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Some weeks ago, while I first started thinking what I would say this evening, four random factors kept recurring in my mind.

First, I have now spent nearly 40 years in the PR business – both inside and outside companies – and I have enjoyed every minute of it. I am proud of being in PR and, while I am occasionally appalled at the antics of some who call themselves PR practitioners, I am increasingly impressed with the quality of younger people who are now making it their number one career choice.

Second, in those ghastly reviews of attitudes towards careers – in which estate agents, pr people, journalists and politicians vie for the bottom slots - the standing of doctors, nurses, teachers, soldiers and so on, seem unaffected by the plethora of bad news stories about the national health service, education and the armed forces.

Third, I re-read the best book on CSR – Good Business by Steve Hilton and Giles Gibbons – and was reminded (as Giles quoted recently in his excellent article in PR Week) of Richard Lambert's view that CSR will have succeeded only when there are no internal departments, board members or employees dealing with it! CSR will then be embedded in the character of, and every decision taken by, the organisation.

And, fourth, I read Ron Sandler's excellent speech to the Guild just under a year ago when, drawing attention to the enhanced role of the PR adviser, he told us all to reflect on the added responsibilities this brings in its wake.

If we fail to address those "added responsibilities" quickly and constructively then I fear that all those bright young people coming into PR will find that the opportunities to expand their professional work in areas such as CSR will be closed to them. Instead they will be taken over by lawyers, accountants and others – far less qualified than us and at far higher fees. In short, as the Americans would say, they will have eaten our lunch!

Those added responsibilities seem to me to entail asking "How can we do our jobs better?" In large, part this is all about education, training, codes of conduct and so on and much valuable work – which I greatly applaud – is being done by the Guild, the IPR and other professional bodies in this area.

But I believe that it is also to do with the way each individual behaves every day in his or her professional life.

We say: "We have a great police force" because, perhaps, we have an attentive and reassuring local bobby. We say: "We have a great health service" – because we experienced wonderful attention from a doctor or a nurse.

The policeman on the beat: the doctor or nurse on the ward – carry the whole reputation of the police force or the National Health Service on his or her shoulders. We always generalise from that one good caring, medical experience to the one million people working in the health service!

And as PR people we do the same. We carry the reputation of the whole industry on our shoulders. Every time we go to work. Every time we advise a client. Not just the stars like Tim Bell or Alistair Campbell. Everyone. All 40,000 of the professionals working away in companies and the 2,500 consultancies up and down the land which never even make the pages of PR Week!

So, what I thought I would do for a few moments, is to identify ten personal thoughts which I regard as central to our behaviour as PR individuals.

Here goes.

First, everything is possible. Everything good and everything bad! Most things are uncontrollable – particularly in our business. Events will always upset the best - laid plans. In that context, rule one, is to be positive.

That does not mean you have to be a joke-cracking comic when the world is collapsing around you. Nor do you have to be Polyanna! It means that you must face bad news, full frontal: face reality as it is. Do not hide. The solution to problems is not pretending they are not there. The answer often lies in the analysis of the problem itself. Dissect it. Do not shy away. Be positive.

Above all else, be positive by grasping and taking responsibility. Do not allow yourself to be sidelined. Make yourself and your skills the driver that makes things happen by being accountable and responsible.

Second, never give up. Ours is a very difficult profession. We tend to be – despite the public image – remarkably sensitive, creative people. And were it not so – then we would be no good at our jobs! The result is that we are more hurt by the unpredictability of events, by the buffeting of clients and journalists, than we care to admit. Being resilient, robust, bouncing back – these are all the essentials of success.

Third, read. Yes read – and I do not mean the papers! For an industry that wishes to be regarded with esteem, our practitioners often seem very ill informed. If we aspire to be more than what we are, then we must stay ahead of what is going on in the world, in industry, in the arts, in politics, in literature.

An evening reading Trollope is certainly a more constructive way of advancing your understanding of human nature than almost anything else.

Fourth, think. Reading and thinking go together. I have never met a PR professional who thinks too much! Learning to think is the most difficult part of education. Clients do not want the same solutions you gave to the last client – except the name has been changed. They want you to solve their particular problems. Think. Close the door for a few hours and think. Blackberries, emails, mobile phones and the like are the enemies of this process.

What did Russell say? “ When all others options have failed, man is thrown back to the painful necessity of thought”.

Fifth, be much more questioning. Let me ask you this - whose mission statement is this?

“We want to be proud and know that we enjoy a reputation for fairness and honesty and that we are respected...Let us keep that reputation high”.

“Ruthlessness, callousness and arrogance do not belong here”

“We work with customers and prospects openly, honestly and sincerely”.

I could go on!

But it is ENRON.

Very often we are so keen to hear the good news: so encouraged that our client has good financial results to put out: so delighted by the client relationship we are developing – that we just do not want to upset the apple cart. Interrogate the clients. Argue with them. Make sure that they are running businesses in a way that enhance your reputations as advocates.

What is the Washington quote? “Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation, for ‘tis better to be alone than in bad company”.

Sixth, never mix business and pleasure. It is much more difficult to be objective, ask difficult questions, be independent, if your clients step over that line into friendship. Neither can you judge the performance of a colleague if that line between civility and friendship is crossed – and it is even more difficult if your families know each other socially as well!

Seventh, pay well. Get the best people on board. Have clients pay well too. If your clients pay you top dollar then you can give them the best people you have and you have the time to think about their problems. The best work I have ever done is where the client has been generous in his fees. I have made money and the client has either saved it – or made it – many times over!

Eighth, honesty is vital. Not just about the big things but the little things too. Best practice is so important. Every tiny deviation from being whiter than white undermines your credibility - not because you are found out - but because you are more likely to bend the rules next time.

Ninth, always manage expectations. Exceeding expectations by the tiniest margin is viewed as a great success. Failing by the tiniest smidgeon is always – what it is – failure!

What is Maurice Saatchi’s famous equation? Satisfaction = performance – expectation.

Finally, and tenth, it is the small things that matter: the research you do for a meeting, the care you take, even the way you dress – all these things build up a cumulative effect and determine how your client or your boss view your performance.

Think I exaggerate?

Last week I was doing a review meeting for a very large, international corporate client. The very demanding CEO said to me, “Peter, for the last eighteen months I have had a weekly conference call with your colleagues the time and date of which is arranged one week in advance. Over these eighteen months it has never been late. Not once. Be clear,” he continued, “I mean never late. If the call is at 3:30 that is

when it comes through – not 3:35 or 3:25. On the dot of 3:30. It makes me more certain that I can trust his judgement about the big things because he is so punctilious about the small”.

So there are my ten rules.

1. Be positive
2. Be resilient
3. Read
4. Think
5. Be questioning
6. Be honest – whatever the cost
7. Keep business and pleasure apart
8. Pay well and be paid well
9. Manage expectations
10. Remember that no aspect of your relationship with a client is too small to do perfectly

Which is the most important?

Assuming – as I can in this audience – that you are honest, honourable people, it must be to be resilient. If you cannot bounce back in this hugely demanding business then you will fail. Resilience is all.

And that does not mean that you have to walk around with a set grimace which advertises “I am being resilient”.

No. Humour has its role too. And it is a great PR weapon.

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