The Outstanding PR Professionals

Ivy Lee heads the list of leaders as determined by a University of Michigan study

BY DAVID L. LEWIS

Ivy Lee, regarded by many as the "father" of modern-day public relations, has been rated the most outstanding public relations figure of the 20th century in a study based on a four-part survey of the membership of the Public Relations Society of America and its Past Chairman's Council.

The study, believed to be the first of its kind, was conducted by The University of Michigan. Similar Michigan-sponsored studies have rated the most admired persons in world history and the greatest figures in American business, labor, and black history.

In addition to Lee, public relations figures who received votes in each of the survey's four parts were, in order of their overall ranking: John W. Hill, Pendleton Dudley, Carl Byoir, Edward L. Bernays, Earl Newsom, Arthur W. Page, Milton Fairman, W. Howard Chase, Paul Garrett, George Creel, Rex F. Harlow, Harold Brayman, Thomas J. Ross, Kaiman B. Druck, Bert C. Goss, Leone Baxter, Clem Whitaker, and William Ruder.

Individuals who received votes in three of the survey's four parts were, in order of overall selection: G. Edward Pendray, Denny Griswold, James W. Hagerty, Philip Lesly, James P. Selvage, James W. Irwin, Allen H. Center, Ben Sonnenberg, Phelps Adams, Ed-

Ivy Lee and Associates, New York City

Father of public relations . . . Set truth standards which have survived as practical code . . . Business success dramatized public relations' possibilities.

Ivy Ledbetter Lee (1877-1934)

Dr. David L. Lewis is professor of business history, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the author of numerous articles on public relations.
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The leading vote recipients in each part of the survey and their vote totals, based on a formula of 10 points for a first-place vote, nine for a second-place vote, and so on, are cited in the accompanying lists. Composite lists, based on overall rankings of those who received votes in all or at least three parts of the survey, also are presented.

As to study methodology, of PRSA’s 7,004 members, 640, or one in 11, were polled, as were the 24 past chairmen who are still carried on the rolls of the society. Half of the members and past chairmen were furnished ballots listing the names of 119 leading public relations personalities; half received ballots without names.

The lists of outstanding public relations figures from 1944-65, who finished in the top two choices as they did. The lists of outstanding public relations practitioners are dominated by consultants, as opposed to corporate or association executives. Three times as many consultants as company executives were ranked among the profession’s leading figures, including all of the top five vote-getters. One of 13 persons who received votes in three parts of the survey are living.

In voting, respondents were instructed to define the term “most outstanding” in any way they wished, but were asked to keep in mind “individuals’ overall abilities, innovative talents, ethical standards, and their contributions to the improvement of attitudes toward their employers and/or clients and toward public relations as a profession.” Interviewees were asked to rank the top 10 greatest public relations people and to state why they rated their top two choices as they did.

Among the 19 practitioners who received votes in all four parts of the study, six are deceased—Lee, Dudley, Byoir, Page, Creel, and Whicker. Of the 13 living figures, most are active in the field, while some are semi-re­tired, and at least one has taken on an important post-retirement job. One of all the 13 persons who received votes in three parts of the study are living.

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8. Milton Fairman  
(1904- )  
Editor, Public Relations Journal, New York City

Ethical, top-flight public relations executive. Has made varied and consistently admirable contributions to public relations. Complete professional.

9. W. Howard Chase (1910- )  
Partners for Growth, Inc., New York City

Has excellent grasp of whole field. Extremely effective in directing attention to changing trends. Constant leader in advancing state of the art.

10. Paul Garrett  
(1891- )  
Public relations counsel, New York City

One of first to think in broad terms of the public problems of industry. Helped to gain acceptance for public relations at highest management levels.

11. George Creel  
(1876-1953)  
Chairman, Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919

Pioneered government public relations. First to appreciate impact of massive publicity, propaganda. Led unique campaign to win public backing for war.

12. Rex F. Harlow  
(1892- )  
Author, editor, publisher, Palo Alto

Pioneer in application of the social sciences to public relations practice. Publications and seminars have had a highly beneficial impact on profession.
Most of those who received write-in votes were or are public relations practitioners by vocation. But there was a matter of ballots cast for statesmen with a deft public relations touch, including Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, and for business executives identified with good public relations practice, among them AT&T's Edward R. Murrow, Pierre Montminy information officers also won support, and corporate-association practitioners to give more support to their counterparts than to counselors.

Several advertising executives received votes, notably Mary Wells Greene, Marion Harper, and Leo Burnett. Numerous presidential press assistants and journalists-turned-government information officers also won support, among them Hagerty, Klein, Howe, Edward R. Murow, Pierre Salinger, Carl Rowan, Murray Snyder, Steve Early, and Joseph P. Tumulty.

One wishes that space permitted comment on all of the study's top-rated figures, for each of these practitioners has made an important contribution to public relations, received high praise from study participants, and deserves special mention in this report on the profession's leaders. But lacking space, let's merely sketch the career highlights of the dozen most outstanding figures.

THE TOP TWELVE

Ivy Lee, who received the highest number (22) of the survey's 111 first-place votes, is generally regarded as the first public relations practitioner of the present sense of the term. After serving four years as a reporter, he plunged into publicity work in 1903, and was named publicist for the anthracite coal industry in 1906. At that time he sent to city editors his "Declaration of Principles," which announced his plan to "supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information" about his clients. Lee also was retained by the nation's largest railroad, the Pennsylvania, in 1906, and by the Rockefellers in 1915.

John W. Hill, after 12 years as a Cleveland journalist, moved into public relations in 1927. He became public relations counsel of the American Iron and Steel Institute in 1933, and formed Hill and Knowlton the same year. Having built his firm into one of the world's largest and most successful public relations organizations, Hill now is chairman of its policy committee.

Pendleton Dudley was the dean of public relations until his death at age 90 in 1966. He established his own firm, Pendleton Dudley & Associates, in New York, in 1909, and served as Dudley-Anderson-Yutz's senior partner after 1949.

Carl Byoir served as associate chairman of George Creel's World War I Committee of Public Information; in 1930, he organized Carl Byoir and Associates, Inc. Before his death in 1957, Byoir, like Hill, had built his firm into one of the world's principal public relations organizations.

Edward L. Bernays, who received 16 first-place votes in the survey, has been a publicist since 1913, a public relations counselor since 1919. "Bernays," as historian Eric F. Goldman wrote in 1948, "moved along with the most advanced trends in the public relations field, thinking with, around and ahead of them." He was the first to teach a course in public relations, at New York University, in 1923. He also authored the first important book on the subject, "Cristallizing Public Opinion," which disassociated public relations from either press agentry or publicity work, and introduced the phrase, "public relations counsel."

Earl Newsom, senior partner in Earl Newsom & Co. since 1935, has counseled many important companies, Jersey Standard, Ford, and General Motors among them. In his chapter "Newsom: Duplex Suite in the Clouds," in "The Image Makers," Irwin Ross accurately stated that "the goal of a good many public relations men is someday to attain the lonely eminence of Earl Newsom. His fees are high; his clients include some of the most august names in the corporate roster; and his work involves pure 'consultation.'"

Arthur Page was an AT&T vice president from 1927-47. He is credited with formulating many of the public relations guidelines which have helped the huge utility to survive and prosper during the past four decades.

Milton Fairman, a Chicago newspaperman from 1925-34 and a federal government press relations officer in 1935-36, joined Borden Inc. in 1937. Retiring as a vice president of the company in 1967, Fairman became editor of the Journal. He served as president of PRSA in 1951, and was president of the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, Inc. from 1961-66. He was rated higher in this survey than any other past president.

W. Howard Chase was a founding member of the PRSA, chairman of its first executive committee, and its president in 1956. His career includes teaching at Harvard, Drake, and Rcliffe; editorship of the Des Moines Register and Tribune and the Fore Letter; and directorships of the public relations departments of General Motors and General Foods. He was a partner in Selvage, Lee & Chase, president Communications Counselors, Inc., a founded his own business, in 1959.

Paul Garrett, after working for government agencies and a New York newspaper for 16 years, joined General Motors as its first director of public relations in 1931, and served as vice president in charge of public relations from 1940-56. Since retiring from GM, he has been a consultant to George Creel edited newspapers Kansas City and Denver, then made his mark in public relations as chairman of the landmark Committee on Public Information during World War II.

Rex F. Harlow in 1939 formed the American Council on Public Relations and headed that organization until 1943, when it merged into the newly organized PRSA. Since 1948 he has headed the Public Relations Institute of the West. He has been editor and publisher of the Social Science Research Review since 1953; of the Public Relations Research Review since 1958. Harlow has authored more than 40 books, several of them on public relations. Founder and first editor (1945-47) of the Public Relations Journal, he has twice received PRSA's citation for Professional Attainment—in 1952 and 1969.

IN SUMMARY

Summing up the study, the findings reflect considerable knowledge of past and present public relations practitioners on the part of respondents. The rankings themselves support such conclusions—there isn't a pygmy among those rated among the most outstanding—and the reasons presented for the rankings reinforce the selections. A carping critic could, it is true, ask why certain individuals, including some whose names are on the "checklist, were not rated higher, or lower. The best answer is that any exceptional omissions in the balloting were just that—exceptional omissions. In the main, PRSA's membership and past presidents chose wisely; those named to their lists abundantly combine vision, ability, dedication, and integrity, plus the key element of greatness—superior achievement. Any fairminded person, while perhaps finding the several lists of outstanding figures less than perfect from his own point of view, would find it difficult not to agree that the top-rated practitioners are worthy of the profession's respect and admiration.