

*Vernon C. Schranz Distinguished Lecture in Public Relations
Denny Griswold – 1986*

I don't suppose that there is anybody in this audience who hasn't at some time or other felt overworked, underpaid, and unappreciated. Am I right? Well, I must say that after having heard the beautiful introduction that Dr. Sharpe gave me, I can no longer say with probity that I'm unappreciated.

I must tell you that when I came to dinner tonight a very handsome man accosted me and said, "I'm terribly surprised!" And I said, "Well if you're surprised that's quite all right, but I hope, having seen me, you're not disappointed." he said "Well, uh, I've got to explain to you that I've always thought that Denny Griswold was a man." i told him that had no been an unusual experience for me with the name "Denny." But, now that he had seen me, what would make me unhappy would be for him to continue to address me as Mr. Denny Griswold. that would worry me to no end! I must tell you this story:

When we started Public Relations News I was receiving a number of letters addressed to Mr. Denny Griswold and I never disabused the writer because at that time, you may remember, women had not yet come out of the closet. Since I was writing what I hoped would be THE authoritative publication for management and publication relations executives, and I very often shook my finger editorially in Public Relations News, I just never bothered correcting the people who wrote me as Mr. Denny Griswold. I had a good relationship with one of our subscribers who was a banker in Chicago and always the letter came across "Mr. Denny Griswold-Dear Denny." Now, this went on for a long time and one day I was feeling a little puckish and I wrote him a letter and then put a postscript on saying: "I hope you won't be to disappointed to discover that Denny Griswold is a she." By return mail, I got a letter and this time the salutation read, "Dear Darling!"

Mr. David Blackmer, who's really a kindly man, is going to take on the role of Mike Wallace tonight. I am ready for your first question, David.

Mr Blackmer: My first question is: Why do you nearly always wear a large button with the large letters "P.R." on it?

Mrs. Griswold: Why am I wearing this button? Can you all see it? It says "proud to be in P.R." and the word proud has cap "Pr" and a cap "R." We think that's very clever. Now, why do I wear it? Because public relations has a persuasive inferiority complex which it doesn't deserve. In my book, public relations has contributed more to the world community than any other profession with one exception and that is science. But, it is rather interesting to speculate that science and its great achievements and the great benefits it has given to mankind would be useless without the persuasive and the informative influence of public relations. In other words, we had to learn what science was contributing and we had to learn how we could use it. Public relations as you and I understand it, deserves to have a lot more credit, approval and understanding. I don't think we're going to have it unless all public relations students, faculty and practitioners subscribe to this slogan, "Proud to be in P.R." That's why I wear the button.

Mr. Blackmer: How did you happen to have the foresight to start the world's first public relations publication for executives, Public Relations News?

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Mrs. Griswold: That's a very personnel question, but I will tell you the answer. Public Relations News is my baby. It was born where all babies are born-in bed. What happened was this. When I was managing editor of Forbes, and when I was with Business Week, and when I was in public relations, I was constantly appalled at the lack of understanding of public relations on the part of top management. And I was worried and mediated. Finally, one night in bed I poke my husband, who was then Glenn Griswold, the editor and publisher of Business Week (you must know that I practiced some personal public relations because after I joined the editorial staff of Business Wee, the first womant o do so, I married the boss and that was Glenn Griswold the editor and publisher.) Well, I poked Glenn and said, "Let's do it." He looked at me in a rather bewildered way and said, "Do what?" I said, "Let's start a publication in the public relations field." He said: "Oh, Denny, you're always getting these ideas in the middle of the middle. Let's worry about it in the morning." I said: "No, it's too good. Get up and we'll make notes." We made notes all night long and the next day Glenn went down and resigned from Business Week. I, at the time, was the advertising and public relations director of Conde Nast.

I resigned my post and we started Public Relations News. I get a lot of ideas, most of them are not good, but apparently this one really worked, because I have the great satisfaction of feeling that we pioneered a medium for developing an understanding of public relations that had never existed before.

Mr. Blackmer: What changes have you observed in your professional career in the way public relations is performed?

Mrs. Griswold: I could spend two weeks answering that. You remember when we started Public Relations News there were about 100 public relations firms, so called public relations firms (most of them were really press agents). There were, perhaps, 125 formal public relations department in the whole world and that is hardly a big enough universe to support a publication. But we went ahead. Now in those days, the major function of a public relations man really was to get the name of the boss's wife in the paper, or to get the boss some good football tickets. But the most significant and exciting change has been the expansion of the frame of reference in which the public works today. Just think, Three or four decades ago, no public relations executive would be concerned with public relations programs about health care, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, crime and transportation-al of these issues that are important to all of mankind. That change is, to me, an example of the wonderful, exciting world of public relations that we live in.

Mr. Blackmer: Why have women been so successful in the field of public relations?

Mrs. Griswold: Why shouldn't they be? They're human beings. I feel very strongly that brains have no sex. And as a boss, when you hire people, you're looking for brains and ability-capability. Frankly, I think we've arrived at a stage where it doesn't make any difference whether you're male, female, young, old, white, black what have you. That isn't what you're looking for. You're looking for brains and capabilities. Now, why have women been so successful? I think in one way they've had a little edge on the boys. In the old days, women who were concerned with community affairs were referred to as the "bloomer girls." I don't know if that means anything to you, but women have always had an

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identity, empathy for suffering and problems and issues. Men, on the other hand, have had the edge on women because they've been in public relations longer. But as you all know, particularly the women in the audience who I'm sure will agree with me, women are catching up. Every year we do an annual review in Public Relations News for the previous year and a forecast issue for the year ahead. We look into the crystal ball. It's very exciting to me that every year we report on more and more women who have come up through the public relations ranks and have taken management spots. But, being an editor with something of a logical and judicial mind, I am equally excited about our report of the men who are coming up. We have reported well over 3,000 executives who've come up through the public relations ranks and are now vice presidents, presidents, and CEOs and I think that's a pretty exciting and comforting thought for public relations.

Mr. Blackmer: What is needed today to move public relations toward great professional stature?

Mrs. Griswold: The same thing we've always needed. There's nothing new about that, David. You and I know that the progress public relations makes is commensurate with good performance and broad knowledge. It isn't any different today than it was before. Fortunately, the avenues for learning are much greater now and the demand for learning is increasing enormously as we go along.

Mr. Blackmer: What do you consider the most important public relations development of the past four decades during which you've been publishing Public Relations News?

Mrs. Griswold: Well, I think I've mentioned it. I think it's the increasing scope of public relations operation and I think perhaps another might be management's recognition of the importance of public relations. You know, no sane management man or woman today will put highly sensitive function of public relations in the hands of an amateur. Management knows that its prosperity, and it's very existence, depends on good public relations.

Mr. Blackmer: What changes do you think will occur in the public relations field in the near future?

Mrs. Griswold: I think we will see tremendous increase in the number of public relations executives at the top executive level; which means more responsibility for the public relations executive, higher salaries, and a seat at the policy making table. Many more will be there than are today, and of course, that's where they should be as we all know.

Mr. Blackmer: How do you view the potential of the International Public Relations Association?

Mrs. Griswold: I was one of the founding members of the International Public Relations Association and I'm still as excited about its potential as I was when it started. I think it has an unrealized potential because the techniques, the procedures, and the philosophy of public relations are universal. Public relations principles are just applicable to a country like Zimbabwe, as they are to the United States or France or any place else. And the IPRA is a magnificent professional organization. It's an organization of about 1,000 public relations professionals who represent some 57 different countries in the world. Professionals worldwide get together and exchange information

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and it's a magnificent way of overcoming prejudices, barriers, and, it's a magnificent way to learn about the culture of these different countries. to answer your questions specifically, I think the opportunities for IPRA are enormous. I'm not altogether sure that its membership has fully recognized the importance of the association's role in world society. But in any event, I believe IPRA's leadership is conscious of it and I'm most optimistic as to the professional contributions this organization can make on a global scale.

Mr. Blackmer: Are you disturbed by the recent ethical abuses by public relations practitioners?

Mrs. Griswold: Am I disturbed by public relations abuses? Of course I am. I'm frightfully disturbed. But I'm also comforted by the thought that public relations practitioners, like practitioners in other professions, are human. And since we're a profession composed of humans, we will have abuses. I venture to say that, and I have no statistics to back up what I'm saying-this is just a feel and editors often go by feel as you know-I feel that there are probably fewer abuses in public relations-ethical abuses-than there are in other professions. For example, you all know that the medical profession has its quacks; many lawyers are shysters and many of our accountants are fakers. So ethical abuses are something that perhaps we have to expect and live with as long as the profession is composed of human beings. I don't think there is any way to alleviating these abuses except to teach ethics at the student level. You see, an amazing thing has happened in this country as I see it. There are only three places you can learn ethics that will stay with you throughout your life. One is at your mother's knee, the other is in your church, and the other is at school. I hate to say it, but I feel all three are abdicating this important responsibility. I think parents say let the church do it and the church says let the schools do it. The tremendous effort that is required is not put forth and I think it's a very serious and important thing for each and everyone to consider.

Mr. Blackmer: What relationship do you see between the free press and the development of public relations?

Mrs. Griswold: Very close. Public relations can't possibly exist except in a free society where there is freedom of press, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly. Now remember this: Everybody and every organization has a public image and consciously or unconsciously, even in an autocracy or in a country like Russia, they must contend with the attitudes of social systems in the performance of their activities. When I was in Russia, I attended a meeting of so-called public relations people, but what they were propagandists of the first order. Now when Gorbachev, or any bureau chief in Russia says, "this is the message and this is the way it is to be delivered and this is the way it is to be understood," that's precisely what happens. The job of the propaganda chief to Russia is cinch. You just do what the big boss tells you to do. But think of the challenge you have in a democracy where everybody has a right to cope with a problem and offer solutions. And you have all the channels of communication to use to reach out and get your message across. It's the most challenging, crucial, important job that any human being can undertake I think.

Mr. Blackmer: Let's open our questions now from the audience.

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Audience Question: What job opportunities are there for an American in public relations in France or other parts of Europe?

Mrs. Griswold: Many! Many opportunities, particularly if you're an American and you are representing an American company in France or some other part of Europe. You will have to be prepared for the opportunities, however. You can't practice public relations in France or in Asia, or any other place in the world, unless you are intimately acquainted with the thinking, the human behavior, the language, everything that makes up a human being in other countries. So to answer your question: There are opportunities galore—for people who are prepared. You know, I like to say that the future belongs to those who prepare for it, and that is my answer to the question. If you are prepared, then the answer is definitely "yes."

Audience Question: What are your feelings about public relations' latest possibly greatest concern—the licensing of public relations professionals?

Mrs. Griswold: Well, in answering that question I have to take on a formidable foe, Edward L. Bernays. Dr. Bernays is, as you know, a great enthusiast for the licensing of public relations professionals. [Speaking to Dr. Bernays who was present in the audience.] Eddie, I am your disciple. I worked for you. You taught me a great deal of what I know about public relations and I love you, too. But I do not agree with you. I feel that the very underpinning of public relations will be destroyed if we are licensed. I talked about freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. How can we be licensed if our friends in the media are not licensed? Shall they be licensed too? Can we be licensed and they not be? No. I also have great confidence in the ability and the truthfulness of public relations people because I've seen the quality, the new quality, of people coming into the field. I am very sure we can establish ourselves as professionals, ethical professionals and top performers, without licensing.

Audience Question: If you could strongly advise public relations majors entering the job market, what would you advise them to do in order to truly succeed?

Mrs. Griswold: First I think he or she would have to have the stuff—the personal characteristics that make good public relations, an ability to empathize and understand human beings. But, I would suggest this: The field of public relations is no place for somebody who doesn't have broad experience. It is no place for somebody who doesn't meet life with arms extended and who doesn't invite experience. Every bit of knowledge, every bit of experience you've ever had, will be called upon in a public relations job. I would learn, learn, and learn as much as I possibly could. I would also do this: I would work terrible hard at school and also try to earn some money I could put aside so that when somebody comes along and says, "Look, here is a job for you where the whole panorama of public relations passes in front of you and you will be able to learn every single day you are involved, but there is very little money in it." The little "kitty" that you will then have to set aside will enable you to say: "I can take this opportunity. I can learn now." Seek a job where you can get a good overview of public relations. I suggest a public relations firm because a firm handles a great many accounts and you will get a lot of knowledge on the way public relations is handled and what public relations is all about. While you are gaining experience have lots of consultations with yourself and say: "What areas of public relations do I really want to be in? Do I want to be in corporate public

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relations, non-profit public relations, with an association such as Kiwanis, perhaps? Do I want to be in consumer relations, vendor relations?" Pinpoint what you enjoy and what you do extremely well. If you decide that you want to be in financial public relations, do you mean you want to be the one to be the authority on the annual report? You can have that kind of specialization today and frankly, I would rather be the best apple corer in the world than somebody who is a generalist and knows a lot about apples. Give yourself a broad introduction to public relations then decided on your area of specialization. Don't checkerboard around. Once you have found what is right for you, stick to it and stay with it and become the expert and the authority in the field of your own choice.

Audience Question: How do you respond to someone who calls public relations "pseudo-journalism"?

Mrs. Griswold: That doesn't worry me at all. Public relations has been called a lot of things. Some names are far worse than that. I would just let it slide off my back. If it is somebody you think you want to bother educating, then you might try and educate them. Tell them what public relations is. Maybe you ought to have some of our Public Relations News definition cards. Give them one and that might teach them something.

Audience Question: In your opinion, should the Public Relations Student Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators be merged?

Mrs. Griswold: Not now. Perhaps later on. I think that there are some advantages and some disadvantages to the merger of the two professional groups. One of the great advantages would be the elimination of the duplication effort. I would love it because I wouldn't have to go to as many different conferences. I think the two organizational identities create confusion in the public mind. But I also think the public relations field is not yet unified enough for a merger. I would like to see it happen, but again I think the climate has to be ready for it and I don't think that point has been reached.

Audience Question: How was Edward Bernays as a boss?

Mrs. Griswold: Ed should I tell them the truth? [Speaking directly to Dr. Edward L. Bernays.] All right. Now you listen. I worked for Eddie when he was handling the highest paid public relations account in existence at that time. It was really quite laughable because the client was the United Brewers Industrial Foundation and he was getting \$75,000 a year for it and it would probably be \$1,750,000 today easily. Of course, I was very underpaid. I think I was getting \$25 a week, maybe \$30, I don't know, but I was underpaid. He was a good boss. He was an interesting boss. He was an exciting boss. He was a creative and imaginative one.

I will tell you a story about his creativity. I was the account executive on that account. He called me and the whole staff in one day and he said: "You know we ought to be getting much more publicity for this account, I'm a little disappointed. Let me show you what I think we should do." He pushed a button and asked somebody to bring in the New York Times. He went through that paper story by story and section by section, all the while telling us how we could involve beer in whatever that

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subject was-finance, religion, education-you name it. Every single one. It was the most brilliant piece of public relations strategy I have ever seen. When he finally got to the back of the paper and got to the beauty column, I said, "Ah ha! He'll never do anything for that." But he did. And I don't know how many of you do it, but he advocated washing your hair with beer. Many women still do it and Edward L. Bernays must be the reason. He was a wonderful boss, just as wonderful as he is today.

Audience Question: Have you felt discriminated against because you are a woman involved in a professional world dominated by men?

Mrs. Griswold: No, I have never, in any job I had, felt that lash of discrimination. Now that may be because I like being a woman and, when I was moving up the ladder, one of the accouterments that were available to women and not men were beautiful hats and I have always had beautiful, exciting hats. I think maybe this story has relevance to the question being asked to me.

At one point I was down in New Orleans talking to an oil group, the managers of oil companies. I like being attractive always, but when I am on the public platform, I try to be particularly attractive as a woman. When I was asked to go down to New Orleans I spent quite a bit of time thinking about what I was going to wear. It was a luncheon and I couldn't be too fussy, so I got a very simple black dress and a beautiful hat. When I was about to start my speech the program chairmen said to me: "Denny do you see that little awed off man in the last row with the great big ten gallon hat? he's the maverick of this group. He controls the purse strings of our budget. If you don't mind, when you talk would you sort of beam your stuff toward him?" I said I would. I beamed and beamed and beamed. And when the speech was over I was quite excited because I saw this little man wobbling up to me at the platform and I said to myself, "Denny, you did it." He came up to me and said, "Miss Griswold, I just want to tell you that you're the best lady speaker I've ever heard." then he walked away. I never knew whether I had converted him or not. But again, I think-this is aside to the women in the audience-if you're a woman be a woman. It's wonderful. It's never a detriment. I don't mean you must use your womanly wiles; but a capable, experienced, talented woman can hold her own, or should against any capable, talented man. Why not?

Audience Question: you have mentioned the lack of real leaders in the public relations in our country today. Why do you think we lack them?

Mrs. Griswold: This is a big, long, troublesome subject. I'm not omniscient enough to be able to answer this question as fully as it should be and there isn't enough time for it. But this is something that came out of a discussion we had about public relations leaders. When I lecture, I sometimes like to ask this question: "Give me the names of five public relations leaders." And shall I tell you I have not gotten five names back, ever. The last time I asked the question I got Edward L. Bernays (mind you, I asked for public relations leaders), Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill. Now I'm very disturbed about this because I believe that past is prologue and I think the kind of leadership we will develop in our future depends upon the kind of leaders we've had in the past. I think Patrick Henry who was speaking to our founding fathers said, "We must study the history of other countries so that we must be able to emulate their strengths and not repeat their mistakes." I feel we must think about that kind of thing very seriously in public relations. We must know what made it happen. Why it is burgeoning, and who is responsible for the development. We need more information about people like Edward Bernays and the others responsible for the wonderful world of public relations. I

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would like to see more courses in the history of public relations in educational institutes. I think it's very important.

Audience Question: How do you see public relations developing, and in what country do you see it developing most rapidly?

Mrs. Griswold: I don't think I would be able to honestly pinpoint any one country except to say this: If we were starting in our development of public relations where most of the countries outside the U.S.A. are starting today, we would be very fortunate. We have exported our public relations know how to the whole world. We can expect very rapid worldwide advancement in public relations and it is now occurring in many countries.

Many of you after hearing me tonight may think of me as a dreamer. I think I am. I like to dream and I'm a missionary, too. For example, I am willing to say this-now this is a dream-I think that the contributions of public relations will be recognized as a potent force in bringing peace and harmony to our world. After all, public relations specialists will be the only ones who will develop the formula and the equations for maintaining harmonious relationships among the peoples of various countries. I think someday, and I hope it won't be too far off; somebody in public relations will carry off the Nobel Peace Prize. I think it will happen.

And I want to say this as my final little note-I have a final little story. An African leader who believes fervently in freedom of expression was often asked to make speeches. He worried about how long his speeches should be. He developed a procedure. When he made his speeches, he stood on my leg and when he could no longer stand on one leg, he quit. Ladies and gentlemen, I have been on one leg. I'm putting my other leg down and my foot, too. I'm quitting. Thank you for recognizing me as the 1986 Vern C. Schranz Distinguished Lecturer in Public Relations.