

ACE and D

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Abstract

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Ralph Reeder

Eldon Fredericks, still in the euphoria of a presidency, and I got to talking the other day about the future of ACE and of the people and jobs that relate thereto.

One thing led to another, the crystal ball began to grow fuzzy. I timidly ventured the opinion that ACE had better begin to consider what would happen when development people began to come into the organization. He cringed visibly as if I'd turned into an equal opportunist, and for a minute I feared he'd bash his head against the computer glowing there.

He jumped unexpectedly, I discovered, because Purdue agriculture had just put on a development person, which led in turn to home economics (excuse me, consumer and family sciences) getting a reasonably accurate facsimile. What were once the Tom Johnston and Herb Schaller jobs in "public information" have been taken by a succession of development experts, coming along about annually.

Around most campuses, I understand, development has now become the magic word, replacing our own beloved, and almost as good as new, communication. Yet there is a difference because this new idea has special meaning for us in terms of the job and the training needed to carry it off. We could bluff ourselves into thinking we were communicators, but we can hardly carry that off with development.

You love reminiscence, so here's some. I got into the business along about 24 BC (before communication). We took up the name public relations to avoid the term publicity.

Reeder, retired from Purdue, was recently director for retired and life members of ACE.

When that got too much for us, we started using the name "information." Then with the advent of NPAC, all of us became Communicators, in name that is.

Now it looks as if the calendar has shifted to about 3 AD (after development), although it's not really that new in its working clothes. The Tom Johnstons, George Rounds, Dutch Elders, and their breed were into it long ago when they "worked with the legislature." Their talents went much deeper than mine. They needed to know legislators by first name, and well enough to get help if some bill did or did not come up according to university needs. They were being assistants to the president much more than information specialists.

County agents helped out with these chores, of course. They already knew their local legislators, of which agricultural administrators were well aware. One of our deans, before he became one, promised he'd put cooperative extension in the same bag with continuing education. But he had a second thought once he got to be dean. Those agents in every county gave him a development resource that no other dean had.

Tom used to get me out now and then to public relations meetings, attended by a dozen people from small colleges, three state universities, and the one land-grant school. I felt very good as half the people spent their time planning how to raise money, and the other state schools fretted about how to get their stuff into newspapers and radio.

Those problems were not mine, praise the Lord. Mine were to get people competent enough to get stories ready for the mass media to use as public service material. Our stuff was regarded as a service to those who wanted to grow or make the things needed. The audiences needed even our publications.

Yet even in those far away years, the word foundation was abroad in the land. Many organizations, including universities, began to feel the urge for a foundation, a base of money from which the income could be used. Of course, now the foundation idea is in full bloom, and even unemployed older brethren get frequent letters asking funds for church, school, health society or club where the foundation can use friends like me.

Development people used to be called fund raisers, and I pitied their sweaty, pallid features. They were always aware of the monkey on their backs that could evaluate their efforts without the aid of a computer. Within a year they could be

labelled success or failure, while I could survive for decades by ignoring any measure of audience acceptance or response.

When we started adopting the word communication, we intended it to be two-way, to-and-from or from-and-to our audiences. But we never got that meaning across to our deans and directors, who were quite satisfied if we got out more of what we-didn't-know-if-it-was-any-good. Even in our enlightened post-NPAC period, we continued to find it simpler to publish by intuition.

Now development won't let us work that way. The money comes or it doesn't come. As state and federal legislators cut their subsidies to us, we have to find more or cut our operations. That's our new given.

Or at least that's what I told Fred when he came from around the computer, that ACE members ought to get their heads out of their computers long enough to hear the avalanche coming. Jobs of the next decade will be in development where journalism and communication degrees will not be sufficient. ACE should already have committees at work studying the field to find what is needed for its people to take their new roles.

In order to be a bit more constructive about this, I've talked with development and contract people, the ones who've been working a long time at the job of raising money for university projects. Here's what they say we ought to be thinking about:

Journalism and communication can continue to serve as a base because public relations will remain important. But public relations courses must be practical and hard hitting. Those courses that we've been adding to pad out our requirements will have new meaning and direction. We must add business and law courses. Those whose job it is to raise money for their institutions must know how the real world of business operates. We will need to know as much tax law as is necessary to explain it to individuals and corporation executives. We must explain tax write-offs when they exist and as they change from week to week. We must learn how corporations and foundations work and why and for what they are willing to invest their money. Finally we must be tough, able and willing to bounce back, change tactics as a result of failure. When one gimmick doesn't work, try another.

It's like I told Fred — I don't think I could stand the heat, but I'll be cheering for you from just outside the kitchen.

