

INTRODUCTION TO

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PUBLIC RELATIONS



IN AN EARLIER ERA, when the world seemed smaller and life simpler, Civitan was widely recognized in countless communities. It still is in many communities with strong and active clubs. But in recent years, the communications media have expanded dramatically and a growing plethora of worthy causes and special-interest groups compete for the public's attention and support.

Public relations, by definition, is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends.

The role of a Civitan public relations coordinator is therefore, more vital to a club's success than ever before. But if the communications explosion has made the job more challenging, it has also created more opportunities. There have never been as many ways to tell the Civitan story as there are today.

The goal of Civitan public relations isn't simply publicity, although publicity is essential to the success of club programs and service activities. The basic goals of Civitan public relations are to increase recognition of the Civitan name and to increase public understanding of Civitan's community service role. Think of public relations as the means used to build relationships with the public and subsequently it is concerned with maintaining a favorable image with those publics. The relationship and favorable image that is formed through public relations is accomplished through avenues such as publicity.

Publicity is actually the process of making something "known" or understood. It is used as a tool from which people construct their own perceptions. How people perceive something creates a sense of reality about that subject. The way people perceive our organization is vital to Civitan's success and existence as a service club. Positive perceptions lead to a positive image, and we want that for Civitan!

Such widespread public recognition of Civitan will benefit your club in a variety of ways. In the community, it will help to "pre-sell" prospective members and make it easier to solicit public support for Civitan service work. Within the club, it will help build pride in membership which leads to better meeting attendance, greater participation in fund-raising and service projects, and will encourage members to invite others to join your club.

A successful public relations program, one which creates a favorable impression of Civitan and delivers what is intended, is essentially a matter of planning, follow-through, and follow-up. It doesn't end with one successful membership drive, service project, or special event — public relations is a continuous effort to maintain a certain image and cultivate relationships with people in the community. This booklet serves to help those Civitans who wish to help create and maintain positive relationships with their community, the media, and their members.

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Information about the Practice of Public Relations

The formal practice of what today is called public relations is less than 100 years old. Yet during its relatively brief history, public relations has been defined in many different ways. Not unsurprisingly, the earliest definitions emphasized the roles of press agency and publicity since these were major elements from which modern public relations grew.

Later as public relations was recognized and employed by more organizations, definitions began to include:

- The need for research prior to initiating actions, careful planning and thorough evaluation or measurement of results
- A continuing, systematic process instead of a one-time or single activity
- Multiple audiences or publics
- Its role as an essential function of management
- Public participation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and accommodation as important tools
- The need, in most instances, for long-term commitment

Many of these definitions were quite lengthy; so much so that they tended more to describe what public relations does than what it is. In 1988, in an attempt to solve this dilemma the governing body of the Public Relations Society of America — its Assembly — formally adopted a definition of public relations which has become most accepted and widely used: "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other."

In this definition, the essential functions of research, planning, communications dialogue and evaluation are implied. Key words are "organization" rather than the limiting implication of "company" or "business", and "publics" which recognizes that all organizations have multiple publics from which they must earn consent and support.

— Information obtained from www.prsa.org