

## 2003 Distinguished Service Award Remarks

### Doing What's Right

by

*Ann H. Barkelew*

Thank you for this wonderful and truly special award. My mother used to always say "Consider the source, Ann." I am...and my heart is very full to be the one selected by you for this great honor.

I also want to thank my favorite people in the world: my husband, Jim O'Hagan...and my children, who have always understood and supported my love affair with this 24/7 profession.

This award means even more to me because the first three giants to receive it have all been important in my life as mentors and friends.

Betsy Plank, Patrick Jackson and Jack Felton exemplify what I think makes our profession shine. They all give back to the profession abundantly. Where would PRSSA be if Betsy Plank had not been their guardian angel? Where would the practice of public relations be if Patrick Jackson hadn't pushed us to speak with One Clear Voice, to be more accountable, more inclusive, more in touch with key influencers? What would be the state of public relations research if Jack Felton hadn't taken his corporate credibility, contacts and experience to the Institute?

There's an old Missouri saying: "Everything we've done, everywhere we've been, has made us who we are. Be thankful for all that has come before." I am...deeply thankful.

I'm also very thankful for the wise counsel of Larry Foster and Chet Burger and Jim Tolley and Ed Block and Jim Murphy and Ron Rhody...who so generously introduced me to the world of corporate public relations by sharing their wisdom and experience...

and for John Graham, my wonderful role model of how to do the agency world right.

I'm from the school that says you return the favor by giving back. I believe that's what sets our Society apart and makes us better...as people and as professionals.

Giving back...making life better...inside our organizations and in the world around us. It's our responsibility.

That's certainly what Arthur Page believed and what this award recognizes.

*Years and years ago, a friend of mine at the University of Missouri wrote his master's thesis on the subject: "How To Raise Children."*

*After he was married, his thesis was revised for publication under the title, "Some Theories on How To Raise Children."*

*A few years and two children later, he was invited to present his paper at a rather prestigious gathering. On the program, his speech was titled, "Some Thoughts on How To Raise Children."*

37 years ago, when I left the classroom to become a school public relations practitioner, my knowledge base was limited to a course I audited at the University of Missouri while getting my master's degree. But it also included nine years as a high school English and journalism teacher, and 30 years as the daughter of a politician and a feminist, who also was community activist. I had lots of ideas -- and values -- about what ought to be.

Today, with 15 years in public sector public relations, 15 years in corporate public relations and 7 years in agency public relations ...

- handling management's side in more than a dozen major teachers' strikes and another two dozen strike build ups,
- building understanding about court-ordered school desegregation,
- closing schools, plants and a flagship department store that happened to have been one of the three largest in the world,
- selling companies, acquiring companies
- merging, reorganizing and streamlining corporate organizations
- positioning the public relations function on an equal status with law, finance and human resources as part of executive leadership ... becoming the first woman elected to Dayton Hudson Corporation's Management Committee,
- guiding a major arts institution through the arrest of its leader on criminal charges of sexual abuse of children (which not only survived and prospered, but this year received the regional Tony Award!!!)
- confronting and defeating the hostile takeover threat of a Fortune 50 company and
- co-chairing first the task force and then the Committee on the Future of Public Relations

...I have just a few "thoughts" about this profession we share and how to make it better.

No matter what your definition of public relations is...

If you believe public relations is a communications and information transfer tool by which people can build relationships and better understand one another by being better in touch with one another...

Or, if you believe in the idea of the Court of Public Opinion, that public relations professionals really are the people who make the democratic system work, because we believe passionately that people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives...

Or, if you believe public relations is managing the reputation of the organization as assets for the organization and its key stakeholders, ensuring that the values are maintained...

Or if you believe that the bottom line of public relations practice is to be the conscience of the organization...

All of the above?

No matter how you define our field, we are automatically and inevitably linked to the public interest -- whether we want to be or not.

We simply cannot do what we do without caring about the broader world. And that means we must be involved.

I've learned a lot about involvement in the last 37 years and I have three quick lessons to share with you.

#### Lesson #1

Be involved in what your organization is doing and where it is going. Don't wait to be asked. Be involved in business planning...not just anticipating issues, but recommending choices.

The 12-member Dayton Hudson Communications Coordinating Council...created and headed by corporate public relations in 1988...brought together the heads of investor relations, the foundation, government affairs, operating division public relations and advertising and the president of the corporation...to take on the competitive issue of branding the company. That group gave birth to a new focus on the company's 5% giving and nationwide community involvement as a strategy of differentiation.

It wasn't easy. The financial people were concerned that talking about how much we gave back wouldn't sit well with "the Street." The merchants didn't want to give up the advertising space.

Bottom line: you still see that focus today in Target's circulars and inside every Target store. We gave customers a reason to choose Target, Dayton's, Hudson's, Marshall Field's and Mervyn's.

Colleagues, working together, can make great things happen.

The Council became a valuable problem solving resource for almost every area and operating unit, and for every big issue that landed on our doorstep.

I learned that we are the common denominator inside a company, with "carte blanche" to get involved with every area of the organization.

I learned that much of our credibility was how we proved it with action.

### Lesson #2

Be involved in your community. It adds balance to our lives and enhances our knowledge about the community. At Dayton Hudson, we believed that our businesses could not be healthy unless our communities are healthy. The mission was “to strengthen the communities that nurture our business.”

I learned that involved executives are better executives...more in touch with where employees and customers live and what they care about. It's easy to give money. The greatest gift is always your time and talent.

And, while I treated it rather tokenistically during the first 15 years of my career, when I became part of the retail world, I learned that staying in touch with the customer has to be a top priority for successful businesses.

Arthur Page believed that too. “To serve the company well, understand what the public wants and is saying...”

I learned that being involved with the community of employees needs a management culture that treats people like they matter, because they do...a culture that truly emphasizes positive relationships.

*Last week, one of Minnesota's Entrepreneurs of the Year said she promises her employees five things: work/life balance that makes time for families... a 40-45 hour work week (she insists her employees need 8.5 hours of sleep)...happy people to work with...no fear of mistakes...and a boss who likes you.*

### Lesson #3

Be involved in making our profession better.

That means lots and lots of giving back. It means being a willing mentor...being thrilled when your people grow and can do almost everything you can do, most times better. That's how it should be.

Ron Rhody is a great example of this lesson. He could just have asked a college or university to create a training program for the next generation of CPROs in California, but instead, he dove in, put together a team and created the San Francisco Academy – a year long program that is now based at UC- Berkeley. Ron was involved and stayed involved. He didn't turn it over to someone else on his staff to do. Leaders set great examples.

After John Graham finally let me retire, he gave me another incredible opportunity with Fleishman Hillard: to mentor each new class of partners as they develop individual training modules that can be used by any of our offices around the world. We're making sure our senior

counselors are involved in the growth of all our people and it makes our firm and the profession stronger.

We in this Society are the senior-most professionals in the field. We can't ever be too busy. If we think it is someone else's job, we're going to miss out on what can be the most fun.

For all of us, it means getting even more involved in the Page Society...sign up for at least one committee, participate in the research opportunities, teach the Page principles to your groups.

Quite simply, my rule is...

When you are involved, you belong.

Where you are involved, you grow.

Perhaps it lies in my roots as a teacher, but I am an idealist about what we do professionally and what we can change...and how we can add more value and make important differences. I believe there is a mission, a purpose and a calling to what we do.

The potential for the kind of examples we can set...for the kind of differences we can make...is awesome.

But, remember Linus's advice to Lucy..."There's no heavier burden than a great potential."

As I still practice very day, albeit at a different pace, I feel rewarded knowing that I contributed – as we all contribute – to democracy, inclusion, and fairness. The gain isn't just the financial bottom line. The gain is in making the system work better for the long run.

That's DOING WHAT'S RIGHT...and proving it with action.

My wish for each of you is that you are as richly blessed as I have been, to work with great people at every turn...that the downs will always be balanced with ups...that you have abundant opportunities to be involved, to stretch and grow...and that each day...when you go to whatever it is you do...that your heart beats fast with the excitement of what you are about to do.

You have made my heart beat very fast today and I thank you – again – for this great honor.

September 15, 2003