



THE UNIVERSAL ACCREDITATION BOARD ACCREDITATION STUDY COURSE

PERSONAL PRESENTATION

Session **12**

Reading to be assigned BEFORE this session

- ▶ Candidate's Preparation Guide for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations
 - Specific areas of competence for Readiness Review, in Speaking, Interviewing, Listening and Presentation skills.

 - ▶ ***Note to Accreditation Chair or Head Coach***
 - > We all know that personal presentation skills are a valuable asset for public relations practitioners. They are a necessary attribute for accreditation. A competent professional should be able to respond to unexpected questions and thought-provoking inquiries with aplomb, grace and assurance.
 - > The ability to “think on your feet” comes into play in job interviews, public forums, presentation of plans or projects, and any situation where ideas are presented and questions are allowed. It will be a factor for candidates in presenting and defending their work in the Readiness Review.
 - > Many candidates for accreditation, because of the nature of their jobs, will have had insufficient opportunity to develop or polish these skills. Stage fright can take over, unexpectedly. The voice mannerism which speech coach Arch Lustberg calls the “audible pause” creeps in, with too-frequent “er”s and “ah”s. Inept presentation can ruin the reception of even the best thinking.

 - ▶ **One Approach**
 - > **The Boston Chapter of PRSA** has tackled this problem vigorously with a team approach, giving candidates the opportunity to field questions in very small groups, where one responded while perhaps two other candidates critiqued, asked questions and helped clarify the response. “This is really critical for people who have been in a non-agency setting for years and have good knowledge but not varied experience,” observes Ann Getman, long-time accreditation coach there.

 - ▶ **How did they do it in Boston?**
 - > “First, we demonstrated,” says Getman. They handed out a list of provocative questions to candidates. She and her co-coach chose a couple of questions for off-the-cuff response. One of them made a brief presentation, the other critiqued, aloud, in front of the class. Then the other did a presentation, and stood for feedback and probes for further information.
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- > Then they instructed the candidates to form into groups of two or three – whatever felt comfortable – and do likewise. Not in front of the whole group; they could choose corners. They were to do several questions each.
- > “We stressed the importance of thinking problems through and thinking on your feet,” Getman reports. “Role playing encouraged them to catch each other off guard in a safe environment AND to track what they were hearing against what they were thinking so they could probe effectively.”
- ▶ **Ethics questions**, in particular, can be a hurdle for candidates. Experienced coaches in other chapters agree that many candidates have never had to respond publicly to a dilemma involving ethics, or defend their position as a professional practitioner in a questionable situation.
- ▶ **Suggestions** for probing, especially around ethics questions:
 - > What kind of research would you do to inform your choices and demonstrate your thinking ability?
 - > Under what circumstances would this be unethical?
 - > What would you change to make it acceptable under the code of ethics?
 - > How would you explain to your boss/client why this is not an ethical practice and what compromises need to be made?
- ▶ Here is a **list of questions** developed by coaches, speakers, session leaders and candidates themselves for such sessions in Boston. The list is offered for use by others who may wish to follow suit. Coaches may, of course, amplify, augment and select as they think best. In a Readiness Review, candidates will have to field the questions they are asked. For practice in presentation, it has worked well to let them select topics from the list.
 - 1) Give an example of a situation in which you utilized formal or informal research for a project and how it influenced your planning or implementation.
 - 2) How would you handle this situation: You are conducting a survey for a client and are running up against the client’s deadline (a very strict deadline was imposed). You have almost all the information in, but it is becoming apparent that you will not have the last pieces of missing data until after the deadline. Based on information in hand, you can make a fairly educated guess about trends and likely outcome of questions. If you do not meet the client deadline, the whole account may be in jeopardy. What do you do?
 - 3) From your own experience, describe a public relations project that required different strategies for multiple audiences (or publics).
 - 4) What do you consider to be two of the more important ethics issues in our profession and why?

- 5) What is one of the more difficult public relations challenges that you have tackled professionally? What was involved and what was the outcome?
- 6) When is it appropriate to go “off the record” with a reporter? What are your own experiences with (or observations of) this practice?
- 7) Give an example of two trends in our industry. How is each shaping or influencing our profession?
- 8) A top officer in the company is grappling with budget cuts and has asked you to justify the existence of the public relations department when there is already a marketing department. What would be your main points?
- 9) What is one of the public relations projects or programs you have developed and implemented that you are most proud of and why?
- 10) Give an example where you have had to demonstrate the results of a particular public relations program. How did you demonstrate those results?
- 11) How would you go about developing a budget for a specific public relations program (or project)? What are tools to keep from going over budget?
- 12) You have just been hired to handle public relations for the expansion of a landfill. What are some of the first steps you would take? Who are key publics in this project?
- 13) Name a company that has performed the public relations function either very well or very badly. Explain why and, if you chose “badly,” explain how you would have advised them otherwise.
- 14) Explain “one-way” versus “two-way” communication models and provide examples of each. Based on your experiences, which is more effective and why?
- 15) How has the Internet and electronic forms of communication changed our industry? How has it challenged our industry?
- 16) An account executive in a public relations firm is asked to help identify prospects and drum up business in a down economy. The AE decides to contact some clients working with a competitive firm and reveal that the competing firm has recently laid off 50 percent of its work force and may have trouble servicing their business in the future. Is this a reasonable approach? Why or why not?
- 17) You are working for a pharmaceutical company that wants to sell more of its allergy drug. You agree to go into chat rooms of health web sites focusing on the topic of allergies to tout the success you have had using your employer’s drug. You do not disclose that you work for the company or that you, in fact, do not have allergies. Is this acceptable?

- ▶ **Further information:** Ann Getman APR, ann@getmanpr.com
- ▶ **A report, please:** If you organize a session or two like this, the UAB will be interested in a report. Send e-mail to Ferne G. Bonomi, APR, Fellow PRSA, UAB Coach's Guide work group coordinator: f.bonomi@att.net with a copy to Kathy Mulvihill, UAB Manager, kathy.mulvihill@prsa.org