

Corporate Counselor

BY DAVID MCKAY WILSON

In the era of email overload, public relations guru Robert Dilenschneider '65 likes to send thank-you notes, the old-fashioned kind that come in envelopes with stamps on them. It's a way he circumvents the crush of emails that flood the in-boxes of power players every day.

"I believe you should thank people for virtually everything," he says. "I treasure a personal note. I save them."

Dashing off a personal note is among Dilenschneider's prescriptions for success, documented in his eighth book, *Power and Influence: The Rules Have Changed*. For those up-and-coming executives who want to prosper in the 21st century, he suggests: embrace the technology, answer your emails within 24 hours, read the blogs and prepare to re-create yourself many times during your working years because job security just ain't what it used to be.

Other strategies, like his devotion to writing notes, touch on age-old niceties that still resonate today. "Decency, civility and straightforwardness are very, very important," says Dilenschneider. "A letter can be quite powerful."

The 64-year-old, who lives in Darien, Connecticut, and commutes to his office on the 26th floor of MetLife building in midtown Manhattan, knows the power game. In 1967, shortly after earning a master's degree in journalism at Ohio State, he landed a job with the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton. Within 20 years he'd become president and chief executive officer of the firm, which then had 82 offices around the world.

He hobnobbed with presidents, kings and corporate barons. But by 1991 he had lost interest in administering the corporation and quit to form The Dilenschneider Group. The corporate counseling and public relations firm brought him back to providing personal service to his clients. A few big ones, including Ford and Procter & Gamble, kept him on retainer.

In his book, he reveals the secrets of his success as he moves from lunches at private clubs in midtown Manhattan to

the Davos World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps. Much of it relates to nurturing his network of friends and professional colleagues. Those contacts can be turned into quite a payday. When one client needed introductions to four top executives, Dilenschneider charged the guy a cool \$25,000 to place the phone calls.

"He's a man who can pick up the phone and reach a CEO," says Jim Lukaszewski, a New York crisis management executive who became acquainted with Dilenschneider more than 20 years ago after receiving one of his thank-you notes. "There are very few public relations CEOs who can do that. Bob Dilenschneider has access. He can get in the door."

Lukaszewski moderated a recent forum in suburban New York with public-relations professionals who'd come to

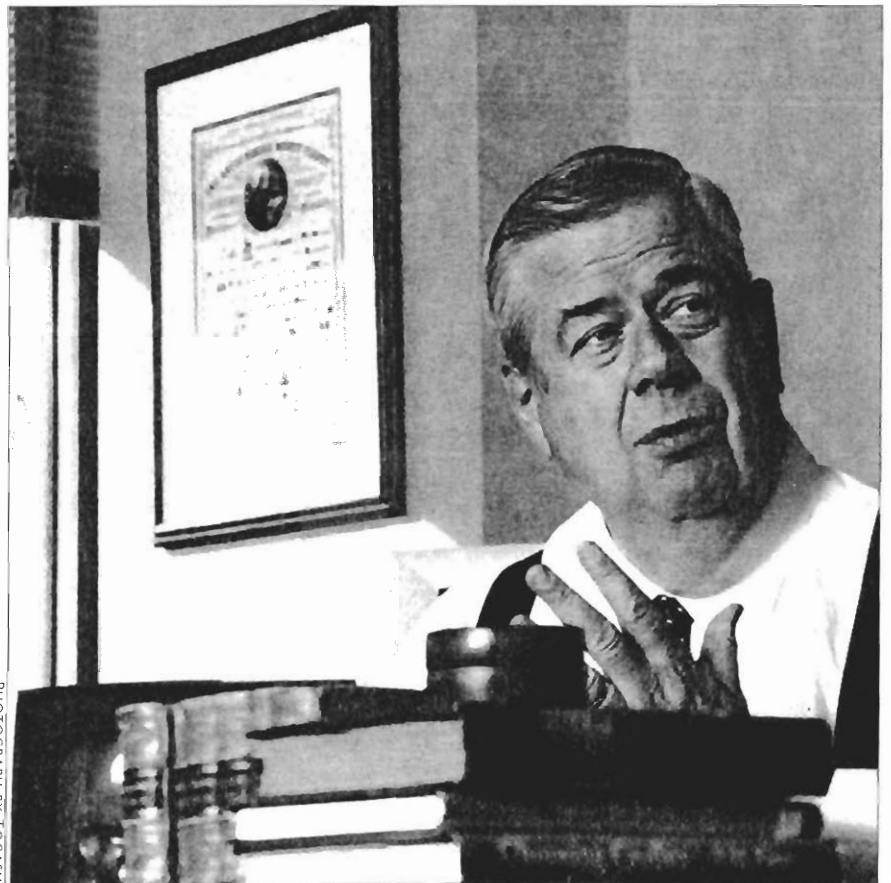
PR pro and author Dilenschneider understands the value of technology and the power of the personal note.

hear Dilenschneider talk about his new book. At the speech, he encouraged the PR pros to adapt to new technologies, search for power but never forget to share it, and to grow their network by reducing it whenever possible.

"Trees don't grow unless you prune them," he told them. "The same thing applies to human capital. And it applies in spades after a setback, or worse."

While having the ability to reach the top dogs in industry still commands top dollar, how Dilenschneider serves his clients has shifted since his Hill & Knowlton days. In the 1980s, the daily newspaper reigned, so one could help shape public opinion with the right contacts at the nation's leading publications. Dilenschneider could rely on professional editors to filter what got into print in the 24-hour news cycle.

That changed with the advent of the Internet. The popularity of blogs — those citizen-run web sites — has opened up the arena of commentary to all comers.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOGASHI

David McKay Wilson is a New York-based freelance writer.

Though that wide-open arena has empowered millions, Dilenschneider says the blogosphere has spawned a more venal world, with myriad outlets for critics to spew their venom. He cites studies showing there are 4 million sites that attack corporations.

This has created countless platforms for criticism of his clients. Dilenschneider says he often advises them to ignore some of the attacks, letting the one-day slam die for lack of interest.

Still, they cannot leave the negativity unanswered. For example, if a client who is under fire gives a speech or receives a community commendation, Dilenschneider will make sure the text and notice of the award

gets posted on the web. "At some point you have to speak out, but it's not a good thing to reinforce the negative," he says. "You need to put out positive stuff about the issue at hand, and that will overcome the problem. And if you are a good writer, you will eclipse the one-sentence guys trying to smear you."

Putting one's good foot forward in the community also can help counter the negative buzz. Dilenschneider laments that today's CEOs tend to be less involved in their communities.

"The giving back just isn't happening today," he says. "There used to be more of a community spirit, with CEOs leading fund-raising drives or helping out in the

food kitchens. The CEOs led by example."

That was the message Dilenschneider learned on Notre Dame's campus in the early 1960s — practice humility, be active in your community, keep a balance in one's life and get caught doing good. When an executive came to his office recently, concerned about what his obituary would say, Dilenschneider showed him a card on his desk that reads: "Our duty is to do good and be courteous and polite to all people."

"I told him he shouldn't sweat his obit," says Dilenschneider. "He needed to sweat what he was doing right now, and he had to try to do the right thing." □

Domers in the News

Marathon runner **Ryan Shay '02** collapsed and died November 3 while competing in the U.S. Olympic team trials in New York City. An All-American track star at Notre Dame, Shay won the NCAA national title for 10,000 meters in 2001. After graduation he became a five-time national road-racing champion. Hundreds of mourners wearing blue-and-gold lapel ribbons with the ND logo attended his three-hour funeral in East Jordan, a tiny town in northern Michigan. Speaking at the funeral, Joe Piane, Shay's ND coach, said "focus, discipline and sacrifice" were the words that best described the young athlete. . . .

Rohan Gunaratna '97, the author of *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* and an associate professor at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, testified for the prosecution as an expert witness at the trial of Jose Padilla, accused of plotting to detonate a radioactive "dirty bomb." . . . In November, Indianapolis Colts punter **Hunter Smith '99** appeared on the cable TV Gospel Music Channel program *Front Row Live*. Performing as the Christian acoustic rock duo

Connersvine, Smith and a friend played music from their recently released debut CD. . . . **Christina Rodriguez '90** was featured in the July 2007 issue of *Money* magazine. The story deals with her struggle with multiple sclerosis and managing personal finances. . . . **James Otteson '90**, professor of economics and philosophy at Yeshiva University, received the 2007 first place Templeton Enterprise Award for his book *Actual Ethics*. The annual award from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute is presented to scholars under 40 for the best books and articles in humane economics and culture. . . . **Alison Bryant '00** recently qualified for the U.S. Women's marathon Olympic team trials, to be held in Boston in April. In 1999, she was the Big East Conference 10,000-meter champion and an NCAA All-American. . . . **Harry Oliver '83**, who became a legend when his last second 51-yard game-winning field goal defeated Michigan in 1980, died of cancer in August. . . . **William Sadlier Dinger '63** and his wife, Maureen Dinger, received the Catholic Guardian Society's Child of Peace Award in September. Dinger is president of the catechetical publishing company William H. Sadlier, Inc. . . . **Mark Hexamer '94** recently launched the Internet company swaptree.com, which allows people to freely trade their old books, DVDs and video games. . . . **William H. Turner '71 M.A., '74 Ph.D.**, chair of the Appalachian Studies Program at Berea College, was inducted into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame in September. . . . Illinois Supreme Court Justice **Bob Thomas '74** received an apology and a reported \$3 million out-of-court settlement from the *Kane County Chronicle* in October. The former Fighting Irish and Chicago Bears kicker sued the newspaper over two columns that he contended had libeled him. . . . **F. Joseph Loughrey '71**, president and chief operating officer of Cummins, Inc., was recently honored by the Ireland Chamber of Commerce in the United States at its 2007 American Celtic Ball. . . . **Scott Friedman '94** has been named weekend morning anchor at KXAS-TV, the NBC affiliate in Dallas/Fort Worth. . . . **Neil Punsalan '00** founded the Internet entertainment company black20.com, which features short videos ranging from comedy sketches to live music. The entertainment website recorded 25 million hits in its first nine months of operation. . . . **Thomas F. Degnan Jr. '73**, manager of breakthrough

and new leads technology at ExxonMobil Research and Engineering Co., was named a "Hero of Chemistry" by the American Chemical Society, recognizing his achievements in catalytic chemistry. . . . **Jian Yi '98 M.A.** was awarded the Bronze Zenith Prize at the Montreal World Film Festival for his fiction feature film *Dong Sun (Bamboo Shoots)*. The independent filmmaker will begin a Starr Foundation artist-in-residence fellowship from March to August 2008 under the auspices of the Asian Cultural Council. . . . **Chandra Johnson '96**, former assistant to then-Notre Dame President Edward A. Malloy, CSC, and former associate director of campus ministry, has become the executive director of the An-Bryce Foundation in McLean, Virginia. The group works to cultivate future leaders from amongst society's most socio-economically disadvantaged young people. . . . **Joseph Tedesco '72** has been named the new dean of the University of Houston's Cullen College of Engineering. . . . **Coquese Washington '92, '97J.D.**, is the new women's head basketball coach at Penn State University. . . . And **Billy Taylor '95**, former men's head basketball coach at Lehigh University, is now head coach at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. . . . Also named a head basketball coach is **Kristin Cole '94**. The former Fighting Irish player now heads the University of New Hampshire's women's team. . . . **Maura A. McCauley '98**, a director in Heartland Human Care Services, Inc., was recognized as a "young, emerging leader in the fight against racism and poverty" by the Community Renewal Society of Chicago. She has worked with the homeless for 10 years. . . . The History News Network has named Baylor University associate professor

Thomas Kidd '01 Ph.D. a Top Young Historian. He is a specialist in 18th century North American history, especially evangelical Christianity in colonial America. . . . **Renee LaReau '96, '00M.Div.**, recently won three writing awards from the Catholic Press Association. "Uncommon Choir," about the Notre Dame Folk Choir, won first place for best feature in the national newspaper category and second place for best reporting on young adults. She won a second place award for her profile of a documentary filmmaker. . . . Architect **Patricia A. Craig '82** was featured in the July/August issue of *Natural Home* magazine in a story about her "environmentally friendly" home design. She also was featured in the November issue of *Cooking Light* magazine as the architect of the magazine's 2007 "Fit House." . . . **Dr. Frederick C. Morin III '72** has been named dean of the University of Vermont's College of Medicine. Previously he had been chair of pediatrics at the University of Buffalo. . . . **Col. Daniel Bruno '81** recently was named garrison commander at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. With the new assignment, he serves essentially as the "mayor" of West Point. . . . Chicago Mayor Richard Daley recently named former Irish and Chicago Bears defensive tackle **Chris Zorich '91, '02 J.D.**, to the Chicago Public Library Board. . . . **Selim Ilter '78MBA** is the new dean of the Ronald L. Bittner School of Business at Saint John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. . . . **Scott Demorest '93 MBA**, co-founder of ACME Business Consulting, has been named by the U. S. Small Business Administration as Oregon's 2007 Small Business Person of the Year. □