

# THE ART OF LEADERSHIP THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS

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# THE ART OF LEADERSHIP THROUGH PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Future of Effective Communication

BY

**PATRIK SCHOBER**  
*PRAM Consulting, Czech Republic*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*'To Francis Ingham, a true leader and advocate for the public relations industry. Your unwavering commitment to promoting ethical practices and professional standards will continue to inspire and guide us as we navigate the future of this dynamic field'.*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Patrik Schober**, the current Managing Partner, started up PRAM Consulting agency in 2002. At that time, PRAM saw an opportunity to provide consultant services in the field of communication to large multinational firms that were entering the Czech market, not knowing the environment and customs. He was awarded as PR Personality in 2018 and with his team he has won several global and local PR awards, such as Sabre, European Excellence Awards, Golden Drum, ICCO Global Award, EFFIE and Lemur – Czech PR Awards.

Patrik graduated from International Relations at the University College Prague and completed internships at Holmes College in Sydney and the University of California Irvine. He began his career at publishing house Computer Press.

Patrik is also well known in his field as a Chairman of the group of independent PR agencies Worldcom through which he shares his observations with other world PR leaders. It enables him to share the guardianship of a client at an international field. At the same time, Patrik was a Chairman of the Board of Directors of Czech PR Association (APRA), which is a professional association whose primary mission is to present the field of public relations to both professionals and general public. Besides that, to promote best practice, set up ethical standards and start discussions among professionals and to promote the good reputation of the industry.

Patrik is passionate about passing by the knowledge of public relations practices. Besides devoting his time to lecturing at the University of Economics and the Charles University Prague he has been hosting his seminars called PR Brunch since 2015. During each seminar he and his guests introduce and discuss new trends in public relations industry. Beside that he advises companies how to

gain so-called leadability through his workshops titled Leadership Lab that presents a unique facility providing training and coaching in all the facets of leadership behaviour.

Patrik and his wife live in Prague and they are proud parents of two teenage girls. When he is not working, you can find him running long-distance trails or climbing mountains.

# FOREWORD

There could not be a more timely moment for this compilation of essays from some of the world's leading PR practitioners and commentators. I would urge anyone interested in the future of our profession to read them eagerly and in detail.

COVID has transformed PR. These terrible years for us all have radically changed the way our industry works; its profile as a professional service; and its prospects and composition.

When COVID struck, our industry like the rest of the world reacted with fear and trepidation, but also with resolve. As I write these words, all of the PRCA, ICCO and Provoke data that I see say that we are slightly bigger than we were a few years ago; that the industry is hiring at pace; and that it is buoyantly confident about the future. Which is a world away from how so many of us felt in 2019.

Against that context of a return to growth, it is an opposite moment to take stock of the nature of challenges ahead of us in the coming 20 years. And this book does just that.

To this end, I would make eight key observations.

*1. We know where the main areas of future growth can be found.*

Not everything has changed. Many trends that had been apparent for years have simply been accelerated. So, for example, we know that the key fundamental drivers of growth in our industry have remained constant for over a decade.

- Companies and CEOs in every region of the world are paying more attention with every passing year to corporate reputation. Something which we saw exacerbated during COVID, where companies' reputations and customer loyalty and engagement soared or crashed depending on the decisions they made.

- The blending of disciplines works in our favour, as organizations shift spend from expensive and often ineffectual advertising campaigns to us instead, based on our ability to narrate a story well.
- We continue to expand the range of services on offer, with a move away from simply pure, old-fashioned PR.
- And we own digital. (of which more below.)

Sectorally, there is remarkable consistency. For years now, the big three areas of growth have been IT and technology; health-care; and financial and professional services. There is no reason to expect this to change.

## *2. New professional tools need to be embraced constantly.*

Our industry's great strength is the speed with which it adapts to change. As Roger Hurni and Sarah Polak argue, our industry needs to embrace AI, apps, behavioural design and many other tools besides. Our industry knows of all of these tools, but over the coming years, it must embrace them more whole-heartedly. And over the coming decades, it must embrace whatever new tools, now unthought of, become available.

If we are honest, as an industry, we fail to invest adequately in the professional development of practitioners. In part, this is probably down to the old-fashioned view that in an industry with no real barriers to entry, skills can be picked up on the job. But if PR aspires to be a true profession, then that needs to change, and the coming years need to see the development of proper frameworks for organizations and individuals alike – a point made by Jürgen Gangoly when he writes about leadership and standards.

## *3. Measurement and evaluation sophistication continue to increase, but far more needs to be done.*

If our industry is to continue to move up the professional services food chain, then it needs to embrace ever-more sophisticated proof of our value, as Richard Bagnall argues in his contribution.

Now we know that much progress has been made here.

- Awareness of, and use of, International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) tools has never been higher.
- While avess are alive still, their extinction continues around the world. They are almost completely dead in North America and the United Kingdom, for example.
- Clients are increasingly requesting more varied and detailed measurement methods, such as engagement and sentiment metrics.

But if we look forward to where the industry needs to be in 20 years, then it must surely commit to real investment in data-driven insight. Not just gut feel or exceptional writing, key as those two abilities will always be. But advice founded on rock-solid foundations of knowledge. That's the future. Because if we don't do this, then others – for example, lawyers and management consultants – will.

The tools to meet this goal exist now and grow more accomplished every year. We just need to pay for them – and yes, that involves clients and organizations allocating proper budgets here, not expecting post-campaign evaluation done for free or on the cheap.

*4. Digital and the embrace of technology and AI are the way of the future.*

There is an excellent ICCO video of Peter Chadlington from a decade ago giving this typically forthright advice: 'If your people can't do digital, then train them in it or fire them. Because otherwise, you won't have a business left to run'.

The good news here is that the most recent ICCO World Report tells us that three of the top four areas of agency investment are digital. That needs to continue, and I believe that it will do.

*5. Public expectations of purpose as well as profit are simply going to accelerate. This is an area where we can be critically important to colleagues and clients.*

Public expectations were already changing fundamentally pre-COVID. But COVID turned this sentiment into something

resembling the default position. Melissa Waggener Zorkin, Fred Cook and others talk about this. Our industry can guide brands to turn well-meaning words into reality, helping to address the societal challenges that people care about.

And in this regard, and as this book notes, we are missing a trick on ESG. We are uniquely placed to own this area in the same way that we own digital. It plays to all of our strengths and insights.

But an ESG strategy is meaningful only if it is measurable, deliverable and embraced wholeheartedly. Points which the Ethical Compliance Initiative in Washington DC and the Institute for Business Ethics in London have made strongly. And that's the truth speaking to power which our industry needs to offer.

## *6. Talent is a critical threat to our future that must be addressed in the years ahead.*

As Alex Aiken and Rich Leigh point out, we need to make our industry a far more attractive place to join and continue in. For years now, industry data have shown us that recruiting and retaining talent is a fundamental problem for us. In fact, many industry leaders say that there is no greater challenge.

In essence, it's about a number of factors, all of them overlapping.

- The industry isn't diverse enough. And it needs to become so. Years of hard work have failed to make much discernible impact here. Far more needs to be done.
- The gender pay gap needs to be eliminated. Again, despite much effort, the picture barely shifts. And this needs to change too.
- Other professional services attract our people – the reverse is rarely true. And if we are honest, much of the reason for this is pay. I would relate this back to the need to prove value – if we could prove better the value that we deliver, then quite simply the industry would be larger, and able to pay people more, and retain more of them.
- And finally, the always-on culture. Exacerbated by COVID, and a major turn-off for many, particularly those with caring responsibilities, or wanting to maintain a decent life balance.

On the positive side, our experience of home working and remote working has shown that it is far from impossible to be effective without permanently being in the office. This may well help us to do two things: offer more flexible working patterns and so keep many of those who otherwise leave our industry; source talent regardless of physical location, but instead based on skills and attitude alone.

*7. As society's ethical expectations have evolved, so too have our industry's expectations of what is acceptable and what is not. But over the coming decades, the existing minority that eschews ethical practice needs to be diminished much further.*

We know from our data that while two-thirds of practitioners feel that their own industry is ethical, a third do not. Which is a pretty striking number. If so many of us don't believe that we ourselves and our colleagues have a moral compass, then how can clients and wider society trust us to represent them ethically?

Wide disparities of ethical expectations exist globally. And if we are honest, wide disparities of ethical enforcement by professional bodies exist globally too. But this situation cannot hold in the future because those public demands of purpose of ethicality are shifting all around the world, albeit from different starting points. A rising tides carries all boats as they say, and the same will surely be true of the PR industry and its attitude towards ethical behaviour over the coming decades.

*8. A final thought*

Having highlighted both the positives and the negatives that I see, I do think that it is important to end this foreword on a positive note. Because the industry that I recognize is a permanently positive one; adaptive to circumstances; and with a track record of growth in size, salience and importance that few if any other professional service sectors can match.

So, looking forward 20 years, I hope that we will see a PR community that is significantly larger even than the one we have

today. More diverse. Even more structured. Even more respected. And I truly believe that we will see all of these things.

Francis Ingham

*Director General, PRCA*

*Chief Executive, ICCO*

### **Who is Francis Ingham**

Francis Ingham had been in the professional communications industry for over 20 years. He studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford University before starting his career as an advisor to the British Conservatives and the Confederation of British Industry. He was Director General of the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA), the largest and most dynamic professional body for PR and communications professionals in the world. For the past seven years he held the position of Chief Executive of the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO) which represents 41 national PR associations. Francis Ingham was committed to PR education at all levels – he was external examiner at the American University at Richmond and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Westminster. He appeared in both the UK and global selection of the best and most influential PR professionals – PR Week's PowerBook.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My biggest thanks go to my wife Lucie for her lifelong support and to my two daughters Kateřina and Tereza, because my world is a happier place with them in it. Peaceful family life gives me the space to pursue my business, work, sports and last but not least, it made this book possible. Without my family, I could not have accomplished half of what I have achieved in the last 20 years.

Over the years, I have been influenced by many people who have contributed to my career. I am grateful to them for sharing and giving me their time. This includes past and present colleagues at PRAM Consulting. Without them, the company would not be where it is now. The first, however, was my business partner Karel Kapinus. Even though our entrepreneurial paths diverged over time, without Karel I probably would never have started the business.

Another partner to whom I owe the current success of my company is my long-time mentor Crispin Manners. I met Crispin at the Worldcom PR Group, and he has passed on lot of his knowledge to me. Crispin can shape my ideas into tangible projects and guides me toward overall effectiveness. Thanks also go to Jakub Štefeček, who is pushing me further in the field of business management.

Over the years, I have been greatly influenced by people in the professional organizations I participate in, whether it is APRA, Worldcom PR Group, or ICCO. I am grateful to my fellow competitors who have elected me to be the chairman of the Public Relations Association. Worldcom and ICCO have given me a global perspective on communications and management and provide me with great inspiration for my projects. There are dozens of people, members of these organizations, whom I would like to thank for sharing their experience and friendship. All the

futurologists who have contributed to this book I have met in these organizations. I hereby thank them for the time and inventiveness they have given to their contributions to this book. I would, however, single out two without whom the aforementioned organizations could not operate. These are their Executive Directors, who have been my closest collaborators during my APRA and Worldcom presidencies: Pavla Mudrochová and Todd Lynch.

Public relations is essentially the same anywhere in the world, you ‘just’ have to respect and acknowledge the cultural differences in each country. This general rule ceases to apply the moment you actually start working in a completely different region. Matt Kucharski showed me how to do PR in the United States when he allowed me to work in his agency for almost a month, for which I owe him a big thank you. This internship showed me how ahead of the curve PR, communications and management are in the United States compared to Europe.

Almost 10 years ago, professional journalist Ondřej Aust and I discovered that no platform or person in the Czech market focussed on trends in public relations. So together we invented a series of communications trends meetings for PR professionals and called it PR Brunch. The series of seminars became an iconic and award-winning brand that helped PRAM Consulting become one of the top five PR agency brands in our market. PR Brunch is also the foundation for Leadership Lab ([leadershiplabnow.com](http://leadershiplabnow.com)), a series of leadership training sessions. Both activities served as the springboard for this book. Thank you, Ondřej, for our long-standing partnership!

I couldn’t have written the book you are reading without Kateřina Matesová, with whom I put together most of the text. She has been giving me feedback on my ideas while editing the text into a friendly and readable form.

As we all know, we can be creative through activities where we relax and completely unwind. For me, such activities are various sports. While I clear my head when running in the city and often come up with interesting ideas (like how to tackle a current campaign brief), there are activities, especially extreme ones, that I

cannot undertake alone. My friends may be in other fields, holding various management positions in global companies or running businesses, but they are always a great inspiration to me.

Thank you all very much for being with me!