writer myself. It's been 15 years since I last walked into a classroom, but those lessons have stayed with me in my work as a PR professional.

Make a checklist of writing traps to avoid.

At the beginning of every semester, I would ask students to honestly assess their own writing skills. This included listing the writing errors they knew they

were prone to make. All writers make mistakes, but not every writer knows how to spot them.

Compiling a personal errors checklist reminds us to double-check — and even triple-check — our drafts for common pitfalls. For example, I tend to leave out prepositions when I write. I remind myself to find and fix those errors before I send an article, a press release or an email.

“During the 10 years that I taught others how to write, I became a better writer myself.”

On your checklist, leave a blank space where you can jot down what you want to improve in your writing. Maybe you need to write better headlines, to learn to leverage AI or simply to brush up on your grammar. The best writers never stop learning.

Dig deeper.

I showed the classic film “Citizen Kane” in many of my courses. “Rosebud”

was the dying word of the protagonist, Charles Foster Kane. It represents the lost innocence of his childhood, a riddle that could never be solved. It's a reminder to never stop asking questions. I urged students not to accept things at face value and to always dig deeper. That also meant they should challenge themselves and one another about what they write.

In a news writing class, I taught students to ask sources one last question that might seem meaningless but could change the angle of the story. In corporate communications, asking why a product is positioned in a certain way can help inform a communications plan.

In public relations, digging deeper might mean asking “how?” or “why?” Your public will undoubtedly want to know more, and so will the news media.

Learn to teach others.

The first time I entered a classroom as an instructor, I was unprepared. I wasn't ready to teach a class on a moment's notice, or for the questions the students would ask. “Should this verb be singular or plural?” they wanted to know. “Should I write ‘who’ or ‘whom?’ Should this be an independent clause or a de-

pendent clause — and why?” I decided to learn everything I could about grammar.

As time went on and I realized how much I had learned from teaching, I asked my students to be guest teachers in the classroom. They would explain concepts to their classmates and answer questions. When the student teachers weren't sure of an answer, we would find it together.

There is much to gain from teaching others. In PR, you might ask a team member to share their screen during a meeting to show how they did something, even if it is something new to them. They will learn from talking through it.

We can also learn by asking ourselves how we did something. And then, as my students always reminded me, be sure to ask yourself, “*why?*” ■



Michelle Franzen Martin, APR, is the manager of system and community PR for Michigan-based Corewell Health. Her more than 25-year career in marketing and communications has included in-house and agency positions in health care, education, nonprofits and utilities. Connect with her on LinkedIn at [mfranzenmartin](#).

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Not the Same Old Story

To Help Audiences Learn, Create Interesting Narratives

By Pam Fultz, M.S., APR

Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year for 2023 was "authentic." As communications professionals, we know that every message we send personally or craft for clients must be real and true.

To achieve authenticity in our messages, we tell true stories. With specific purposes in mind, we produce messages for targeted audiences. Whether the goal is to motivate, empower or energize, we seek to enlighten audiences through our narratives.

Educating audiences might mean training employees, informing external stakeholders or teaching students. But these varied approaches with different audiences all have the same intentions: to convey information, ensure understanding and build relationships.

Stories connect facts to emotions.

Judy Whitcomb, a certified Berkeley

executive coach, is also a national learning and development strategist, speaker and trainer. She tells me that storytelling is the key to learning. Her primary focus is helping organizations with their internal communications, but Whitcomb's insight about teaching by telling stories applies to many kinds of audiences.

"One of the most effective ways to spark learning is to engage a learner's emotions," she says. "The key to their hearts is story. People are inspired to change and think differently not just by a set of facts, but by emotionally connecting with the ideas you are trying to teach."

As a community relations facilitator and adjunct college professor, I agree that stories connect the emotional to the logical in audiences. As a teacher, I use stories to grab the attention of my students, paint pictures in their minds

and encourage them to engage in discussions. Typically, it's easier to get students to share information with their peers by having them tell their own stories.

As an outreach professional, I use a data-driven storytelling strategy that combines facts, compelling narratives and images that audiences can easily comprehend and recollect. This approach to communication helps motivate stakeholders to act.

Whitcomb says storytelling can be a valuable tool throughout an organization. Whether to reinforce company values and successes or promote change initiatives, these narratives help audiences comprehend the information more clearly. Stories connect with an audience's emotions, which helps them learn and motivates them to adapt.

Messages enveloped in stories may also be easier to remember. According to Jennifer Aaker, a professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, stories help people recall information up to 22 times better than facts alone.

Compelling stories help students and other audiences remember information that benefits their studies and their work. As communications professionals, let's continue to hone our storytelling skills. ■■



Pam Fultz, M.S., APR, is senior community relations manager of Vi at Bentley Village, a retirement community in Naples, Fla. She is also an adjunct instructor for the University of Florida and Northeastern University. She holds a Master of Science degree in corporate and organizational communications from Northeastern University in Boston. She is a past president of PRSA's Gulf Coast Chapter.



Top Tech-Writing Tips to Simplify and Streamline

By Becky Lowicki, APR

From AI to ChatGPT and more, it's often a challenge to convey complex topics for general audiences without getting mired in techspeak, which creates more eye-rolling than understanding.

The good news is that you don't have to be a DevOps wizard to bring lay language connectivity to readers by heightening your writing technique with these tech-focused tips:

Less is more

While it might be tempting to write as much as possible to ensure readers understand the topic with the thought that the more words the better, what's more useful and effective, yet truly more challenging, is targeted writing in a clear and concise way using fewer words with focused intent.

Editing with purpose enables the reader to grasp understanding without weeding through erroneous fluff. Think of it as precise pruning, if you're a gardener — difficult, yet yielding better overall results.

Data storytelling

The ability to weave a narrative by letting the numbers speak for themselves



helps support the general theme within technical topics. Be careful, though, to ensure that the data selected provides a useful picture, rather than overwhelming the reader with a litany of statistics that don't enhance the content.

For example, think about results-oriented datapoints that inform the reader of progress to date, improvement (or decline) and any end points or summary stats, and don't forget to include a bench-

mark starting point of comparison for readers to see the stat story for themselves.

Tech teaser text

Think of tech writing in terms of leading readers on a journey — while complex, it's your job to simplify by crafting teaser text, or breadcrumbs on a trail of content that builds upon each nugget within each graph.

For example, guide your readers through sequential thought processes that answer basic questions about the subject matter, project or process by asking queries for lead-in graphs that engage the reader as an active participant vs. a static standby.

Subheads that address the "what's in it for me" concept are prime examples, including why does this matter, how do I..., and tell me more. By linking the thought process sequentially, the tech story unfolds for the reader in a way that not only makes sense, but also answers

fundamental questions within any technology piece.

Human-centered approach

While the tech frontier will always continue to provide eons of content ripe for writers to craft, what's most critical to remember is that humans are the connective thread through readership and engagement throughout the technical evolution to date and the path forward.

Using a persona-based, human-centric approach provides the ability to not only enhance your writing skillset, but also to continuously improve your approach throughout the complex journey by keeping the simplify and streamline mantra as the foundational focal point. ■■



An award-winning executive communications writer, **Becky Lowicki, APR**, is a strategic change management leader in the energy sector who serves on the PRSA Houston board of directors as chair of the Chapter's Ethics Committee. She earned both a master's and a bachelor's in journalism/public relations from The Manship School of Journalism of Louisiana State University where she was a founding member of the PRSA Chapter.

On the Same Wavelength

Steps for Responsible Storytelling in Science

By Susan Stipa



The public's appetite for deeper science and "knowing how things work" is palpable. This hunger is fueled by the issues we face each day — from managing disease to confronting our climate crisis to rethinking the global food system — and, solution-seeking citizens are craving answers.

At its best, responsible storytelling in science has the power to incite positive change, equipping readers with the knowledge to make more informed decisions about their health, their work and global responsibility. At its worst, shaky, unreliable reporting can perpetuate misinformation, ultimately leading to confusion and a growing mistrust. The stakes have never been higher.

Don't underestimate your audience.

As science storytellers, it's essential that we begin with the foundational assumption that the general public *can* understand well-articulated (albeit simplified) science stories. Our inquisitive audience is filled with community leaders, teachers, policymakers, health care providers, activists and even investors — a group whose buy-in becomes critical to

the advancement of science.

And, as the world continues to become more technology-driven, people will continue to seek out information, making storytelling in science ever more critical. But responsible writers can be hard to find. The onus is now on us, the storytellers, to deliver the facts in a way that makes them not only accessible but captivating enough to spark inspiration and action.

Provide an outside perspective.

While a science background is necessary for medical writing, ghostwriting for scientists, and other more rigorous types of writing, you don't need to be a scientist or an engineer to write strong science stories for a more general audience.

In fact, an outsider's point of view can be powerful, helping to connect seemingly rigid research findings to a bigger, more profound story. And yet, it can still be intimidating to tackle more technical subject matter.

For those who may find this type of storytelling daunting, remember to lean into your inner curiosity — your

inner scientist — to help ask the right questions. The goal is to listen, observe and find the hidden gem, the angle that makes the story sing by virtue of having a unique, outside perspective.

“As the world continues to become more technology-driven, people will continue to seek out information, making storytelling in science ever more critical.”

After all, isn't that where our readers sit? If you've had a lifelong fascination with some sort of science, like astronomy and the stars or rock collecting, or even understanding the types of medication your family takes, then these are indications that the inner scientist is there.

Below are a few more tips to help you bring important scientific findings to life through responsible storytelling.

Research your subject... again and again.

Gain a foundational knowledge of the subject matter — you cannot ask the “silly” questions without knowing what you don't know. Conduct research, make a list of terms you don't recognize, and then do more research on those terms to get your bearings.

Layer your interviews. Interview others before interviewing the main subject-matter expert. Everything you learn in science builds on top of previous learning, so use that scientific method to test the theories you develop in each

new interview.

Ask your question and then pause. You won't fully, and may not ever, understand someone's story through research. Give your interviewees a chance to share their story in an authentic way by creating an environment that allows them to do so. Ask open-ended questions. An anecdote or memory may share additional insight that may shift your perspective.

Find the hidden gem. (It's there.) Constantly ask yourself: “What is absolutely fascinating about this story/this science that even the scientists don't see?”

Write it once; write it 10 times. Rewrites are critical to scientific storytelling. Pretend you know nothing about the subject as you proofread. Slim it, trim it and then add information where the logic breaks down. But make sure it tells a story — and, most important, explain why this science matters to them.

Go a step above peer review. Pressure test your piece of writing with a scientist. They're the experts and will ultimately guide you toward an accurate, compelling story.

We live in an era where technology is ingrained in our lifestyles and information is at our fingertips. Responsible storytelling in science has become key in not only disseminating vital information to a more savvy, curious society, but also in advancing the life sciences industry via excitement, understanding and investment.

You don't have to be a scientist to share significant findings with the world, but you do need a willingness to learn, to embrace an outsider's perspective, and to assume the responsibility necessary to bring exciting new discoveries to light. ■

In Brief



Restoring Trust in Science Requires Better Communication, University Researchers Say

During the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists often stumbled when trying to publicly explain

their evolving knowledge of the virus and how to prevent infections, Boston University says.

Scientists and academics who communicate with one another in specialized technical language suddenly found themselves speaking directly to the public. Few of them had the training to do so, which exacerbated misinformation and distrust in science. As Boston University writes, academics have a responsibility to translate technical jargon into clear, succinct

language the public can understand.

To rebuild trust in science, higher education institutions themselves must also improve how they communicate their research, Boston University says. Universities should invest in communications training; write Op-Eds, personal essays and explainer articles; produce podcasts; collaborate with journalists; and engage with social media through Instagram reels, TikTok videos and other multimedia formats, the school says.

When communicating with the public, scientists and public health officials must understand different audiences and tailor their messages accordingly, Boston University says. — Greg Beaubien



Susan Stipa is an executive vice president at the life-science-centric agency CG Life, where she brings her thirty years of experience in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, financial services, and health care-related worlds to help inform client strategy and facilitate media engagement with her clients' stories.



People Posting on Social Media Less Often, Surveys Find

Lots of people still check their social media accounts every day, but fewer are posting anything, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. Many social media users now favor a more passive experience, surveys find.

A report from data-intelligence company Morning Consult revealed that people say they've become more guarded about sharing details of their lives online. Among U.S. adult respondents with a social media account, 61% said they've grown more selective about what they post.

Meanwhile, a perceived decay in the quality of social media platforms will drive 50% of consumers to abandon or significantly limit

their interactions with social media by 2025, according to research firm Gartner, Inc.

In response, Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok are investing in private user experiences such as messaging. Adam Mosseri, head of Instagram, said the app's users are mostly using its direct-messaging feature. The companies are making interactions more secure and encouraging people to post to an intimate audience.

In a survey from Gartner, more than half of respondents say the quality of social media has deteriorated in the past five years. They cite toxicity, misinformation, bots, ads and suggested posts as reasons. Cassius Hudson, a 31-year-old pharmacist in Columbus, Ohio,

says he lost interest in social media because he felt pressured to look a certain way in his posts.

Recent events, such as the Israel-Hamas war, have made people reluctant to share their views publicly, for fear of judgment and retribution, says Pamela Rutledge, director of the independent Media Psychology Research Center.

Isaiah Hug, a 24-year-old Marine officer in Carlsbad, Calif., says he hasn't posted to Instagram for more than a year. "I don't need to add more friction to my life and have people bickering about who I voted for or what I think," he says. — *Greg Beaubien*

Why It Matters That 'Authentic' Was the Word of 2023

By David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA

I'm sure it came as little surprise to many that Merriam-Webster announced in December that "authentic" was its annual "word of the year," meaning it was a high-volume dictionary look-up and a concept that people were clearly thinking and writing about.



According to Merriam-Webster, authentic has a number of meanings, including "not false or imitation," a synonym of real and actual; and also "true to one's own personality, spirit or character."

Building trust in the age of AI

Clearly, the rise of artificial intelligence led people to look up the word, and some of that was buttressed by celebrities such as Taylor Swift and Prince Harry promoting the importance of being their authentic selves.

"The rise of AI helped drive interest in the word," Peter Sokolowski, Merriam-Webster's editor at large said in announcing the news. "The line between 'real' and 'fake' has become increasingly blurred. As a result, in social media and marketing, authentic has become the gold standard for building trust." In a separate interview with the Associated Press, Sokolowski said the quest for truth is ever-present in society today.

"Can we trust whether a student wrote this paper? Can we trust whether a politician made this statement? We don't always trust what we see anymore," Sokolowski said. "We sometimes don't believe our own eyes or our own ears. We are now recognizing that authenticity is a performance itself."

Personally, I'm thrilled to see authenticity getting its time in the limelight. I've been a big fan of the pursuit of authenticity in leadership for years, so much so that the quest for authenticity was a key theme behind my book, "Heart



“The crucial piece I've learned about the quest for authentic leadership is that it's an ongoing journey.”

First." I've defined Heart First leadership as leading with authenticity, empathy and humanity.

People's understanding of authenticity naturally varies quite a bit, which is what drives so many people to search for official definitions. For some, authenticity has been misused almost as a weapon, with the idea that expressing an "authentic" opinion gives leaders an excuse to be painfully blunt, rude or closed off to different points of view.

Respectful authenticity

At its core, I believe respectful authenticity is what's most important for leaders. This is about being true to

yourself and acting in ways that are consistent with your values. And in today's era — when people are clearly searching for truth and meaning — respectful authenticity has never been more important.

In a nutshell, here are the top three components I use to define what's meant by respectful authenticity in leadership. I believe these components not only make for great leadership, but are also the keys to building a trusting and engaged workforce.

➔ **Know yourself.** Reflect on what's most important to you, who you are today and what you value. Truly understanding this helps you better relate to others and focus on building more valuable relationships with your team.

➔ **Be your best self.** Walk the talk. Ensure that you are acting in ways that are in sync with your values instead of simply trying to please people or get something from others.

➔ **Have quiet courage as you relate to others.** Respectful authenticity is about the constant process of being truthful — first with yourself and then with others. This is about saying the things that need to be said but in a kind and respectful way.

The crucial piece I've learned about the quest for authentic leadership is that it's an ongoing journey. As leaders, we are challenged all the time to put on masks rather than be who we really are.

What I've learned is that the work of being real — with ourselves and our teams — is not only more fulfilling, but a true game-changer in building a stronger team culture. ❖

David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA, is founder & CEO of The Grossman Group, which has celebrated 20-plus years of engaging employees and helping leaders lead with heart. He also teaches "The Authentic Leader" at Columbia University in New York.

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Techniques for Becoming a Trusted Comms Adviser

By Joshua Reynolds

How often has your communications counsel been ignored — or worse, a crisis has arisen that could have been avoided had someone asked for your advice?



Too many communications professionals find themselves working for clients who don't consider public relations a strategic function, or who believe that public relations is mostly about personal connections and generating soundbites.

The truth is that public relations is a strategic function when it helps further an organization's goals. Professionals who practice at this level listen closely, ask probing questions and make confident recommendations. These trusted advisers can persuade even the most skeptical business leaders.

Being a trusted adviser requires skills that any PR professional can learn. By practicing a few fundamental techniques, you can accelerate your own journey toward becoming a trusted adviser. For more experienced communications professionals, these techniques will also help you quickly diagnose what's missing from your interactions with business executives.

Ask, or assert?

A fundamental principle that's easy to forget is knowing when to ask questions, versus when to assert recommendations.

As PR professionals, when we have something important to say, we sometimes second-guess ourselves and couch our statements as questions. For example, perhaps a CEO wants to "create some buzz" by issuing a press release that we know will have no hope of being covered by the news media.

Too often, communications professionals will find themselves meekly asking, "Don't you think maybe we could try another approach?" Instead, they should



be asserting: "A press release won't bring the result you're looking for in this case."

Sometimes we go too far the other way. We make the mistake of asserting a suggestion when we should be asking questions instead. In that same example with the CEO who wants to build buzz, if we say, "The best way to drive sales is with a word-of-mouth campaign, not a press release," we might miss the point. Perhaps the CEO's real objective is to create a sense of momentum for investors or the board.

As always, PR professionals must ask questions and understand what the client is trying to achieve before they can recommend the appropriate communications strategies and tactics.

Put another way, when the other person is closest to the truth of something, we ask. When we are closer to the truth of something, we assert. As PR professionals, we're either asking or asserting. If not, then we're damaging our own credibility.

After all, business executives are in the best position to tell us what they need

to accomplish, the challenges they face and the circumstances of the audience they're trying to reach. And as communications professionals, we are in the best position to assert the messages that will achieve the desired results and to recommend which messages will work best in which communications channels.

“A fundamental principle that's easy to forget is knowing when to ask questions, versus when to assert recommendations.”

Rather than directly ask the client the message that he or she wishes to convey — which would place the burden on the business executive to be a communications expert and damage our credibility in the process — we should ask questions that help us understand the deeper context. That way, we'll gain the insight we need to provide strategic value and engender trust.

Here are some techniques for asking more useful questions and making more confident assertions, both of which can deepen your clients' trust in your advice. As PR advisers, we should ask:

- What business outcome does the client desire and what's at stake for them, personally?
- Who is our target audience and what are their circumstances?
- What do we want our target audience to think, feel or do differently after hearing our message?
- What's the truest thing we can say to this audience?

➤ What feels tricky or difficult about the message that we intend to communicate?

And when it's time to give counsel, PR pros do well to assert:

- The communication strategy that will achieve the desired outcomes
- What we know about the intended audience and the issues they care about most
- What the audience is thinking and feeling and what kind of messages are most likely to persuade them
- How to sequence our messages into a compelling, persuasive story
- What does and doesn't work with traditional media or with social media influencers
- How the executive's delivery style might affect the audience and the executive's own credibility

By alternating between asking and asserting, we can co-create the right strategies and messages with our executives and secure their buy-in along the way. And by asking what they want to accomplish and what concerns them most, we establish that we're working in service of their agenda, not our own. That's where we build trust.

Perhaps the biggest secret about being a trusted adviser is this: Nobody is ever going to walk up to you one day, hand you a certificate, and say "Congratulations! You're a Trusted Adviser!" Start acting like one now. Eventually, the people you work with will come to recognize you for what you are. ❖

Joshua Reynolds is CEO of Rob Roy Consulting, a communications advisory firm in Los Altos, Calif. He teaches trusted-adviser courses to clients worldwide, including the Stockholm School of Economics. For more, visit: robroyconsulting.com.

In Brief



Don't Tell the Boss 'I Don't Know'

No one wants to look incompetent at work, but telling the boss "I don't know" might give that impression.

"The simple acceptance of not knowing" can make you seem uninterested in solving problems, career consultant Patrice Lindo recently told CNBC. The phrase doesn't show "initiative and willingness to learn."

Rather than say "I don't know," ask for time to research the subject, Lindo suggested. If the request is outside your purview, ask the boss or a knowledgeable colleague to explain it. Doing so demonstrates your desire to improve your knowledge and performance at work, she says. Consider convening a team to collaborate on the answer.

As investor Mark Cuban said in a video posted on LinkedIn, "The one thing in life you can control is your effort." — **Greg Beaubien**

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Alex Ebanks on the Importance of Writing — and Having Fun

Alex Ebanks is the vice president of communications at Essence Ventures, overseeing all executive, external and internal communications for the private equity company that aims to empower, connect and give ownership to Black communities.

Before joining Essence, Ebanks led consumer PR and multicultural comms on the global communications team for Xbox at Microsoft. She also served in various PR roles at The Coca-Cola Company for five years.

Here, she talks with Editor-in-Chief John Elsassser about the start of her PR career, the lost art of writing and the importance of having fun with work.

Q You graduated from Spelman College with a degree in English. While there, you served as president of The Black Public Relations Student Society. When did your interest in PR/comms happen?

A My interest in public relations happened the summer after my first year of college when I had the opportunity to shadow a family member who was working at a PR agency. I loved the hustle and bustle of planning events and getting

media to cover and attend.

During that summer, I started seeking out other PR professionals to conduct mock interviews and gain insights into the field. Spelman doesn't necessarily have a communications department. Still, one of the most important things that I learned from speaking with professionals in the industry is how essential writing is. I then began a keen focus on setting my sights on the English major to pair the skill of writing with my passion for public relations.

Q Did you have a dream job in mind while growing up?

A I didn't necessarily have a dream job in mind while growing up, but I knew I wanted to do something that allowed me to engage and interact with many people.

As a college student, I completed seven communications-related internships during the school semester and over the summers to explore various areas of the PR profession. I learned all the ways I could interact with others through the work I was tasked with and the work I was producing.

Q You have an MBA from the University of Georgia. Why did you decide to pursue an advanced degree? What advice do you have for others thinking of obtaining an MBA?

A Securing an MBA was always on my list of goals, as I never wanted to get to a place in my career where I was told that I couldn't achieve a professional goal at work due to not having an advanced degree.

My advice for others considering obtaining an MBA is to make sure that it is the right decision for you and at the right time.

I didn't apply for my MBA until I had over a decade of

work experience under my belt. And I am so happy that I waited, as I was genuinely able to pair and apply real-world examples and practices to what I was learning in the classroom, which made for a more fruitful learning experience.

Q What's an essential skill that communications pros need today?

A Number one is writing. Oftentimes, we focus so closely on the media and building those relationships, which are also key. But we forget how important writing is, whether it's an email, a press release or a pitch. Those components seem to have gotten a little lost over the past few years, but they're still critical in public relations.

Q This is our annual writing and storytelling issue. Why do you think people have forgotten the importance of writing over the past few years?

A I think people have forgotten the importance of writing over the past few years, given how accessible social media is and how quickly people can get their messages across to broad audiences.

I still believe that writing is essential within any field — especially with communications. It can be as simple as an email that is well-written and informative and can land a pitch to a reporter to help to secure the perfect press hit!

Q What qualities do you look for in your team members?

A I look for people who are great to be around and are great communicators. The biggest thing about public relations is the networking aspect — how you network with media, peers and people of all levels around you.

Q How has mentoring aided your career, and what's your advice for PR pros seeking mentors?

A When I look for a mentor, or if someone's looking for one, it's definitely



a person who is transparent. I call my mentors all the time and say, "Hey, I need a quick gut check on this. What do you think?" And then you have to be OK with the feedback that's given. You're not always going to hear what you want to hear.

But that feedback is valuable. And knowing it's coming from a good place — that's helped me over the years, both from mentors and when I mentor my mentees. They always know they can call me. I'm going to give them honest feedback and make sure they succeed in their next endeavor.

Q What's the best career advice you have ever received?

A Have fun with PR. Make sure you're making great connections. Bring your creativity to the table. Don't take it too seriously. We aren't heart surgeons, but we are telling great stories.

Q Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your younger self if you could return to the start of your career?

A I would tell myself to start at a PR agency and spend at least three to five years there. It was my second job out of college. You learn so many great skills starting at a PR agency before going in-house — managing multiple projects at one time and connecting with others. In-house [public relations] always seems the place to be, but at agencies, you can spread that creativity, utilize your skills [and pull] together awesome client campaigns. ❖



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