

2011 PRSA Foundation Paladin Awards
Acceptance Remarks
Thursday, March 24, 2011

Good evening, everyone.

I have long admired the work of the PRSA Foundation. I'm flattered and honored to receive the 2011 Paladin Award. I do so on behalf of my many colleagues on the IBM communications team.

Over the past several months, I've had the chance to speak with my peers about the landscape of our profession – and how it's evolving.

We talked about the emergent patterns, forces and trends shaping our roles – and our team's missions and work.

We talked about our ambitions to reconceive the 'models' we use to guide and govern that work, and to optimize our impact.

We examined the links – or dare we envision it, the unification – of the processions of marketing and of communications.

And we took a sobered view of just how meaningful of an impact we're making in our enterprises.

Along the way, what we discovered in these conversations is that there is a universal understanding that our profession is changing. Some contours are starting to emerge – some edges of that emerging profession have been distinctly drawn, while others are just being sketched.

I'd like to offer you some of my views.

I won't speak with you about the era of big data.

But there is an opportunity as never before to make sense of information and interactions, and to extract insights from that data to understand, to know, to predict the actions and behaviors of the constituents that matter to us.

And I won't speak with you about corporate character.

Many of you have heard me describe this as the intentional alignment of brand and culture. Today, as never before, people care about the corporation behind the soft drink, the bank account, the computer. They do not separate their opinions about the company from their opinions of that company's products and services -- or its stock, for that matter.

Corporate character must then underpin everything we do – it is about ensuring we are clear on what makes our enterprise unique, and then doing the real work of bringing it to life.

I find that I quote Abraham Lincoln frequently these days. He said, “Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

I think you’ll agree that in many ways, our profession has not changed since the 19th century.

Communications has always been the conscious of the corporation; we have always focused on changing public opinion and shifting personal perceptions; we have always uniquely understood how to look across and understand multiple audiences.

But the work of communications has traditionally ended when we’ve made others aware of our products and services, when we’ve influenced others to think positively about our enterprise or our brand.

I’ve come to believe in the power of building belief. Beliefs encourage, guide and entice; they help us make sense, help us build conviction, they are the precursor to action.

Think about making someone aware of something compared causing them to believe. It is very different work.

I’ve asked hundreds of people in universities and corporations what causes them to believe. It always comes down to three things: people they trust, facts and evidence and personal experiences.

Of course, holding a belief and acting on that belief are two different things. After all, think about the myriad things you believe in, but fail to act on.

By knowing what motivates an individual – gleaned from a science of information about them, through careful consideration of their behavior – we can help them act on their beliefs.

Perpetuating that action is largely a factor of how much “agency” that individual then develops, or how much they feel they can successfully complete an action once they’ve started.

Our work is not just to help the individual build confidence in our product, or service or experience, but confidence in their own role and participation within it.

By helping individuals successfully act on their beliefs, and build their agency, we can help them advocate not just for our brand, or our company, or our cause; but for the shared beliefs that underpin them.

This is fundamentally about the work of equipping advocates with the tools, information and proof they need to advocate at scale. In turn, how they forge shared belief in others.

I’m eager to dive into this work – the work of figuring out new methods and skills in the years ahead.

And given the leadership of the people in this room...people whose example and friendship I value so much.... I couldn't be more optimistic, grateful and excited to construct this new profession with you.

Thank you.