

Public Relations Career Path Explanation

Vince Olando

Ball State University
vaorlando@bsu.edu

Layla Jones

Ball State University
layla.jones@bsu.edu

Dr. Edward J. Lazaros

Ball State University
ejlazaros@bsu.edu

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide information for individuals interested in pursuing a career in Public Relations. This article contains information on how to pursue a career in PR, the responsibility of this position, along with the yearly salary. Also included in this article is an interview with James Parham who served 45-Years in PR Communications and former CEO of Hirons Advertising Agency.

Responsibility

Public Relation (PR) jobs play a pivotal role in shaping and maintaining the image of a company or organization. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) “public relations managers direct the creation of materials that will enhance the public image of their employer or client.” PR professionals are responsible for managing communication strategies that aim to build positive relationships with customers and employees. Their responsibilities include often creating “media, from press releases to social media messages, that shape public opinion of the company or organization and increase awareness of its brand” (Betterteam, 2023). Looking into a workday for a PR specialist, they “work classic 9-5 with frequent overtime and many work weekends” (Ferriolo, 2023). So long days and some work on the weekend is to be expected to meet deadlines and company goals. But these long hours are necessary because PR specialists are responsible to foster trust, strengthen brand awareness, and drive the achievement of strategic goals through effective communication and relationship-building.

Charting your Career Journey

The process of working in PR looks a little different for everyone. For a starting public relations specialist position only, a bachelor's degree would be necessary. A good place to start would be with a relevant bachelor's degree in fields like communications, journalism, or marketing. However, if individuals want higher up positions such as managers they may consider pursuing a master's degree. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) public relations managers typically need at least a bachelor’s degree, and some positions may require a master’s degree. Many years of related work experience are also necessary.” Networking and staying informed about PR is important as you look to put your foot in the door. According to Forbes

Advisor, “PR is a skills-based field, so gaining relevant experience early in your career or while in school is essential for advancement in the field” (Reiland & Swanston2023). It's also important to consistently focus on developing strong communication and interpersonal skills because these are essential in PR careers. Individuals who often succeed in “PR must have soft skills including strong written and oral communication skills, the ability to solve problems, and the ability to think critically and creatively” (Hayes, 2023). As you embark on your PR career journey, remember that these soft skills are not just helpful, they are the building blocks that pave your way to success in this ever-evolving industry.

Pay

“The median annual wage for public relations specialists was \$67,440 in May 2022”(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Additionally, as professionals gain experience and move positions they have a chance to make more yearly. The median annual wage for public relations managers was \$129,430 in May 2022”(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Job Outlook

The outlook for jobs in PR is looking very promising. “Employment of public relations specialists is projected to grow 6 percent from 2022 to 2032, faster than the average for all occupations. About 25,800 openings for public relations specialists are projected each year, on average, over the decade” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Interview with Dr. James Parham former CEO of Hiron’s in Indianapolis, Indiana and current Director of Strategic Partnerships at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.



1. What previous experience prepared you for your career in PR?

Just about everything prepared me for a career in PR. This is a highly diversified occupation. If you have a variety of different experiences, it can make your life easier. If you understand culture for example, this may be relevant. My education experience also prepared me for the career. I have a natural resources and journalism degree. I started in communication in the natural resources field. My internships were helpful in getting an early start with learning about communications. This prepared me for my first career. Each situation gave me more insight, which really helped with crisis communication.

2. What did a typical workday look like for you?

It varied quite a bit. My last twenty years plus were in an agency, and I ran the agency for most of that time. When you are in leadership, your work day varies quite a bit. You are responsible for everything. My area of work related to crisis communication. That takes you from morning to noon to night. I often worked an eight to twelve-hour day each day. My job was filled with diverse projects. I might deal with an oil spill in the morning and a speech for the executive branch of government in the evening. A lot of my job involved writing, which consumed half my days.

3. What was your favorite part about working in PR?

The strategic challenges / problem solving. PR problems and communication is a complex science. It is not a guessing game. I love the strategic part of using research-based materials to come up with a workable and viable solution. This is my favorite part! I've enjoyed working in the crisis niche. I enjoyed helping people, especially when they were in a bad situation.

4. What were the main challenges you encounter in PR?

The lack of clarity in communication was the main challenge. This gave me a job though. The clients can also be a challenge. At times clients can have unrealistic results and the metrics may be hard to meet. Clients don't always understand what it takes to meet communication goals. Finding talented staff has become more challenging than ever. The culture shift can be a challenge.

5. What advice would you give someone who would like to get into PR as a career?

Think about a diverse major. Take a lot of subjects in high school and college and learn everything you can about life so you can be more effective in PR. You must develop strong writing skills. Computer proficiency is very important. You also need the ability to socially interact with clients and others. Not everyone has had the social exposures that they need.

6. How much impact did you have on the PR companies or organizations that you worked for in the past?

I took Hiron's from a small company to one of the largest in the state. I believe I had an impact on the organization and the people that worked for me. I also had an impact on the clients. I have had close to 5,000 students during my career which I have helped.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a career in public relations is a very rewarding position and needs individuals who excel in communications and strategic thinking. Professionals working in PR play an essential role in creating and maintaining the image of an organization.

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