

What is ethics?

‘Ethics is concerned with how we should live our lives. It focuses on questions about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, caring or uncaring, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible, and the like.’

(Jaksa and Pritchard cited in Wilcox, p.182)

‘The principle behind professional ethics is that one’s actions are designed to create the greatest good for both the client and community as a whole rather than to enhance the position and power of the practitioner.’

(Cutlip et al, pp.144-145)

How ethical issues can be improved?

- Education about the importance of ethical behaviour and its influence on long-term strategy
- Identification of ethical principles of the organisation and communication of those within it
- Understanding and predicting crisis and response to them
- Following the industry's code of conduct by becoming members of e.g. CIPR
- Knowing and following organisation's code of conduct

Implications of the issues to the practice of PR in organisations

- Unethical behaviour of one client can affect both the PR agency and individuals in their relationship with current and future clients and employees
- Trust and loyalty become undermined
- Withholding the information generate more interest and suspicion – this could be more harmful than coming out clean
- Once lost, credibility and reputation are hard to get back

Ethical standards in the industry

'Public relations people must adhere to a high standard of professional ethics, with truth as the key determinant of their conduct.'

(Seitel, p.111)

'Ethics in public relations really begins with the individual - and is directly related to his or her own value system as well as to the good of society. Although it is important to show loyalty to an employer, practitioners must never allow a client or an employer to rob them of their self-esteem.'

(Wilcox, p.185)

Further ethical issues

- Should the agencies take on arguably unethical clients (tobacco and alcohol industries, etc.)?
- Should agencies disclose who they work for and what is their brief?
- Should in-house PROs have their primary obligation to the public or the organisation?

Ethical standards in the industry

‘Practitioners and public relations scholars alike suggest that professional organizations can play a key and powerful role in advancing ethical practice.’ (Wilcox, p.184)

However...

Ethical standards in the industry

Because public relations has impact well beyond the boundaries of client organizations, individual practitioners must be concerned with both the intended and the unintended consequences of the function. Collectively through their professional associations they must take responsibility for prescribing standards of competence, defining standards of conduct, establishing educational and accreditation requirements, encouraging research to expand the body of knowledge that guides the practice, and representing the profession in matters affecting the profession's charter and social mission.

(Kultgen, 1988 cited in Cutlip, et.al., p.146)

Ethical standards in the industry

Principles of good practice:

- Integrity
- Competence
- Transparency and avoiding conflicts of interest
- Confidentiality

(CIPR Code of Conduct, section A of the document available
in appendix)

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Ethical issues in PR

PR is accused of:

- withholding information from the public
- directly and indirectly paying for 'independent', 'objective' views and opinions
- biased approach and loyalty
- distorting the reality
- propaganda
- bailing out and promotion of questionable industries and organisations
- pseudoevents

Why ethics is important in PR?

'The practice of public relations is all about earning *credibility*. Credibility, in turn, begins with telling the truth. Public relations, then, must be based on 'doing the right thing' - in other words, acting ethically.'

(Seitel, 2007, p.108)

What is ethics?

Ethics is the branch of study dealing with what is the proper course of action for man. It answers the question, "What do I do?" It is the study of right and wrong in human endeavors. At a more fundamental level, it is the method by which we categorize our values and pursue them.

(http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/Ethics_Main.html)

Ethical issues in PR

'Many people perceive public relations as something less than respectable — as clever strategies to convince the public that what's wrong is right. Some see public relations professionals as manipulators of the public mind, rather than conveyors of truth.'

(Steven R. Van Hook, PhD)



Ethics in PR