

One of the key goals for the public relations industry is to maintain a positive reputation for companies through strategic campaigns catered toward the public. Public relations practitioners use integrated communication to build brand awareness, establish relationships between businesses and consumers, and create specific goals for companies. Integrated communicators, like iconic Harold Burson, inherently use the social change model of leadership when developing campaigns for specific goals of companies. The social change model and public relations share an end goal of changing specific actions and opinions of an individual, a group, or a community.

The social change model directly correlates with the mission of the public relations field. In 1994, the Social Change Model of Leadership Development was established with intentions to explain how leadership should be value-based and creating change within a society (UC San Diego, n.d.). Successful campaigns raise awareness of opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward a specific company. Tactics are the specific and tangible actions a company does to find a common purpose through sharing value-based content. The evaluation of a campaign's success will be shown through raising awareness, establishing authenticity, and collaborating with the audiences toward a common goal to influence a change in opinion or persuade action.

Servant leaders in the communication field are those behind the scenes creating content that influences customers to engage in long-term actions. A servant leader's main goal is to provide service to their people (Forbes, 2021). Campaigns require thorough research to develop goals specific to a company's needs that are executed through strategies and tactics. Communication teams and independent public relations firms are servant leaders by default due to the nature of the job. A public relations professional must showcase attributes like creativity, transparency, and persuasion.

Harold Burson is a well-known public relations specialist who represents servant leadership in the integrated communication industry. He challenged his clients to use their voice to bring change within their community and audiences. A public relations campaign's biggest success is in the numbers, as seen in Burson's explanation of an accomplishment early in his career. Burson in 2017 said, "if you can have the right leverage, you can accomplish anything." This advice led to a movement across the Ole Miss fanbase to cease using Confederate flags at the football games over a period of two weekends (YouTube, 2017). After a press conference with the Ole Miss football coach, the number of Confederate flags decreased by 75% by the next football game, and then none by the following game. This is a prime example of using transparency of the actions you want to see in your community, and then giving the resources and support to accomplish them.

The applicable leadership theory in the public relations industry is a mix between servant and authentic leadership. Authentic leaders focus on the transparency and accuracy of their intentions, much like public relations specialists instill in companies when aiding campaign development. Authenticity and transparency build strong relationships between companies and their stakeholders. Stakeholders develop deeper connections to a company when they feel valued. Mission-driven goals of authentic leadership set businesses up for success with their customer base.

The way I challenge my clients, or my team members, will have a heavy impact on the success of campaign development in my future public relations career. Successful campaigns are influenced by how well a practitioner knows their audiences and what makes them motivated to act toward a common goal, such as increasing the attendance rate of events for a future company through offering multiple event dates, because I know my audiences have busy lives with their

children on travel teams most weekends. As a result, I am setting my client up for success to have higher attendance rates through researching the stakeholders.

I believe I am a servant leader with a sprinkle of authentic leadership thrown in. My servant leadership roles were prominent in my Public Relations Internship at Robin Blu during 2021. My experience serving in the public relations industry sets my leadership ahead of other applicants through establishing my top strengths in empathy, development, and responsibility. Graphic design and content creation are my strongest talents within the public relations field. I know that I can contribute my love of creativity to make enticing content for my clients. Along with my skillset, I also bring passion and endurance to the workplace.

I tend to lead with my heart, whether the task is for work or personal life. Authentic leaders strive to leave legacies and are true to themselves all the time. Authenticity is a difficult attribute to possess today with society forcing the public to compromise values within the work environment. I aspire to lead teams and clients like Burson as I work my way up the chain in the industry while remaining true to my identity. Burson shows me that regardless of my career route I will find a way to serve my team and find fulfillment in my work.

Burson wore many hats during his lifetime, including servitude. He constantly strived to remind businesses of their purpose to rekindle their passion and establish relationships with their stakeholders. The social change model is taught in class, but the real learning comes from turning a campaign into a community-wide movement. Life is like a campaign – if we want change, we must put in the work.

References

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