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Public relations - How it works for me

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Public relations is a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies policies and procedures of an organization and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

As professionals who are not trained or highly skilled in public relations, we normally do not become that involved in public relations work, nevertheless we usually find ourselves doing public relations in our daily work. We are continually striving to obtain a better understanding and acceptance of our work whether it be with our administration, co-workers, staff or the general public.

Public relations means good communication. We must practice and be prepared to operate in whatever media is appropriate. Our written communication, whether it be through reports, letters or reporting to the news media is important, however it does not cover it all. The public responds through the spoken word. This may come from the neighbors, friends, co-workers, families and what they hear in public places. How we react to face-to-face situations is extremely important. The public usually reacts more negatively to what they don't know than what they do know. Sometimes those who are our best supporters may ask some extremely probing questions - how do we react to these situations? Some of the frustrations and failures that I have experienced have come about because my public just didn't have all the facts or information for them to fully understand what my work was all about. Never miss the opportunity to discuss your work with people, whether it involves your administration, co-workers, or the public. Show interest and enthusiasm for what you are doing. Always take the time to visit with your contacts. These are the people who might be helpful to you in getting that extra piece of laboratory equipment or additional funding to support or expand your program.

As professionals, we see our role in public relations in different dimensions. To the researcher, it may involve only interactions with the administration, co-workers and staff. Conversely those of us who are in educational or industrial work, see our major efforts in public relations directed to the general public. A public more diversified and perhaps less knowledgeable about our programs. We must always probe to determine how "our public" perceives us in our work. It is better to help shape public opinion than to allow them to arrive at their own conclusions as to the importance of our programs.

While public relations is a day-to-day unscheduled activity, we must also be mindful that we must plan and project our public relations activities into the future. This is especially true when it comes to implementing new programs, budgets and staffing. Don't wait until the deadline to make your "pitch" for additional support. If you wait too long,

important decisions may have already been made as to any additional support that might be forthcoming. Don't be fearful of becoming an "empire builder." You are in control of your destiny. No one is going to build it for you.

In summary, public relation is a management function that all professionals must exercise daily. Our goals are to give understanding and acceptance of our programs. Good communication skills are important and use of these skills in whatever media is appropriate. We must also plan and project our public relations work to the future.