



Accreditation in public relations? Yes, it matters.

By Lynn Perez-Hewitt, APR

“Because I say so.” It wasn’t persuasive when Mom said it and I can’t imagine saying that to a client or my CEO expecting to be credible. So why do so many professional public relations practitioners procrastinate over accreditation? I can’t tell you.

Pursuing accreditation is often a personal decision. Very few employers require accreditation. My B.A. is in English and Communication, which laid a good foundation for my years in business and public relations. What I found in reading the recommended textbooks supports a recent survey published in *Public Relations Review* debunking the assumption that age and experience can substitute for accreditation (Tactics April 2011).

The best practitioners have age, experience – and accreditation. The accreditation process is straightforward, but not simple. A practitioner applies to the national Public Relations Society of America accreditation department. Established in 1964, the Accreditation Program is the profession’s only national post-graduate certification program. It measures fundamental knowledge of communications theory and its application; establishes advanced capabilities in research, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation; and demonstrates a commitment to professional excellence and ethical conduct. The skills acquired through the process are applicable to any industry or practice area. Granting of Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) is overseen by the Universal Accreditation Board.

The application process helps to weed out the practitioners who are too new to the profession as well as the people with titles sans experience. If the applicant is approved to begin the path to becoming an APR, the applicant then has one year to complete a readiness review, present the review and their portfolio to a panel assembled by the local chapter, and, if approved by the panel, take a 185-question computerized test (four hours are allowed for the test.)

The Readiness Review sections bring out one’s understanding of one’s organization and role in it; a demonstration of experience; and an analysis of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). There are fifty-eight discrete KSAs – from using information technology efficiently, to history, ethics, crisis communications, business literacy and media relations. Oh, and media relations is only 2 percent of the overall. Yes, journalism majors, you read that correctly. Media relations is considered to be only 2 percent of what you need to know to be a public relations professional.

So, still think experience is a substitute for being accredited? Of the 21,000 members of the Public Relations Society of America, 5,000 are APRs, 25 of whom practice in Tucson. Sadly not all practitioners of “public relations” become members of PRSA. To a business owner or an employer, that means a lot of people are saying that they are worth your trust and your money and they can’t back it up.

That sounds harsh, and it is. But it's your money and your corporate reputation on the line. I have my taxes prepared by a CPA. I trust my health to a board-certified physician. I have my legal affairs managed by an attorney who has passed the Bar. So, yes, I believe accreditation matters.

Lynn Perez-Hewitt, APR, is a consultant to nonprofits, economic development groups and government agencies, including Friends of Kartchner Caverns State Park, Microbusiness Advancement Center, and Community Food Bank. She is the immediate past president of the Southern Arizona chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, the members of which write this local column.

Lynn Perez-Hewitt, APR, is founder and CEO of The Caliber Group, a brand marketing, public relations and interactive firm based in Tucson. She is past president and a current member of the Southern Arizona Chapter of PRSA, and past chair of PRSA's national board of ethics and professional standards. Members of the local PRSA chapter write this monthly column.