**Reaching Ethical Maturity:**

**The Ethical Development of Public Relations Practice**

Module 2/Lesson 2 Lesson Plan

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**Overview:**

The public relations profession has always faltered in its perception as an ethical profession. This failure is partially due to a misunderstanding of public relations. Many confuse the profession with advertising or have a narrow view of public relations activities. Nevertheless, public relations must address its perceived ethical deficiency. The key is to develop heightened ethical literacy among public relations professionals so that they recognize and understand the ethical principles that guide public relations practice. Lesson one introduced the values and ethical orientations that form the foundation of ethical literacy. This lesson assesses the connection between the ethical principles and public relations practice.

Grunig and Hunt’s four models of public relations represent the growing sophistication of public relations practice. They also illustrate the ethical development of public relations. In this lesson, students will learn the four models of public relations and the ethical principles that guide their practice. They will recognize that the progression of the models also represents the ethical development of public relations. The lesson concludes with the five ethical pillars of public relations to help students enhance their ethical literacy skills in the assessment of ethical considerations in public relations practice.

**Learning Objectives:**

*As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:*

* Define the stages or moral obligations of ethical development.
* Identify the four models of public relations.
* Describe the ethical orientations associated with each model of public relations.
* Explain the ethical development of public relations using the four models of public relations.
* Assess the ethical development of public relations messages.
* Apply the five pillars of public relations to a public relations situation.

**Key Concepts:**

Axiology

Categorical imperative

Deontology

Golden Rule

Moral obligations

Mutuality value system

Partisan value system

Pillars of ethical public relations

Press agentry model

Professional ethic principle

Public information model

TARES

Teleology

Test of sincerity

Theory of ethical discourse

TV test

Two-way asymmetrical model

Two-way symmetrical model

Utilitarianism

**Activities:**

1. While students may be familiar with the four models of public relations, many have never considered the ethical dimension of each model. Have students find an example that represents each public relations model, and discuss the ethical considerations of their example. Students might also evaluate how well the ethical considerations guided their public relations example.
2. Ethical discourse is at the heart of symmetrical public relations, and TARES offers a good test for ethical message development. Have students assess organizational messaging using the TARES test.
3. The five guiding questions associated with the five ethical pillars of public relations offer guidance in assessing the ethical behavior of an organization. Using the lesson two case study or a case study of the instructor’s choice, have students go through the five guiding ethical questions. Based on the answers to these questions, how would the students counsel the organization to improve their ethical public relations practice?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Explain how the press agentry model exemplifies a teleological approach. What are the ethical advantages/ disadvantages of this practice of public relations?
2. How does the application of the PRSA code of ethics represent a deontological approach in the public information model of public relations?
3. How does the two-way asymmetrical public relations model offer an “other” perspective absent from the two lesser models? Why is this perspective important to ethical development?
4. How does Habermas’ theory of ethical discourse support the ethical practice of two-way symmetrical public relations?
5. How might the pillars of ethical public relations guide the ethical behavior of public relations professionals?

**Suggested Readings:**

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