



## Code of Ethics

# Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

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## “Leading the PR profession globally”

The **Global Alliance (GA) for Public Relations and Communication Management** ([www.globalalliancepr.org](http://www.globalalliancepr.org)), is the confederation of the world's major public relations and communication management associations and institutions, representing 160,000 practitioners and academics around the world. The Global Alliance's mission is to unify the public relations profession, raise professional standards all over the world, share knowledge for the benefit of its members and be the global voice for public relations in the public interest.

## Declaration of Principles

A profession is distinguished by certain characteristics or attributes, including:

- Mastery of a particular intellectual skill through education and training
- Acceptance of duties to a broader society than merely one's clients/employers
- Objectivity
- High standards of conduct and performance

We base our professional principles therefore on the fundamental value and dignity of the individual. We believe in and support the free exercise of human rights, especially freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the media, which are essential to the practice of good public relations.

In serving the interest of clients and employers, we dedicate ourselves to the goals of better communication, understanding, and cooperation among diverse individuals, groups, and institutions of society. We also subscribe to and support equal opportunity of employment in the public relations profession and lifelong professional development.

We pledge:

- To conduct ourselves professionally, with integrity, truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility to our clients, our client publics, and to an informed society;
- To improve our individual competence and advance the knowledge and proficiency of the profession through continuing education and research and where available, through the pursuit of professional accreditation;
- To adhere to the principles of the Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations.

# 1. CODE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

We are committed to ethical practices, preservation of public trust, and the pursuit of communication excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism, and ethical conduct.

- **Advocacy**

We will serve our client and employer interests by acting as responsible advocates and by providing a voice in the market place of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

- **Honesty**

We will adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of clients and employers.

- **Integrity**

We will conduct our business with integrity and observe the principles and spirit of the Code in such a way that our own personal reputation and that of our employer and the public relations profession in general is protected.

- **Expertise**

We will encourage members to acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience to build understanding and client/employer credibility. Furthermore we will actively promote and advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education.

- **Loyalty**

We will insist that members are faithful to those they represent, while honoring their obligations to serve the interests of society and support the right of free expression.

## 2. CODE OF PRACTICE

We believe it is the duty of every association and every member within that association that is party to the Code of Professional Standards to:

- Acknowledge that there is an obligation to protect and enhance the profession.
- Keep informed and educated about practices in the profession that ensure ethical conduct.
- Actively pursue personal professional development.
- Accurately define what public relations activities can and cannot accomplish.
- Counsel its individual members in proper ethical decision-making generally and on a case specific basis.
- Require that individual members observe the ethical recommendations and behavioral requirements of the Code.

## 3. ADVANCING THE CODE

We believe it is the responsibility of each member association to draw upon its own member's experiences to expand the number of examples of good and bad practice so as to better inform members' ethical practices. Experiences should be broadly shared with other members within the association and with the Global Alliance so as to build up case histories that may assist in individual cases throughout the world.

Appendix A offers some values-based guidance to members. Appendix B is a set of case studies to add real life situations to the ethical practice of public relations. Both of these documents should be read as adding value and meaning to the universal code.

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## APPENDIX A

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The working group would like to thank the PRSA Board of Ethics and professional standards for providing the inspiration of the guiding principles and the use of the case studies in appendix B.

#### Preamble

A code of ethics and professional conduct is an individual matter that should be viewed as a guide to make sound values-based decisions.

Ethical performance, not principles, is ultimately what counts. No one can dictate precise outcomes for every situation. However, we can apply common values and decision-making processes to arrive at a decision and justify it to others.

In making decisions, we should be **guided by a higher sense of serving the public** as a whole as opposed to specific constituencies on an exclusive basis.

Consideration should be given to the protection of **privacy** of individuals and respect for **the spirit as well as the letter** of applicable laws.

#### Decision-making guide

1. Define the specific ethical issue/conflict.
2. Identify internal/external factors (e.g. legal, political, social, economic) that may influence the decision.
3. Identify key values that are in question
4. Identify the parties who will be affected by the decision and define the public relations professional's obligation to each.
5. Select the ethical principles to guide the decision-making process.
6. Make a decision and justify it to all parties affected by the decision and to the public if necessary.

## APPENDIX B

### CASE STUDIES *(all companies are fictional)*

#### **Case Study #1 - Megabucks Energy Company**

- New oil discovery
- Management wants discovery downplayed
- Discovery is real
- What to do you do in making announcement?

##### 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Is it ethical to disseminate deceptive information regarding the financial condition of my company?

##### 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- SEC rules
- Federal and state laws
- Company values, policies and procedures

##### 3. Identify key values

- Loyalty
- Advocacy
- Honesty
- Independence

##### 4. Identify affected parties

- Company/employer
- Board of directors
- Shareholders
- SEC
- Financial community
- Financial media
- Employees
- Public
- Profession
- Self

## 5. Select ethical principles

- Protecting and advancing the free flow of accurate and truthful information
- Preserving the integrity of the communications process

## 6. Make a decision

- Advise the company of potential legal issues including SEC regulations
- Advise the company against deceptive practices
- Refuse to write the release

# Case Study #2 - PR Counselling Company

- Provides media with a tip regarding competitors alleged underhanded tactics to win new mine approval
- Tactics include payoff of public officials
- Tip results in front page story burning competitor and client
- What do you do?

## 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Is it ethical for disgruntled competitor to tell media what the winning firm has proposed?
- Is it appropriate to share this information with a reporter?
- Or, should you report it to the proper authorities?

## 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- Would the new mine benefit or harm the public?
- Are the proposed tactics legal?
- Are the proposed tactics part of the firm' program?
- Are local officials suspect?
- Does the competitor know if company will use the recommended tactics?
- How did the competitor discover this information? Was it improperly obtained?

## 3. Identify key values

- Fairness
- Honesty
- Advocacy

## 4. Identify affected parties

- Competitor and employees

- Elected officials
- Media
- Citizens
- Losing firm and employees

## 5. Select ethical principles

- Promote and respect healthy and fair competition among professionals
- Protect and advancing the flow of accurate and truthful information is essential to serving the public interest

## 6. Make a decision

- Ethical obligation should be based on facts only
- If the facts are unsubstantiated then the “tip” is unethical
- If the fact are substantiated, the losing firm has an ethical obligation to make illegal actions known to the public

## Case Study #3 - PR World, Inc.

- You represent the National Cement and Asphalt Contractors Assn in Italy
- Your PR firm has been asked to organize the Livorno Citizens for Active Road Expansion
- You have been asked by media about LCARE
- What do you tell them?

### 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Is it ethical to omit sponsor information?
- Is it ethical to disseminate false information regarding LCARE that my firm manages?

### 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- Do local, state or federal laws play a role?
- What are my company values policies or procedures?
- What action do I believe are in the public’s best interest?

### 3. Identify key values

- Honesty
- Fairness

- Independence

#### 4. Identify affected parties

- Livorno citizens
- Voters
- Government officials
- Media
- Public relations profession
- Colleagues/employees/self

#### 5. Select ethical principles

- Disclosure of information
- Open communication fosters informed decision making in a democratic society

#### 6. Make a decision

- Responsible advocacy requires that those affected be given due consideration
- Appropriate action dictates a truthful response to the media disclosing your client as the sponsor of ICARE

### **Case Study #4 - Worldwide India Widget Co**

- Non-Disclosure policy set in stone
- Rapal & Rapal PR account team briefed on revolutionary new product
- Information regarding new product is unintentionally leaked by drunk employee to media
- What do you do?

#### 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Do I inform client what has happened?
- Should I try to get editor to hold story?
- What are my responsibilities to my employee?

#### 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- Enforcement of non-disclosure policy
- Policy of media regarding hold on story
- Responsibility to intemperate employee

### 3. Identify key values

- Honesty
- Independence
- Loyalty
- Fairness

### 4. Identify affected parties

- WIWC management and employees
- Specific media as well as other media
- Rapal & Rapal employees

### 5. Select ethical principles

- Safeguarding confidences
- Clients trust requires appropriate protection of confidential information
- Obligation to protect privacy right

### 6. Make a decision

- Immediately inform client of breach
- Ask editor to hold information and offer exclusive, or
- Consider early release of information
- Terminate employee
- Hope you don't get sued and/or lose the account

## Case Study #5 - Outback Bank

- Advertising specialty program for 10,000 employees
- Large Promotions company recommended by PT agency
- Your wife owns Large Promotions
- What do you do?

### 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Do I inform bank management?
- Should I ask PR firm to select another vendor?
- Should I let PR firm select vendor?

- Large Promotions had the best price, isn't that good enough?

## 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- Conflict of interest policy at bank
- Conflict of interest policy at PR firm
- Responsibility to employees

## 3. Identify key values

- Honesty
- Expertise
- Independence
- Loyalty
- Fairness

## 4. Identify affected parties

- Bank management
- Bank employees

## 5. Select ethical principles

- Conflict of interest
- Avoiding real, potential or perceived conflicts of interests builds trust

## 6. Make a decision

- Even though it is ok with your employer, notify PR agency of your decision not to use your wife's company, Large Promotions

## **Case Study #6 - Sussex group-Housing Developer**

- Multi-family project in Greater London area
- Land for development was former landfill site
- Low levels of contaminants present
- You recommend open communications regarding site
- Your boss informs you that the landfill information is not to be included
- What do you do?

## 1. Define specific ethical issue

- Do you follow your employer's instructions?
- Should potential renters have this information?

## 2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence decision making process

- Is the developer legally bound to reveal land history?
- What steps is developer taking regarding contamination?
- Is monitoring a strategy?
- Residents. Might they be affected by the state of the land in the future?

## 3. Identify key values

- Honesty
- Independence
- Loyalty
- Fairness

## 4. Identify affected parties

- The developer
- Public relations professional
- Potential residents

## 5. Select ethical principles

- Enhancing the public relations profession
- Disclosure of information

## 6. Make a decision

- Environmental agency reports are public information
- Open and honest communication with all parties is paramount
- Your company's and your professional reputation are at stake
- PR professional must convince boss to disclose