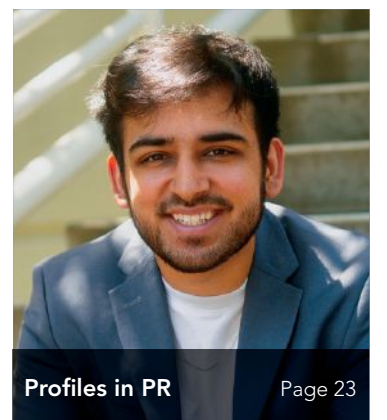
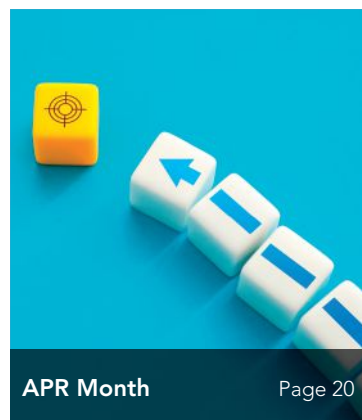
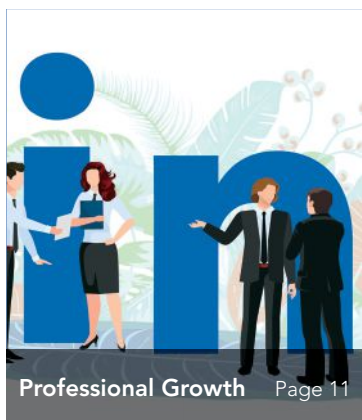
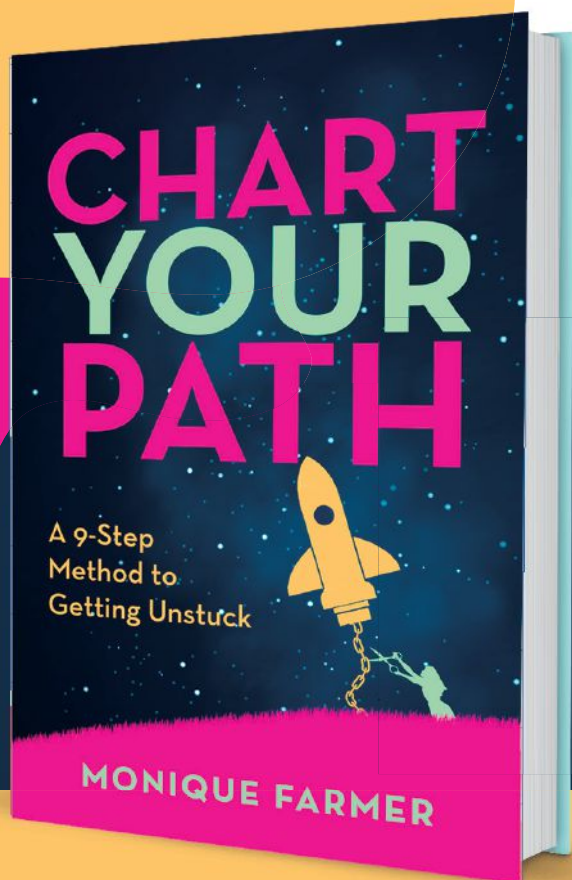


PRSA  
**STRATEGIES  
& TACTICS**

Building a  
**Solid Foundation**  
for Your Career





# IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GET UNSTUCK!

Have you ever felt like you're not living up to your potential? Are you ready to stop watching your dreams slip away and start shaping your destiny? What if happiness and success aren't found in following the well-trodden road, but in blazing your own trail, no matter how unconventional it may seem?

Imagine having a roadmap to not only overcome obstacles but to also unlock your personal growth. In "Chart Your Path," you will embark on a transformative journey through nine practical steps that will change the way you navigate life's challenges.

## Uncover the answers to questions like:

- What are the root causes of dissatisfaction in your life?
- Is there an art to mastering the perfect timing when facing difficult situations?
- What does it take to summon the courage to confront challenges head-on and communicate effectively?
- Why is patience and observation crucial on your journey?
- How do you adapt to the ever-changing "new normal" in your life?
- What adventures and possibilities await you, even in the face of uncertainty?

In this book you will not only find the answers to these questions but also real-life anecdotes, exercises and reflections that will guide you on a path of self-discovery. It will be your guide to rediscovering your power, your purpose and your personal path. In these pages, you'll explore the reasons behind the allure of conformity and the rewards of embracing the unconventional. Your journey from tension to tranquility begins here.

## About The Author

**Monique Farmer** is an accredited public relations professional with more than 20 years of experience. She leads Avant Solutions, a PR, Communication and Marketing consultancy in Omaha, Nebraska. Her career decorations include the Superior Civilian Service Award, PRSA Nebraska's Professional of the Year and Special Achievement in Public Relations Awards as well as the Omaha World-Herald's Inspire Award. She holds national communication awards, including a PRSA Silver Anvil for regional flood response communications and NSPRA's highest honor, the Gold Medallion for brand strategy.

Monique is also the creator of Anvil Ready, an online SAAS platform that makes creating communication plans simple. She also teaches PR courses for the University of Texas at Austin's Moody School of Communication and is a regular contributor to PR Strategies & Tactics, the industry's national newsletter. She holds two master's degrees (Public Administration and Journalism and Mass Communications) and a bachelor's degree in Journalism.



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## Editor's Corner

We marked the start of our third year of *Strategies & Tactics Live* earlier this year. The monthly livestream on LinkedIn takes readers behind the scenes of a story or subject in the paper, offering further insights and takeaways with interviews with contributors and other special guests.

*Strategies & Tactics Live* has featured various thought leaders and top-of-mind topics, including AI, DEI, crisis management, issues management and storytelling.

Guests from our 27 episodes have included Linda Ruth-erford, chief administration and communications officer for Southwest Airlines; Jen Hartmann, global director, strategic public relations and enterprise social media, John Deere; Mary Osaka, vice chancellor for strategic comms, UCLA; Jim Joseph, U.S. CEO and global CMO, Ketchum; and Chris Perry, chair, Weber Shandwick Futures.

For the past year, we've recorded extra footage with our guests after the live session and posted it to the online version of *S&T* on PRSA's website. This member exclusive provides even more insights from our guest speakers.

I want to share some of the bonus content that my February guest, Ted Anthony, director of new storytelling and newsroom innovation at The Associated Press, provided.

In our taped conversation, we discussed how finding compelling stories to tell about the companies or brands communicators represent can be a challenge. To uncover interesting stories, "treat reporting within the company like a news beat," he said.

"You want to get to know the people doing interesting things... to establish relationships with people," Anthony said. Those connections "feed your curiosity about things to discover."

To find story ideas about your organization, "go to coffee with someone you've never met before who has a job title that

interests you," Anthony suggested. "Find out about them." Doing so "will open up new worlds and new story ideas to you."

He advised against pursuing preconceived story angles. "Writers often choose the story they're going to tell, and then they go forward with that narrative," Anthony said. "But there are often things that relate to the story or the [broader] culture that you can bring in, that add texture to your story."

In most cases, "If you have tunnel vision about what the story is, you miss opportunities to talk about other things that would reward your readers. The more you create a collage around this topic, the more you have an opportunity to interest and engage people who aren't necessarily inherently interested in the topic."

Editing your own writing will make it better, he said. "Writers tend to get deeply attached to their babies, their turns of phrase and quotes. To be your editor and put a critical eye on your work, ask yourself: 'What is great in this story? What needs to stay, and what is good but can go?'"

Meanwhile, join me on LinkedIn on April 18 at 1 p.m. ET for the next episode. Gini Dietrich, CEO and founder of Arment Dietrich + Spin Sucks, is my guest.



### Observing APR Month

April is PRSA Accreditation Month. Be sure to check out my editor's note online. The web edition will include a short video interview with Tara Lynn Smith, APR, co-chair of the Accreditation Marketing Committee. She is the graduate program director and instructor at the University of Delaware and serves as PRSA's Delaware Chapter president.

We'll discuss how becoming Accredited in Public Relations can advance your career.

*John Elsasser*  
@JohnElsasser

# PRSA STRATEGIES & TACTICS

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### ABC's Gio Benitez to Be Keynote Speaker at ICON 2024

Gio Benitez, co-anchor of "Good Morning America" Saturday and Sunday, will be a keynote speaker at ICON 2024, being held Oct. 15-17 at the Anaheim Marriott in Anaheim, Calif.

Benitez is also a transportation correspondent for ABC News based in New York. He covers aviation, space, railroads and the auto industry across all ABC News programs and platforms, including "20/20," "Good Morning America," "Nightline," "World News Tonight with David Muir," ABC News Live and ABC News Radio.

Benitez has covered a wide range of stories for the network, including the Pulse nightclub shooting, El Chapo's underground escape from a Mexican prison and the Boston Marathon bombing.

He has a long history of breaking exclusive investigative stories as part of the "GMA Investigates" series, some of which have led to important safety recalls.

Visit the PRSA website for more information on ICON 2024.



### Katie Thomas, APR, Elected PRSSA 2024-2026 National Professional Adviser



Katie Thomas, APR, will serve as the National Professional Adviser for 2024-2026.

In this role, Thomas will, among other duties, offer best practice guidance on Chapter operations, help Chapters discover and connect with Professional Advisers, and assist in the professional development of Chapter members.

Thomas has held various positions with Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, where she is currently senior manager of population health marketing. She is also a lecturer at the Ohio State University in the School of Communication.

### Nomination Process for the 2025 Board Commences

The application process is underway — as of March 18 — for the 2025 Board of Directors.

PRSA is seeking candidates to fill three officer positions, five district director positions and one director-at-large position.

- Officer (one-year term)
  - ➔ Chair-elect
  - ➔ Treasurer
  - ➔ Secretary

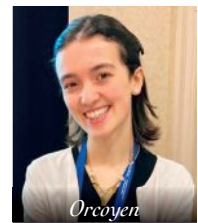
- Director (two-year term)
  - ➔ East Central District
  - ➔ Mid-Atlantic District
  - ➔ Northeast District
  - ➔ Tri-State District
  - ➔ Western District

The duties and responsibilities of board members include providing fiscal oversight, helping guide and oversee PRSA's strategic vision and goals, enhancing membership growth, and serving as representatives of the organization.

Applications are due April 30. Please visit the PRSA website to apply. (See the ad on Page 12 for more details.)

### PRSSA Names 2024-2025 President

Milagros Orcoyen was elected as the organization's first president from the Latin American Chapters. She will lead the volunteer student committee members beginning their one-year term on June 1.



A senior at the Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE) studying public relations and institutional communications, Orcoyen joined PRSSA as a freshman when she served as the events coordinator at her local Chapter and as the conference coordinator for their first-ever District Conference.

### PRSA Reveals 2024 Anvil Award Finalists

PRSA has announced the finalists for the 2024 Bronze and Silver Anvil Awards.

Entries were received across 89 categories and included agencies Finn Partners, FleishmanHillard, Ketchum and Padilla, as well as such leading brands as Planned Parenthood, Delta, United Airlines, Aflac, McDonald's, 7-Eleven and The Library of Congress.

Entries are analyzed and peer-reviewed as part of the judging process. The judges are assembled from experts across the communications community, including C-suite executives, academics and senior-level practitioners.

Visit the PRSA website to see the list of finalists. The winners will be announced during a live ceremony on May 9 at the Edison Ballroom in New York City.

Inside PRSA

## What's Trending

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



**@PRSAPhoenix** We teamed up with @asuprssa to host an incredible networking night at @Cronkite\_ASU. One of the big takeaways offered by panelist Heather Vana was to "be open to all experiences."

**@PR SARVA** @PRSA offers fantastic resources for #PR pros seeking to champion #DEI in their work. Check out the resource page for #BlackHistoryMonth featuring our article, 5 Steps to Create Educational Heritage-Observance Content

**@PRSA** Congratulations to Katie Thomas, APR, who has been elected to a 2-year term as PRSSA's National Professional Adviser... she will help Chapters connect with Professional Advisers & assist in the prof. development of Chapter members.

**@PR SABuffNiag** We were so grateful to have Joshua Hays with us last week to share his insights into earning his APR+M & the ways it has helped him grow as a leader & open doors for his work on a global scale.



25 likes

prsaoundation We're announcing today that nine new Trustees have been appointed to the PRSA Foundation Board of Directors. The appointees will serve a four-year term as a member of the Board and oversee the Foundation's strategic direction.



### What is your advice for the PR class of 2024?

"Never stop learning & invest in yourself. Prof. development is key to career growth, no matter how long or short you've been in the industry. Take advantage of conferences, webinars, in-person functions & networking." — *Alisha Katz, APR*

"Get involved with professional organizations such as PRSA & other industry-specific associations. In these, you will find mentors, resources, learning & leadership opportunities, & maybe, your future boss." — *Kelli West, APR*

"The world of digital media is in constant flux, so helping brands navigate this rapidly changing landscape is one of the important services PR consultants can offer. Interactive videos, livestreams & short-form video content will gain more popularity so it's important to invest in learning these skills." — *Lisa George*

## In Brief

### With Hybrid Work, People Living Farther from the Office

White-collar employees who can work remotely now live roughly twice as far from their offices than before the pandemic, a new study finds.

As *The New York Times* reports, the average distance between people's homes and workplaces has expanded from 10 miles in 2019 to 27 miles in 2023, according to the study by economists at Stanford using data from Gusto, a payroll provider.

The so-called "ZIP code shift" is primarily happening among white-collar employees in tech, finance, law, marketing and accounting, the study finds. Workers moving away from city centers are often in their 30s and 40s, have young children and want larger homes.

Only about 12% of employees now work entirely remotely, compared to roughly 50% of the workforce at the peak of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Some in hybrid arrangements have accepted "super commutes," in one case a flight from Cincinnati to New York City every other week, in exchange for cheaper housing and more space away from cities.

### Brands Look to Youngest Generation as Influencers, Ambassadors

After courting Gen Z for years, brands are turning to Gen Alpha, born 2010–2025 and now ages 14 and younger, to become influencers and ambassadors.

As *Modern Retail* reports, the retailer Claire's, which markets to teen and tween girls, has launched a year-long marketing campaign that features Gen Z'ers and Gen Alphas, the youngest of whom is seven years old. Last May, the girls' clothing brand Evsie started an ambassador program for kids ages 7 to 14.

Gen Alphas are maturing at a younger age and often influence what their families buy, said Ashley Fell, director of advisory at McCrindle Research. Added Fell, "any organization that... fails to understand and engage with them will edge toward extinction."

Minors need parental consent to work with a brand and cannot sign a contract independently, but many consumers and companies are wary of using children as ambassadors or influencers. As Fell said, at ages 13 and 14 they're developing cognitively and "are still kids."

### Chicago Communicators Have Positive View of Using AI, Survey Finds

A majority of communicators and their clients hold positive attitudes toward using artificial intelligence technology in their business, finds a recent survey by Communication Leaders of Chicago and DePaul University's College of Communication.

Among communications leaders surveyed in the Chicago area, 78% of respondents said they held slightly to extremely positive attitudes toward using AI. Among their clients, 62% had positive attitudes about adopting the technology. However, just 33% of respondents said their firms currently have a dedicated AI team.

Concerns respondents expressed about adopting AI in strategic communications included quality and accuracy, ethical issues, privacy and data security. Respondents said their companies are currently using artificial intelligence to create content (43%), conduct research and analyze data (30%), perform administrative tasks (18%) and manage social media (16%).

Respondents said they personally use AI to generate ideas, inspire their thinking, analyze data and create or summarize content. Half said AI work product is permitted in their companies on a limited-use basis.



### Despite Reputational Blows, Harvard Regains 'Dream School' Status

Rebounding from a wave of negative publicity, Harvard is once again the top "dream school" among college applicants, a Princeton Review poll finds.

As CNBC reports, the poll of nearly 8,000 college applicants was conducted in January and February, just weeks after Harvard President Claudine Gay resigned amid allegations of plagiarism and controversy over her congressional testimony about antisemitism on campus.

This year's early-admissions cycle occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. Amid multiple incidents of antisemitism on the Harvard campus, early applications sank by 17%.

But in March, "I'm seeing clients who were so against Harvard just four months ago, easing back into it already," said Christopher Rim, CEO of college-consulting firm Command Education.

Harvard admitted 8.74% of its total applicant pool, an increase of more than 1 percentage point over the previous year. The slightly more favorable acceptance rate may have prompted more students to apply, Rim said.

— *Greg Beaubien*



At 61.5%, Facebook was the top social media channel where U.S. internet users interacted with brands in 2023. — *Attest*

## Connect With Us Online

- Read the online version of *Strategies & Tactics* and view the digital flipbook: [prsa.org/SandT](https://prsa.org/SandT)
- Sign up for our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter, and the e-version of *Strategies & Tactics*, via your communications preferences: [prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile](https://prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile)
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# The Explainer

## How to Master the Art of Small Talk

Small talk can be a chance to learn about others, become more curious and build trust, according to an article from Vox. Even if you're shy or introverted, you'll often be faced with numerous encounters where you will have to make conversation with people you don't know well. So it's important to learn some best practices.



Try finding out "what makes them tick, what drives them," the article says of potential conversation partners. Ask what books they're reading, or what movies and TV shows they like to watch. Most important, make sure that you're truly interested in what they have to say, rather than just talking about yourself, says Vox.

"Small talk gets a bad rap for being too surface-level, too rote, a throwaway filler conversation. But casual chat can be the on-ramp to deeper connection," the article says.

Don't think of small talk as a way you'll "get stuck" talking to someone, but instead think about how it's just the beginning of a conversation — not where you'll end up.

Though conversations with strangers and acquaintances can potentially be awkward, the more often you engage in these types of chats, the more confident you will become in your ability.

Avoid talking about obvious topics like the weather, traffic or someone's job — people usually give canned or automatic responses. Instead, give them a chance to expound and share. Make a list of talking points that you'd like to discuss, including topics like new restaurant recommendations, upcoming vacations, shows or movies recently streamed, etc.

Beyond a prepared list of questions, you could share an observation or make a statement about something you're both experiencing, like a comment about your mutual friend or commiserating over how long a line is, Vox says. Research also shows that commenting on a colorful piece of clothing or a band or school shirt someone has on can be a great conversation starter. This way, both parties often care about the topic.

Make sure that you're actively listening to someone and being empathetic. Ask follow-up questions and show that you're interested in what they have to say. Both people will become more invested, offer more information and want the conversation to continue.

Here are several more tips from Vox on making small talk. — Amy Jacques

- 1 View small talk as an opportunity.
- 2 Avoid job talk.
- 3 Be a good listener.
- 4 Don't make it weird.
- 5 Learn what to do if you get stuck.



### Dispatch From Oklahoma

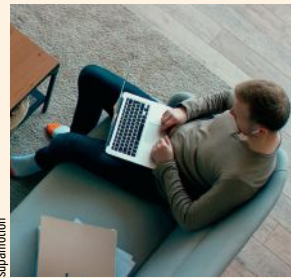
#### POSTCARD

"We enjoy the unique cultures of the Creek, Osage and Cherokee Nations, among other sovereign nations that call northeastern Oklahoma home. We believe the PRSA Tulsa Chapter should reflect our community. In our effort to lead by example, we welcomed a new board member in 2024 who is a PR/comms professional with Cherokee Nation Entertainment. Being at the table matters; being invited to the table matters too."

—Nicole Burgin  
Development Officer, Tulsa Community College Foundation  
President, PRSA Tulsa Chapter



## By the Numbers



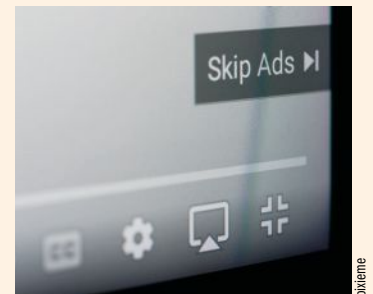
A Harris Poll survey with Bloomberg finds that 63% of employed Americans would prefer to work remotely in some capacity if it were up to them. At the same time, 50% of remote workers believe doing so hurts career progression.

Employee demand for moral leadership from CEOs and managers is on the rise: The percentage of those who believe it's more urgent than ever jumped from 86% in 2020 to 93% in 2024, according to findings by The HOW Institute for Society, a leadership development firm.



Pew Research reports just 34% of U.S. adults say social media has been good for democracy in the United States, while nearly twice as many (64%) say it has been bad.

78% of U.S. consumers would rather pay nothing and encounter more ads across websites, apps and online services than pay any amount and be served either some or no ads, per data from the Interactive Advertising Bureau.

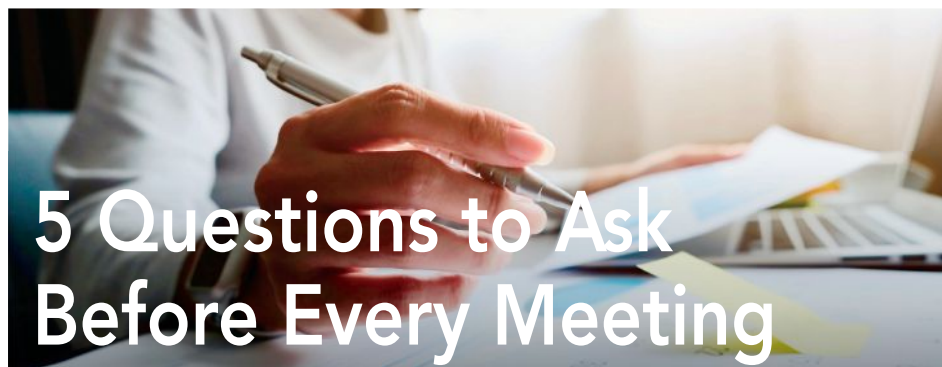


Less than 25% of government organizations will have generative AI-enabled citizen-facing services by 2027, according to Gartner, Inc.

## Issues Trends

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

- ▶▶ The "She"-conomy is booming
- ▶▶ Public trust in AI is sinking
- ▶▶ Crises continue for Boeing
- ▶▶ The looming ban for TikTok
- ▶▶ Election 2024 misinformation ramps up
- ▶▶ LinkedIn doubles down on news
- ▶▶ The workplace etiquette business takes off
- ▶▶ Toxic traits to avoid at work



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By Rob Biesenbach



Years ago, I suffered one of the most embarrassing moments of my professional life. (Not *the* most embarrassing — that one I take to the grave!)

I was having one of those days we all have — a revolving door of back-to-back meetings and calls. This was pre-Zoom, so I was rushing back to my office from an in-person meeting to a conference call with a client and her senior executives.

I dropped my stuff, dialed up the number and conference code (remember those?) and joined at the exact start time. As the group exchanged the usual pleasantries, I rifled through my file to figure out what the meeting was about.

Just then, the client said, “So ...” Followed by a long pause. And I was thinking, “So ... what?”

That’s when it dawned on me: I was supposed to be leading the meeting! And I had no idea what it was about.

I stumbled through the first few minutes, uttering some vague generalities until I found my footing. In the end, the meeting was a success, so it’s possible that some of the executives didn’t even recall the awkward start.

But, certainly, the client did. And the only thing that saved my proverbial bacon that day was that we had a history of working together.

She knew this wasn’t my usual style and was willing to extend some grace. But if it had been a brand-new client or prospect, the relationship could have ended before it even started.

After the call, as the adrenalin drained from my system, I vowed to never let that happen again. And now, before every meeting, I make it a point to take a few moments, clear my head and make a plan.

So, if you’ve ever entered a meeting feeling underprepared, whether with a group or one-on-one, here’s a simple road map you can follow to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

**1. What’s happening?** What exactly is the purpose of this meeting? (Especially if it’s *your* meeting!)

**2. Who’s going to be there?** Think about who’s going to be in the room and, just as important, who they are as people.

What are their pain points, hot-but-ton issues and usual concerns? What’s

your relationship and track record with them?

**3. Who am I?** Sounds like a dumb question, right? You are you. But we all play many roles on any given day — boss, colleague, employee, client, etc.

And within those roles, and depending on the relationship, we may act as coach, confidante, cheerleader, friend, shoulder to cry on, sounding board, problem-solver, devil’s advocate, authority figure, drill sergeant and more.

Figure out who you need to be in this particular moment.

**4. What do I want?** This is the critical question in any interaction. You may want something explicit: a decision, approval, buy-in, support, direction or compliance.

Or it could be implicit. You want to inspire trust, offer assurance, demonstrate expertise or exhibit leadership.

And if you’re a meeting participant instead of the leader, then you may want to ask an essential question, raise an objection, identify an issue for consideration, clarify roles or throw your hat in the ring.

**5. How do I get what I want?** Think through the possible obstacles and objections that may come up and how you’re going to overcome them.

Again, examine your past history with this person or group. What are their usual doubts and concerns? Is it lack of budget? Fear of change? Distrust?

You might counter budget concerns by demonstrating long-term value. Fear of change requires reassurance. If there’s distrust, then work on establishing (or repairing) the relationship.

Of course, not every meeting will require this level of preparation. And you’ll probably want to create your own process. But whatever you do, don’t just rely on your ability to wing it. It’s not worth the risk to your reputation and relationships.

So, carve out at least a moment or two before every meeting to take a breath, make a plan, and show up with clear focus and intention. ❖

**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.

# Combat Grievance Culture With PR

By Melissa Vela-Williamson, APR

How we feel about an issue versus what data shows groups of people feel can be quite different. Gauging public sentiment is important for PR pros so we can work *with* that sentiment and use that “vibe” to base messaging on. Or, we can work to *change* that sentiment — preferably from a negative to a positive!

*Washington Post* Opinion Columnist Catherine Rampell’s piece, “Why the United States needs to stop being a nation of losers” caught my eye recently. Her take on the current American “losing” sentiment made me think.

“That must be what’s going on,” I thought as I read. People seem so downtrodden lately. Do Americans really feel like losers? Are more people feeling hopeless? I have certainly observed more despair and overwhelm lately.

Rampell says America is struggling with “grievance culture.”

She cites studies that show that no matter a group of people’s *actual* level of privilege (or lack thereof), everyone sees their group as the underprivileged group. The groups with privilege — or as I like to call it, leverage — felt at a disadvantage. And those without privilege thought they were at a disadvantage, but more so than their other disadvantaged peer groups. When it came to politics, liberals were most likely to say the country shifted more right-leaning, while conservatives say the country has shifted left. This interpretation of “my group is losing” was also seen across religious groups. Across major racial groups, each group felt their group was the most discriminated against.

What does this mean for communicators? Data from Pew Research illustrates how misconceptions and the blaming of others that we see in grievance culture can easily spread. This shift is important for PR professionals to recognize because if everyone thinks they’re losing, that sentiment may impede the positive initiatives and change we work on.

The entitled “Karen” avatar that’s become mainstream in popular culture is the characterization of this persona. (My sympathy to all the real Karens!)

How do we overcome new sentiment shifts like grievance culture? Here are three ways to help influence a more flexible, aspirational society through the

power of communication and public relations.

## 1. Remind people they can win.

While we don’t all need a trophy, we certainly do appreciate them! Use your messaging and work to remind stakeholders what the data really shows related to what matters to them. Remind those you work with or mentor that they can control much more of their professional and personal success than they may realize. When we spend too much time blaming, our ability to see our wins and shape future outcomes diminishes.

## 2. Use unifying terms whenever possible.

We’re more alike as people than we are dissimilar. Did you know that DNA analysis shows that any two humans are 99.9% identical? Let’s keep pointing out our commonalities as humans and groups, rather than highlighting differences or grievances. Explore and communicate similar interests, cultural practices, backgrounds, values or ways we can otherwise connect with others.



good studio

## 3. Share grace and flexibility.

Our reactions to microaggressions — smaller, perhaps ignorant or unconscious slights — can perpetuate grievance or victimhood mindsets, and thus behaviors. Offer grace and accept apologies when possible when others offend you. Ask for forgiveness and learn from your own mistakes, every time.

Do your research and make sure not to hurt others with your deeds or professional work, and don’t be the one publicly canceling others when feedback could be shared more constructively in private. Relationships take work, and it’s our business to try to foster healthy relationships for the long term. ❖

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



## Your Springtime Outdoor Challenge

By Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA

We get paid to think, not just do.

Unfortunately, most of our time is spent on instinct, based on years of experience. Meetings, emails, constant notifications, conflicting deadlines and eager customers block us from doing true deep thinking.

On top of that, I often hear from people who are battling upper body injuries from sitting at their desk all day. Not good!

Being outside and one with nature is critical to our well-being. Studies show we feel better, sharper and more creative by being outside.

So, as we head into springtime, let's spend time around green grass, large trees and luscious parks. But it's one thing to simply say, "go outside." I understand the daily stresses and realities of our profession. That's why I want to help us spend our workdays outside with intention.

Your challenge is to allocate 150 minutes per week — 30 minutes Monday through Friday — to get outside and get paid to think.

Some of you might want to play it by ear to determine what you'll be thinking about. Perhaps you need to just vent to yourself, and that's OK! However, some of you might need some prompts. Here's an example of how to use your time outside to get some great thinking done.

👉 **Monday:** What do you want to learn this week, and what are the steps you'll take to do so? Since professional development is typically lower on the priority list, this gives you the chance to process in real-time what you want to learn.

👉 **Tuesday:** What's a challenge you're eager to tackle? Perhaps you're processing how to bring a new idea to



an executive, or you need some new story angles to pitch media. Getting outside will help stimulate new ideas.

👉 **Wednesday:** Who is someone you want to connect with and learn from? Since public relations is a relationship business, it's important that we're constantly connecting with new people. But we also need a strategic approach so we're meeting the right people at the right time. Who is one person you want to connect with this week, and for what purpose?

👉 **Thursday:** Who is someone you want to help this week? Paying it forward is good for our well-being as well. Is there someone in your network looking for a new job or career change or who shared a challenge with you? This is a chance to do some deep thinking on how you can be of service.

👉 **Friday:** What is something you're proud of this week, and why? Often, we forget great work we've done over the course of a year. This gives us time to write down key milestones so when it's reviews time, or awards season, or you're interested in updating your résumé or LinkedIn profile, it's much fresher.

In just 150 minutes per week, you can get some movement in, and some real work done that will help you and those around you.

Please let me know what challenges you've solved this spring as a result! ❖

**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.

## Your Résumé vs. LinkedIn

By Christina Stokes

In this digital age, job seekers have access to a plethora of incredible tools to support them in their searches. Gone are the days of solely relying on Craigslist to apply for open jobs or circling ads in the Sunday newspaper.

Amid this (sometimes overwhelming) abundance, two indispensable tools stand out: your résumé and your LinkedIn profile. Having both finely honed and ready to use will be a huge benefit to you in your job search.

You might be wondering: What sets these two apart? Can I simply copy and paste my résumé's content into my LinkedIn profile?

Yes, of course you can! But, while that's an option, I wouldn't advise it.

Here's why:

### Format and content

The résumé is typically a very concise document. At no more than one to two pages in length, the résumé summarizes an individual's work experience, skills and education, focused

on primary responsibilities and top-line achievements. While a résumé might be customized for specific job applications, something I often advise, it still almost always follows a standardized format.

The name of the game with a résumé is brevity and relevance. You'll use the document to highlight key achievements and skills directly related to the job being applied for.

A résumé characteristically includes sections such as a summary or objective statement, work experience, education, skills, and sometimes additional sections like certifications or volunteer work.

LinkedIn, on the other hand, provides countless ways to highlight your experience and capabilities. The platform allows for a dynamic and detailed representation of a person's professional journey, and not just a comprehensive work history.

There are options to share endorsements from connections and recommendations from colleagues. You can highlight awards that you have won, classes you've taken and articles you have published. Your LinkedIn profile can even include multimedia elements, such as portfolios, presentations and more.

LinkedIn's multitude of profile options and tools are a significant benefit for PR practitioners who wish to showcase their writing and elements of successful campaigns they have spearheaded or supported in a significant capacity, among other things.



### Purpose and flexibility

Résumés are typically sent directly to hiring managers or recruiters, or uploaded into job boards, as part of the job application process.

For the most part, résumés are relatively static documents.

People only update them periodically, and it is usually when they are ready to begin seeking a new job or when significant changes occur in their career, such as a promotion or the completion of a degree program.

LinkedIn is a trusted social networking site for professionals. The profiles we



can create there serve as our professional online presence. They can be a very effective networking tool. It's shortsighted to use LinkedIn as a carbon copy of your résumé. Viewable by recruiters, potential employers, colleagues and others interested in learning more about your background, you can extensively extend your professional reach.

Imagine that! You can use your LinkedIn profiles for networking, job searching and personal branding.

Since LinkedIn profiles offer job seekers greater flexibility than résumés, it is common to update them more frequently. Users can add new skills, update work experience, engage in conversations on posts, share articles and connect with new contacts.

I've had a LinkedIn profile since very early on in my career, and it has been a tremendous value add to my professional brand.

As a talent acquisition professional, I am looking at everything, and I love to dig deep into what is available. Your résumé and LinkedIn go hand in hand and, when coupled together, they can weave a thorough, compelling and vibrant representation of your professional identity, which will better position you as a candidate in your job search. ❖

**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. X: @NewYorkRoses.

## Learn and Grow

### How to Take Control of Your Professional Development

By Leah Gladu

If your career were a vehicle (a potentially troublesome comparison), then professional development is its fuel. Without it, you may eventually end up on the side of the road waiting for help.

Regardless of your industry or experience level, investing in growth opportunities is a great way to level up in your career, stay engaged, and find professional fulfillment in new ways.

For employers looking to attract and retain top talent, investing in your teams' professional development can also be a catalyst for more engaged employees and less employee turnover (Gallup Workplace Insights). Having the opportunity to learn and grow is one of the top drivers of a strong company culture (LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2022).

No matter how beneficial it can be, however, professional development can feel overwhelming to those who think it may not align with their personality. That said, I believe there's a style of professional development that can work for everyone — you simply need to discover what that style is (it may be more than one!) and how to put it into practice.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

**The Networker** enjoys making new connections as much as they enjoy investing in maintaining them. They proactively seek opportunities to meet others in one-on-one or group settings like after-hours networking events, alumni mixers, mentorship meetings or coffee get-togethers. Networkers are energized by socializing and learning through others' lived experiences and perspectives.

**Action Plan:** Make a list of five people you respect professionally. (Think: someone you've worked with or a friend of a friend.) Send per-

sonalized notes inviting them to get together, and don't be afraid to meet virtually if they aren't local to you. Make sure your notes are authentic and explain why you're seeking to connect. For example, maybe you want to expand your industry contacts or gain insight into their career journey. You may be surprised what doors organically open as a result.

**The Scholar** seeks out intellectual stimulation through continuous learning opportunities. They may go back to school, listen to podcasts or watch videos, or spend their free time reading career development books. Scholars find enjoyment in discovering new and different ways of working and thrive on continuous improvement.

**Action Plan:** Select four books to read or listen to this year (one per quarter is a realistic goal) that are relevant to your goals. Look for topics that give advice or help you level up on skills. Not sure where to start? Don't be afraid to ask for recommendations.

“Having the opportunity to learn and grow is one of the top drivers of a strong company culture.”

**Experiential Learners** seek on-the-job opportunities to learn and grow in their career. They look for openings to shadow peers and leaders, raise their hand to lead new clients or initiatives and welcome feedback on their performance. They seek continuous improvement that directly advances their skills and career level.

**Action Plan:** Write down the top three things you'd like to learn at work (like mastering Excel or learning graphic design), the ideal timeline for learning and then share it with your manager so they can

support your development journey. Consider if you would need to shadow someone or implement new feedback methods.

**Joiners** thrive on building connections with like-minded individuals by joining associations, clubs and organizations that connect others based on interests and skills. Their active participation in events and learning opportunities helps accelerate their growth and advancement by pairing them with a support system of like-minded professionals. Joiners also have the added advantage of being invited to networking and learning opportunities.

**Action Plan:** Make a goal to join at least one organization this year. Start by researching organizations closest to you, like your company's employee resource groups or your alma mater's alumni group. Find out if there are any membership requirements or financial obligations before you commit. Maximize your membership by attending in-person and virtual events and learning sessions, or consider applying for leadership roles or awards.

I hope one or more of these professional development styles resonate with you. If so, then I encourage you to take control of your development by applying the action plans in a way that fits your style and schedule.

Keep fueling that vehicle, and it will take you far. ■■



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

**Still not sure which professional development style is best for you? Take this short quiz:**

**What most motivates you to grow in your career?**

- A. Building a strong network of contacts and expanding your circle of influence
- B. Gaining knowledge and expertise in your field through continuous learning
- C. Challenging yourself with new tasks and projects to expand your skill set
- D. Connecting with others who share your interests and passions to advance together

**How do you typically engage with professional organizations?**

- A. Actively participating in events and networking opportunities
- B. Seeking out resources and learning sessions
- C. Volunteering for leadership roles
- D. Building relationships with fellow members to collaborate and learn from one another

**What excites you most about meeting new people?**

- A. Making meaningful connections and learning from others' experiences
- B. Engaging in intellectual conversations and gaining new insights
- C. Seizing opportunities to learn by doing and applying new skills
- D. Building a network of like-minded individuals to share ideas and support each other

**How do you prefer to learn new things?**

- A. Through interactions with others, like networking and mentorship meetings
- B. Through self-study, like reading books or joining classes
- C. Through hands-on experiences and on-the-job feedback
- D. Through joining group activities and events with similar professionals

**Results:**

◆ If you answered mostly **A's**, you're a **Networker**. You thrive on building relationships and learning from others' experiences.

◆ If you answered mostly **B's**, you're a **Scholar**. You love diving into intellectual pursuits and continuously expanding your knowledge.

◆ If you answered mostly **C's**, you're an **Experiential Learner**. You learn best by doing and welcome opportunities to apply your skills in real-world situations.

◆ If you answered mostly **D's**, you're a **Joiner**. You enjoy leveraging group activities with like-minded individuals to enhance your professional growth.



# Build Your Skills

## Navigating the Changing Landscape of Lifelong Learning

By Susan B. Walton, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA

**E**mbracing ongoing learning is integral to enhancing the lives of communicators at any stage of their careers. Whether you're a working professional aiming to expand your skill set or a student thinking about graduate school, a plethora of options await you. (In fact, a recent Google search of the term "PR Certificate Program" yielded nearly 5 million results.)

Why the proliferation of such programs? In a word: Change.

"The world is changing and communication is at the forefront," said Mike Cherson, APR, Fellow PRSA, executive vice president of SCG Communications and co-academic director of the Communication Certificate Program at Rutgers University. "PR practitioners have to find ways to retool and reorient quickly in this shifting landscape. And so, new forms of training and education are emerging."

### Understanding the options

The first step to finding the right PR learning program is understanding what's currently available to learners:

➔ **Undergraduate and graduate degree programs** remain the pathway to earning a college degree in public relations, and now include more online options than ever before.

➔ **Certificate programs** are shorter courses of study that often focus on strengthening specific skills, such as crisis communications or knowledge of a specific industry such as health care. They are offered through professional associations, employers, private entities or academic graduate programs, especially programs geared toward working professionals.

➔ **Microcertificate or microcredential programs** may be even shorter and more focused than certificate programs. They can be a series of short courses and are usually focused on skills needed for a specific employer or job, such as analytical tools for a particular web platform. Successful completion of the microcertificate(s) may earn a microcredential, such as a badge, which can be displayed on the recipient's social media sites.

If you're a professional who's considering jumping back into school, then certificate and microcertificate programs are

excellent ways to dip a toe in the water.

"These programs can help you understand yourself as a potential student for the more rigorous degree programs," said Maria Russell, APR, Fellow PRSA, emerita professor of public relations, and director, Newhouse Executive Education Programs at Syracuse University. "You'll discover quickly whether you enjoy independent learning and whether you have the time and fortitude to succeed for a year or more."

### Understanding what's in it for you

The next step is to identify your educational and professional goals and match them to the appropriate training programs. Most programs focus on one of five areas:

➔ **Enhancing specific skills:** Jeneen Garcia, PRSA's senior vice president of programs, who oversees PRSA's portfolio of 16 certificate programs, suggests that learners consider three things when choosing skill enhancement training: "Do I know what skills I need to advance in my career? Do I know what skills my employer values? Can I find training in those areas?"

Cherson also suggests skills training as a means of transitioning into areas where you *want* to be — not necessarily where you are now. "If you want a job working on a specific web platform, consider training on that platform," he said.

“The world is changing and communication is at the forefront.”

➔ **Strengthening knowledge of the industry you serve:** Russell notes, "PR professionals hear this from employers over and over again: 'You're a great writer, but you don't understand our business.'"

"Increasingly, PR professionals seeking the proverbial 'seat at the table' look for professional education not just in public relations, but also in business and management to better understand those fundamentals and their employers' industries."

➔ **Improving your ability to adapt to specific job demands and environments:** If you work at an orga-



nization that makes highly scrutinized decisions affecting many stakeholders, for example, then you might choose training that strengthens your crisis communications skills.

➔ **Developing general strategic and organizational skills:** Academic PR programs can't teach everything, and certificate programs provide a way to gain additional expertise in skills broadly valued in the workplace, such as decision-making and critical thinking, Cherson said.

➔ **Becoming a trusted counselor:** PR practitioners are increasingly seeking training on how to more effectively counsel clients and the C-suite.

### Looking before you learn

When choosing a program, learn as much as you can about its features and strengths before you commit yourself. Here's a checklist:

➔ **What are the program's qualifications and requirements?** Cherson cautions, "Be mindful of the rigor and challenge that the program demands. This holds just as true for certificates as it always has for diplomas."

➔ **Does it fit your lifestyle and learning style?** Be honest about your strengths, capabilities and preferences as a learner. Online learning can be more convenient, but it takes great personal discipline.

For instance, Russell notes that while many online students find structured assignments manageable, once they begin projects without regularly imposed deadlines, such as those for formal projects, theses or dissertations, they struggle to finish in a timely manner.

Also, suggested Garcia: "Consider whether you learn best when you're interacting with other people. If so, then choose a program that allows you to learn with a community."

➔ **Who's delivering the course?** Pay attention to who's delivering the content, Russell said.

"If it's faculty, what are their academic credentials and the currency of their knowledge to teach the specific courses assigned to them? Do they have the

capability to guide you to meet academic requirements?" Russell said.

Adds Garcia, "Also, check out the program to ensure that it includes practicing professionals and uses data such as industry or attendee surveys to keep the content current and relevant."

➔ **What's the cost?** It's a good idea to include your employer in your thought process about cost. Nick Kalm, founder and CEO of public relations strategy firm Reputation Partners, explains that many employers, including his own firm, provide a stipend or pay for training, especially if it is training that teaches the employee about their industry.

➔ **Do others feel the program was worth it?** Kalm recommends talking to people who have received that same specific education. Ask them: "Was it worth it? Was it valuable? Was it better than other alternatives you considered? What did or didn't the program offer that you needed and wanted?"

### Value of experience

If you're already employed, then there's some wisdom in trying to complete a graduate degree or certificate program while you're on the job. Taking time off your career to return to school cuts into the work experience you're acquiring. If you then seek jobs with employers who primarily value work experience, you could be viewed as a less strong candidate.

If now isn't a good time to pursue a formal program, then volunteer your PR services. Seek new experiences on the job or find a mentor.

"A good mentor can be the equivalent of having your own private professor," Kalm said.

To keep pace with the changing world, communicators must stay curious and never stop learning. ■■



Susan B. Walton, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, is a PR faculty member at Brigham Young University-Idaho.

## Standing Out

### How to Make a Lasting Impression on LinkedIn

By Julie Livingston

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About five years ago, I was amplifying my presence on LinkedIn to identify new clients for my fledgling PR consultancy.

People started noticing my content, including a former client prospect who was “lurking” on my profile, although she never commented or shared anything I had posted. She was now at a Fortune 500 company, and her C-suite female boss, who was flying under the radar, needed to stand out more within the organization and in the industry; COVID led to a lot of talent attrition and people feeling disconnected.

That’s when I started offering LinkedIn content strategy and ghostwriting for senior leaders. Over these past few years, I’ve honed my craft and deepened my understanding of what makes a LinkedIn profile get noticed.

Whether you’re hunting for a job, seeking another internal opportunity or looking to build your network, LinkedIn is where you must have a robust profile. With more than 900 million users globally and 58 million companies in 200 countries, it’s a vibrant platform to tell your story, attract attention and build your career.

#### Build your brand.

When LinkedIn was first introduced more than two decades ago, most people thought of it only as a job search platform on which to post your résumé.

It’s evolved a lot since then, and although people use LinkedIn to look for employment and fractional work, I like to think of it as a personal brand-building tool.

Its purpose is to give people insight into who you are as a human being, combined with your knowledge, skills and work experience. The platform presents a unique opportunity to expand who you know — new connections who can help you get to your next career step.

#### Separate yourself from the pack.

Being in the PR space, the quality of your LinkedIn profile also speaks to your ability to communicate and tell a story effectively, as you use both language and graphics to set yourself apart from the rest.

So, be thoughtful about the content and the best way to illustrate who you are and what you’ve accomplished.

As a first step, look at the profiles of people in similar positions. What are they doing that’s worthwhile? How can you make your profile different?

#### Showcase the real you.

The top third of the LinkedIn profile is the first thing people see, so give it the most attention. I recommend getting a professional headshot, one where you look approachable, are in business casual clothing, smiling and making eye contact.

If you can’t have a headshot taken professionally, then ask a friend to take a photo of you with a simple, well-lit background. When it comes to wardrobe, I prefer colorful yet classic clothing.

“Whether you’re hunting for a job, seeking another internal opportunity or looking to build your network, LinkedIn is where you must have a robust profile.”

#### Create the positioning statement.

Behind the headshot is an area that’s often overlooked but is prime real estate to telegraph who you are and what you do or aspire to do.

Using a graphics tool such as Canva (you can do this using their free version), add a short statement of two to five words in the upper-right area that encapsulates who you are or what you want to do next, such as PR Account Supervisor or Business Development Driver.

In the lower-right corner of this

section, add a photo of you in action at work — delivering a presentation, having a conversation or winning an award. This demonstrates your self-confidence and gives context to your personality and achievements.

#### Customize the introduction and content sections.

In the header where your name appears on the left, you can customize and add a descriptor and link that takes you to the platform of your choice. Mine goes to my website, but you can also direct it to a landing page, portfolio or video.

Remember to add your email under the Content section. I can’t count the number of times I’ve tried to contact someone, and there’s been no email address, which is incredibly frustrating, especially if a recruiter or job prospect is trying to contact you. Make sure you include a direct way to get in touch.

#### Make it about you.

The About section is akin to a personal branding story, where you summarize your background. Make it vivid so that people can envision you standing before them.

You have 2,000 words to do this, but the first three sentences are the ones that appear before clicking “Read More,” so make them count by using keywords such as public relations, content, media relations, communications skills and social media.

I like to start with a short story (make it as concise as possible) that demonstrates your leadership skills, energy and passion for your work. How did you get to where you are today? Who/what inspired you? What was your path to a PR career?

#### Update work history and education.

Depending on your PR career stage, you can use the Experience section in a more traditional way (more like a résumé, listing results, etc.) or as a landing page.

Use the title slot to add a statement encapsulating your main achievement, such as “Media Placement for Fortune 500 Clients.” Add the employer’s name in the appropriate slot.

Add a media section to bring the experience section alive. Use that space to upload media placements you’ve garnered, photos of you delivering a presentation, holding an award, or a snapshot of you and your colleagues at an industry event or trade show. This demonstrates your interest and passion for public relations.

In the Skills section, there is a prompt to showcase five of your top skills, making you more searchable. Again, refer to your keywords. If you click the edit tool (a pencil), you can now click and drag the skills so they are in priority order.

#### Utilize recommendations.

Many people disregard Recommendations because they feel uncomfortable about requesting them or because they don’t know who to ask. These are worthwhile and can help recruiters and hiring managers see your value — how you moved the needle — to a team or organization.

I’ve found that it’s best to request a recommendation while you’re in a job or just after you depart — when you’re still top of mind.

The best way to optimize your LinkedIn profile is to learn about and experiment with the company’s continuously updated features. This is an excellent exercise in becoming more familiar with the platform and will keep your profile current. ■■



**Julie Livingston**, president of WantLeverage Communications in New York, specializes in raising executive visibility on LinkedIn. Find more information at [wantleverage.com](http://wantleverage.com). Email: [julie@wantleverage.com](mailto:julie@wantleverage.com).

# Executive Presence

## A Blueprint for Becoming a LinkedIn Influencer



By Shalon Kerr

**A**mid the ever-evolving terrain of trust and credibility outlined in the Edelman Trust Barometer, businesses stand out as the beacon of reliability, embodying both proficiency and ethical fortitude.

In a remarkable turn, CEOs find themselves held in higher esteem than governmental bodies, NGOs, and media entities globally. As expectations surge for company leaders to maintain a prominent online presence, reports have shown that devising a compelling executive social media strategy has shifted from optional to imperative in cultivating authentic connections with diverse audiences.

LinkedIn emerges as the undisputed champion in this realm, offering unparalleled opportunities for meaningful engagement and influence.

This may leave you wondering — how do you become an influencer on LinkedIn? Here's the blueprint:

### 1. Identify topics.

Understanding your audience is the cornerstone of meaningful engagement. Begin by identifying three core topics that resonate with your personal brand and target audience. Need help figuring out where to start? Dive deep into your core beliefs. Engage with ChatGPT or similar AI tools to explore your industry insights and align them with your values. Try this prompt:

“If I were to deliver a TED Talk, what unique insights could I share from my industry that speaks to my core beliefs? Ask me questions to collect information until you can provide recommendations. Ask me the first question.”

This exercise encourages introspection, helping to refine your value proposition and tailor your content strategy accordingly.

### 2. Craft a compelling profile.

Your LinkedIn profile is your digital handshake. From a high-quality photo to a value-packed headline, every element should be strategically chosen. Don't squander the headline space with a title alone; summarize your role and the value you offer. If you don't have a designer,

then visit Canva to create a banner that aligns with your brand.

### 3. Generate value-driven content.

Focus on your core topics to establish authority, credibility and trust:

- ➔ Video or carousels for thought leadership posts.
- ➔ Text only or carousels for educational posts.
- ➔ Text only or text plus an image (especially a selfie) for personal storytelling posts. However, exercise caution — while authenticity is critical, oversharing can detract from your professional image.
- ➔ Company posts or “bottom-of-funnel” content shows what working with you is like. Include success stories and testimonials, how to work with you/your company, reasons to invest (if relevant) and major milestones.

“Your LinkedIn profile is your digital handshake. From a high-quality photo to a value-packed headline, every element should be strategically chosen.”

Even with detailed prompts, most LLMs, such as ChatGPT, write poor social posts. While Taplio, an AI tool built for LinkedIn, is a huge improvement, it's still not going to do everything, nor should it. AI-generated content on LinkedIn experiences a 30% drop in reach, a 55% decrease in engagement and a 60% lower click-through rate than human-generated content.

Additionally, research has shown that AI-generated images on LinkedIn receive up to 70% fewer clicks.

It's important to experiment, but keep in mind that LinkedIn's algorithm keeps tabs on the performance of your last 10-15 posts, and a run of content with low engagement may limit posts' visibility in the future.

### 4. Embrace consistency.

Consistency is critical to maintaining visibility. Aim for two to three posts weekly and experiment with posting times to optimize engagement. LinkedIn's algorithm favors content with high dwell time, so focus on captivating your audience's attention. Remember, even silent readers contribute to your post's visibility, signaling interest in the algorithm.

Here's what the latest data shows:

- ➔ **Text Only:** Monday-Friday: 10 a.m.–12 p.m.; weekends are also good for personal storytelling
- ➔ **Text + Image:** Monday-Friday 8 – 10:30 a.m.
- ➔ **Carousels:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, avoid Sundays
- ➔ **Videos:** Tuesday-Thursday 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

### 5. Use a post sign-off.

Don't overlook the power of a sign-off. Adding a personal touch reinforces your brand identity while providing a subtle yet effective call to action. Use this space to prompt followers to stay updated on your content by following you and enabling notifications (clicking the bell icon on your profile).

The LinkedIn algorithm prioritizes your content to bell ringers followed by those who frequently engage with your posts, then new followers or connections, and lastly, the broader audience of active LinkedIn users.

### 6. Engage daily.

Active engagement is the lifeblood of LinkedIn. Promptly respond to comments on your posts to boost visibility and longevity. Interaction within the first hour of posting increases visibility for the next 18 hours by up to 40%.

Encourage meaningful conversations, as the algorithm favors posts with substantial engagement. Adding two to four comments on your post after the first hour can reintroduce the post into all participants' feeds, typically resulting in an additional 25% reach. There isn't a penalty for being the first to comment on your post.

Don't underestimate the impact of

engaging with others' posts. Interacting with 5-10 posts from your connections increases your post's reach by up to 15%. Furthermore, 10 quality comments daily for a month can lead to up to 40% more profile views, up to 25% more engagement on one's content, and up to 20% more followers/connection requests.

Even if you follow all the other guidance, the algorithm will take note when you don't actively engage with the LinkedIn community.

### 7. Leverage your company page.

Likes, comments and reposts from your company page bolster your personal branding efforts, signaling credibility to your audience and the algorithm alike.

### 8. Aim for LinkedIn 'Top Voice.'

LinkedIn invites experts on specific topics to co-author collaborative articles based on their professional background, skills and engagement on the platform. By contributing to at least three collaborative articles on a single topic that garner significant engagement, you can earn a “Community Top Voice Badge.”

Sharing the article URL with your network can speed up this process by attracting more engagement. Research shows that profiles with this badge receive 25%-40% more profile views and are promoted by LinkedIn in relevant searches. However, inactive contributors risk losing their badges.

Mastering LinkedIn demands strategy, authenticity and persistence. By applying this blueprint, you can boost your presence, grow your network and establish yourself as a leading voice in your field. ■■



**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

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

# Career Boost

## 5 Ways to Accelerate Your Professional Development

By Leela Stake

**W**hile I have more than two decades of work experience, I know that I will always have a lot to learn.

With humility, I offer the following ideas for accelerating your professional development, drawing from some of the most meaningful lessons of my career.

### 1. Mentor and invite reverse mentoring.

Have mentors and be a mentor, especially to people who have less access to mentorship and sponsorship. Foster mutual learning with people in every decade of life, if you can.

One of my closest friends growing up was Eleanor Fleischman, who was 80 years my senior and lived to be 101. And now, nothing energizes me more than being a sponge with the firm's rising stars, who are brilliant and renew my optimism about our future.

Relatively little is written about reverse mentoring — when a younger employee mentors the “senior” leader — but there should be much more of it. Reverse mentoring helps provide fresh insights into workplace culture and is an essential component of getting 360-degree feedback so you can lead better into the future.

### 2. Know your strengths and how to prevent them from misfiring.

We adopted CliftonStrengths assessments as an organization a few years ago. Still, I did not appreciate their full value as a professional development tool until

I used them more deeply during the past year. I've found that getting to know my strengths and those of others on my teams has helped us find great complements and work together on a new level.

Beyond that, an epiphany for me has been mindfulness that our strengths can go into overdrive. One of my top five strengths is optimism, and I have learned to balance my positivity with more realism in certain audiences and situations. Sometimes, people may need to vent, and the best thing to do is listen before coming in with a “glass half full” perspective.

“Take time to catch your breath outside of work to look at the big picture of your professional life.”

### 3. Expand your inclusion horizons.

We live in a diverse society, and it will only become more diverse in the years ahead. Cultivating an inclusive work environment is our collective responsibility and requires consistent effort.

Be intentional in learning about life experiences that are less familiar to you so that, as a leader, you are better equipped to help all team members feel welcome and thrive.

If your workplace has employee resource groups or the equivalent, then consider joining one as an ally. Do a lot of listening to help broaden your understanding and get a pulse on how best to support and advocate for those around you.

### 4. Zoom out to better focus in.

Take time to catch your breath outside of work to look at the big picture of your professional life. Consider which passions and skill sets might need more attention to make you feel whole.

A few years ago, I realized that I had primarily been focused on business and nonprofit work and had relatively less government experience.

So, I applied for, and was selected to, a local task force for my town and served for two years. I also realized I wanted to do even more environmental work, which led to a meaningful board role with my local conservation corps. Remember that some of the most significant professional development can happen outside of work.

### 5. Request and provide feedback.

I credit my long-time Fleishman-

Hillard San Francisco colleague Heather Pierce with evangelizing American psychologist Carol Dweck's work on a growth mindset for our office many moons ago. The basic idea is that our talents can be developed through hard work, the right strategies and input from others.

People and organizations that embody a growth mindset actively seek out and offer constructive feedback. This means fighting the urge to become defensive when receiving feedback or avoiding sharing their opinion because it can be uncomfortable.

As Albert Einstein once said, “Once you stop learning, you start dying.” Here's to making our professional development a continued priority inside and outside of work. ■■



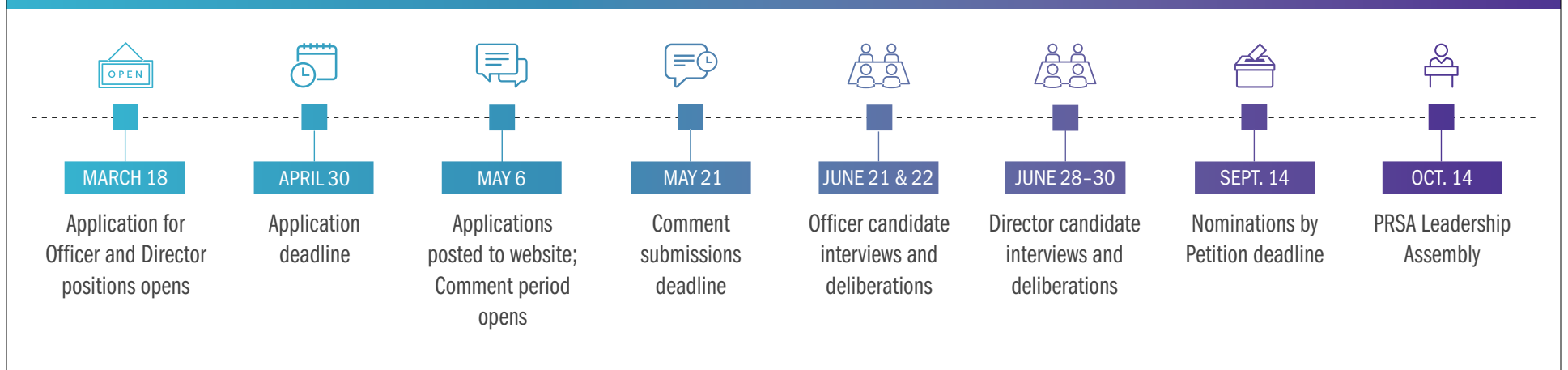
**Leela Stake** is a senior partner, Cabinet member and global lead for True MOSAIC and FH4Inclusion at FleishmanHillard. She has a track record as a trusted adviser to executives of 100+ of the world's most influential companies and organizations. She is the incoming

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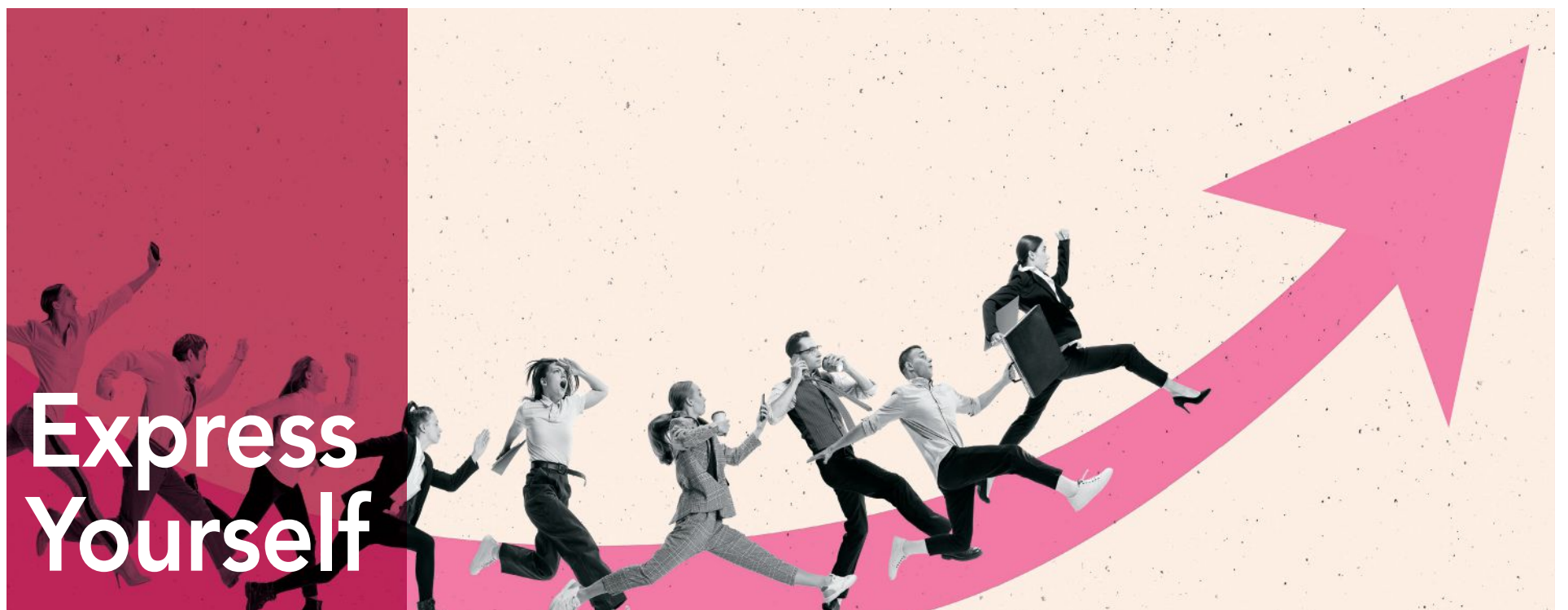
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## Express Yourself

### Taking the Next Steps on Your Professional Journey

By John Walker

As I reflect on my professional journey, I'm reminded of the constant evolution and perpetual growth that defines our careers. Our journeys are ours to define and accomplish based on our ever-changing perceptions of growth and development.

One commonality: Our professional journeys are always grounded in continuous improvement, and we control the path we take. How can we accomplish the next "big thing?" Where will our next career-defining opportunity come from? What is our next step?

The answer to these questions might not always be found in the professional space — often, growth and development are fostered in how we stretch ourselves in the other areas of our lives.

Growth isn't confined to the professional realm; it's a personal journey that encompasses the entirety of our lives, beckoning us to explore new parts of what life has to offer. Give yourself time to just "be" — to be still, to be bored, to be curious, to be in your own head. Carving out these moments of introspection is essential in pursuing continuous growth and development.

It's difficult to find time to slow down in this busy life. Throughout our professional journeys, work has the potential to take center stage in nearly all aspects of our lives. However, if you take time to be diligent and put your work away, you'll find inspiration in the least likely places, allowing you to focus and deliver against your commitments.

“By taking the time to sit still and reflect on life, we're inclined to ponder what motivates us to keep us on track.”

#### Taking a break

During a career transition, I took a year off to reflect on my past and focus on the future. During this yearlong self-imposed sabbatical, I learned more about my passions and determined my professional path forward as an entrepreneur would enable me the flexibility to be more intentionally present in life with

family, friends and colleagues.

When we sit still, many things have the potential to transpire: Big ideas, new goals, new opportunities or course corrections in our lives. By taking the time to sit still and reflect on life, we're inclined to ponder what motivates us to keep us on track. Is it picking up a new hobby or continuing the one you've neglected for a while? Is it pursuing another form of education or certification? Or perhaps it is focusing on where you should travel next to achieve your life goals.

A colleague of mine recently began to learn to cross-stitch. Another team member is an avid rail fan — he continues to feed his passion for history through writing and research. Another recently took some time to work as a wrangler on a ranch despite having no prior horse experience. Why? They aspired to stretch themselves and learn something new outside their professional wheelhouses.

#### Getting out of your comfort zone

Expressing your creativity is one of the most formative parts of lifelong learning. Throwing yourself into the unknown

and pushing yourself to explore new areas of interest is one of the most opportunistic traits that shapes every aspect of your life.

Whether you have actively been in the workforce for 20 years or are a recent graduate, prioritize your focus on professional growth and development. Get out of your comfort zone, push yourself and evolve by constantly growing, adapting and learning new things about yourself and the world in which you live, work and prosper.

The only constant in our lives is change. In our ever-evolving world, pursuing professional growth isn't just an end goal we aim to accomplish in the distance; it's a continuous journey we weave into our everyday lives to fuel our path to the next destination. What are you waiting for to take the next step on your professional journey? ■■



**John Walker** is founder and managing partner of Chirp, an integrated brand marketing, communications, digital and PR agency for high-growth companies. He also serves as chair of the Executive Committee of PRSA's Counselors Academy.



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# Moving From the Newsroom to the Boardroom

## A Journalist's Journey Into Comms Leadership

By Anita Brikman

When I graduated from college, I couldn't believe that I was heading straight to the job I had dreamed of since childhood: working in a broadcast newsroom. I had no doubt it was the career for me. I loved the energy, the chaos, the endless stories and the fascinating people I met in broadcast news.

Working as a health care reporter and news anchor was a challenging, satisfying career that took me from smaller markets in the Midwest to the bright lights of Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Every day, I felt fortunate to be doing what I loved, especially after achieving my goal of becoming an evening news anchor in a major market.

Yet, despite feeling proud of what I'd accomplished, I knew that after more than two and a half decades in the newsroom, a career change was inevitable and would be the right decision. For years, I had altered between 3 a.m. wake-up calls and late-night newscasts, a schedule that had taken its toll on me.

Just as I'd been determined to join a newsroom at the start of my career, I knew exactly what I wanted to do when it was time for me to leave the newsroom: run a communications shop. After years of working with talented news professionals to produce touching stories that had an impact, I hoped that what I had learned in the dynamic environment of broadcast journalism would be a valuable asset when switching careers to communications. Little did I know that, now, just over a decade since entering communications, the traits that I learned in the newsroom would lead to significant leadership opportunities.

### Writing your career 'lede'

I was leaving the relentless pace of news behind, but still needed to find the "lede" for my new career story — which would be to work with mission-driven organizations in health care. After being a health care reporter on TV, the transition

gave me a sense of expertise and continuity.

Organizations such as the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and the Consumer Healthcare Products Association became my professional homes. I could contribute to causes that aligned with my values and with my experience as a health care journalist.

Now, as president and CEO of the Plasma Protein Therapeutics Association, an organization committed to the well-being of patients who rely on plasma-derived therapies, I'm able to strategize and communicate while leading a global organization into a new era. I am grateful that my journalism experience has prepared me for the job.

“A lesson that has arisen repeatedly throughout my career, and probably yours, too, is that clear, honest communication might be difficult, but it's always necessary.”

Like any good story, our careers have an arc and a theme. Mine has always been about championing health and wellness. As a reporter, I loved the medical beat. The stories that I covered were challenging and rewarding, usually focused on helping people understand medical research and medical advances. Those stories might encourage viewers to overcome or cope with illness or empower them to take charge of their personal well-being.

When I decided to enter nonprofit communications, my previous experience as a broadcast journalist dedicated to health care advocacy would prove instrumental in my new role. By focusing on what I knew — after decades of covering the ever-changing medical landscape — I'd become an expert in a niche field, and



I discovered an array of opportunities that aligned with my skill set.

### Showing value as a leader

Next in my story was meeting my audience where they were — or showing my value as a leader — thanks to my journalism background. What unique attributes could I offer my colleagues and direct reports?

As I spent the first half of my career as a TV news reporter and anchor, I could communicate clearly and deliver direct messages to different audiences appropriately. I could go beyond the surface level and be an active and engaged listener, asking profound questions with impact.

Tensions can run high in the newsroom and in some communications shops. Whether facing the pressure of a live shot in TV news or the stress of telling a complicated story for an organization, we learn to be unflappable and resilient — traits that are necessary for leadership.

Whether dealing with a budget crisis or having to quickly prepare talking points a few minutes before a congressional briefing, my careers in journalism and communications have helped me thrive under pressure. If you work in public relations, then you know the feeling.

### Communicating honestly, transparently

A lesson that has arisen repeatedly throughout my career, and probably yours, too, is that clear, honest communication might be difficult, but it's always necessary. But sadly, as many of us have experienced, not all leaders communicate well. As a result, they do not lead well.

I hope more communications professionals and former journalists will aspire to executive roles. We are adroit at communication both in delivery and listening, the latter trait being often overlooked

or undervalued in corporate leaders. Skills cultivated in the high-stakes worlds of journalism and PR help us stand out when we become organizational leaders.

The turning point for my career story, which laid the foundation for my becoming CEO, was my prior experience of managing a growing educational foundation focused on medicine safety.

In that role, I answered directly to a board of directors. These professional experiences gave me a deep sense of accountability and a heart for organizational leadership. My ability to plan strategically and set a future-focused direction played a pivotal role in showing that I was more than simply a communications professional — I was a business-minded leader.

### Growing in new directions as a professional

Now, at the happy ending of this story, I'm fortunate to be able to reach a reflection point and share it with other communicators who want to push themselves beyond a more traditional career trajectory and embark on the path to the C-suite. Don't be afraid to take risks and see yourself growing in bold, new directions.

My career continues to be a transformative experience, one underscored by valuable lessons, challenges and meaningful contributions. It's a journey that has come full circle for me, bringing together the diverse threads of my professional life into a tapestry of leadership, impact and change. ■■



Anita Brikman is president and CEO of the Plasma Protein Therapeutics Association. A broadcast news journalist and anchor by training, she pivoted her career to become a communications executive. She encourages everyone to give the gift of life by donating plasma. Reach her at [abrikman@pptglobal.org](mailto:abrikman@pptglobal.org).

# Finding Your Voice

## Psychological Safety Lessons and Applications

By Jeff Vorwerk

I have vivid recollections of walking into my eighth-grade social studies class on Jan. 28, 1986, and learning that Space Shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after takeoff, killing all seven crew members on board. Seventeen years later, Space Shuttle Columbia experienced a similar outcome — this time upon reentry to the Earth's atmosphere — again killing all seven astronauts on board.

In both instances, I was saddened about the loss of life, I felt terribly for the astronauts' families, and I was filled with tremendous empathy for those who worked at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and supported these ill-fated missions. I also recall rationalizing the practical view that space travel is fraught with risks that can lead to devastating consequences. However, I remained hopeful each experience would generate sufficient knowledge to help prevent future disasters.

What I did not appreciate until years later was the role NASA's organizational culture played in these tragedies.

The technical elements associated with these disasters — including the defective O-ring of Challenger and the torn insulating foam that struck the reinforced carbon panels on the left wing of Columbia — are beyond my limited scientific comprehension.

In any event, there are significant lessons to internalize from the reported lack of psychological safety that permeated NASA time against the backdrop of

these two incidents.

An investigation of the Challenger and Columbia events revealed evidence of employees who either failed to speak up due to perceived fear of retribution or were ignored when they shared warnings of the missions' dire consequences.

While the results of decisions we make within our organizations may not rise to the profound life-and-death consequences faced by NASA astronauts, engineers or leaders, we can take a page from the lessons learned from the Space Shuttle catastrophes and study the benefits of psychological safety to help guide our interactions with one another as we execute on key initiatives.

“Leaders should encourage multiple voices of input and express feedback to employees who provide it.”

### What psychological safety is and isn't

Your first question might be, “What is psychological safety?” Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmondson popularized this essential concept in the 1990s and further crystalized its benefits in her 2019 book, “The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth.” She defines psychological safety as “a climate in which people are comfort-

able expressing and being themselves.”

Before summarizing the key elements of psychological safety, let's cover what it is not. Edmondson cautions us that psychological safety is not about offering unconditional support or praise for the ideas of others, synonymous with extroversion, another word for trust, or diminishing performance standards. Instead, psychological safety promotes an affirmative answer to the following questions:

- ➔ Can you freely surface problems and challenging issues?
- ➔ Are you encouraged to offer different views from others?
- ➔ Can you make mistakes without fear of reprisal?
- ➔ Are you allowed to take calculated risks?
- ➔ Can you ask other team members for help?
- ➔ During team collaboration, are your unique skills appreciated and put to good use?

So, how can we promote psychological safety? According to Edmondson, leaders set the stage by explaining the purpose of an initiative, helping employees feel safe to speak their minds and encouraging them to take calculated risks. Along the way, leaders should encourage multiple voices of input and express feedback to employees who provide it.

As employees, we can contribute to a psychologically safe environment by showing a willingness to express our

views openly, listening intently when ideas are shared, and supporting respectful debate with our colleagues.

### The benefits of psychological safety

Why should we care about psychological safety? According to McKinsey research, 89% of employees surveyed believe psychological safety in the workplace is essential. McKinsey also noted the predictive power psychological safety brings to generating positive team performance, productivity, quality, safety, creativity, motivation and overall employee health outcomes.

Additionally, Edmondson espoused the benefits of psychological safety for promoting employee engagement, favorable mental health, lower turnover intentions, and positive trust-building between employees and top management.

Whether leading a new product launch, working through the details of a project to improve customer experience or even debating a company policy, promoting psychological safety can help leaders do their part in building and maintaining a high-performing culture within our collective organizations. ■■



Jeff Vorwerk has held a variety of leadership roles in the financial services industry over his 27-year career. He also recently completed his Ed.D. from Creighton University's Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership.



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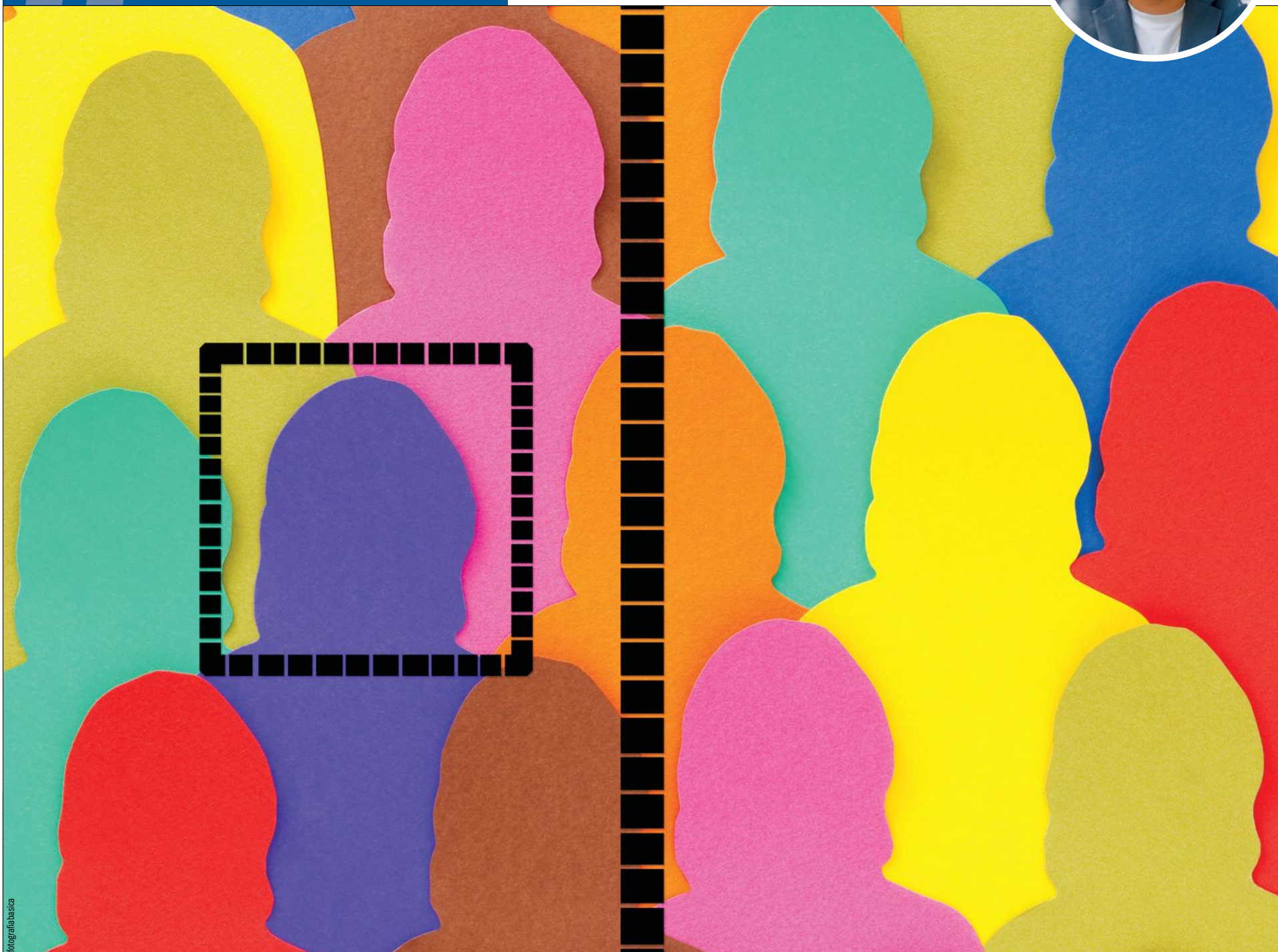
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## Age-Related Discrimination Is Common in Workplaces, Studies Find

Nearly 80% of women have encountered age-related stereotypes, assumptions and discrimination in their careers, finds a recent survey by the advocacy organization Women of Influence+. The survey received responses from more than 1,250 women in 46 countries and various industries.

More than 80% of respondents said they had witnessed women being treated differently in the workplace because of their age. The survey suggests that ageism is practiced at all levels of seniority, implicating recruiters, HR departments, co-workers, clients, managers and executives.

Half of the respondents said they had been shown a lack of respect from colleagues, while 49% reported unfair treatment in promotion processes. Some 62% of women surveyed said they had felt increased stress as a result of experiencing ageism. A similar percentage reported that their capabilities had been second-guessed, while 55% said they had ex-

perienced lower self-confidence as a result of age-based discrimination.

Nearly 60% of respondents said they had overcompensated or worked harder to prove their worth. About 58% said that age discrimination had impaired the progress of their careers. More than half (52.1%) of respondents reported they didn't feel a sense of belonging at work, while a similar share (50.9%) said they felt dissatisfied with their employer.

While the February 2024 study concluded that women suffer disproportionately from age-related discrimination in the workplace, other studies have found that ageism can affect men more than women. In a 2018 study by researchers at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, assertive older women were found to have an easier time than assertive older men, who were perceived as more threatening.

— Greg Beaubien

# Communicating Expectations and Staying Productive When Working Remotely

By Brenda Duran



It's hard to believe that four years have passed since we first faced a pandemic that shut down the world in a matter of days. Offices quickly transitioned from places where we spent our days in cubicles Monday through Friday, to workspaces that we set up at home so we could conduct business remotely via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

In the public sector, where I am employed, remote work was unheard of before the pandemic. Working from home was not an option for most public-sector employees. Providing public services remotely from your house was not considered a viable alternative to working from the office.

Four years later, it's clear that the way we work, in both the private and public sectors, will never be the same. The pandemic has proven to be the catalyst for one of the most impactful cultural shifts in both the public and private sectors. Most employers have adopted hybrid-work models and maintained remote work as an option. The hybrid approach allows for more flexibility and has contributed to overall employee satisfaction, studies have found.

In August 2020, about six months into the pandemic, *Harvard Business Review* published a study on the productivity of knowledge workers. These employees use their own judgment at work, so their output can't be tracked like that of workers who perform physical tasks. But because knowledge workers, including those in communications, can withhold effort by not fully engaging their brains in their work (often without anyone noticing), it's difficult to assess their productivity.

By comparing knowledge workers in 2020 to those from a previous study in 2013, *Harvard Business Review* found that the lockdown had positive effects on their productivity, at least in the short term. Knowledge workers during the pandemic said they focused more on the work that really mattered. They spent 12% less time in large meetings and 9% more time interacting with customers and external partners. During the lockdowns, they viewed their work as more worthwhile.

But remote work also raised concerns about the longer-term effectiveness, creativity and personal resilience of knowledge workers, the study found.

How can we make sure that remote teams stay motivated and engaged in their work? Here are four ideas to try,



whether you manage teams in the private or public sector.

## 1. Set expectations through clear communications.

Communicators can help develop guidelines for what organizations expect of their employees in the hybrid workplace. We can help management establish accessible communication channels and teach employees how to use them.

In the public sector, many workers now use Microsoft Teams to chat about projects or hold virtual meetings. We must clearly communicate our organization's expectations for employees who work remotely.

“Communicators can help develop guidelines for what organizations expect of their employees in the hybrid workplace.”

The new culture of remote work also requires managers to communicate that they can be reached through these digital platforms. Managers should let employees know they're available to help them realize the full potential of these tools, which teams can use when working on projects or conducting meetings.

To get started, familiarize yourself with these new communications technologies and then hold a training session for your staff. You might also conduct a

virtual forum, where employees can ask questions and be reminded of management's expectations for the remote workplace.

## 2. Check in with remote employees.

Before the era of remote work, walking over to someone's office to check in was the norm. Today, in remote work environments, we must make it a point to still check in with employees, sometimes virtually. Managers can ask for progress reports and learn about the challenges employees are facing. Check-ins are good opportunities to discuss pending tasks, identify next steps and get everyone on the same page.

Show that you're proactively making time for these conversations to happen. By scheduling check-ins on a weekly or even daily basis, we can help peers and employees stay engaged in their work. Let people know that even when working remotely, you still aim to create a collaborative environment where ideas can be discussed.

## 3. Create a virtual hub of information.

When was the last time you logged on to your organization's intranet? Are you ensuring that your staff is plugged into your organization's social media sites and following you? Working in a remote environment is a good time to assess company intranets and see how they can become hubs of information that remote staff can access at any time. As communicators, we might refresh our company intranets so people can find

forms, receive alerts and view important upcoming events.

We can also find new ways to connect with employees through social media. LinkedIn has made it easy for organizations to establish their own page, where employees can connect with managers and see new job postings and special announcements.

Social media pages are a great way to keep your organization engaged online. Employees can easily create and share content with colleagues while also expanding their own professional networks.

## 4. Offer professional development opportunities online.

Organizations can provide their employees with a plethora of online training opportunities and professional development resources — from anywhere in the world. Courses that help employees grow their careers also keep them engaged in their work.

What's more, employees bring the knowledge they gain from training courses back to the organization and share it with their teams. Online training resources also help employees collaborate online and engage with one another about what they are learning.

Think about what kinds of online opportunities will help your staff enhance their skills and stay motivated while working remotely, so we can all continue to flourish in our evolving workspaces. ❖

Brenda Duran is director of external affairs for the Los Angeles County Justice, Care and Opportunities Department. She can be reached at bduran5@yahoo.com.

# Cultivating Collaboration in Hybrid and Remote Teams

By Lizabeth Wesely-Casella

Over the past 18 months, businesses transitioning to remote and hybrid work have faced challenges with engagement, effective collaboration, and maintaining or building community within their workforce.



Leadership and staff are increasingly concerned that the loss of physical proximity negatively impacts efficiency, innovation and morale.

Furthermore, these obstacles manifest in low productivity and low organizational awareness and contribute to poor customer service and high production time or, worse, rework.

The following are common tactical mistakes businesses make and the reasons why they don't work:

### Challenge: Engagement

**Tactical mistake:** Repeating messages that don't create engagement and instead create apathy

**Why it falls short:** More is not always better. If communications don't have a feedback mechanism or don't allow recipients to self-select for additional details, then messaging becomes "noise"

### Challenge: Collaboration, community and culture

**Tactical mistake:** Engaging in "forced fun" and social activities

**Why it falls short:** Collaboration is built on trust and requires greater organizational awareness

### Challenge: Informing teams

**Tactical mistake:** Pumping out information about operations and processes in a style that doesn't align with team communications needs

**Why it falls short:** Without understanding the organizational culture type, the needs of the communication recipient are not met

### Challenge: Direct communication

**Tactical Mistake:** Relying on communications channels that don't work for the workforce

**Why it falls short:** Not all workers have access to email or are not "text first" learners

### Why this matters

Engagement plays an important role in productivity, retention, stress and burnout. Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2023 found that "when employees are engaged at work, 70% report feeling significantly lower stress in their lives," positively impacting retention and preventing "quiet quitting."

To encourage engagement, successful

communications are also the simplest. People have limited time to absorb a multitude of messages, and intentionally or unintentionally, they prioritize what is easiest to process.

If you develop consistent, easy-to-access, brief internal communications, then you will improve engagement and collaboration, increase organizational awareness, reduce time spent answering questions and break down silos.

Overcoming these challenges results in better efficiency, increased retention and higher job satisfaction.

The least expensive and most effective ways to address engagement, collaboration and community with measurable success are:

- ➔ Build highly effective, well-informed teams that understand the big picture.
- ➔ Leverage institutional knowledge rather than spending money on additional tools and technology.
- ➔ Spend time creating a strategic communications plan.

“Engagement plays an important role in productivity, retention, stress and burnout.”

### 5 effective tactical solutions

**1. Increase organizational awareness.** To improve collaboration, your staff must understand what your organization's various groups do and what defines success for each. Additionally, understanding the key contacts within each department will help individuals reach out to the right people.

➔ Create a "Staff Spotlight" and distribute it at a regular cadence. Interview team members and ask questions that delve into what interests them, what work they have expertise in and what projects they focus on. Publish their photo and give their contact information. Your audience will learn who they should connect with and under what circumstances.

➔ Build portals or sections within your intranet or employee resources documents that describe the type of work each department or team focuses on. Make clear how each team supports the organization's overall success and what other departments/teams it works closely with. Also, provide contact information for key personnel within each group.

### 2. Understand organizational



**culture types.** To increase engagement, it's vital to understand how information needs to be distributed, what style of writing/communication is preferred and how the end user assimilates it.

For example, suppose your communications are highly detailed with a lot of explanation and dot-connecting, but your workforce is composed of "big picture" thinkers. They will not absorb detailed information on a regular basis. This style will cause your workforce to disregard messages that may be important.

Conversely, if your team wants more information and detailed plans, then it's important to know that when crafting communication.

If you get the TLDR (Too Long Didn't Read) or the analysis paralysis response, then that's an indication your communication is ineffective for your overall culture type.

➔ Identify chaos/order tolerance and drivers for your workforce and departments. We recommend using a tool such as the Helix Assessment or obtaining professional guidance to craft your survey.

➔ Conduct a focus group with your organization with a statistically significant sample size to gain deeper insight into how communication needs to be crafted.

### 3. Prepare a content calendar.

In addition to preventing information overload by designing a healthy cadence, a content calendar helps ensure proper resource use and organizes information for a logical flow throughout the year.

➔ Remember that content calendars, or editorial calendars, can be as simple as a spreadsheet or as complex as a workflow with dependencies. Use the tool that makes sense for your organization and the skill level of your content creators.

➔ Keep space in your calendar for unanticipated messaging that will inevitably arise throughout the year.

➔ Assign resources to your message-

ing campaigns, such as graphics design, intranet page development, photos, interviews, etc.

### 4. Get creative with channels and multimedia.

You may have a deskless workforce or a distributed team, so consider a layered communications approach. Don't depend on one channel, such as email or intranet, and don't rely exclusively on text. Deliver your messages, especially if you have deskless workers, in a variety of formats.

- ➔ Utilize infographics for workflows and processes.
- ➔ Engage in short podcasts to capture your deskless workers.
- ➔ Use video messages for evergreen content.
- ➔ Share the annual goals and year-end celebrations with your team in pre-populated digital picture frames.

### 5. Update the intranet or single source of truth (SSOT) to reflect the user.

- ➔ Conduct a focus group with your workforce to find out what *they* want to see on the intranet/SSOT.
- ➔ Develop a great user experience (UX).
- ➔ Assign specific people to manage and update the portal/pages/tool.

Whether they are a dedicated internal communications team, HR or influencers such as management or team leads, developing a strategic communications plan with feedback mechanisms is a critical problem-solving step that saves time, money and talent. ❖

**Lizabeth Wesely-Casella** is the founder and CEO of L-12 Services Corp., a Washington, D.C.-based firm focused on operational excellence. She is a skilled strategic adviser specializing in internal communication, attrition mitigation, workflow management, process improvement and culture. Visit the L-12 Services website at: [l12services.com](http://l12services.com).

# How the APR Helps You Get Where You Want to Go

By Troy Brown, APR

Lawyers have the bar exam and doctors have a host of professional credentials they must fulfill to practice medicine. But, what about communications pros? How can we demonstrate our PR expertise to potential employers, especially for those of us who came into the profession from educational backgrounds other than communications?



For me, the APR made a huge difference. Earning Accreditation in Public Relations facilitated my transition into communications from an unrelated field, and later helped open the door to other previously out-of-reach opportunities, including teaching PR writing at the university level.

## Demonstrating comms skills

I started my professional life as an airport planner. After about five years, I realized it was not the career for me. Following much self-reflection, I decided to move into PR/communications.

Although I had gained solid professional communications experience in my airport planning roles, it was a challenge to demonstrate the full breadth of my comms expertise to employers on a résumé that had only planning-related job

titles.

To make the switch to communications, I joined PRSA, where I heard about the APR. Through self-guided study and a drive to get it done, I earned the APR credential in six months.

Soon after achieving the APR, I landed my first communications-focused job, working as a PR account executive for a marketing agency, and becoming PR director for the firm within two years. The APR made the difference.

On my résumé and in job interviews, I was able to demonstrate that I was more than an airport planner who also was a skilled writer and public speaker. I now could show that I knew how to prepare and implement a strategic communications plan and how to measure the results — all topics covered in the APR.

By sharpening my knowledge of communications theory and best practices, the APR also made it possible to achieve other dreams. When the opportunity arose to teach an upper-division undergraduate PR writing class at the University of Washington Tacoma, the APR credential helped me to become a part-time lecturer, with only a B.A. in an unrelated field (geography).



“The APR also helped me land my current position — leading internal and external communications for one of the busiest courts in Washington state.”

## Setting myself apart

The APR also helped me land my current position — leading internal and external communications for one of the busiest courts in Washington state. Based on information I had gathered in my first round of interviews, using my APR-sharpened skills I prepared a brief strategic communications plan for a major project

the court was implementing.

During my second round of interviews, one of the questions that the court's chief presiding judge asked was: “What would be your three-month plan of things to accomplish?”

Being able to respond by showing her a tangible communications plan that was specific to her court's needs is what I believe set me apart from other candidates and landed me a job that I am still loving five years later. ❖

**Troy Brown, APR**, is the communications officer for King County District Court, in the Seattle area. His career experience includes a range of leadership roles in public and private sector communications. Brown is also a past president and Assembly delegate of the PRSA Puget Sound Chapter.

April is Accreditation Month at PRSA. It's a time to learn about how becoming Accredited in Public Relations can help advance your career. Look for posts on the PRsay blog and each month in *The Pinnacle*, PRSA's monthly newsletter offering insights on Accreditation. Learn more about earning your APR by visiting: [PRaccreditation.org](http://PRaccreditation.org).

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# PRSA Learning

## WRITING ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, April 11, 3–4 p.m. ET

### 7 Steps to Stellar Writing

*Ann Wylie, president, Wylie Communications Inc.*

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ▶▶▶

In-person Workshop, April 11–12, 9 a.m.–6 p.m. CDT

### Master Class in Strategic Communication

*Helio Fred Garcia, president, Logos Consulting Group; Katie Garcia, advisor, Logos Consulting Group*

## MEDIA RELATIONS, WRITING ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, April 17, 3–4 p.m. ET

### Boost Your News Writing Skills

*Tom Unger, APR, ABC, CTM, ACB, Fellow PRSA, owner, News Writing Pro, LLC*



## ACCREDITATION PREPARATION & MAINTENANCE ▶▶▶

In-person Workshop, April 17–19

### APR Boot Camp

*Amy Adamy, APR, PR and marketing manager, Lansing Board of Water & Light; Andrew D. Corner, APR, Fellow PRSA, interim chair and professor of practice, Michigan State University; Sean Connolly, APR, owner, Connolly Communications, LLC; Jason Kirsch, APR, principal and senior counselor, PRworks*

## ACCREDITATION PREPARATION & MAINTENANCE ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, April 24, 2–3 p.m. ET

### APR Panel Presentation: Secrets to Success

*Juanita Traugher, MBA, APR, director of marketing and communications, University School of Nashville*

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY, TECHNIQUES & TACTICS ▶▶▶

Virtual Workshop, April 30, May 2 and May 7; 12–3 p.m. ET

### PR Boot Camp

*Robin Schell, APR, Fellow PRSA, senior counsel and partner, Jackson Jackson & Wagner*



## ACCREDITATION PREPARATION & MAINTENANCE ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, May 1, 12–1:00 p.m. ET

### APR: Nuts and Bolts — APR Panel Presentation

*Becky Best, APR, public relations consultant*

## ETHICS ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, May 9, 3–4 p.m. ET

### PRSA Storytellers Series: Essential Ethics Competencies in Public Relations: Common Deficiencies and Helpful Resources

*Marlene Neill, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, associate professor and graduate program director, Baylor University*

## CRISIS & REPUTATION ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, May 15, 3–4 p.m. ET

### How Can Practitioners Make Their Crisis Communication Evidence-based?

*Jo Detavernier, APR, SCMP, principal, Detavernier Strategic Communication*

Each learning opportunity qualifies for APR renewal credits.

For more details, visit [prsa.org/pd](https://prsa.org/pd)

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## Profiles in PR

Sankalp Sharma has just returned from PRSSA's Leadership Assembly in Seattle, as well as a site visit and planning meeting in Anaheim, Calif., ahead of next year's student conference.

The PRSSA 2023-2024 president is a senior at Sacramento State University, where he is majoring in public relations. He has been a PRSSA member since his first week of college and has held several leadership roles for his Chapter. At the national level, he has served as a district ambassador, member of the PRoud Council and the vice president of chapter development.

Sharma is active in his community and has written two books that raise awareness about social injustices and inequalities. "I truly believe that everyone has a story, and I want to do my part to help tell those stories," he says.

Here, he talks with Managing Editor Amy Jacques about leadership, community and life after graduation.

**Q** Did you have a dream job as a child?

**A** I only had one main goal, and that was to travel the world and learn about as many people as possible. I was always fascinated by the world, the different cultures and different ways of life, and wanted to be able to travel as much as possible!

# PRSSA's Sankalp Sharma on the Importance of Community

**Q** You've been a member of PRSSA since your first week of college. Why did you initially decide to join? And why did you decide to take on several leadership roles?

**A** I found PRSSA through my college orientation. My tour guide mentioned that, for all the public relations majors, there was a club on campus called PRSSA. I sent an email asking what PRSSA was and, after my first meeting, realized it was the right place for me. I came to college during the beginning of the pandemic, and I remember being extremely nervous about meeting people.

With everything virtual, I was set on trying my best to find friends in college, and the welcoming environment I experienced in my first PRSSA meeting solidified that this was where I could make lifelong friends and grow.

As a freshman, I felt extremely motivated to take risks and was elected to the executive board in my second semester. After that, I applied to be a district ambassador. From there, I was encouraged to run for the vice president of chapter development position, and then was fortunate enough to be elected as president. I was encouraged to take risks and bet on myself.

**Q** What are you most proud of so far during your tenure as

PRSSA president?

**A** Easily, the community that we've strengthened. ICON and Leadership Assembly were such incredibly successful events and a lot of that happened because students really could be comfortable at these events.

After the virtual time, a lot of students understandably felt disconnected from the National Committee and their fellow Chapters.

My incredible National Committee team made it our priority to focus on outreach and creating a welcoming community. We fostered a celebratory environment where our PRSSA family was heard. Although a society can always be more diverse and open, I am proud of my team and of PRSSA for taking a step in the right direction.

**Q** What are you and your peers and fellow students talking about right now?

**A** With graduation coming closer, students are looking for jobs and internships. One constant discussion I've had with students was asking the question: "What's next?" While some had their answers ready to go, others hesitated, and I reassured them that it was OK.

To me, the beauty of PRSSA and PRSA is helping those who don't know what's next, whether that be through networking, mentorship or improving someone's portfolio. I'm eager to see the incredible journeys these young leaders are ready to embark on.

**Q** Community is very important to you — you've even written two books on the topic!

**A** I came to write the books in 2020. With the nation being filled with unrest due to civil, racial and overall health issues, I knew I wanted to make a difference. I remember seeing a lot of people reposting information on their Instagram or other social media, and that was great in terms of educating the



public, but I wanted to do more. Public relations and communication are such an instrumental part of our world because we can use our voice and share the voices of others.

My first book consisted of pieces written solely by me, revolving around all kinds of topics, but the second one was to promote the voices of my peers. I wanted this piece to be a collaborative piece where I not only told a story of what I saw, but also allowed others to share their stories as well. All the proceeds from both books have been going to charity and I'm thankful for all the support that I have gotten regarding them.

**Q** How has your time in PRSSA at Sacramento State prepared you for life after college and a career in communications?

**A** PRSSA at Sacramento State has set me up perfectly because that is where my journey started. The support that I've gotten in my four years here is truly life changing and I am inspired every day. One of the most influential parts, for me, was spending time around graduating seniors as a freshman because they showed me the reality of the working world and what to expect, but more important, how to get my foot in the door. I always encourage students to join PRSSA as quickly as possible because you find mentors at every step of your journey who can tell you the realities of what to expect, push you in the right direction and guide you when you hit a roadblock. ❖



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