

Keynote Address
2008 CASE Institute for Senior Communications and
Marketing Professionals
“What do I Want From the Communications Team?”
Noon, September 25, 2008
Westin Buckhead Atlanta

- Good afternoon. On behalf of this state’s flagship institution and America’s first state-chartered university, welcome to Georgia. I trust you have enjoyed your stay thus far and will continue to enjoy yourselves here.
- Please spend lots of money before you leave – we need the tax revenue.
- I want to thank CASE for the invitation to speak with you today on what is one of my favorite topics. I particularly want to thank John Hachtel and Margaret Avritt, your conference co-chairs, for their work on pulling together the senior communications professionals to this conference. And I want to also thank Rae Goldsmith for her leadership of the communication and marketing efforts at the CASE mothership. Your work is incredibly important to higher education, and I am pleased with what I know is happening regarding what YOU do and what your president – and my friend – John Lippincott do for the advancement profession.

- Much of my professional background lies in the external affairs area. Frankly, I think presidents must consider themselves to be a vital part of the institution's external affairs program; otherwise, those programs cannot be successful.
- I started out on the academic side of this life, earning a doctorate in political communications at The Ohio State University and teaching there for two years. Through happenstance or chance or fate, I landed in external affairs through politics.
- I was chief of staff for Senator Howard Baker in the late 1970s. One Monday, after I had spent the weekend in Florida and the Senator had been home in Tennessee, he called me into his office. At the time, he was in some political trouble because of his stand on the Panama Canal.
- He told me that he was sending me to Tennessee to run his campaign – and by the way, I had to raise \$2.5 million. Now, keep in mind that this was 1978, and \$2.5 million was a lot of money. It seemed an impossible task to me.

- But I learned that I was a pretty good fundraiser. That, coupled with the Ph.D. and my academic experience, made me attractive to academic institutions, and in 1982 I was named Vice President for University Affairs at Pepperdine University.
- I brought to the presidency a good understanding of what you are doing on a daily basis. As public relations professionals, you construct and deliver a message with an attempt of shaping public perception. We all want public opinion of our institutions to be strong and positive so that people feel confident in what we are doing.
- To use a baseball analogy, pr people are like the starting pitcher, setting the tone and pace of the game.
- Before I talk about the specific issues related to a president's expectation of the pr chief, I would first like to share with you some thoughts on the role of external affairs as we approach the second decade of the 21st century.
- Having been a president for more than 20 years now, I have spent some time trying to project what will happen in higher education in the next 10 years. I have a few thoughts for you to consider.

- One, this is the decade of External Affairs leadership. Show me a small and weak Institutional Advancement program and I will show you a university or college that is making little progress.
- But if you show me an institution with a large and aggressive Advancement operation, that includes a robust strategic communications and marketing operation, I will show you a university or college that is making great progress.
- Ultimately, advancement means support – mostly financial – but support in many other ways. Let me talking briefly about funding challenges.
- There is a new paradigm in university funding, particularly on the public side, but much of what I will discuss applies to the private side as well. I will note that 81% of all students across the nation are in public institutions. But the charge for schools, both public and private, is to promote the value of higher education. I always say that there is no fight between lighthouses.

- There is little chance that government at any level is going to increase support for higher education substantially, and private school tuitions are reaching the outer limits of what people will, or even can, pay. Even federal research funding is leveling off.
- Over the past decade, the Consumer Price Index has risen at an average annual rate of 2.4 percent, while tuition at public four-year colleges and universities has risen at an average annual rate of 6.6 percent. And from what we have witnessed in just the past two weeks with Lehman Brothers, AIG, and others, we will not be able to maintain that differential going forward – families won't accept it and legislators won't accept it.
- It is probably too strong to say that there is a budget crisis in higher education, although the past few years have been difficult for public institutions. But there will be an altered funding mix moving forward, and that is a reality that everyone in higher education is going to have to understand, accept and address.

- All of this adds up to the fact that the work of Institutional Advancement professionals – in development, in alumni relations and in communications – is critical to progress at our institutions. Institutions, both public and private, will have to depend more on annual fundraising and endowment earnings to achieve their goals. This is even more so the case for capital projects, scholarships and endowed faculty positions.
- The places that really commit to strong institutional advancement programs will do well – the rich will get richer.
- All of this means more pressure on the president, provost, vice presidents and deans to commit time to institutional advancement. That commitment can lead to tension with the faculty, many of whom do not yet fully understand the changing role of the president, in particular.
- Many faculty are still operating with the model of people in university leadership positions having come up through the faculty ranks. Yet even those who do so find that once they are in the position of president that the demands have more and more to do with External Affairs issues and somewhat less to do with academic issues. More and more, academic issues fall into the hands of the Provost.

- In many ways, on most of the major university campuses in America, provosts are doing much of what the faculty think the president ought to be doing – curriculum issues, research funding, admissions, financial aid, public service and outreach.
- Every vice president and dean must accept the Advancement responsibilities that come with those positions. At the University of Georgia, I ask my administrative team, including deans, to spend at least one-third of their on friend-raising and fundraising. That may not be a historically conventional model, but it is a 21st century model.
- It has been my experience that the art of development has become more complicated over the past 10 or 15 years – and it is my prediction that it will become even more so in the coming years. Creative, and more complex, ways of communicating and giving become even more important in light of the demographic shifts facing this country.
- The men and women of the “Greatest Generation,” as Tom Brokaw dubbed it, are in their 70s and 80s, and will, in the next two decades for the most part, divest themselves of resources in a wealth transfer unlike any the world has seen. This transfer is going to take place whether it is planned or unplanned.

- We are sitting on the largest run-up of appreciated property in U.S. history. *American Demographics* magazine reported in 2003 that a Boston College sociologist had estimated that \$41 to \$136 trillion – yes, TRILLION – could change hands by 2052.
- The second event with the potential to impact higher education is the retirement of the Baby Boomers – let’s say those born between 1946-1956. I was born in 1948 and, at age 60, I am starting to think that I’ve probably got five or six more years in the workplace. How do I prepare?
- All of this causes me to note that since so much is at stake, the key to success lies in our ability to enhance relationship-building – whether that be with your donors, with your alumni, with the legislative officials in your state, with your board members or with the media outlet or individual reporter that covers your college or university. Thus, I am concerned about the lack of job security and consistency in the advancement profession.

- In short, there is too much job-hopping and too little institutional loyalty. I cannot tell you how many resumes I have seen in the past five years with a move every 24 months. There are too many people concerned with resume-building instead of relationship-building.
- My point is that sometimes, staying power and commitment are as important, or more important, than ability or money. Some of the most effective advancement professionals I have known were all highly talented people, but their most important credential might well have been the fact that they stayed at one place for 15 or 20 or 30 years. All of them have built up a reservoir of relationships, institutional memory and goodwill which is paramount to success in external affairs.
- You as senior management will argue that sometimes salaries in higher education can sometimes be a challenge regarding retention. Although I would advise you to remain sensitive to that issue, I would also share with you that the data does not support salaries as a primary hurdle.

- According to the July CASE Currents issue that surveyed salaries in advancement, the salaries of public relations professionals fell pretty much in the middle between alumni relations and fund raising staff. The starting salary for an entry level pr or graphic design person is noticeably higher than a similar position at a non-profit operation or media outlet.
- My advice on staffing to senior and mid-managers in communications is twofold: 1) consider diversity in your staffing decisions, and 2) help nurture your pr professionals so that they have experiences across the advancement spectrum.
- Next, I would also encourage external affairs people to have some academic credibility. I don't think I have to tell you that the academic world operates on its own set of rules, and that occasionally the way campuses operate can be maddening, especially for people in advancement, who by definition like to get things done and get them done quickly.
- What we do in higher education requires the support of the faculty and it requires a level of understanding about what the faculty do. It is in your best interests – as an advocate for the needs of your institution – that you understand those needs as fully as you can.

- A master's degree is a good start, and graduate school provides one with a deeper level of experience in higher education. Graduate students are exposed to the "inner workings" of academic departments and, in many cases, have the opportunity to teach introductory classes.
- A doctorate carries that level of experience even further, and if you have had the chance to be a member of the faculty at a college or university, I know that you will be a more effective member of the advancement operation on campus.
- Finally, people in Institutional Advancement must understand that the government's role in higher education is going to be less financial and more regulatory in the coming years whether we like it or not. There will be more challenges, more red tape and more intrusion into our daily lives.
- Much of what the federal government has done in higher education has been very beneficial; the 1862 Morrill Act, the 1890 HBCU land-grant legislation, the GI Bill, the Pell Grant, TRIO, the NIH and the NSF have all contributed to the progress of American higher education in ways that none of us can fully comprehend or appreciate.

- With federal money comes an army of lawyers, rules, inspectors, controllers and rules interpreters and I-dotters and t-crossers.
- I do not believe there will be significant increases in the support coming to higher education from the government, but I do believe that the issue of accountability will continue to grow in significance.
- These are the big picture items that you, as managers, should be thinking about. You need to continuously ask what your communications and marketing operation can do to help address these macro issues.
- External Affairs leadership on your campus. Pressure on presidents to devote time to fundraising. Committing to a position over time. Academic credibility. These are the components of a successful External Affairs program.
- I have several points I'd like to share with you in response to the question posed by the title of this speech: What do I want from my communications team?
- There are three categories in my response to that question: I want strategic thinking; I want advice and information; and I want availability.

- Strategic thinking, of course, implies that there is a strategy for communicating about the institution. It implies that we have decided what it is we want to say about the University of Georgia and how we are going to say it.
- At UGA our strategic messages grew out of a strategic planning process – I know what you’re thinking – that was actually very productive. The vice president in charge of that process, Don Eastman (who had served as UGA’s advancement chief and who had a communications background), did not let people off easy, and we produced a document that has served us quite well for the past 10 years.
- That process produced a set of messages that are the basis for what we try to communicate about UGA:
 - Building the New Learning Environment
 - Maximizing Research Opportunities, and
 - Competing in a Global Economy
- Those of you from land grant schools or who are familiar with the land grant mission of teaching, research and public service will see those reflected in these phrases. We did intend to reframe those historic missions into a set of 21st-century missions.

- For the most part, this is the responsibility of my communications team and not something I am involved in on a daily basis beyond speaking engagements or other opportunities for me to deliver a message. But I do expect my team to be thinking on a daily basis about the messages we want to deliver and how we are delivering them.
- They must look at every alumni magazine story they write, every release they prepare, every statement that is drafted, every photograph that is taken, every website we maintain and ask this question: What does this say about the institution? Everything that is done in communicating about the institution must have some grounding in the core messages.
- Everything delivers a message, either intentional or unintentional. Are we delivering the messages we want to deliver?
- In our proactive messaging, we try to link everything we say about UGA to one or more of those strategic statements. The construction of the first new residence halls on campus since the late 1960s reflects building the new learning environment. Opening a new biotech research facility or hiring a world-class scholar or scientist reflects maximizing research opportunities.

- Having 30 percent of our graduating class leave here with a residential study abroad experience reflects competing in a global economy.
- Are we 100% successful? Of course not. But I do believe that my communications people are thinking about those strategic messages as they go about their business every day.
- Finally, on the UGA campus, strategic thinking requires coordination with the various unit-based communications professionals who report to deans and directors and not the Office of the Vice President for Public Affairs. For us, that is about 25 or 30 people who are communicating on behalf of colleges, schools and other units but who must also understand the role they play in communicating about the university as a whole.
- I know that there are some communications programs that are fully centralized and operate on a beat system, and there are pros and cons to both systems. But the important thing is whether the desired messages are being delivered effectively and consistently – the result is more important than the process.

- I refer to this challenge as the culture of the news release. Distribution of news releases is centralized through the Public Affairs office, and we sometimes send multiple releases in a single day, some of them, to be honest, with little of substance to say.
- With that, I would advise you to keep abreast of new technologies and how our audiences actually receive messages.
- Admittedly, I am an old newspaper person. I often fuss at my staff because they don't get subscriptions delivered to their homes. They tell me that, instead, they read their news online.
- The fact is simply that people communicate in completely different ways than they have done before. E-Harmony and Match.com show that some even *date* differently.
- The traditional press release, alumni magazine and departmental brochure are still valuable. And while I would never advocated abandoning traditional communications, I implore you to keep up with how today's audiences— who are getting younger and younger every year – share and receive information. In today's world, Facebook, MySpace, Linked In, Twitter, and Blogs are powerful communication tools.

- You need to make sure you are using today's technology to reach tomorrow's young people.
- The message about your institution and your institutional image must be succinct in order to be effective. Recently I was talking with a person who runs many large newspaper operations, and we discussed the online news.
- He told me they conducted research on what people were viewing online and how much time they spent online. The research showed the average reader spending only 38 minutes per month reading their news online. Surface level reading like that demonstrates that you have about 1 minute to capture the reader's attention and to get your message across.
- And the messages need to be relevant. Nothing turns off a reporter more than to get a message from you that does not relate to their experience or their interests. Nothing irritates alums more than to open up the quarterly magazine and not see people that they know, not see people who look like them or not see people who did what they did in college.

- It gets back to the core messages and how they are delivered consistently over time. If you are not intentional about what you are saying, the result is simply *too many* releases and *not enough* message. And success, in my point of view, is not always measured in column inches.
- The next thing I want from my communications team is advice and information. Tom Jackson, who is here today and on your conference faculty, is my Vice President for Public Affairs. Tom serves on the Cabinet, which is a statement on my part of the importance of his role in the administration.
- It is also important that senior communications staff be literally at the table when important decisions are being made. They bring a viewpoint that is helpful to the academic and administrative side of campus life.
- They help move the decision-making process when, as it is wont to do in academe, it slows to a crawl. And they are more prepared to speak publicly on issues when they have the first-hand background.
- I need to hear what senior people think. I need their opinions. I need their advice. Now, I reserve the right to reject it all, but I want to hear from them.

- To show you how much I value the communications perspective, I have also have on my personal senior staff Matt Winston, who is here with me today. Matt is both a member of the CASE District III board and a member of the CASE Commission on Marketing and Communications. His background is in public relations and his counsel to me on so many, many areas is invaluable.
- And to demonstrate how far I've jumped into the deep end of that pr pool, my most recent hire to my personal staff is a former writer and sports editor for the Chronicle of Higher Education. Many people have suggested that I'm taking a piece of the hair of the dog that bit me.
- At our highest level we have some vigorous discussion on the issues confronting the University of Georgia. In the communications area, try as we might to manage the message, we are often reacting.
- What I need in those times is not just good advice, but good quick advice. As you all know, we often operate on the media's timetable, not ours, and our operating policy is, if there is going to be a story, we want to be part of it ... or sometimes we don't!

- And at a place as large and complex as UGA, there are multiple audiences, both internal and external, for everything that we say. Trust me, we don't make all of them happy most of the time. But understanding those audiences and how they connect to the university – whether it is a high school senior applying for admission, a cotton farmer in South Georgia, and alumnus in Los Angeles or a legislator from Hahira or Elberton or Marietta – is an important part of the communications process.
- I also need help in preparing for speaking events, media availabilities and other such opportunities. Every speaking opportunity is a strategic messaging opportunity, and I do not want to miss the opportunity to deliver one or more of those strategic messages I mentioned earlier. (Can you tell that my speechwriter had a hand in these remarks?)
- Having been a speechwriter myself, I have a very good sense of what goes into that role and how important it is to be well prepared.
- Finally, I need my communications team to be available – at all times. We don't get to control when we need to respond to or speak about an issue – yours is a 24/7 job (just ask Tom).

- That level of availability requires backup plans, in case the senior person is not available. That, in turn, means that there must be a core group in the communications office that is kept current on issues and is ready to assist me when I need them. We have that core group at UGA, and it generally serves me well.
- An important part of effective response, though, is planning. A good crisis communication plan is essential. Eisenhower said that in battle, plans are useless but planning is indispensable.
- We are better able to respond effectively if we have prepared to do just that. Anticipating questions, suggesting answers and focusing on the message are critically important skills in such times.
- Strategic messaging. Advice and information. Availability. This is what I expect from my communications professionals – their planning, their professionalism and their presence.
- When I get those things consistently, I can be an effective part of the University of Georgia’s messaging team – as I should be.
- I am grateful for what each of you do in advancement to support higher education, and I thank you for inviting me to be with you this afternoon.