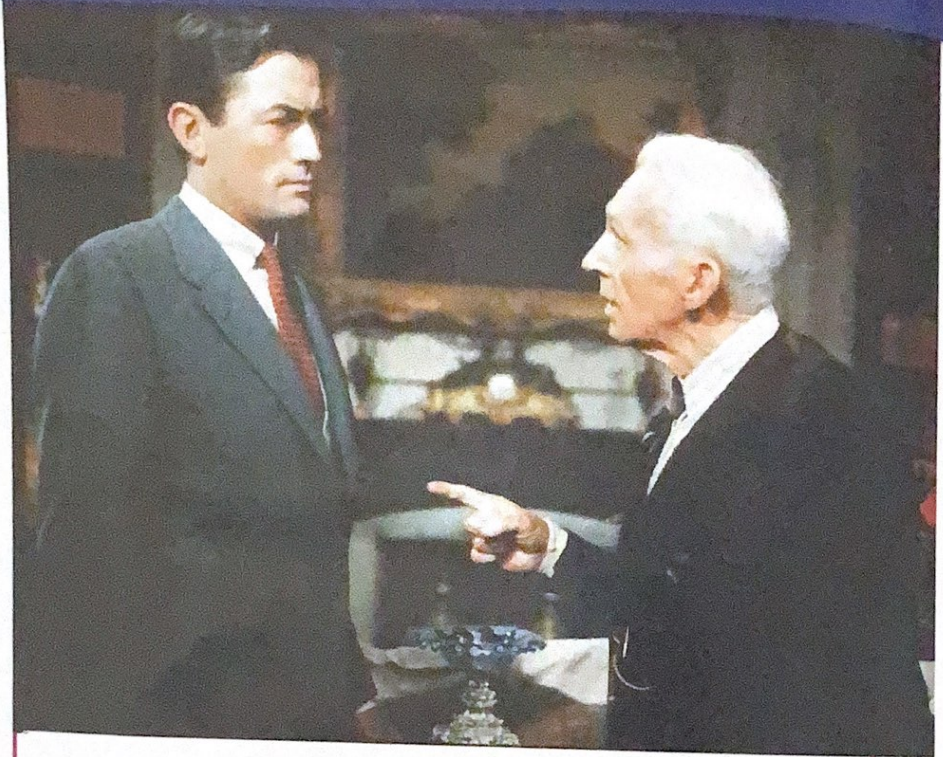


# 2

## The History and Growth of Public Relations

### Chapter Objectives

- 2.1. To track the development of the practice of public relations from ancient times to the present.
- 2.2. To underscore the contribution to the field of two pioneers, in particular, Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, whose philosophies and policies set the tone for modern-day public relations.
- 2.3. To chart the growth of public relations and its emergence as a major societal force in the 21st century.
- 2.4. To examine the factors, such as social media, that have propelled the practice of public relations as a powerful and valuable force in this new century.



▲ **FIGURE 2-1** *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.*

Gregory Peck's 1956 portrayal of a harassed and tortured public relations man didn't do much for the field's reputation. But at least he bathed regularly.  
Source: Photo 12 / Alamy Stock Photo

In its first 100 plus years, the practice of public relations has come a long way baby—from the days of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. The 1956 film starred the immortal Gregory Peck (Figure 2-1), who returns from the war and interviews for a position in public relations.

*"But I know nothing about public relations,"* says an embarrassed Peck to his television network interviewer.

*"Nonsense,"* retorts the personnel man, *"You've got a freshly pressed suit and you apparently bathe regularly. What more is there to know?"*

Not a particularly auspicious beginning for a field that today is responsible for billions of dollars in revenue.

Nearly three decades later, the practice of public relations came of age.

On September 30, 1982, the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Company of New Brunswick, New Jersey, confronted the most diabolical crisis in the field's young history—the sabotaging of company products resulting in the murder of company customers. The respectful and public way that J&J handled "The Tylenol Murders" is the subject of the case at the end of Chapter 4 and a large reason why the field enjoys such prominence today. Johnson & Johnson's "Credo" of corporate values that it considers sacrosanct is a model for companies around the world.

But public relations is a continually evolving social science. And none other than the legendary Johnson &

Johnson company learned that lesson again in the fall of 2010, when it was forced to recall a series of products, from its children's liquid Tylenol to tens of thousands of artificial hips to millions of contact lenses, all produced by J&J units. The spate of highly publicized product problems cast a pall over the commodity that Johnson & Johnson had fought so valiantly to uphold in the face of the Tylenol murders 30 years earlier—its integrity.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the fragility of a public relations reputation.

Unlike accounting, economics, medicine, and law, the modern practice of public relations is still a young field, just a few years more than 100 years old.

Modern-day public relations is clearly a 20th-century phenomenon. The impetus for its growth might, in fact, be traced back to one man.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. (Figure 2-2) was widely attacked in 1914 when the coal company he owned in Ludlow, Colorado, was the scene of a bloody massacre staged by Colorado militiamen and company guards against evicted miners and their families. When a dozen women and small children were killed at the Ludlow massacre, Rockefeller called in journalist Ivy Ledbetter Lee to help him deal with the crisis.

Lee, whom we discuss later in this chapter, would go on to become “the father of public relations.” His employer, John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose legendary father had always adhered to a strict policy of silence in public affairs, would bear responsibility for the birth of a profession built on open communications.



▲ **FIGURE 2-2** Pondering a crisis.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (center) needed public relations help in 1914, when the Colorado coal company he owned was the scene of a massacre of women and children.

*Photo: Rockefeller Archive Center*

## Building a Strong Profession

The relative youthfulness of the practice of public relations means that the field is still evolving. It is also getting *stronger* and gaining more *respect* every day. The professionals entering the practice today are by and large superior in intellect, training, and even experience to their counterparts of decades ago (when few studied “public relations”).

The strength of the practice of public relations today is based on the enduring commitment of the public to participate in a free and open democratic society. Several society trends have influenced the evolution of public relations theory and practice:

1. **Growth of big institutions.** The days of small government, local media, mom-and-pop grocery stores, tiny community colleges, and small local banks have largely disappeared. In their place have emerged massive political organizations, worldwide media and social networks, Walmarts, Home Depots, Googles, Amazons, statewide community college systems, and worldwide banking networks. The public relations profession has evolved to interpret these large institutions to the publics they serve.
2. **Heightened public awareness and media sophistication.** First came the invention of the printing press. Then came mass communications: print media, radio, and television. Later it was the development of cable, satellite, videotape, videodisks, portable cameras, word processors, fax machines, and cell phones. Then came the internet, blogs, podcasts, wikis, and, most prominently, social media that have helped fragment audiences. Fifty years ago, McGill University Professor Marshall McLuhan predicted the world would become a “global village,” where people everywhere could witness events—no matter where they occurred—in real time. In the 21st century, McLuhan’s prophecy has become a reality.
3. **Increasing incidence of societal change, conflict, and confrontation.** Minority rights, women’s rights, senior citizens’ rights, gay rights, animal rights, sexual harassment, consumerism, environmental awareness, downsizings, layoffs, and resultant unhappiness with large institutions all have become part of day-to-day society. With the growth of social media, activists throughout the world have become increasingly more daring, visible and effective. Today, anyone who owns a computer can be a publisher, a broadcaster, a motivator of others.
4. **Globalization and the growing power of global media, public opinion, and democratic capitalism.** While institutions have grown in size and clout in the 21st century, at the same time the world has gotten increasingly smaller and more interrelated. Today, news of a cyclone that ravages Myanmar or an earthquake that imperils Nepal is broadcast within moments to every corner of the globe. The outbreak of democracy and capitalism in China, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, South Africa, and even, in recent years, in Middle East nations from Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya and Egypt (although not without pain and suffering) has heightened the power of public opinion in the world. The process has been energized by media that span the globe, especially social media that instantaneously connect like-minded individuals. In China alone, the most popular microblogging service, Sina Weibo, has more than 500 million registered users and 313 million monthly active users, 85% of whom use Weibo on their mobile devices.<sup>2</sup>

5. **Dominance of the internet and growth of social media.** Today, nearly four billion people use the internet, many of them through social media. And with only 50% penetration in Asia, the room for internet growth is ample.<sup>3</sup> The extraordinary expansion of the internet and social media have made billions of people around the world not only "instant consumers" of communication but also, especially with the advent of social media, "instant generators" of communication as well. The profound change this continues to bring to society—and the importance it places on communications—is monumental.

## Ancient Beginnings

Although modern public relations is a 20th-century phenomenon, its roots are ancient. Leaders in virtually every great society throughout history understood the importance of influencing public opinion through persuasion. For example, archeologists have found bulletins in Iraq dating from as early as 1800 BCE that told farmers of the latest techniques of harvesting, sowing, and irrigating.<sup>4</sup> The more food the farmers grew, the better the citizenry ate and the wealthier the country became—a good example of planned persuasion to reach a specific public for a particular purpose—in other words, public relations.

The ancient Greeks also put a high premium on communication skills. The best speakers, in fact, were generally elected to leadership positions. Occasionally, aspiring Greek politicians enlisted the aid of sophists (individuals renowned for both their reasoning and their rhetoric) to help fight verbal battles. Sophists gathered in the amphitheaters of the day to extol the virtues of particular political candidates. Thus, the sophists set the stage for today's lobbyists, who attempt to influence legislation through effective communications techniques. From the time of these early sophist lobbyists, the practice of public relations has been a battleground for questions of ethics. Should a sophist or a lobbyist—or a public relations professional, for that matter—"sell" his or her talents to the highest bidder, regardless of personal beliefs, values, and ideologies? When modern-day public relations professionals agree to represent repressive governments, such as Iran or Zimbabwe or North Korea or even Russia, or to defend the questionable actions of troubled celebrities, from Amanda Bynes and Mario Batali to Harvey Weinstein and R. Kelly, these ethical questions remain a focus of modern public relations.

The Romans, particularly Julius Caesar, were also masters of persuasive techniques. When faced with an upcoming battle, Caesar would rally public support through published pamphlets and staged events. Similarly, during World War I, a special U.S. public information committee, the Creel Committee, was formed to channel the patriotic sentiments of Americans in support of the U.S. role in the war. Stealing a page from Caesar, the committee's massive verbal and written communications effort was successful in marshaling national pride behind the war effort. According to a young member of the Creel Committee, Edward L. Bernays (later considered by many to be another "father of public relations" and the subject of the interview at the end of this chapter), "This was the first time in U.S. history that information was used as a weapon of wars."<sup>5</sup>

Even the Catholic Church had a hand in the creation of public relations. In the 1600s, under the leadership of Pope Gregory XV, the church established a College of Propaganda to "help propagate the faith." In those days, the term *propaganda* did not have a negative connotation; the church simply wanted to inform the public about the advantages

### 2.1

To track the development of the practice of public relations from ancient times to the present.

of Catholicism. Today, the pope and other religious leaders maintain communications staffs to assist in relations with the public. Indeed, the chief communications official in the Vatican maintains the rank of Archbishop of the Church. It was largely his role to deal with perhaps the most horrific scandal ever to face the Catholic Church—the priest-pedophile issue at the start of the 21st century. In the continuing fallout from that scandal, the Vatican has become super sensitive to public relations, led by Pope Francis—the “People’s Pope.” Pope Francis, who assumed the Papacy in March 2013, has forged a positive public relations image around the world, with upwards of 40 million Twitter followers and five million Instagram followers in 2018.<sup>6</sup>

### Early American Experience

The American public relations experience dates back to the founding of the republic. Influencing public opinion, managing communications, and persuading individuals at the highest levels were at the core of the American Revolution. The colonists tried to persuade King George III that they should be accorded the same rights as English men and women. “Taxation without representation is tyranny” became their public relations slogan to galvanize fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

When King George refused to accede to the colonists’ demands, they combined the weaponry of sword and pen. Samuel Adams, for one, organized Committees of Correspondence as a kind of revolutionary Facebook to disseminate anti-British information throughout the colonies. He also staged events to build up revolutionary fervor, such as the Boston Tea Party, in which colonists, masquerading as American Indians, boarded British ships in Boston Harbor and pitched chests of imported tea overboard—as impressive a media event as has ever been recorded sans television.

Thomas Paine, another early practitioner of public relations, wrote periodic pamphlets and essays that urged the colonists to band together. Paine’s first pamphlet was called “Common Sense,” a paean to human liberty, published in January 1776. In a nation of fewer than three million people, it sold a half-million copies.<sup>7</sup> In one essay contained in his *Crisis* papers, Paine wrote poetically: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country.”<sup>8</sup> The people listened, were persuaded, and took action—testifying to the power of early American communicators.

### Later American Experience

The creation of the most important document in America’s history, the Constitution, also owed much to public relations. Federalists, who supported the Constitution, fought tooth and nail with anti-Federalists, who opposed it. Their battle was waged in newspaper articles, pamphlets, and other organs of persuasion in an attempt to influence public opinion. To advocate ratification of the Constitution, political leaders such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay banded together, under the pseudonym Publius, to write letters to leading newspapers. Today those letters are bound in a document called *The Federalist Papers* and are still used in the interpretation of the Constitution.

After its ratification, the constitutional debate continued, particularly over the document’s apparent failure to protect individual liberties against government encroachment. Hailed as the father of the Constitution, Madison framed the Bill of Rights in 1791, which ultimately became the first 10 amendments to the Constitution. Fittingly,

the first of those amendments safeguarded, among other things, the practice of public relations:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the rights of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*<sup>9</sup>

In other words, people were given the right to speak up for what they believed in and the freedom to try to influence the opinions of others. Thus was the practice of public relations ratified.

## Into the 1800s

The practice of public relations continued to percolate in the 19th century. Among the more prominent, yet negative, antecedents of modern public relations that took hold in the 1800s was press agency. Two of the better-known—some would say notorious—practitioners of this art were Amos Kendall and Phineas T. Barnum.

In 1829, President Andrew Jackson selected Kendall, a Kentucky writer and editor, to serve in his administration. Within weeks, Kendall became a member of Old Hickory's "kitchen cabinet" and eventually became one of Jackson's most influential assistants.

Kendall performed just about every White House public relations task. He wrote speeches, state papers, and messages, and he turned out press releases. He even conducted basic opinion polls and is considered one of the earliest users of the "news leak." Although Kendall is generally credited with being the first authentic presidential press secretary, his functions and role went far beyond that position.

Among Kendall's most successful ventures in Jackson's behalf was the development of the administration's own newspaper, the *Globe*. Although it was not uncommon for the governing administration to publish its own national house organ, Kendall's deft editorial touch refined the process to increase its effectiveness. Kendall would pen a Jackson news release, distribute it for publication to a local newspaper, and then reprint the press clipping in the *Globe* to underscore Jackson's nationwide popularity. Indeed, that popularity continued unabated throughout Jackson's years in office, with much of the credit going to the President's public relations advisor.\*

Most public relations professionals would rather not talk about P. T. Barnum as an industry pioneer. Barnum, some say, was a huckster whose motto might well have been "The public be fooled." Barnum's defenders suggest that although the impresario may have had his faults, he nonetheless was respected in his time as a user of written and verbal public relations techniques to further his museum and circus.

Like him or not, Barnum was a master publicist. In the 1800s, as owner of a major circus, Barnum generated article after article for his traveling show. He purposely gave his star performers short names—for instance, Tom Thumb, the midget, and Jenny Lind, the singer—so that they could easily fit into the headlines of narrow newspaper columns. Barnum also staged bizarre events, such as the legal marriage of the fat lady to the thin man, to drum up free newspaper exposure. And although today's practitioners scoff

\*Kendall was decidedly not cut from the same cloth as today's neat, trim, buttoned-down press secretaries. On the contrary, Jackson's man was described as "a puny, sickly looking man with a weak voice, a wheezing cough, narrow and stooping shoulders, a sallow complexion, silvery hair a seedy appearance." Fred F. Endres, "Public Relations in the Jackson White House," *Public Relations Review* 2 (3) Fall 1976: 5-12.

at Barnum's methods, in this day of professional publicity-makers from Kardashians to Real Housewives to Trumps, there are still many press agents practicing the ringmaster's techniques. Indeed, when today's public relations professionals bemoan the specter of shysters and hucksters that still overhangs their field, they inevitably place the blame squarely on the fertile mind and silver tongue of P. T. Barnum.

## Emergence of the Robber Barons

The American Industrial Revolution ushered in many things at the turn of the century, not the least of which was the growth of public relations. The 20th century began with small mills and shops, which served as the hub of the frontier economy, eventually giving way to massive factories. Country hamlets, which had been the centers of commerce and trade, were replaced by sprawling cities. Limited transportation and communications facilities became nationwide railroad lines and communications wires. Big business took over, and the businessman was king.

The men—and virtually all were men!—who ran America's industries seemed more concerned with making a profit than with improving the lot of their fellow citizens. Railroad owners led by William Vanderbilt, bankers led by J. P. Morgan, oil magnates led by John D. Rockefeller, and steel impresarios led by Henry Clay Frick ruled the fortunes of thousands of others. Typical of the reputation acquired by this group of industrialists was the famous—and perhaps apocryphal—response of Vanderbilt when questioned about the public's reaction to his closing of the New York Central Railroad: "The public be damned!"

Little wonder that Americans cursed Vanderbilt and his ilk as "robber barons" who cared little for the rest of society. Although most who depended on these industrialists for their livelihood felt powerless to rebel, the seeds of discontent were being sown liberally throughout society.

## Enter the Muckrakers

When the axe fell on the robber barons, it came in the form of criticism from a feisty group of journalists dubbed *muckrakers*. The "muck" that these reporters and editors "raked" was dredged from the supposedly scandalous operations of America's business enterprises. Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* attacked the deplorable conditions of the meatpacking industry. Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company* stripped away the public façade of the nation's leading petroleum firm. Her accusations against Standard Oil Chair Rockefeller, many of which were unproven, nonetheless stirred up public attention.

Magazines such as *McClure's* struck out systematically at one industry after another. The captains of industry, used to getting their own way and having to answer to no one, were wrenched from their peaceful passivity and rolled out on the public carpet to answer for their sins. Journalistic shock stories soon led to a wave of sentiment for legislative reform.

As journalists and the public became more anxious, the government got more involved. Congress began passing laws telling business leaders what they could and couldn't do. Trust-busting became the order of the day. Conflicts between employers and employees began to break out, and newly organized labor unions came to the fore. The socialist and communist movements began to take off. Ironically, it was "a period when free enterprise reached a peak in American history, and yet at that very climax, the tide of public opinion was swelling up against business freedom, primarily because of the breakdown in communications between the businessman and the public."<sup>10</sup>

## FYI

## P. T. Barnum Redux

## Kourtney, Kim, Khloé, and Kris and the Never-Ending Quest for Publicity

Self-respecting public relations professionals despise the legacy of P. T. Barnum, who created publicity through questionable methods. They lament, as noted in Chapter 1, that public relations communication should always reflect “performance” and “truth.”

Ah, were it so.

Alas, Barnum’s publicity-seeking methods are just as effective with 21st-century media as they were with 19th-century media.

Doubt it?

Then consider the Kardashians, those walking/talking/publicity-generating masters of media, who have parlayed their peculiar personal predicaments into reality-TV fame, public relations renown, and oodles of nonstop cash. P. T. Barnum never met publicity he didn’t like, and neither have the Kardashians.

The Kardashian girls—Kourtney, Kim, Khloé, mother Kris Jenner (former wife of Los Angeles attorney Robert Kardashian and remarried to U.S. Olympic gold medalist the former Bruce now Caitlyn Jenner), and younger sisters Kendall and Kylie—are celebutantes, famous for, well, being “famous.”

The Kardashian girls parlayed their fame into a reality-TV series, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, which spawned the reality show *Khloé and Lamar* about Khloé and troubled basketball-playing husband Lamar Odom. The Kardashians also cashed in on clothing lines, perfume franchises, a retail store in Las Vegas, and Kim’s 72-day wedding to professional basketball player Kris Humphries.

While cynics doubted the staying power of the Kardashians, the media continued to report their every movement. Somewhere, P. T. Barnum is smiling (Figure 2-3).



▲ FIGURE 2-3 Here come the Kardashians.

Forget the Trumps. America’s first publicity family is the extended Kardashian *klan*, featuring Khloé, Kylie, Kris, Kourtney, Kim and Kendall, not to mention Kanye, Saint, North, Chicago, et al.

Photo: Hyperstar/Alamy Stock Photo

For a time, these men of inordinate wealth and power found themselves limited in their ability to defend themselves and their activities against the tidal wave of public condemnation. They simply did not know how to get through to the public. To tell their side of the story, the business barons first tried using the lure of advertising to silence journalistic critics; they tried to buy off critics by paying for ads in their papers. It didn't work. Next, they paid publicity people, or press agents, to present their companies' positions. Often these hired guns painted over the real problems of their clients. The public saw through this approach.

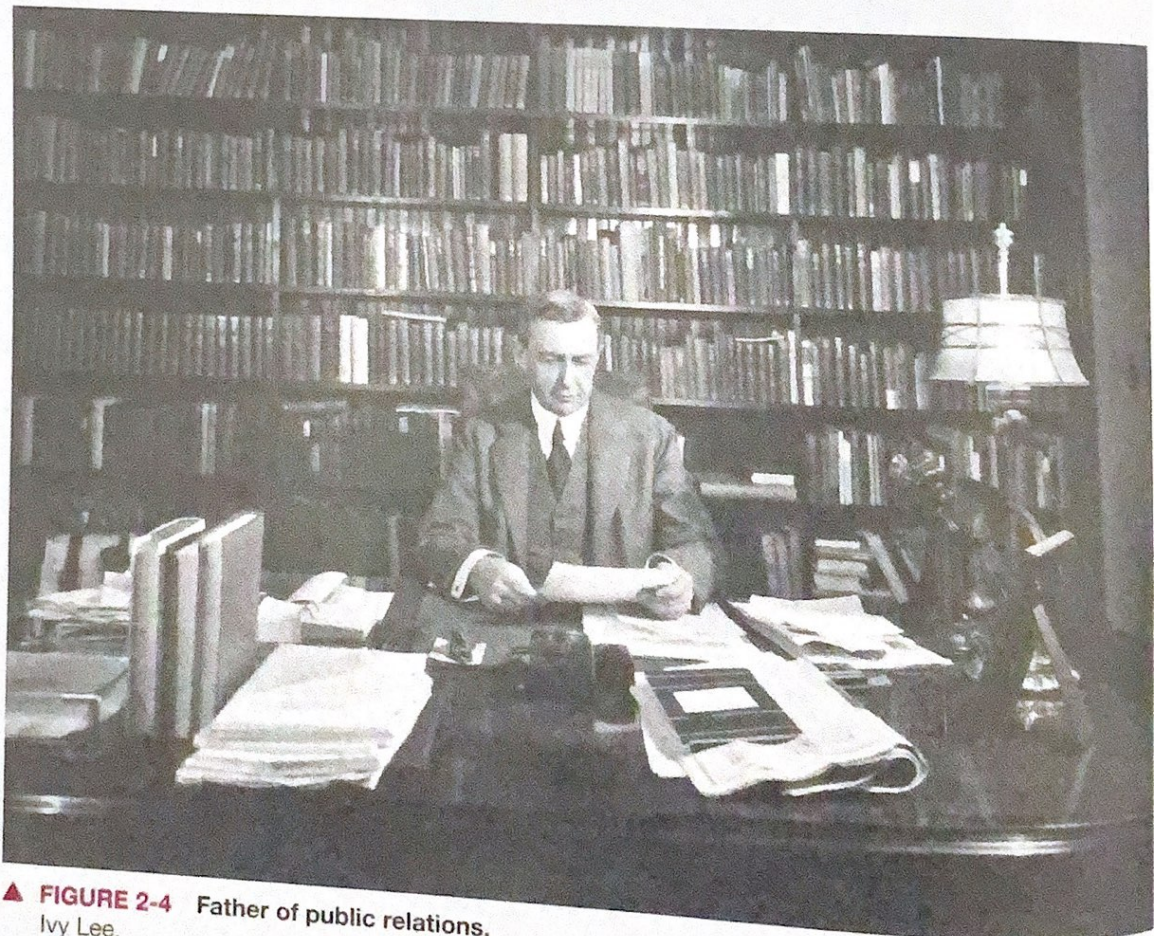
Clearly, another method had to be discovered to get the public to at least consider the business point of view. Business leaders were discovering that a corporation might have capital, labor, and natural resources, yet be doomed to fail if it couldn't influence public opinion. The best way to influence public opinion, as it turned out, was through honesty and candor. This simple truth—the truth that lies at the heart of modern-day, effective public relations practice—was the key to the accomplishments of American history's first great public relations counselor.

## 2.2

To underscore the contribution to the field of two pioneers, in particular, Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, whose philosophies and policies set the tone for modern-day public relations.

### Ivy Lee: The Father of Public Relations

Ivy Ledbetter Lee was a former Wall Street reporter, the son of a Methodist minister, who plunged into publicity work in 1903 (Figure 2-4). Lee believed neither in Barnum's public-be-fooled approach nor Vanderbilt's public-be-damned philosophy. For Lee, the key to business acceptance and understanding was that the public be informed.



▲ **FIGURE 2-4** Father of public relations.

Ivy Lee.

Photo: Courtesy of the P...

Lee disdained the press agents of the time, who used any influence or trick to get a story on their clients printed, regardless of the truth or merits. By contrast, Lee firmly believed that the only way business could answer its critics convincingly was to present its side honestly, accurately, and forcefully. Instead of merely appeasing the public, Lee thought a company should strive to earn public confidence and goodwill.

In 1914, John D. Rockefeller Jr., son of one of the nation's most maligned and misunderstood men, hired Lee to assist with the fallout from the Ludlow massacre, which was affecting his Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. Lee's advice to Rockefeller was simple:

*Tell the truth, because sooner or later the public will find it out anyway. And if the public doesn't like what you are doing, change your policies and bring them into line with what the people want.*<sup>11</sup>

Despite the tragedy of Ludlow, Lee encouraged Rockefeller to create a joint labor-management board to mediate all workers' grievances on wages, hours, and working conditions. It was a great success. The miners—and the public—began to see John D. Rockefeller Jr. in a different light. Most important, he began to see them in a new light as well. As Rockefeller's youngest son, David, recalled nearly a century later, "My father was changed profoundly by his meetings with the workers. It was a lesson that stayed with him throughout the rest of his life and one of the most important things that ever happened to our family."<sup>12</sup>

In working for the Rockefellers, Lee tried to "humanize" them, to feature them in real-life situations such as playing golf, attending church, and celebrating birthdays. Simply, Lee's goal was to present the Rockefellers in terms that every individual could understand and appreciate.

Ironically, even Ivy Lee could not escape the glare of public criticism. In the late 1920s, Lee was asked to serve as advisor to the parent company of the German Dye Trust, which, as it turned out, was an agent for the policies of Adolf Hitler. For his involvement with the Dye Trust, Lee was branded a traitor and dubbed "Poison Ivy" by members of Congress investigating un-American activities. Ironically, the smears against him in the press rivaled the most vicious ones against any of the robber barons.<sup>13</sup>

Ivy Lee's critics cite his unfortunate involvement with the Dye Trust and even his association as spokesperson for John D. Rockefeller Jr. as proof that his contributions weren't particularly profound. They argue that Lee "was not someone who was particularly effective at getting business to change its behavior."<sup>14</sup>

Ivy Lee's supporters, on the other hand (and your author is one of them), argue that Lee was among the first to counsel his clients that "positive public relations starts with action, with performance" and that positive publicity must follow positive performance.<sup>15</sup> This more positive view of Ivy Lee was corroborated in 2017 with the publication—for the first time—of a manuscript written by Lee and published by the Museum of Public Relations. In that rare manuscript, Lee reveals his belief in the importance of "ethics" to drive public relations counsel.

*The advisor in public relations is an ethical advisor. He not only has to know what the public will think of a given policy, but has to suggest to his employers the moral implications of such a policy. He has to see not the financial, not the technical, and not the legal effect—only the social effect. In that sense, he is concerned with the progress of man and the improvement of civilization.*<sup>16</sup>

This is why Ivy Lee is recognized as the individual who began to distinguish "publicity" and "press agency" from "public relations" based on honesty and candor. For his seminal contributions to the field, Ivy Lee deserves recognition as the *real* father of public relations.

## 2.3

To chart the growth of public relations and its emergence as a major societal force in the 21st century.

## The Growth of Modern Public Relations

Ivy Lee helped to open the gates for modern public relations. After he helped establish the idea that high-powered companies and individuals have a responsibility to inform their publics, the practice began to grow in every sector of American society.

### Government

During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson established the Creel Committee under the leadership of journalist George Creel. Creel's group, composed of the nation's leading journalists, scholars, and public relations leaders, mounted an impressive effort to mobilize public opinion in support of the war effort and to stimulate the sale of war bonds through Liberty Loan publicity drives. Not only did the war effort get a boost, but so did the field of public relations. The nation was mightily impressed with the potential power of publicity as a weapon to encourage national sentiment and support.

During World War II, the public relations field received an even bigger boost. The Office of War Information (OWI) was established to convey the message of the United States at home and abroad. Under the directorship of Elmer Davis, a veteran journalist, the OWI laid the foundations for the U.S. Information Agency as America's voice around the world.

World War II also saw a flurry of activity to sell war bonds, boost the morale of those at home, spur production in the nation's factories and offices, and, in general, support America's war effort as intensively as possible. By virtually every measure, this full-court public relations offensive was an unquestioned success.

The proliferation of public relations officers in World War II led to a growth in the number of practitioners during the peace that followed. One reason companies saw the need to have public relations professionals to "speak up" for them was the more combative attitude of President Harry Truman toward many of the country's largest institutions. For example, Truman's seizure of the steel mills touched off a massive public relations campaign, the likes of which had rarely been seen outside the government.

Later in the century, the communications problems of President Richard Nixon, surrounding the "cover-up" of the Watergate political scandal, brought new criticism of public relations. It didn't matter that Nixon was surrounded by alumni of the advertising industry, rather than public relations professionals. The damage to the field's reputation was done. But the administration of the "great communicator" Ronald Reagan reaffirmed the value of public relations. And later, the communications skills of President Bill Clinton—before a nasty scandal in the Oval Office submerged him in controversy—added to the importance of the practice in government. In the 21st century, the communications ability of President Barack Obama reinforced the power of communication in the White House. With Donald Trump's ascension in 2017, public relations was once again cast into center stage. Trump was hounded during his first years in office by charges of "cover up" in the independent counsel's investigation of Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

### Counseling

The nation's first public relations firm, the Publicity Bureau, was founded in Boston in 1900 and specialized in general press agency. The first Washington, D.C. agency was begun in 1902 by William Wolff Smith, a former correspondent for the *New York Sun*.

and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Two years later, Ivy Lee joined with a partner to begin his own counseling firm.

The most significant counselor this side of Ivy Lee was Edward L. Bernays, who began as a publicist in 1913 and was instrumental in the war bonds effort. He was the nephew of Sigmund Freud and author of the landmark book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (see interview at the end of this chapter).

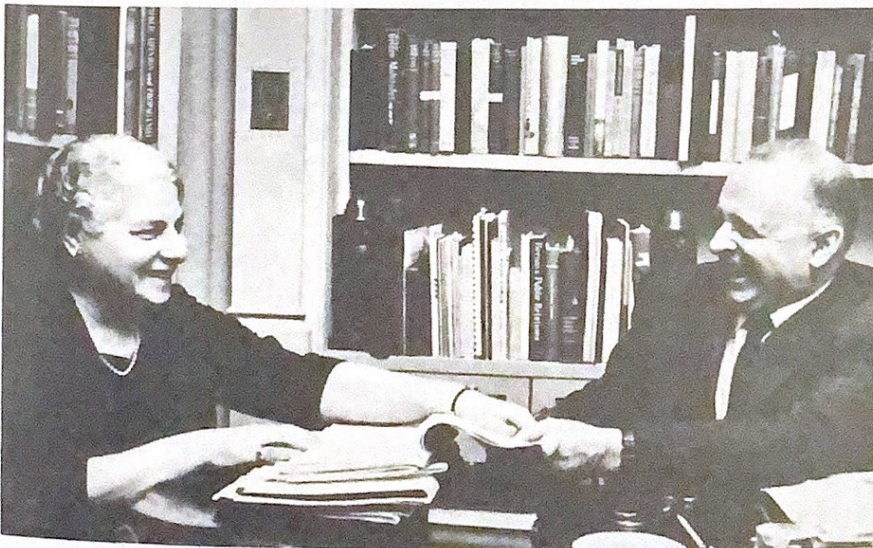
Bernays was a giant in the public relations field for nearly the entire century. In addition to contributing as much to the field as any other professional in its history, Bernays was a true public relations scholar. He taught the first course in public relations in 1923 and was also responsible for “recruiting” the field’s first distinguished female practitioner, his wife Doris E. Fleischman.

Fleischman, former editor of the *New York Tribune*, was a skilled writer, and her husband was a skilled strategist and promoter. Together they built Edward L. Bernays, Counsel on Public Relations into a top agency. In many ways, Fleischman was the “mother” of public relations, paving the way for a field that is today dominated by talented women (Figure 2-5).

Bernays’s seminal writings in the field underscored the importance of strategic communications advice for clients. For example, Bernays wrote:

*At first we called our activity “publicity direction.” We intended to give advice to clients on how to direct their actions to get public visibility for them. But within a year we changed the service and its name to “counsel on public relations.” We recognized that all actions of a client that impinged on the public needed counsel. Public visibility of a client for one action might be vitiated by another action not in the public interest.*<sup>17</sup>

Due to his background, Bernays was fascinated by a wide range of psychological theories and practices beginning to emerge in society. One of his major contributions to the practice of public relations was transforming the practice from a purely



▲ **FIGURE 2-5** Dynamic duo.

Edward L. Bernays and his wife, Doris Fleischman, formed the 20th century’s greatest public relations tandem.

Photo: Museum of Public Relations

journalistic-based approach to one underpinned by psychology, sociology, and social-psychology to reach individuals in terms of their unconscious desires, fears, and needs.<sup>18</sup>

After Bernays's pioneering counseling efforts, a number of public relations firms, most headquartered in New York, began to take root, most notably among them Hill & Knowlton, Carl Byoir & Associates, Newsom & Company, and Burson-Marsteller. It took another three decades for African American public relations counselors to arrive on the scene. One of the earliest was D. Parke Gibson, who began his firm in the early 1960s, authored two books on African American consumerism, and advised companies on multicultural relations. Gibson served as inspiration to later African American counselors, such as Ofield Dukes and Terrie Williams.<sup>19</sup>

For many years, Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller jockeyed for leadership in the counseling industry. One early counselor, Harold Burson (see From the Top in Chapter 1), emphasized marketing-oriented public relations "to help clients sell their goods and services, maintain a favorable market for their stock, and foster harmonious relations with employees." In 2000, Burson was named the most influential PR person of the 20th century.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1990s, the counseling business saw the emergence of international super agencies, many of which were merged into advertising agencies. Indeed, both Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller were eventually merged under one corporation, WPP, which also included the J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicam advertising agencies. Another mega-communications firm, Omnicom Group, owned seven major public relations firms, including Fleishman-Hillard, Porter Novelli, and Ketchum. In the 21st century, with the growth of such large agencies, occasional lapses in ethical standards confronted the profession (see A Question of Ethics in this chapter). Despite these communications conglomerates, most public relations agencies still operate as independent entities. The largest of these, Edelman Public Relations, founded by another legendary public relations pioneer, Daniel Edelman in 1952, collects \$875 million in annual fees.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, local agencies, staffed by one or several practitioners, still dominate the industry.

In the 21st century, then, the public relations counseling business boasts a diverse mix of huge national agencies, medium-sized regional firms, and one-person local operations. Public relations agencies may be general in nature or specialists in everything from consumer products to entertainment to health care to social media and technology.

## Corporations

After World War II, as the 20th century rolled on, the perceptual problems of corporations and their leaders diminished. Opinion polls ranked business as high in public esteem. People were back at work, and business was back in style.

Smart companies—General Electric, General Motors (GM), and American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T), for example—worked hard to preserve their good names through both words and actions. Arthur W. Page became AT&T's first public relations vice president in 1927. Page was a legendary public relations figure—memorialized in today's Arthur Page Society of leading corporate and agency public relations executives—helping to maintain AT&T's reputation as a prudent and proper corporate citizen. Page also was one of the few public relations executives to serve on prestigious corporate boards of directors, including Chase Manhattan Bank, Kennecott Copper, Prudential Insurance, and Westinghouse Electric.<sup>22</sup>

## A QUESTION OF ETHICS

### Burson Fumbles Facebook Flap

As noted, there is no more respected individual in the practice of public relations than Harold Burson. The agency he founded, Burson-Marsteller, has a long and proud tradition of ethical practice. (Your author, himself, is a proud alumnus of the firm.)

But in the spring of 2011, Burson-Marsteller was caught red-handed in an embarrassing scheme to make a client's competitor look bad. The fact that the client was Facebook and the competitor was Google—two of the most powerful names in the social media world—only added to Burson's dilemma (Figure 2-6).

It all started when two Burson staff members—both former journalists—approached daily newspapers and bloggers about authoring articles critical of a feature on Google's Gmail service called "Social Circle." The social media feature, said the Burson representatives, was guilty of trampling the privacy of millions of users and violating federal fair trade rules.

When the bloggers pressed Burson to reveal its client, Burson refused. One blogger was so enraged with the Burson whispering campaign that he posted Burson's entire pitch online. The blogger reported that Burson offered to ghost write an op-ed column, let the blogger sign his name to it, and then help get it published in the *Washington Post*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, *Roll Call*, and *The Huffington Post*.

This led to a chain reaction in the media. *USA Today* ran a Money section front-page story, "PR Firm's Google Attack Fails," exposing the two former journalists, one former CNBC news anchor Jim Goldman and the other, former *National Journal* political columnist John Mercurio, as the surreptitious leakers.

Meanwhile, Google began fielding media calls about the little-known service and issued its own statement: "We have seen this e-mail reportedly sent by a representative of the PR firm Burson-Marsteller. We're not going to comment further. Our focus is on delighting people with great products."

Facebook quickly came out to separate itself from its public relations agency. Said a Facebook spokesperson, "No 'smear' campaign was authorized or intended," adding that it hired Burson to "focus attention on this issue, using publicly available information that could be independently verified by any media organization or analyst."

\*For further information, see Bryon Acohido and Jon Swartz, "PR Firm's Google Attack Fails," *USA Today* (May 10, 2011): B-1, 2; and Greg Hazley, "Burson Becomes Target in Facebook Flap," *O'Dwyer's* (June 2011): 10.



▲ **FIGURE 2-6** Thumbs down.

The world's leading social media company was caught with egg on its face (book) as a result of the sneaky campaign of its public relations agency to plant incriminating stories about its competitor, Google.

Photo: imageBROKER/Alamy Stock Photo

A chastened Burson said Facebook asked to be anonymous but acknowledged that the misguided effort was "not at all standard operating procedure and is against our policies."

The public relations industry was quick to denounce the clumsy "fake news" efforts of Burson and the two reporters-turned-public relations professionals. Said the chair of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), "This reflects poorly upon the global public relations profession. Burson took the road of misleading and not disclosing who they were representing. In the essence of the public relations code of ethics 101, that's a no-no."

No-no.

#### Questions

1. How should Burson have handled its Facebook assignment?
2. Should a public relations client always be identified?

Page's five principles of successful corporate public relations are as relevant now as they were in the 1930s:

1. To make sure management thoughtfully analyzes its overall relation to the public
2. To create a system for informing all employees about the firm's general policies and practices
3. To create a system giving contact employees (those having direct dealings with the public) the knowledge needed to be reasonable and polite to the public

4. To create a system drawing employee and public questions and criticism back up through the organization to management
5. To ensure frankness in telling the public about the company's actions<sup>23</sup>

Another early corporate public relations luminary was Paul Garrett. A former news reporter, in 1931 he became the first director of public relations for mighty GM, working directly for GM's legendary CEO Alfred Sloan. Garrett once reportedly explained that the essence of his job was to convince the public that the powerful auto company deserved trust, that is, "to make a billion-dollar company seem small." Ironically, as good as Garrett was, according to the late maestro of management Peter Drucker (see From the Top in Chapter 5), he nevertheless reflected the universal public relations complaint, still common today, of "never feeling like an insider" within his organization. Drucker, who counseled CEO Sloan, said that because Garrett was a "communications professional" and not a "car man," GM executives often treated him with wariness.<sup>24</sup>

You would think that companies today all recognize the importance of proper public relations in the conduct of their business. Most do. But, as the corporate financial scandals in the first 20 years of the 21st century—that torpedoed entrenched firms such as Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, Countrywide, Washington Mutual, and the Weinstein Companies and laid low respected names such as Wells Fargo, Volkswagen, Merrill Lynch, Mylan Pharmaceuticals, Sony Corporation, and Wynn Resorts—show, CEOs don't know everything. The point is that in a day dominated by social media and cable TV, smart corporate leaders more than ever need to seek out the counsel of trained public relations professionals in dealing with their key constituent publics.

## 2.4

To examine the factors, such as social media, that have propelled the practice of public relations as a powerful and valuable force in this new century.

## Public Relations Comes of Age

As noted, public relations came of age largely as a result of the confluence of five general factors in our society.

### Growth of Large Institutions

Ironically, the public relations profession received perhaps its most important thrust when business confidence suffered its most severe setback. The economic and social upheaval caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s provided the impetus for corporations to seek public support by telling their stories. Public relations departments sprang up in scores of major companies, among them Bendix, Borden, Eastman Kodak, Eli Lilly, Ford, GM, Standard Oil, and U.S. Steel. The role that public relations played in regaining post-Depression public trust in big business helped project the field into the relatively strong position it has enjoyed since World War II.

Today, businesses of every size recognize that aggressively communicating corporate products and positions can help win public receptivity and support and ward off government intrusion. The best companies in the 21st century are those that have learned, as Ivy Lee preached, that proper action results in the best public relations.

### Heightened Public/Media Awareness

In the 1970s and 1980s, companies were obligated to consider minority rights, consumer rights, environmental implications, and myriad other social issues. Business began to contribute to charities. Managers began to consider community relations a first-line

responsibility. The general policy of corporations confronting their adversaries was mostly abandoned. In its place, most large companies adopted a policy of conciliation and compromise.

This new policy of corporate social responsibility (CSR) continued into the 1990s. Corporations came to realize that their reputations are a valuable asset to be protected, conserved, defended, nurtured, and enhanced at all times. In truth, institutions in the 1990s had little choice but to get along with their publics. The general prosperity of the 1990s, fueled by enormous stock market gains, helped convey goodwill between organizations and their publics.

By 2012, 98% of American homes had television, and by 2017, 168 million people in the U.S. used an internet-connected TV, with smart TVs accounting for half of those viewers. Meanwhile, more than 50% of Americans subscribed to basic cable, and 320 million North Americans used the internet.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, where once three television networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—dominated America’s communication nexus, now a plethora of channels and cable networks, talk radio stations, as well as millions of blogs, websites, and social media outlets cater to every persuasion, enabling media consumers to choose what they want to view.

As a result of all this communication, publics have become much more fragmented, specialized, and sophisticated.

## Societal Change, Conflict, and Confrontation

Disenchantment with big institutions peaked in the 1960s, coincident with an unpopular Vietnam War.

The social and political upheavals of the 1960s dramatically affected many areas, including the practice of public relations. The Vietnam War fractured society. Movements were formed by various interest groups. An obscure consumer advocate named Ralph Nader began to look pointedly at the inadequacies of the automobile industry. Women, long denied equal rights in the workplace and elsewhere, began to mobilize into activist groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW). Environmentalists, worried about threats to the land and water by business expansion, began to support groups such as the Sierra Club. Minorities, particularly African Americans and Hispanics, began to petition and protest for their rights. Gays, lesbians, transgender people, AIDS activists, senior citizens, birth control advocates, and social activists of every kind began to challenge the legitimacy of large institutions. Not since the days of the robber barons had large institutions so desperately needed professional communications help.

By the 21st century, such movements had morphed into established, well-organized and powerful interest groups. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), united by the internet, proliferated around the globe. By the presidential election of 2008, public disapproval of the Iraq War, concerns about energy supplies and prices, global warming and climate change, and a host of other issues, as well as renewed disenchantment with those in charge of government and business, generated a new round of activism. The enthusiasm, among young people, generated by Senator Barack Obama and his call for “hope and change” was illustrative of the mood. When Senator Obama was elected the nation’s first African American President and Senator Hillary Clinton was named his secretary of state in 2009, it was clear that traditional times in America had, indeed, “changed.”

Exactly how things had “changed” became apparent in 2016 with the surprising election of Donald Trump (see Case Study at the end of this chapter). Trump’s presidency stimulated a “resistance” movement from a broad coalition of almost half the country interested in causes from women’s rights and income inequality to LGBTQ rights

and immigration. In opposition, the other half of the country argued that its priorities had been “*forgotten*,” subsumed by elites interested in identity politics that was unrepresentative of the best interests of all citizens.

## Spread of Democracy and Capitalism

In the rest of the world in the 21st century, democracy and capitalism, as someone once said, have “broken out everywhere.”

In recent years, significant events that spurred democracy—all reported in real-time by pervasive social media—have been breathtaking.

- In 2005, after the defeat of Saddam Hussein signaled the potential for a democratic Iraq, an astounding 10 million citizens—70% of eligible voters—went to the polls to elect new leaders.
- In 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in a stunning signal of freedom. Also, democratic revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine challenged Russian dominance.
- In 2011, the political uprising that swept through the Middle East represented the most significant challenge to authoritarian rule since the collapse of Soviet communism. Champions of democracy demanded that tyrants cede power as the “Arab Awakening” extended into totalitarian nations such as Syria well into the winter of 2013.
- By 2018, revolution had been beaten back in Syria, Egypt, and Turkey. A return to authoritarian rule and instability in countries from Libya to Afghanistan to Iraq again became the order of the day. Meanwhile, random terrorist attacks throughout the globe continued to plague the world order, even as anti-societal, militant groups like the Islamic State were confronted and largely subdued.

While the world remains a troubled place, the growth of democracy remains an inexorable force that can’t be denied. Even in nations that aren’t democracies, such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, the spirit of capitalism, of individuals free to earn a living based on their own industriousness and entrepreneurship, pervades. Moreover, in a world nearly completely “wired,” the power of communication and public relations to bring down tyrants and build up democracy is profound.

## Growth of Social Media

In the 21st century, true two-way communication has arrived largely as a result of the growth of online access. Social media, cable, satellite, mobile, instant messaging, pagers, bar code scanners, voice mail systems, videodisk technologies, and a multitude of other developments revolutionized the information transmission and receiving process. The emergence of the internet and the World Wide Web radically intensified the spread of communications even further.

The internet began during the cold war in 1969 as a U.S. Department of Defense system. In 2000, 22% of Americans had bought a product online. The rate grew to 49% in 2007. Revenues from online purchases grew from \$7.4 billion in the third quarter of 2000 to an estimated \$34.7 billion in the third quarter of 2007. And today, with 4 billion global internet users, sales via e-commerce surpassed \$2 trillion in 2017.<sup>26</sup>

The impact of the web and social media on public relations practice has been phenomenal. Mobile texting and email dominate internal communications. Journalists, like

many other Americans, regard the internet as their primary choice of most organizational communications. In the 21st century, knowledge of and facility with the internet—from Facebook to Twitter, from Instagram to Pinterest, to mobile apps of every variety—has become a front-burner necessity for public relations practitioners.

## Public Relations Education

As the practice of public relations has developed, so too has the growth of public relations education. In 1951, 12 schools offered major programs in public relations. Today, well in excess of 200 journalism or communication programs offer concentrated study in public relations, with nearly 300 others offering at least one course dealing with the profession.

The last major study of public relations education was done more than a decade ago by the Commission on Public Relations Education, chartered by the PRSA. This commission recommended a public relations curriculum imparting knowledge in such nontraditional but pivotal areas as relationship building, societal trends, and multicultural and global issues.

While public relations education isn't generally incorporated into most business schools, it should be. As noted, the practice has become an integral part in the daily workings and ongoing relationships of most organizations—from companies to churches, from governments to schools. Therefore, business students should be exposed to the discipline's underpinnings and practical aspects before they enter the corporate world.

Likewise, in journalism, with more than 70% of U.S. daily newspaper copy—and 80% of UK newspaper copy—estimated to emanate from public relations-generated releases, journalists, too, should know what public relations is all about before they graduate.<sup>27</sup>

### ▼ LAST WORD

From humble beginnings 100 years ago, the practice of public relations today is big business around the world.

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that close to 260,000 individuals practice public relations across the country, with an expected growth of 9% over the next decade.<sup>28</sup>
- The PRSA, organized in 1947, boasts a growing membership of 30,000 nationwide.
- The PRSA, formed in 1968 to facilitate communications between students interested in the field and public relations professionals has more than 10,000 student members at close to 300 college chapters in the United States and one in Argentina.
- The International Association of Business Communicators boasts 10,000 members in 70 countries.
- More than 5,000 U.S. companies, 2,100 trade associations, 189 foreign embassies, and 350 federal government departments, bureaus, agencies, and commissions have public relations departments.<sup>29</sup>
- More than 12,000 public relations agencies exist in the United States, with firms in places like China, France, Germany, and Japan recording net fee income in excess of \$100 million annually.<sup>30</sup>
- Top communications executives at major companies and agencies draw six-figure salaries, and more than a few make in excess of a million dollars a year.

The scope of modern public relations practice is vast. Media relations, government relations, social media relations, employee communications, public relations counseling and research, local community relations, audiovisual communications, philanthropic communications, interactive public relations, and numerous other diverse activities fall under the public

relations umbrella. This may be one reason public relations is variously labeled *external affairs*, *corporate communications*, *public affairs*, *corporate relations*, and a variety of other confusing euphemisms.

Just as the name of the field generates confusion, so too does its purpose. Specifically, public relations professionals lament that the practice is still often accused of being a haven for snake oil salespeople peddling cosmetics, subterfuge, and spin. What many fail to understand is that proper public relations—the kind that builds credibility—must begin and end with one important commodity: *the truth*.

Indeed, there is no more important characteristic for public relations people to emulate than the candor that comes from high ethical character. The field's finest ethical moment, in fact, occurred when

the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Company, in the wake of unspeakable tragedy brought about by its lead product Tylenol, didn't hesitate to choose the ethical course. As the case study at the conclusion of Chapter 18 suggests, the handling of the Tylenol tragedy was public relations' most shining hour. On the other end of the spectrum, the unprecedented election of President Donald Trump, the focus of the case study at the end of this chapter, has presented public relations with perhaps its most perplexing moment.

Despite the stereotypes that still overhang the field, with hundreds of thousands of men and women in its practice in the United States and thousands more overseas, public relations has become solidly entrenched as an important, influential, and professional component of 21st-century society.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- 2.1. What societal factors have influenced the spread of public relations?
- 2.2. Why do public relations professionals think of P. T. Barnum as a mixed blessing?
- 2.3. What is the significance to the practice of public relations of American revolutionary hero Samuel Adams?
- 2.4. What did the robber barons and muckrakers have to do with the development of public relations?
- 2.5. Why are Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays considered two of the fathers of public relations?
- 2.6. What impact did the Creel Committee and the Office of War Information have on the development of public relations?
- 2.7. What was the significance of Arthur Page to the development of corporate public relations?
- 2.8. Where should the practice of public relations be situated in a university?
- 2.9. What are some of the yardsticks that indicated that public relations had "arrived" in the latter part of the 20th century?
- 2.10. What are some of the issues that confront public relations in the 21st century?

## PICK OF THE LITERATURE

Ivy Lee with Burton St. John III, *Mr. Lee's Publicity Book: A Citizen's Guide to Public Relations* (New York, NY: PR Museum Press, 2017)

Written originally in 1928 by public relations patriarch Ivy Lee, this manuscript, brought to life by esteemed public relations professor Burton St. John is the only written record that Lee ever produced.

The book reveals Lee's earliest conceptions of the practice of public relations that he endorsed. Specifically, he downplayed the "publicity" emphasis that others of the day were practicing. Instead, he suggested that the field should play

a leading role in "informing" the public, appealing to both "reason and emotion." Lee also endorses "ethical practice" as the proper way to convey information.

One thing Lee wrestled with was the definition of this new field "I have never been able to find a satisfactory phrase to describe what I try to do," he wrote. A century later, modern-day public relations practitioners confront the same dilemma.

Ivy Lee with Burton St. John III (New York, NY: PR Museum Press, 2017).

## CASE STUDY

## The Election that Shook the World ... and Tested Public Relations

The U.S. presidential election of 2016 was one for the ages.

A brash, bombastic, real estate developer, Donald Trump, with no political background whatsoever came out of nowhere to defeat a wily, well-financed, professional politician, Hillary Clinton, to become the 45th President of the United States (Figure 2-7).

## A Public Relations Triumph but also ...

Trump's dark horse victory was an outright triumph for the practice of public relations. For decades, "The Donald," the son of a wealthy New York City builder who owned lucrative, debt-free apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Queens, had meticulously constructed a public persona built primarily on public relations publicity, special events, media appearances, and round-the-clock image maximization.

- Trump constructed ornate skyscrapers in Manhattan and elsewhere, always emblazoned with the gold "Trump" brand. He promoted his buildings unceasingly, always labeling them "the best" and "the greatest."
- Trump plastered his name on all manner of products, from wines and ties to steaks and airplanes with varying degrees of success. When a Trump business failed or was criticized on ethical grounds—like the ill-fated Trump University, which ultimately went out of business after multiple lawsuits from disgruntled graduates—its namesake barely acknowledged the criticism.
- Trump was a gossip column staple. He divorced two wives in bitter, public squabbles; bought the Miss America Pageant, and appeared frequently with the contestants; suffered Atlantic City casino bankruptcies and left investors holding the bag; and periodically criticized journalists who questioned his unsubstantiated claim of being a "billionaire."
- Trump staged his biggest coup by helping begin "The Apprentice" TV show, in which business people competed for a chance to run one of the Trump companies. The show's long success propelled Trump and his catch phrase, "You're fired," to international celebrity and paved the way for his unprecedented presidential victory.

So the Trump ascension to the highest office in the world could very much be attributed to his *canny knack for speaking out, sounding off, and securing "earned media" publicity for any and all actions.*

## ... a Public Relations Disaster

On the other hand, Donald Trump's climb to power ran afoul of many traditional principles in the effective and ethical use of public relations.

While effective public relations begins with real achievement, truthfully communicated, Donald Trump's publicity quest wasn't particularly concerned with either "achievement" or "truth." Indeed, the Trump business record has been plagued by numerous lemons, among them:

- Trump's purchase of the Eastern Airlines Shuttle in 1988 was one such bust. The shuttle, which was a popular, low

frills commuting flight linking Boston, Washington, and New York, was converted by Trump into a lavishly appointed experience, complete with chrome seat belt latches and gold-colored bathroom fixtures. The whopping cost the new owner paid for such nonessential items helped drive the Trump Shuttle into the ground, and in four years it was gone.

- Trump Steaks was launched in 2005, with its founder dubbing the premium meats, "the world's greatest." Apparently not. Trump Steaks, distributed through the Sharper Image stores, never sold. In 2012, Trump Steakhouse in Las Vegas was closed down for 51 health code violations. And the steak line was discontinued.
- Trump Vodka was launched in 2006, with its namesake predicting it would become the principal ingredient in "the most called for cocktail in America, the Trump and Tonic." The fact that Trump, himself, was well-known as a non-drinker probably didn't help the product's sales. Trump Vodka's trademark was abandoned in 2008.

Business missteps like these and others were seized upon by Donald Trump's many critics, who also accused him of often playing fast and loose with facts.

Telling the truth, of course, is essential to the proper practice of public relations. So the criticism that Trump sometimes stretched the truth was also bothersome to public relations purists.

## Unorthodox Steamroller Campaign to the White House

Donald Trump entered the 2016 Republican presidential primary campaign as one of 17 candidates, with no political experience and a decided long shot to win the nomination. Over the next nine months, he rejected public relations orthodoxy, disdaining public relations counsel, and violating virtually every rule in the public relations handbook. For example, he refused to take "the high road."

Proper public relations advice always argues to "do the right thing"; in other words, take the high road when speaking about colleagues or adversaries. "If you can't say something nice about someone," the public relations wisdom goes, "don't say anything."

Not candidate Trump. He bellowed at the drop of a hat, leaving friend and enemy in his wake. For instance:

- "Look at that face (on fellow candidate Carly Fiorina). Would anyone vote for that?"
- "Barack Obama is the worst President in American history."
- "I like his (Trump critic actor Robert DeNiro's) acting but ... we're not dealing with Albert Einstein."

Nor did Trump follow the advice to "never bad mouth the competition." He took every opportunity—whether invited or not—to make fun of his Republican rivals and belittle them. Not only didn't he mind violating President Ronald Reagan's so-called



▲ **FIGURE 2-7** Standing by their man.

Donald Trump campaigning his way to the presidency of the United States of America.  
Photo: Storms Media Group/Alamy Stock Photo

11th commandment that “*Thou shall never denigrate a fellow Republican,*” he delighted in doing it. Among the more stinging Trumpisms, he branded Florida Gov. Jeb Bush as “*low energy,*” called Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul “*a spoiled brat,*” and labeled Florida Sen. Marco Rubio “*little Marco.*”

The candidate’s withering assaults worked, as his rivals sputtered to defend themselves against dreaded Trump tweets and failed to match the Trump bravado in debates.

Public relations counselors also preach the importance of “*doing your homework.*” Trump rarely gave the impression that he cared much about preparation. While the other candidates showed up prepared for set stump speeches and meetings with constituents, Trump rallies were more free-wheeling affairs. The candidate didn’t give speeches. Rather, he spoke extemporaneously, wandering this way and that, in any direction his mind took him. His free-form narratives generally covered such favored topics as the unfairness of the media; why the protestors outside were bad people; and occasional throwaways about building a wall, keeping out immigrants, and getting back at unfair trade partners.

His crowds ate it up. Trump was nominated and then practiced the same kind of non-traditional, non-rules during the campaign against a stunned, far more politically experienced Hillary Clinton. Their race was bitter, nasty, and dominated by so-called “*fake news*”; bogus news stories planted on social media to embarrass

one side or the other. After the campaign, Clinton forces accused the Russians of spreading the false stories to ensure a Trump victory. Ultimately, a special prosecutor was appointed and an investigation launched.

It made little difference. The unorthodox candidate had prevailed.

And in his unorthodoxy, Trump still embraced one important public relations principle: *Keep your primary message clear.* Trump’s message wasn’t only clear; it was simple, i.e., “*I stand for the hard-working, God-fearing, family-loving average American against the wealthy, connected elites.*”

And it was that simple message that in the end gave the unorthodox candidate winning margins in toss-up states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and ultimately won him the White House.

## Accidental President

The Donald Trump presidency proved equally as tumultuous as his campaign, with traditional public relations principles continuing to face a rocky road.

President-elect Trump might have vowed he would cease his tweeting habit once he assumed the responsibilities of the President. But President Trump not only failed to cease the tweeting, he accelerated the early-morning barrage. Likewise,

President-elect Trump said he would ultimately release his tax returns—something presidential candidates had always done. But after becoming President, Trump said he'd release his returns "after I'm out of office."

Likewise, the Trump tendencies to exaggerate continued unabated once he got to the White House—or even *before* he got there. On Inauguration Day 2017, Trump commanded his Press Secretary Sean Spicer to tell the White House press corps that those watching the proceedings were among the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration. Spicer was hounded for months to prove it. A year later, with Spicer gone from the White House, the President acknowledged he made a mistake to make the claim.

When a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, resulted in the death of an anti-rally protestor, President Trump, in an effort to be conciliatory, said, "I think there is blame on both sides." The President's critics immediately accused him of condoning white supremacists. Some of those critics branded themselves, "the resistance," in opposition to the Trump administration.

On the other hand, in his first year the unlikely President presided over a booming economy and a roaring stock market. The economic policies he championed helped stimulate buoyant corporate profits and higher wages for American workers, and national unemployment continued to decline. And in his second

year, President Trump became the first sitting American President to meet with Kim Jong-un, the leader of the rogue state of North Korea; giving hope to an improbable peace process, after months of the two leaders publicly taunting each other (Figure 2-8).

From one dizzying day to the next—both positively and negatively—President Donald Trump continued to stretch the bounds of traditional public relations strategies and tactics and confound the world.

### Questions

- 2.11. If you were candidate Trump's public relations advisor, how would you have advised him to modify his approach?
- 2.12. What public relations strategy would you have suggested Trump follow in competing with Hillary Clinton?
- 2.13. As press secretary, had you been Sean Spicer, what would you have done after the President asked you to talk about the size of the Inauguration Day crowd?
- 2.14. With his presidency now well along, what public relations advice would you give President Trump for the future?



▲ **FIGURE 2-8** Giving peace a chance.  
Photo: SHEALAH CRAIGHEAD/UPI/Newscom

For further information, see Joe Escobedo, "How Trump Broke Every PR Rule to Win the US Election," *Forbes*, December 1, 2016; Beth Monaghan, "What the Trump Election Means for Public Relations," *Inkhouse*, November 18, 2016; Josh Nash, "Trump's PR Miracle Explained," *The Hill*, November 17, 2016; Fraser P. Seitel, "The Anti-Public Relations Presidential Candidate," <http://www.odwyerpr.com>, March 14, 2016; Fraser P. Seitel, "Donald Trump and the End of Public Relations," <http://www.odwyerpr.com>, February 9, 2017; Curtis Sparrer, "Did Trump Run the Best PR Campaign of 2016?" *Adweek*, December 8, 2016.

## FROM THE TOP

## An Interview with Edward L. Bernays

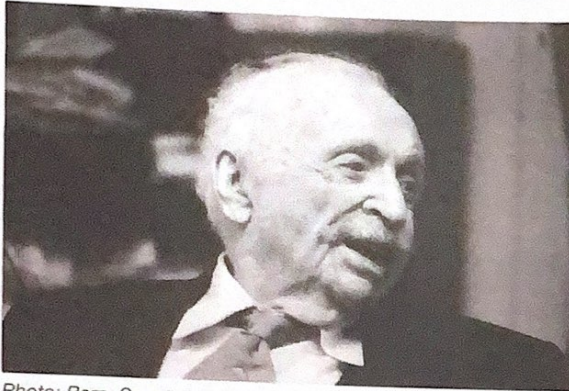


Photo: Barry Spector

**Edward L. Bernays**, who died in 1995 at the age of 103, was a public relations patriarch. A nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays pioneered the application of the social sciences to public relations. In partnership with his late wife, Doris Fleischman, he advised Presidents of the United States, industrial leaders, and legendary figures from Enrico Caruso to Eleanor Roosevelt. This interview was conducted with the legendary counselor in his 98th year.

**When you taught the first public relations class, did you ever envision the field growing to its present stature?**

I gave the first course in public relations after *Crystallizing Public Opinion* was published in 1923. I decided that one way to give the term “counsel on public relations” status was to lecture at a university on the principles, practices, and ethics of the new vocation. New York University was willing to accept my offer to do so. But I never envisioned at that time that the vocation would spread throughout the United States and then throughout the free world.

**What were the objectives of that first public relations course?**

The objectives were to give status to the new vocation. Many people still believed the term “counsel on public relations” was a euphemism for publicity man, press agent, or flack. Even H. L. Mencken, in his book on the *American Language*, ranked it as such. But in his *Supplement to the American Language*, published some years later, he changed his viewpoint and used my definition of the term.

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**What are the most significant factors that have led to the rise in public relations practice?**

The most significant factor is the rise in people power and its recognition by leaders. Theodore Roosevelt helped bring this about with his Square Deal. Woodrow Wilson helped with his New Freedom, and so did Franklin Delano Roosevelt with his New Deal. And this tradition was continued as time went on.

**Do you have any gripes with the way public relations is practiced today?**

I certainly do. The meanings of words in the United States have the stability of soap bubbles. Unless words are defined as to their meaning by law, as in the case of professions—for instance, law, medicine, architecture—they are in the public domain. Anyone can use them. Today, any plumber or car salesman or unethical character can call himself or herself a public relations practitioner. Many who call themselves public relations practitioners have no education, training, or knowledge of what the field is. And the public equally has little understanding of the meaning of the two words. Until licensing and registration are introduced, this will continue to be the situation.

**What pleases you most about current public relations practice?**

What pleases me most is that there are, indeed, practitioners who regard their activity as a profession, an art applied to a science, in which the public interest, and not pecuniary motivation, is the primary consideration; and also that outstanding leaders in society are grasping the meaning and significance of the activity.

**How would you compare the caliber of today's public relations practitioner with that of the practitioner of the past?**

The practitioner today has more education in his subject. But, unfortunately, education for public relations varies with the institution where it is being conducted. This is due to the lack of a standard definition. Public relations activity is applied social science to the social attitudes or actions of employers or clients.

**Where do you think public relations will be 20 years from now?**

It is difficult to appraise where public relations will be 20 years from now. I don't like the tendency of advertising agencies gobbling up large public relations organizations. That is like surgical instrument manufacturers gobbling up surgical medical colleges or law book publishers gobbling up law colleges. However, if licensing and registration take place, then the vocation is assured a long lifetime, as long as democracy's.

## Public Relations Bookshelf

Bernays, Edward L. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. New York: Liveright, 1961. The original 1923 version was the first significant book in the field. It deserves to be read for its historical value as well as for the amazingly progressive ideas that its author forwarded about the modern practice for which he was so responsible.

Bernays, Edward L. *Public Relations*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963. This book offers an informative history of public relations, from Ancient Sumeria through the 1940s, and includes Bernays's view of what public relations ought to stand for.

- Bernays, Edward L. *The Later Years: Public Relations Insights, 1956–1986*. Rhinebeck, NY: H & M, 1987. Essentially, this is a series of columns that Edward Bernays authored for the late *Public Relations Quarterly*.
- Broom, Glen M. *Cutlip and Center's Effective Public Relations (11th Edition)*. New York, NY: Pearson, 2012. Outstanding historical perspective on public relations.
- Burson, Harold. *The Business of Persuasion*. New York, NY: Rosetta Books, 2017. Harold Burson, our interviewee in Chapter 1, was described by *PRWeek* as “the 20th century’s most influential PR figure.” In this book, the dean of American public relations traces his life in building the world’s largest public relations agency and working for the world’s most powerful companies.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*. Boston: South End Press, 1989. A contrary view to Bernays’ concept of public relations, this book, written by a well-known social critic, expresses all “that is wrong” about the media and attempts to persuade the public.
- Cutlip, Scott M. *Public Relations History from the 17th to the 20th Century*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995. A one-of-a-kind historical reference.
- Cutlip, Scott M. *The Unseen Power—Public Relations, A History*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994. This 800-page book is perhaps the definitive history of public relations in the 20th century. And it’s not always “positive,” either.
- Dukes, Ofield, and Rochelle L. Ford (ed.). *Ofield: The Autobiography of Public Relations Man Ofield Dukes*. New York, NY: PRMuseum Press, 2017. The story of one of history’s most successful African American public relations practitioners.
- Ewen, Stuart. *PR! A Social History of Spin*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996. And oldie, but baddy, at least in terms of its view of public relations. This Hunter College history professor is no fan of public relations, and the book is worth reading for that reason alone.
- Miller, David, and William Dinan. *A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power*. London, England: Pluto Press, 2008. Two British sociology professors present a not-so-flattering view of how public relations developed and became the powerful societal force it is today.
- Olasky, Marvin N. “Roots of Modern Public Relations: The Bernays Doctrine.” *Public Relations Quarterly*, Winter 1984. Olasky wages a spirited defense of Bernays as a more pragmatic and effective public relations representative than Ivy Lee.
- Slater, Robert. *No Such Thing as Over-Exposure: Inside the Life and Celebrity of Donald Trump*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005. If you’ve ever wondered about the phrase “a legend in his own mind,” read this book and find out what it means.
- Tedlow, Richard S. *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900–1950*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979. An analytical and comprehensive history of corporate public relations in the first half of the 20th century.
- Tye, Larry. *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998. The author’s background as a *Boston Globe* journalist, not a public relations practitioner or professor, both limits the depth of this biography and offers the refreshing viewpoint of an “outsider.”

## Endnotes

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