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PR Tactics and The Strategist Online

Bonus Tactics Online article: PR legend Harold Burson, APR, Fellow PRSA, shares advice on PR profession Nov.03, 2008

By Amy Jacques

On Oct. 23, [the City College of New York](#) hosted "The Living Room Experience" with [Harold Burson](#), APR, Fellow PRSA, founding chairman of [Burson-Marsteller](#). The 87-year-old PR veteran spoke with moderator and professor Alicia Evans and a crowd of about 60 PR students and professionals.

In a wood-paneled room with stained glass windows, surrounded by pillows, cushions, rugs and plants, Evans and members of the audience asked Burson, the architect of the largest PR agency in the world, about how he got his start, changes he has seen in the profession through the years and tips for future and current PR professionals.

Defining public relations

Burson began by stating that public relations has been around since people first started interacting with each other. He referenced early PR practitioners like Ivy Lee and Edward L. Bernays, while encapsulating the history of profession. Burson cited Bernays as the person who first established the methodology of public relations, which he says is very much still the methodology of today.

He agrees with Bernays' original definition of public relations as the function, which analyzes public opinion and helps determine a policy or actions that will agree with the public interest. He added, "after you set your course of behavior and actions that way, then you start communicating... and public relations really has two parts: behavior and communication. I subscribe very much to his definition, but what I have been objecting to the last 20 years is how the word communications has taken over as a descriptor for public relations and I think it really demeans what we do."

An early start

Burson began working at *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*, a daily newspaper, when he was 13 years old. He received on-the-spot editing and advice from his editor, which he said was the best training he's ever had. After graduating from high school at age 15, Burson went to college at Ole Miss and became a stringer for the Memphis paper, making 14 cents per column inch.

Around 1940, he started working and "realized it is better to be part of management rather than to be the people who do all the work," he said. Burson met the owner of a construction company who asked him to take a leave of absence and handle media relations for him. Six months later he was in New York doing publicity for the company. Burson decided he wanted to learn the business and traveled with him for three years, which he referred to as his "business school education." So, by age 25, he was already working with the business press and the trade press in publicity and started on his own firm in August of 1946 with two clients. Soon after, he teamed up with Bill Marsteller, who was known for his advertising tactics, founding the Burson-Marsteller agency.

The agency goes international

A defining moment for Burson-Marsteller came in 1959 when Burson read a *New York Times* article stating that a treaty had been agreed upon by six European nations that would start a common market. Shortly thereafter, two of his largest clients announced that they were opening manufacturing operations in Europe. Since Burson was always interested in foreign relations, he decided to expand into Europe. The agency opened its first office in Geneva in 1960 and opened its second office in Berlin in 1965.

"From 1960 to 1990, Burson-Marsteller and [Hill & Knowlton](#) — the largest firm overseas at the time — were the only two local PR firms," he said. "It was a great market for us. International business was more profitable than domestic business and for thirty years, Burson-Marsteller and Hill & Knowlton had the international business to ourselves."

After Burson briefly discussed his foray into the PR profession, he fielded questions from Evans and the audience. Among the topics covered:

What is the common thread in public relations in all countries?

"I've always had trouble with international public relations, I don't think there is any such thing. Public relations is country by country by country so basically its being able to coordinate and... deliver the same message in all these different countries, taking into account the differences in culture and the way that they do business."

What keeps you enthused?

"I like the people and getting involved in [solving] different problems. I like young people and I like going into the office each day. I have three ongoing client interests (now four) that I continue to putter around with... Merrill Lynch, Coca-Cola and recently AIG and I still do some institutional and ceremonial appearances."

What in this business is always consistently true?

"The basics of the business have been constant since the beginning and will be constant until the end of time and that is that you can't make promises and not deliver on them — and that if you are going to make a claim, you've got to deliver on that claim. Also I feel that every action that is not in the interest of the people and does not meet public expectations may be successful in the short term, but it will never be successful in the long term. I believe that truth, transparency, and payoffs... I think if you have problems, no matter how serious or difficult, try to make it and get by — make a one day story out of it if you can. I think our successes depend on our serving the public with truthfulness."

"Looking ahead, there will be a very tough job market. Particularly in the field of communications, there are more college graduates coming out of school than there are jobs — you need to know that you're going to have a lot of competition when you get out there."

Burson also offered three important things young people and professionals should be doing right now:

1. Build A Network. There is nothing that will serve you more in life, no matter how old you grow up to be, than being networked with people. Being networked is not only just knowing somebody — but you've got to work to keep in contact with those people. And the trick is you want to try to network with the winners, and not the losers.

- We did a survey in our New York office on how people got to Burson-Marsteller and for 40 percent of them, it was by knowing somebody who knew somebody — sometimes three or four remote. But with these networks — you know, if you get into trouble or need some information, you've got somebody you can call on. I urge you to keep up with people who you think are going to be important in your life and to start now.

2. Spend as much time as you possibly can trying to be a good writer. If you are a good writer, then you are going to be a special person in any organization that you have anything to do with. If somebody comes into our organization and it becomes known that they can write well, that person becomes 110 percent billable almost over night. There are so few people who are coming out of school today who are really good writers. Writing is really getting to be a dying art and the computers and text messaging is not helping it at all.

3. Try to develop a body of knowledge about a lot of different things. Whenever anything comes up, at least you can talk for two minutes about it and make people think you are smart. You have to be able to speak knowledgeably for the first few minutes and the only way I know how to do that is to do as much reading as you possibly can — newspapers, magazines, books, talk shows on television and things like that. My father had an expression — he said that you should "always be in the know."

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Mum's the word for Bo

BY MITCH SHERMAN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

NORMAN, Okla. - Along its 10-year fall from football supremacy and repeated failure to avoid collapses like Saturday night, Nebraska has produced more than its share of unusual moments.

Nothing, though, quite like this.

Coach Bo Pelini muzzled the NU players and assistant coaches following a 62-28 loss to fourth-ranked Oklahoma, refusing to let anyone other than himself talk publicly about game.

"I'm responsible for what happened out there, and (I'm) the voice of this team," Pelini said after the Huskers allowed a school-record 49 first-half points and fell behind by five touchdowns in the first quarter. "I told our guys, 'Oklahoma's over.' We're moving on."

The situation led Pelini to grow irritated during his postgame interview session and contributed to a bizarre scene outside the NU locker room as players and coaches shuffled toward their buses past reporters.

Many Huskers stopped for several minutes to embrace friends and family members.

Nearby, large groups of Oklahoma fans congregated in front of televisions in the stadium, cheering and then celebrating the final moments of Texas Tech's last-second win over hated OU rival Texas. The Huskers appeared oblivious to all of it.

Asked for an interview, quarterback Joe Ganz said: "I don't think I'm supposed to."

Linebacker Cody Glenn, receiver Todd Peterson and offensive line coach Barney Cotton also declined.

"I don't think we're going to talk," tight ends coach Ron Brown said. "I don't think Bo wants it."

A credentialed news-media contingency of 54, including six World-Herald writers, followed NU to Norman. After Oklahoma posted its highest point total in the 84-game series against Nebraska, most everyone was looking for answers from the Huskers.

What went wrong in the first quarter?

Did the NU players feel well prepared?

How do they expect to rebound with key North Division games against Kansas, Kansas State and Colorado to come this month?

Only Pelini answered.

The coach, after Nebraska's 12th consecutive loss to an opponent ranked in the Top 10, informed media relations director Keith Mann of his decision. Mann relayed the information by text message to an intern stationed outside the locker room.

"It's a three-game season now," Pelini said. "There's nothing we can do about what happened at Oklahoma, and I don't want them talking about it. We're moving on."

Pelini said he would make the Huskers available for interviews Monday after practice at their normal time.

Asked to explain his decision further, the first-year coach grew agitated.

"You know what, I will make them not available the whole week, if that's what you want me to do," Pelini said. "Is that what you want me to do? I thought I made it clear where we stand on that."

"The players are not available for comment, OK? If you don't like it, tough. Ask me the questions you'd ask the players."

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Wisconsin Athletics launches text message service

Madison, Wis.

The University of Wisconsin Athletic Department and AT&T Inc. today announced the launch of a free wireless text-message service to keep Badgers fans further connected to Wisconsin Athletics whether they're at the game or on the go.

Beginning today, fans can text Bucky to 72645 and register to receive text alerts. Or, simply click [here](#) and register online. Throughout the athletic season, registered users will be provided three to five alerts per week featuring score updates, breaking team news, ticket announcements, promotional information, special event invitations, and more. The alerts will also direct consumers to a Badger-specific portal where they can find information and content from their favorite team. The service is free and available on all phone carriers in the United States. Standard text message rates apply.

During football games at Camp Randall Stadium, fans can actively participate in their football game day experience by using their wireless phone as part of a videoboard feature called the "Badger Jukebox presented by AT&T."

Throughout the first half of the game, fans can cast their vote for one of three songs selections. The winning song selected by Wisconsin fans will be played in the second half. By participating in the voting, fans will have the opportunity to opt in for the service and receive text alerts. Similar text-to-vote promotions are planned for the upcoming basketball season.

"This is a great opportunity for Badgers fans to really get in the action and receive all the team news and information they could want," said Vince Sweeney, Senior Associate Athletic Director of the University of Wisconsin. "This service allows us to connect with our fans in new and unique ways – whether they're in the stands or at home in front of their big-screen TV."

"We're thrilled to give Badgers fans more ways to stay connected to their favorite team," said Tim McGhee, Director, AT&T Corporate Sponsorships. "This is a great way to showcase AT&T mobile technology and our support for Wisconsin athletics."

The University of Wisconsin is one of 22 collegiate athletic programs nationwide to participate in AT&T's integrated wireless and texting program, which is the largest wireless collegiate texting program of its kind. It's also the first wireless program to enable collegiate sports teams to use texting to deliver in-game activities, news alerts and content to wireless handsets, enhancing the fan experience and allowing teams to connect more effectively with their fans across the country.

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washingtonpost.com

The AP Is Breaking More Than News

Advertisement

By Jay Newton-Small
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Any young journalist covering a presidential campaign is likely to have read Timothy Crouse's classic book on the 1972 election, "[The Boys on the Bus.](#)" In the first chapter, the author describes the pecking order of print journalists. At the top of the food chain are the wire-service reporters, particularly the reporters from the Associated Press, the oldest of news organizations -- those hard-bitten, vigilant correspondents who set the agenda for everybody else.

"Wire stories are usually bland, dry and overly cautious," Crouse wrote. "There is always an inverse proportion between the number of persons a reporter reaches and the amount he can say. The larger the audience the more inoffensive and inconclusive the article must be."

These days, Crouse would be in for a shock. Some of the most eyebrow-raising stories this presidential-election cycle have come from a surprising source: the stodgy old AP. And this new boldness is threatening not only the AP's standing as a neutral arbiter of the news but also challenging its relationship with its owners, thousands of struggling U.S. newspapers that are coming to see the AP as a monster of their own creation: a competitor that could hasten their demise.

A sampling of headlines and leads this year:

["Is Edwards Real or a Phony?"](#)

["Mitt Romney's victory in Michigan was a defeat for authenticity in politics."](#)

["John McCain calls himself an underdog. That may be an understatement."](#)

["Obama Walks Arrogance Line"](#)

["Slick Hillary?"](#)

["I miss Hillary."](#)

["Biden pick shows lack of confidence."](#)

Just as the Internet is changing newspapers, so it is also changing the AP. In its efforts to survive the tectonic shifts destabilizing most daily newspapers and to brand itself online -- many of the above articles ran only on the Web as part of the new, edgier AP -- the wire service is evolving into the world's largest virtual newspaper and a direct competitor to the papers that own it. When the news organization entrusted with calling elections sets off down the slippery slope of news analysis, it's hard not to wonder: Is the journalism world losing its North Star, the one source that could be relied upon to provide "Just the facts, ma'am"?

Ron Fournier, the AP's new Washington bureau chief and the author of many of the above headlines, describes the organization's new track as "accountability journalism."

"Katrina made a believer out of me," he wrote in an [internal memo](#) just before he was named bureau chief in June. "I had always known that [The Associated Press](#) played a role in holding public officials accountable, but it took a killer hurricane and an incompetent, arrogant government response to make me realize this is no mere role. It's an obligation, a liberating one at that."

Fournier, however, has come under attack by liberal blogs for many of his stories this election season. Accusations of bias escalated after chummy e-mails between Fournier and former senior [White House](#) adviser [Karl Rove](#) surfaced in an unrelated congressional investigation and reports emerged that Fournier had been offered a job by Sen. John McCain's campaign. To many readers, there's a fine line between analysis and bias. But AP Executive Director Kathleen Carroll says this campaign season is not so different from any other. "My e-mail inbox has been, over the course of this campaign, filled with angry organized e-mails from people on the left who think we are too supportive of McCain and people on the right who think we've been too soft on Obama," she says.

One AP reporter described the new style more as "calling [expletive] when you see it." But many of the reporters I spoke with for this article were uncomfortable with doing the instant analysis now being demanded of them. In the old days, longer enterprise stories ran separately from breaking daily news and took hours, if not days, to complete. Now split-second analyses are expected as part of breaking news. "It's enough that we're expected to always be first, this incredible pressure to break the news," one AP political reporter told me. "But now we also have to magically find a brilliant and nifty lead, the unique angle, while still beating everyone else. I feel like I'm competing with [Politico](#), the [New York Times](#) and [Reuters](#) simultaneously." And, indeed, they are.

"I worry that their strategy is too 2004 Web and not a 2008 approach to the Web," says Dick Keil, a former AP reporter who spent 20 years working for wire services before becoming a political consultant. "It's like New Coke -- it seems cool now, but just wait. It could bring down the whole company: They have a recognized, respected and trusted brand and identity, and they are moving in a radically new direction likely to make the vast majority of their subscribers uncomfortable."

Founded in 1846, the Associated Press is a nonprofit organization owned jointly by 1,500 U.S. newspapers, which realized that by pooling their resources, they could achieve far more than they could alone, such as setting up 243 AP bureaus in 97 countries. The idea behind the cooperative was to feed newsrooms nationwide a fire hose of raw data that their own writers and columnists could use to produce copy tailored to the local area. Over the years, the service was expanded to include photographs, then audio and finally television footage.

With the arrival of former [USA Today](#) president and publisher Tom Curley at its helm in 2003, the organization has undergone drastic changes. The shrinking pains hurting the newspaper industry, which still accounts for a quarter of AP's business, have also hurt the wire. But the measures taken to mitigate that impact have caused new, potentially more damaging, problems. As the industry has retracted, Curley has inked lucrative deals to distribute content directly to online news aggregators [Google](#) and [Yahoo](#). But that move essentially cut out the newspaper Web sites as middlemen -- at the very moment when growing those sites is critical to the papers' survival.

"The Internet has become our new business environment," [Curley told an Online News Association](#) conference in 2004, "not just another medium for distribution." He has also restructured the AP's pricing system so that, starting next year, papers may no longer buy the services they need "cafeteria-style" but will be forced to buy packages. Two groups of angry editors wrote letters of protest.

"I think you vastly underestimate the resentment and anger in this room," [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#) editor

David Shribman told Curley at an American Society of Newspaper Editors conference in April. Echoed Ron Royhab of the Toledo Blade, "I would remind you that it is newspapers who put this cooperative together." The AP says the new structure should save papers \$30 million annually and announced last week that they will be reviewing the rates.

Many members feel that the pricing changes, given the state of newspapers, are designed to help the AP more than them. Some have begun to explore opting out, and at least 16 have done so, including the [Tribune Co.](#) with its nine papers and the [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#). Last month, the [Newark Star Ledger](#), the largest newspaper in New Jersey, ran an issue without AP copy to test whether it could survive without the service. The Spokesman-Review of Spokane, Wash., has refused to wait the two years required after giving notice and has announced plans to withdraw in January, a move that will probably force the AP to sue. "Obviously, we are concerned," says Carroll, who adds that many papers have demanded increased analysis. "We are obliged to serve all of our owners, and their appetites are vast and not unanimous."

Still, what was once minor griping is turning into a full-fledged revolt. The eight largest papers in Ohio have formed their own co-op and exchange stories with one another for free. This end run around the AP is being duplicated by newsrooms in Maine, Texas, Pennsylvania and Florida, says Benjamin Marrison, editor of the Columbus Dispatch, which earlier this month announced that it's also opting out of the service. The AP in Ohio "is doing a lot of the work that newspapers do, which is great if they want to be a competitor," Marrison says. "We would prefer that they cover the routine state legislature hearings and let us cover the analysis. They're now missing some of those kinds of hearings, forcing us to cover them. . . . [Some] think we've become the wire service to the wire service."

So far the changes have affected only the U.S. service. But Curley argues that this is the future of news. As he said in a 2004 speech that essentially heralded the end of newspapers, "Content will be more important than its container." People, he predicted, will get their news online in nuggets that they pick and choose, ignoring the rest. You like [Barack Obama](#)? Here's an RSS feed of everything being written about him -- and nothing about John McCain to give it context. Like [Picasso](#)? Here's everything we have on him, but you may miss the Renoir exhibit because you failed to sign up for Renoir alerts. For the AP, this future is potentially profitable because, with its new online partnerships, it can deliver tailored news directly to every reader's, viewer's and listener's inbox.

But in a world, and a Web, full of analysis, opinion and "accountability journalism," what's missing is a neutral referee. Which is a bit like living in a world with a [North Pole](#) and a [South Pole](#) but no equator. If there's no one to set the standard, how will we know when we've crossed the line?

Jay Newton-Small is a Washington correspondent for Time magazine. She worked for six years for wire services, including Bloomberg News, Agence France-Presse and the Associated Press.

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