

Marketing & State Associations: Tips For Promoting The Professions

by

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Good morning everyone. It is tough to be the last speaker. The pressure is on for me to be original.

Consequently, I thought I would talk some baseball this morning. Why not? I have come across a news report or two that tells me we are in the hometown of the World Champion Boston Red Sox.

Congratulations Sox!

Already, some of you are probably already thinking, “What does baseball have to do with marketing the professions? Who is this crazy person?”

Good questions. I promise you that I will get to the answers. Before I do, though, please allow me to set the stage a bit.

Thank you for this opportunity. As ASHA’s PR Director, I am very conscious of the importance of getting out from behind my desk and interacting with people. And I am not alone. For example, a speaker at a recent meeting of PR professionals actually called for changing the signage that identifies PR departments to “Office of Relating To The Public.” He thought that would remind PR types not to isolate themselves and to strive to make true connections with people.

Well, because clarity contributes to making that connection, I want to be clear with you about a couple of things.

First, I am going to give you tips this morning. I will mean them as suggestions, and I will make them well aware that they are not the last word about what you may want to do. Still, they will be something that I believe can help you, and I will pass them along with a humble, sharing spirit.

I have been asked to speak about marketing the professions. I figure your conference theme, “Strategies For State Association Success: Leadership, Marketing, and Management,” uses the word “marketing” broadly. But marketing is synonymous with selling. For example, ASHA’s marketing department sells products that are helpful to those in your professions. Marketers spend a lot of time trying to figure out marketplaces, and success often lies in monetary return.

No doubt your aims include selling people on the idea of joining your organizations and professions. Yet, I suspect that your goals go beyond that, too--that you want to foster understanding and appreciation of what your members do to a wide range of audiences—medical and health professionals, state legislators, educators, young people in search of career paths, the news media, and the public. To do that, you will need to take broader, different steps with goals that can include building, strengthening, and reinforcing the image of your organizations and professions; providing various audiences with all kinds of messages and information; and, fostering familiarity with and understanding of your organizations and members. If you decide to take those steps, you will come to the door of public relations.

What is public relations? Is it talking to the media? Developing an informational brochure? Writing a speech? Answering a complaint from a dissatisfied party? Well, public relations can be all of those things--and more. Yet, in my view, at its core public relations amounts to this: within a given context, continually putting forward the best foot possible in terms of your image, message, general information, and ultimately strategic

position—to such a degree--and in such a way--that others come to know, believe in, and support you and your efforts.

Of the distinction between marketing and public relations, it is said that marketing is what you say about yourself; PR is what others say about you. I believe you want a wide variety of audiences to know about your organizations and who and what they represent. Because that involves public relations, it is public relations tips that I will share this morning. I don't mean to belabor this or be pedantic. Believe it or not, though, despite the talk about public relations being spin, or the pursuit of obfuscation, it is honest and clear when it is done right. I am a PR guy; I want to be honest and clear with you.

OK. Without further adieu then, here are my PR tips:

Tip 1 - *Successful public relations requires taking many small steps over and over again.* There is no quick fix; no magic wand to wave in order to improve everything overnight. About a year ago, I heard *Good To Great* author Jim Collins discuss what his research of corporate performance showed about what distinguishes great companies from good ones. Collins highlighted this important distinction: great companies accept that there is no easy way to achieve a goal. In short, they understand that greatness stems from cumulative effort—from the pursuit of doing a lot of little things well, continually and indefinitely.

What Collins found has always been and continues to be true in public relations. There never was a magic wand and there never will be. More dollars and staff can certainly help; I would be the last person to say otherwise. As the expression goes, however, money does not guarantee happiness, and that applies to public relations as much as anything else. At the same time, regardless of your size and resources, you can do very effective public relations.



Tip 2 - *Be there when the ball doesn't come to you.*

And now for my little baseball talk . . . Meet Mike Lowell, third baseman for the Red Sox. Here, I'm trying to take a proper public relations tack—I am attempting to be appropriate and relevant. If you're going to talk baseball during a presentation in Boston, you've got to pay some deference to the Sox. My deference is that photo of Mr. Lowell.

However, here is the third baseman I really want to focus on, Cal Ripken, the Hall of Fame infielder for the Baltimore Orioles.



Cal played 20 years. He was a great hitter, but he was also a tremendous fielder. When asked why he always seemed to be in just the right spot to catch the ball, he replied that it was because he spent quite a bit of time being there when the ball didn't come to him. Now, for Cal that must have amounted to a lot of seemingly dead time—two decades of standing around poised, inning after inning, waiting for balls to be hit to him. Sometimes they were; but a lot of times they weren't.

I suggest that you, too, need to be there, even when the ball doesn't come to you—that you need to put yourselves forward in whatever the figurative game is in your states even though many times there will be no immediate public relations payoff. How do you do that? By being visibly dynamic and engaged, with the emphasis on visibly.

How you do that can run a gamut, from taking leadership roles with state health coalitions, to commenting in your leading state newspapers, to appearing on public affairs shows to talk about Better Hearing and Speech Month, to sponsoring community health forums, to posting straightforward Q & As with major figures in your states on your websites and in your newsletters. Also, you can speak before civic groups; author articles in strategic professional publications; use your state meetings to take public and compelling positions that make news. Nothing may lead immediately to a great PR catch. In the aggregate, however, repeated over and over, they should contribute to creating familiarity in your state with your organization and professions — put you in a position that can very well result in being called by a reporter for a front-page story, consulted by a legislator on a critical measure, contacted by a public who needs professional help and who can easily become your staunchest promoter.

Tip 3 - *Tend To Fundamentals.* How? By having at the ready some important tools, including a simple but strategic plan with clear goals and a means of measuring impact; an understood and feasible way of managing your messages so that they are clear, too, as well as strong, uniform, consistent, and strategic; talking points that are easy to recall and understand and spokespersons who are trained in media relations; compelling, universal,

and accessible data for key audiences; a list of friendly media contacts; on file models for things like press releases and letters to the editor; and, a defined and dedicated approach to updating your web site. Such steps will give your efforts important structure and consistency. They should also help enable the succeeding president to hit the ground running on the PR front.

Tip 4 - *First check out existing resources and pegs.*

Resources for public relations are not easy to come by. Consequently, before you spend time, energy, and money creating or doing something entirely new, I suggest you check out some of the resources and opportunities that already exist. You can do that by going to ASHA's home page. The bar across the top is divided into subject areas. At the far left end, you'll see a section, "Members and NSSLHA." Click and scroll down to "Promote Your Profession." There you will find many helpful on-line resources, including tip sheets, a PR Handbook, and Better Hearing and Speech Month promotional materials. (And as long as I am talking about the web site, a couple of related notes: if you go to ASHA's home page and click the press room prompt in the left margin, you will come to ASHA PR staff contact information. Also, if you enter Pro Search on the home page search engine, you will find our on-line self-registry of professionals by geographic location, a resource that is a small but useful way to promote the professions.).

It helps to have an identifiable reason, a peg, for conducting public relations. A handy way to find one is to consult a calendar of relevant annual observances. If you go to Google and enter health observances, you will see a month-by-month breakdown. Determine what is relevant and use it as your peg. Do the same with education and other subjects.

When you undertake PR, you can easily get this question: "Why are you acting now?" Some simple, understandable, and acceptable answers: "Because it is Better Hearing and Speech Month," or "Literacy Awareness Month," or "Stroke Awareness Month," or "Disability Awareness Month." Also, using the calendar this way allows you to plan

ahead. You can see what the potential pegs are over the course of the year, make your selections, and plan accordingly.

And speaking of available resources, I am pleased to report that ASHA PR is debuting a new resource here in Boston at ASHA's Convention. It is a DVD based upon our Share Your Stories Project and we believe it does a very effective job of promoting the professions.

[I would like to play it for you now . . .](#)



I invite you to use this resource—or something similar—to spread the word about the professions in your states. Show it to legislators; guidance counselors; PTAs; state and regional health councils; local civic groups, and the like. Also, I encourage you to submit story leads to our Share Your Stories Project. To learn how how, go to ASHA's web site and enter Share Your Stories.

Tip 5 - Wear PR Colored Glasses. Are members of your organizations presenting at ASHA's Convention? Winning any of the awards that will be presented? Conducting important and timely research? If so, have they been featured in your communication vehicles and press releases? Also, what regular activities of yours could be opportunities to spread the word about the professions? Have you invited major state figures to keynote your meetings and used that to make news? Can you sponsor public events like hearing testing and use them to make news, too? Do you track national trends, developments, and news for opportunities to regularly weigh in at state and local levels? Speech-language

pathology and audiology rank highly in national career polls. Have you used that as a peg to promote the professions? Does it lead your contact with guidance offices? What are the hot national stories? Autism is of huge media interest. I am sure there are autism experts among your organizations. Have you considered putting them forward to the media with tips for parents? Given the advent of the holidays, couldn't the same be done with audiologists to discuss the potential risk if parents buy noisy toys for their children?

Tip 6 - Conquer parts of the world

Ask yourself who needs to know about your professions . . . Physicians? Academic program directors? State legislators? State health officials? Educators? Students? Guidance counselors? Journalists? Maybe you think they all do. Most likely, though, all don't need to know right away, in the same degree or way. Prioritize and proceed. If you try to conquer the entire world all at once, you could find yourself becoming too scattered to be effective, and getting discouraged. Focus on one or two areas and succeed. Your successes will give you credibility that can be leveraged for success in other areas.

Tip 7 - Speak your audiences' languages

We have produced a new public service announcement that is directed at the late teen, young adult demographic. It features the rock group O.A.R., a band popular with those age groups.

[Here is the PSA . . .](#)



This piece illustrates the importance of tailoring your outreach, depending on the audience in question. Customizing like this needs to occur regularly. Is the audience state legislators? They tend to be interested in who is for or against a measure, where their constituencies stand, what precedents exist, and budgetary considerations. On the other hand, consumers want relevancy—they need to be shown why what you are promoting relates to them. News organizations? They ask why their readers/listeners would care, if you have sources, who they are and how they can be reached. Moreover, broadcast media wants to know if you have visuals or video to complement your story. Meantime, there is increasing awareness of the differences among generations in terms of how they receive information. One size does not fit all. Baby Boomers have been weaned on print pieces; younger people, on-line communication. I encourage you to become familiar with these differences by consulting generation experts like Claire Raines, the author of *Generations At Work* and other books.

Tip 8 - *Manage well message content and delivery*

Accuracy and truthfulness give you credibility; hence, they are extremely important. Otherwise, a strong message has: a dramatic element that establishes what is at stake (it will provide relevance--why you are doing what you are doing); justification for the timing of your effort; a clear tie to a broader issue or trend of major importance; selective, compelling, relevant, easy-to-comprehend data(it will validate your message); helpful tips or bits of advice for solving problems or improving things; and, practical steps that are easy for message recipients to take.

Timing and relevance are linked. As I've indicated, news organizations will ask why they should cover what you are proposing. An example of an effective response: "Because the state legislature is about to consider a related bill. The measure that could directly impact a profession that provides critical services to the children of your readers (or viewers)."

In public relations, there are different levels of timing to keep in mind, too. As a rule of thumb, I suggest that you get your activities underway well in advance of deadlines. For

example, start raising awareness about Better Hearing and Speech Month by mid-April at the latest—not the middle of May. Why? Because you need time for your message to be heard. Typically, a message needs to be repeated many times over; rarely, if ever, can you send one out once and your job is over. This has always been so, but it is especially true today, when people are bombarded with information from an expanding number of channels. In short, you are in a stiff competition for their attention. The audience's time is becoming more and more precious. Consequently, you need to say your piece briefly, clearly, and plainly, without incomprehensible jargon and false assumptions that your message is easily graspable.

One way around the time problem is to give just enough information to get your essential message across, together with links to more comprehensive backgrounders. Recently, I listened to leading journalists say that this is how they prefer to get story pitches. Why? Because they are being bombarded by press releases that they don't have time to read. They want very concise, linked information about what is happening and why they should they cover it. If they are interested in knowing more, they have the option of clicking on the links to get it.

Lastly, if you find it hard to come up with a succinct message, chances are your message isn't very strong. Whatever you do, don't try to spread a weak message. It can hurt your credibility, wear out your welcome, and waste precious resources.

Tip 9 - Promote To Those With A Vested Interest In Listening

Recently, ASHA exhibited at AARP's national meeting, where attendees had strong interest in the services of speech-language pathologists and audiologists. If you haven't already, I suggest that you cultivate relationships with AARP at the state level. I would do the same with educational and parents' groups and related media; school principals and teachers organizations; PTAs, and so forth. Contribute articles and advertise in their publications and other communications vehicles; exhibit at their trade shows; exchange web site links; include them on your mailing lists. I believe that would have a much

better chance of making headway promoting the professions than “cold calling” others who have no vested interest in what you do.

In addition, I suggest that you invite your state or local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, and/or faculty from nearby university journalism programs to speak to you regularly about the revolution that is occurring in media—and what you need to know and do to not only be part of it, but also to keep up with it. We are well past the hey day of the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The LA Times*, *NBC*, *CBS*, *ABC*—we have entered the era of podcasts, blogs, RSS Feeds, SEO, You Tube, FaceBook and other social media. The evidence is all around . . . from the recent story that Microsoft has invested \$240 million in Facebook, which has 50 million members and annual ad sales of \$125 million—to the fact that during the California wildfires, TV stations encouraged their viewers to read the blogs of their on-the-scene reporters--to features in journalism magazines about how older reporters are having to adapt to new and increasingly popular forms of communications that were unheard of just a few years ago.

Gradually, ASHA has been getting into these forms. Please allow me to play part of one, [a podcast with Lee Woodruff](#), which is currently on the ASHA home page.

A podcast can be used to not only attract people to your web site, but also to make news, complement news down the road, and serve as an accessible, sitting on-line resource.

But the point I want to leave you with is this: new forms of media are increasing exponentially, and rising rapidly in popularity and importance. In addition, they will be preferred by your organizations and professions’ next generation of members.

Finally, I encourage you to meet regularly with demographers, futurists, and diversity and societal experts. Hear from them about the changes that are coming in their respective areas and how you can be in the best position possible to promote the professions.

Tip 10 - So Much Is Possible

I hope this has been helpful. Sometimes, people unfamiliar with public relations think there is a mystique about it, especially in the area of media relations.

There is no mystique, though. Instead, there is a lot of preparation, organization, and assorted fundamentals and details that need tending. But those things are available for anyone to do, including your organizations and members. Also, I wouldn't be daunted by the profound changes taking place in media. Instead, I would welcome and be excited by them. For they are laden with tremendous opportunity, including the chance to speak and interact more directly with audiences.

You can do public relations. I know because I have seen the evidence. I say that mindful of an ASHA Convention offering scheduled for 3:30-5:30 tomorrow. If you have a program, it is session number 0413, "Collaborating with Clients & The Media to Improve Public Awareness." It will feature a video of patient testimonials that was produced in Ohio with help from ASHA's Star Network. The piece is well done and reflects a grassroots effort that is on the right track promoting the professions. You may find it useful to attend and hear how the presenters produced the video and their thoughts about how to apply it. No doubt you will have some good ideas to offer, too.

I wish you a rewarding meeting and the best with your organizations. I invite you to come by the PR booth at ASHA's Convention to say hello. And please feel free to contact me at ASHA national if you think I can assist you.

Thank you once again. It has been an honor. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.