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PR LACKS LEADERS, SAYS HEYMAN STUDY

"There's an absence of nationally recognized PR leaders," concludes a "PR Leadership Study" by Heyman Associates and the Dept. of Advertising and PR, University of Alabama.

A majority of the respondents said there were either no outstanding leaders or skipped the question, Heyman Assocs. reported.

No great mystery has been unraveled here. Statesmanlike public speeches by corporate and agency heads are almost non-existent. They have gone the way of the press conference, also a rarity.

Leadership cannot be exercised by people who are in a closet somewhere.

Asked for individual examples of leaders, the names most mentioned by the respondents were Burson-Marsteller's founder Harold Burson, IBM's Jon Iwata, and Presidential candidate Barack Obama.

Burson has helped lead the field for decades but we see no one on the agency or corporate side ready to fill his boots.

David Drobis of Ketchum used to be the leader of the industry, heading the Arthur W. Page Society, helping to found and then lead the Council of PR Firms, and heading ICCO, the European network of associations of PR firms. But Drobis retired four years ago at the age of 62.

As for Iwata, he headed PR Seminar last year when it



dropped the "PR" from its name and was unavailable for comment. This was a time for a statesmanlike speech for a group that was founded in 1952 but we never got past assistants blocking the path to him.

**Jon Iwata, senior VP,
marketing and comms.
for IBM**

Seminar itself is a model of near total secrecy.

Decades ago, outspoken PR pros were the norm. At one point in the 1970s, Hill & Knowlton published a 135-page book of dozens of speeches by executives at all levels.

'Profession Needs Leaders'



**Prof. Bruce Berger,
Univ. of Alabama**

Prof. Bruce Berger, chairman of the University of Alabama's Ad/PR Dept., said the absence comes "at a time when the profession needs excellent leaders to strengthen its image and create ethical role models."

He would like the leadership issue "put on the agendas of professional associations,"

implying that the PR trade organizations are falling down in this regard.



**David Drobis, ex-CEO of
Ketchum, carrying the
Olympic torch in 1996.**

The PR leadership study was conducted via an online national survey of more than 200 "experienced PR professionals in various fields and company types and sizes, and a series of in-depth interviews of 20 diverse, young and highly successful emerging leaders."

Seitel, Paul are Real Leaders

Leadership in PR has to be conducted by PR execs speaking out and debating with various experts including those in the press. It is especially needed now as the nation tries to understand the Wall Street meltdown. Lack of public confidence could cause a ruinous run on banks.

The two PR people with a national reputations who appear often on TV interview shows in behalf of the industry are Fraser Seitel, author of the college text "The Practice of PR," former editor of PR Society's *Strategist* quarterly and who has written a twice-monthly column for odwyerpr.com for five years, and Mike Paul, former executive at Burson-Marsteller and Hill & Knowlton who has had his own firm since 1994. Paul came up through the political ranks, working for elected officials at the local, state and national levels.

**Fraser Seitel on FOX News
Channel last week
discussing Sen. John
McCain.**

Both are PR "experts" that TV hosts have turned to hundreds of times. Seitel has been making appearances for 15 years and was on Fox three times last week, including one show where he was asked his opinion about John McCain skipping the Sept. 26 debate.

Both Seitel and Paul are invited because they are knowledgeable about current crises. Seitel has authored more than 50 essays [on the handling of PR crises](#) and 50+ [on the basics of PR](#) for odwyerpr.com.

Paul has averaged 3-4 appearances a week on TV news shows for many years including Fox, CNN, MSNBC and radio shows including WINS and National Public Radio.

Mike Paul appears on MSNBC's "Hardball."

But the Heyman study gives short shrift to media relations, barely mentioning it. There is this sentence: "PR leaders must be able to create a vision for how

communications strategically connects an organization to its publics, and understand media technologies in order to successfully deliver messages."

Media don't want "messages" delivered to them. They want dialogue.

PR leadership is needed now when secrecy and refusal to submit to government regulation (or the government's lax regulation) has led to a financial collapse.

O'Dwyer staffers [called numerous PR execs for their views](#) on this mess and got answers from [some of them](#). These are by definition the leaders of the industry. Leadership in PR requires quick thinking because, as the saying goes, "media are traveling at blinding speed." They have to in order to keep up with the events. There's no such thing as PR leaders working behind the scenes. Eloquence, charisma and goodwill need to be publicly expressed and a dialogue set up with the relevant experts. Knowledge of subject matter and being on top of the latest news are key ingredients of PR leadership.

Among those commenting on the current crisis were IR veteran Ted Pincus; Rich Torrenzano, former VP-PR, NYSE; Dave Senay, CEO, Fleishman-Hillard; Mark Hass, CEO, Manning, Selvage & Lee; Michael Kempner, CEO, MWW Group; Michael Petruzzello, CEO of Qorvis Comms., and Richard Goldstein, O'Dwyer financial columnist.

PR Professor Tim Penning's view that PR is "dialogue," stated 11 different ways in

cauldron of public debate now and the business world could certainly benefit from the same.

PRS CEO Jeff Julin told the Denver Post April 12 that "a two-way dialogue...is ultimately the goal of effective PR programs."

There's certainly a lot of lip service being paid to PR as dialogue but we don't see much follow-through.

PRS hardly even talks to its own members. Dialogue is needed to attack such issues as the right of all members to run for national office; elimination of proxy voting at the Assembly; whether or not there should be a printed members' directory; moving the charter to Delaware to allow more meetings of the Assembly; releasing Assembly transcripts; re-instituting an enforceable code; showing PRS financials several ways, etc.



Bill Heyman
of Heyman Assocs.

The Heyman study says that "ethical orientation" is a key ingredient of PR leadership and we agree.

A big ethical bone of contention in PR is whether a PR firm or PR counselor should identify clients.

This issue broke the back of the old code of the PR Society in 1999 when the Ethics Board declared the code unenforceable. The code only said members had to be "prepared" to disclose the origin of a release but stopped short of mandating this. A possible case with nationwide ramifications had to be dropped and PRS opted for a new code that would not be enforced.

MGA Communications, Denver, whose president, Jeff Julin, is chair of PRS, has on its current website a list of 11 "past and present clients" including "Americans for Balanced Energy Choice," which changed its name in April to "American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity."

When we said on odwyerpr.com that ABEC is a client of MGA we were corrected—told that MGA has not worked for what is now ACCCE since 2004. We were further told that MGA does not release a current client list so we have to guess who is or who is not a client.

MGA listed 46 clients in the 1997 [O'Dwyer's Directory of PR Firms](#), 22 in 1998, ten in 1999, and seven in 2001. It didn't give any information at all for the 2008 Directory. What made it change its policy is a question we put to the firm. Our ethical view is that all clients of PR firms should be on the record in order to live up to the "public" in PR and so prospective clients can see if there are any conflicts. Reporters also look for help from PR firms on stories.

In recent years, there has been a trend for some firms, especially those owned by the five ad conglomerates, to avoid listing any clients.

But the 204 firms in the [2007 O'Dwyer rankings](#) all provided account lists which are required for a ranking and had no problem doing so. Leadership in PR would be fighting the tendency to retreat behind the scenes.

"Transparency" is one of the supreme values of the industry.