

Rise of Women Power in Public Relations

Probably no other profession in the world can today boast of having as many women in leadership position as Public Relations (PR) can. Across countries and across positions, an increasing number of women are not only taking up PR as a profession but excelling in it to an extent of leading organizations or in quite a few cases running their own organizations.

Women have definitely made their mark in the PR business, to the extent that there is now a major shortage of men coming into the profession, and that's official. According to membership figures released by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), an independent nonprofit organization based in US that builds and documents research-based knowledge in public relations, and makes this knowledge available and useful to practitioners, educators, researchers and their clients, women now outnumber men by 60:40 - a massive swing since 1987, when figures highlighted the opposite at 20:80.



The same is true for India as well. A cursory glance at the PR agencies in India shows women leading from front in agencies such as Genesis and Practice PR. From my own first-hand experience, I have always had more women colleagues working with me than males. While

studying PR at Symbiosis about eight years back, women outnumbered us men folk by 8:1. Well, not that we are complaining. That's nice. What could be the reasons for this dominance and how did it all begin in India?

I personally feel that the shift happened with the change in face of Public Relations in itself. PR which was once relegated to doing liaison with the government on behalf of a company quickly gained acceptance in the Indian market with



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the entering of full service PR agencies. Many of the International agencies such as Good Relations also entered India and strengthened the profession through its practices and processes.

What initially started as a backup career option, because of the soft skills and relationship building capabilities of women, has now transformed into the preferred choice of women. It is evident from the sex ratio of any mass communication/ PR college in India.

So what exactly is this Public Relations, to which, women are so attracted now?

Robert L. Heath describes it in Encyclopedia of Public Relations- "Public Relations is a set of management, supervisory, and technical functions that foster an organization's ability to strategically listen to, appreciate, and respond to those persons whose mutually beneficial relationships with the organization are necessary if it is to

achieve its missions and values."



A book launching function, a part of Public Relations activities

However, putting it in simple words, it is essentially a management function that focuses on two-way communication and fostering of mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. This is done by either hiring Public Relations Professionals internally wherein they are called as Corporate Communicators or else through hiring of specialized PR firms. It is the growth in PR firms that is driving the profession forward.

According to a random survey carried out by The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) on "ATTRITION VS. PR & ITS FUTURE PROSPECTS", the PR industry is growing at an annual rate of 32% and likely to double its size to over US\$ 6 billion by 2010 from over US \$3 billion presently since corporates are relying more on PR professional to hike their brand image to take maximum benefits of current economic boom for increased sales and turnover volumes.

The survey confirms the trends that a

large number of corporates are opting to rope in PR professional for their increased sales turnover as one of finest marketing strategies".

A majority of PR professional said that in the economic boom, a huge competition has emerged for brand building, as result of which PR agencies are in demand and quoting a very market driven prices for their services for which takers are available.

Since demand for PR professional are rising and so are opportunities galoring for relationship industries and it is because of this reason it has shown a growth rate of about 22-25% in last couple of years. It has now risen to 32% and the trend will continue in future and even grow for better. According to estimates by the ASSOCHAM, the Indian PR industry comprises 1200 -1500 agency with their manpower strength of between 30,000 to 40,000.

It is in this discipline that the industry has seen most growth and expects to see continuing growth in the future. In terms of vertical markets, healthcare has been identified by several of the industry as the fastest-growing sector; however, the public sector, the environment and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are all emerging as growth areas for PR.

Public relations is being used as a supplement along with advertising to form an effective communication strategy. This is primarily because at times advertising does not suffice in communicating the exact message. Public relations services not only help in communicating their message but can also help in generating a



a favourable response. Any average PR agency's normal retainer fee can be anywhere between Rs 2.5 to Rs 5 lakhs. According to estimates by the ASSOCHAM, the Indian PR industry comprises 1200-1500 agencies with their manpower strength of 30,000 to 40,000.

But what is the job profile?


Public Relations in practice can be divided into three major parts; Client Servicing, Strategizing & content creation and media relations. All the aspects require a through understanding of the economy, client and his business environment and media.

Where do women come into the picture?

One of the reasons behind the success of women PR professionals is undoubtedly the flexibility of the profession, as it provides the opportunity for career-minded women to have it all in terms of high powered jobs, while still balancing family life - at least to some degree. One of the reasons for the proliferation of women versus men at the junior entry level is their willingness to be totally hands-on, take on administration roles initially and work their way up the promotional ladder. Women also tend to be more practical than theoretical, particularly when it comes to attention to detail, which are critical success factors behind award-winning PR campaigns. It could also be argued that women are better listeners, more methodical in their decisions, less confrontational and less likely to go off in unproven directions

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Who is dependent on whom?



Is she really dependant?

The weaker sex, assumed to be woman, is not only known by her name but also by the relationships she keeps with the family and society. She can be a wife, mother, sister and daughter. The explanation for this in the patriarchy is that women depend on men throughout their lives. It is like two men are a company while five women sitting in a restaurant are 'alone'.

If human being had to live independently, unaccompanied, without any help of dependency, he would not have survived or would have never evolved as civilized and social being. Dependency needs are a universal aspect of human experience. In general, the traditional society believes that the word dependency is more frequently associated with female. Indeed dependency like passivity, it has been considered the very hallmark of femininity. However, a man in his childhood is solely dependent on his mother and later on another woman in the form of his wife. When an ideal woman is described, she is characterized to be a giver, a

philanthropist. By traditional standards, a 'good wife means a married women who cleans, cooks, comforts, nurtures, soothes, although she is much less frequently on the receiving end of such nurturing and caring. Through the process of providing for the dependency needs of others, including the husband and children, a woman may consciously or unconsciously anticipate that her own needs may be met. The root of this could or could not be in the society and culture.

Dr. Harriet Goldhor Lerner has mentioned in The Dance of Intimacy "when a woman's needs are left unmet, she may manifest behaviour that appears to be excessively dependent or demanding little attention however is given to the fact that the women's dependency needs are not being adequately met by important others, or that she is unable actively to pursue self-directed, self seeking activities that would allow her to provide for her own wants." From this perspective women are not the excessively dependent gender. A more accurate generalization might be to say that women are not dependent enough. Most of the women are far more expert at worrying about the needs of others than identifying and assertively claiming their own needs. As a group, women may behave in a more passive way than do men, but women are not more dependent than men if we consider the actual level of autonomy or differentiation of self that an individual achieves.

When we say women are being

