

The New Power Rules PR Pros Should Know About

BY ROBERT L. DILENSCHNEIDER

We now live in a culture where the young are lionized — and, perhaps, that is right and good because they will shape the next generation.

Yet, despite what some have been saying lately in the political arena, there is still no substitute for experience.

Experience is the mark of a senior professional in any calling.

In the PR universe especially, experience means not only the expertise, knowledge, contacts and practices that one absorbs during a lengthy career, but, perhaps most important, it equates to informed, mature, fact-backed judgment — in making the right decisions and imparting the most appropriate and efficacious counsel.

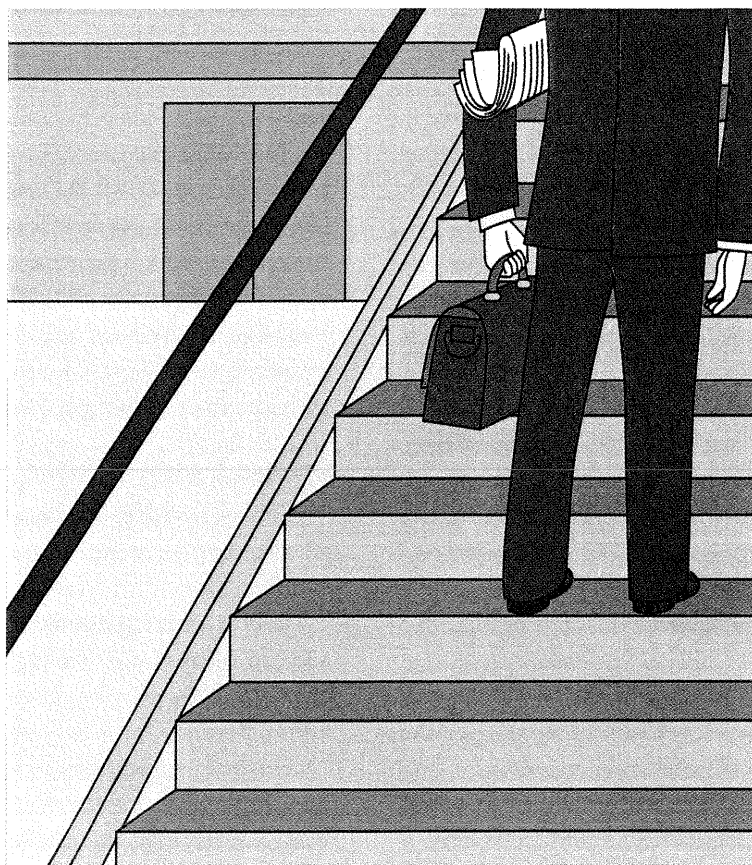
My firm has a saying, “When the money is on the table, you have only one chance — get it right the first time.”

The key to getting it right is judgment.

At my firm, the average employee is older than 50, which means clients benefit from hundreds of years of invaluable experience. There is no substitute.

Age can claim many virtues besides experience that are often denied the young — not the least of which are trust and confidentiality, the essential components of any business relationship.

Many years ago, I wrote a book titled “50 Plus! — Critical



Career Decisions for the Rest of Your Life.” It is filled with tips and ideas for anyone older than 50 who is seeking to restart his or her career in any business. It underscored the trust that age inspires.

I recently published “Power and Influence: The Rules Have Changed,” with a chapter titled “Be Prepared to Start Over — Again and Again.” One of the key points is that in this age of corporate downsizing, mergers, outsourcing, layoffs and mass dismissals, one should come to terms with the reality that there is little job security. Even though corporate profits have, until now,

rarely been higher, and even though the U.S. gross domestic product is soaring past \$13 trillion, companies are taking their cues from Wall Street — especially in the current problematic economic environment. Their goals are too often solely about streamlining expenses, cutting the work force, and continuing to make profits for shareholders.

Technology as ally

Recognize that paternal corporations, which cared for people from cradle to crypt, are no more. Studies have shown that a typical professional in this early part of the new millennium may need to change jobs six or seven times. On the face of it, that may seem daunting.

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This is where technology, a major theme of my new book, can be an ally. One of the key new rules I write about stems from the explosion of new technologies we have all witnessed during the past several decades, and the necessity to harness and exploit this unprecedented development — particularly in today's workplace.

Technology is an area that young people take to naturally and an older professional would do well to sharpen his or her skills. I don't mean just the glancing knowledge of the youth culture and its icons and tools that you may have picked up from your kids. I mean using and understanding these techniques and technologies whether they be search engines, blogs, iPod downloads or mass Internet postings.

Resist these tools at your peril.

Understanding where to go on the tech map is an invaluable asset for any professional. The databases and the in-depth information currently available with a click of the mouse are not only huge time-savers but can also be a powerful stimulus to critical thinking and more creative efforts on behalf of clients.

Specifically, anyone who wishes to be a power player must build certain strengths. One of them is the ability to do exhaustive research. Thanks to search engines, the tools are there to do what used to take days in minutes. It's truly remarkable.

But one should always remember that information, however massive and deep, does not necessarily equate to knowledge. You need to know what to do with the data you glean.

The downside of the high-tech revolution

There is a certain downside to this technology revolution.

These days, all too many people have minimal writing skills and do not take the time to think logically and critically. The new technology, with its emphasis on instant communication and imagery, is a mixed blessing. No matter how much information you have, your ability to fashion it into a compelling story or argument is crucial. Many cannot do this. Often, those who can have the advantage of a different education than the younger generation received.

Connecting directly with people remains another key to accessing power. As I wrote in the book: "Leaving a voice-mail message isn't really connecting. Sending an e-mail isn't the final answer, or even a beginning. Unreceived or deleted e-mails are the current bane of our profession — especially when they are not followed up.

"By speaking directly with people, by reaching out to them with authentically individualized written communica-

tions and avoiding boilerplate language... you can build relationships that will last. You may know how to network, but it's how you keep that network alive that will be the key to your progress."

Of the business executives I interviewed for the book about power and influence in the 21st century, the majority were gung ho for new technology. However, there was almost universal agreement on one caveat: The baseline has to be a person-to-person relationship. The relationship has to be nurtured through direct communication — that is, speaking on the telephone or, better, seeing the person — even through a videoconferencing facility, if necessary.

Virtual worlds may work on TV and in the movies, but nothing will replace sitting face-to-face and arranging any business, civic, governmental, philanthropic or other proposal.

In this relatively brief piece, I can only touch on a few of the new rules (out of 10 principles) that readers should know for winning in today's hypercompetitive business climate.

Tips for the next phase of your career, especially if you are older than 50 include:

- Learn how to network and leverage those relationships.
- Understand and use technology, but apply the lessons you learned about logic and writing during the first part of your career.
- Differentiate yourself through your expertise — the results you have achieved over time.
- Step back from all problems and opportunities, and use the wisdom and judgment you have acquired over the years.
- Never give up. ■



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