

Address—by M.B.Jayaram on Accreditation and Code of Conduct for PR PROFESSIONALS at Global Forum for Public Relations. at Hyderabad on 12th Nov. 2006 at National Conference on PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Dear friends and fellow PR professionals,

It is indeed a memorable occasion for me to be present here and deliver the Key Note address today.

As one committed to the cause of public relations in the country, it has been an eternal struggle to obtain the necessary recognition and standing for PR professionals along other professionals in society. In the era of permit licence raj, public relations became an avocation or even a pastime for the well connected and wealthy sections of society to operate in a murky environment to serve the interests of a few vested persons. Public relations became a euphemism for the dirty behind the scenes activities associated with the furtherance of private interests. Since then we have traveled a long way and emergence of a global economy with greater awareness, accountability and visibility has redefined the very concept of public relations in a market economy.

Our Profession in India is now increasingly recognized. In its wide sense Public Relations now embraces virtually every branch of human activity – whether it is just promotion of product or image building for individuals, corporate bodies, government and even political parties, who wish to project their activities and policies. However, progress towards professionalisation of PR in India has been rather slow. Quite a few may be in top positions but many of them are half baked, while large number of PR practitioners are innocent of what PR is all about or how it should be practised. IN this category many are from journalistic background, they may be good at writing or experts in reporting but the fact remain the same. Our Profession is a hard core business and a greater credibility building medium and a combination of many intelligent opinions influencing efforts to building a general reporting of goodwill for an organization. Hence, PR is essentially the ability to communicate effectively to the targeted audience. We have to carefully and usefully devote greater attention to this discipline. We have to set some standards to our profession to

be on par with other disciplines. We are supposed to educate the public about causes and prevention of illness and diseases. We are meant to cultivate and support a free open society by serving as credible reliable resources for the media and other who disseminate information to the public. We are the agents to enhance the brand visually and verbally and by action to help restore public confidence in all organizations those who operate with openness, honesty and integrity.

Unfortunately when a profession has such a wide ranging mandate, the public misunderstood the profession and it means so many things to so many people as Flack, gin and tonic brigade press agent, spin doctor etc. Why this, why did we lose our identity like this? To some extent the profession itself and the practitioners are to be blamed for the lack of discipline and integrity with which the profession is practiced. There is no check for the entry, any one can enter this field and practice PR in which ever way he feels. How to avoid this problem? How to bring professionalism ?

Instead of worrying, we must focus on enhancing the understanding of what our profession is all about, Building relationship with public - an enterprise that goes beyond publicity. We in the profession, to avoid this kind of identity crisis, irrespective of age, background, level must come out with our full potential to control the job instead of others ruling us. We have to determine what we are, what we do and our value system, our value proposition etc. to break from the cluster and shine above other competitors. We must cultivate power of mind- mapping, power perception, power of focus, power of learning and power of improvement. When we aquire the precious brand, whole lot of people express good feelings about us. Hence the answer for all these crisis, is Branding our profession and branding ourselves to get ahead in this competitive environment. Branding is everything. In my opinion PR professionals have to become brands to create an impression and get immediate attention of the market place. Therefore, you need to be a person with whom others can enjoy being with you, accept you to do business with.

When we think of personal branding, we think of Sachin Tendular, Amitab Bachan, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam., Dr. Narayanmurthy of Infosys, Ratan Tata, Sania Mirza, Late Mahatma Gandhi and so many. These names have made impressions upon the minds of the people. All of them have added value to their work sphere, like that we have to build some brand image to ourselves to have a proper placing in the market. Accreditation is one of the answers for this. I am sure

branded professionals will have more opportunities than the usual one in the changing environment. For any business to grow, an efficient branded PR professional is needed to provide the extra edge.

It is with a view to reflect the changing dynamics of the profession in tune with the economy that the Public Relations Council of India was reengineered.

The emphasis of this body is to motivate and encourage the practitioners of public relations to embrace a wholesome, dignified and ethical approach to the profession, thereby carving out a niche on par with other disciplines like engineering, medicine, law, accountancy etc..

Professions are distinguished by the following features:

- a) A body of knowledge of use to mankind
- b) A number of practitioners of that knowledge
- c) The application of the knowledge in a fiduciary capacity and with the objective of serving the society
- d) A code of conduct for conducting the transactions
- e) An institutional frame work for imparting knowledge, evaluating the practices from time to time and refining them.

We at PRCI are conscious of the above aspects and have evolved the necessary steps to operationalise the above. We also request, worldwide PR schools of ethics and conduct state that ethical and professional conduct for PR practitioners to promote, honesty, accuracy, integrity, transparency and truth in public communication, as we have stated in our PRCI Ethics Manual.

You will be happy to note that the PRCI has published its ethics manual which outline the professional values, principles of conduct and the commitment and compliance to these. The manual has codified the values and standards to be followed, the manner of advocacy, the acquisition of expertise, the display of honesty, independence, loyalty and fairness, the free flow of information, promotion of fair competition, open communication, maintaining confidentiality, dealing with conflict in interest and the promotion of the profession.

In the past the public relations movement has focused on popularizing the scope and content through various programmes to train persons in the field. The objective was to equip the practitioners and the students with the emerging knowledge in the field. However, there was a gap in the whole scheme of things as far as recognition was concerned. While it is true that a number of PR professionals have risen high in the corporate hierarchy, it is equally a fact that there has been no system of evaluation of the contribution and standing of the members or professionals in the profession. We at PRCI thought it fit to address this void by initiating a process of accreditation.

Accreditation is not something new. It is there in the education field with regard to institution and also in respect of individuals by various professional bodies. Even in the PR field accreditation was started in 1964 in the US and was administered by the PRSA till 1998. Similar practice is followed in UK, Canada, Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. We propose to make a beginning in India. I am sure the current decade is a period that will spell change for the profession. The new role of professionals after accreditation will be called as Strategists who can think of business. The role of research and courses will become more important in this process.

There are a number of pre-requisites to be complied before the accreditation process can be formally commenced. An accreditation committee has been formed under the Chairmanship of Shri Sreenivasan of Prime Point Foundation, Chennai. This committee will undertake and evaluate all the aspects to be covered and assessed before extending the accreditation to the PR professionals in India.

The findings of this Committee will be examined by the PRCI National Executive and the certification programme formalized. A separate body called the Public Relations Accreditation Council of India, (PRACI) as a unit of PRCI, would handle the certification programme. This process is expected to standardize the PR profession and give it a standing on par with other professions.

We do hope that this path breaking process will bring about higher standards in PR education and practices, motivate the practitioners and give them due recognition in Society and also lend greater credibility and standing to the profession as a whole.

If we don't project ourselves, who will? This always keep bothering me. Thank you very much. Good day.