

Acceptance Remarks for IPR's**Alexander Hamilton Medal**

James E. Murphy**Chairman & CEO, Murphy & Co.***Yale Club, Thursday, November 8, 2012*

Thank you, Matt, and thanks to you, Frank and the entire Institute board. And thank you all for this honor. It is wonderful to be here this evening.

My wife Pat is with me also. She is the love of my life, the anchor of our family and vitally important to my career and me. How lucky I am.

The Institute's Hamilton Medal is very special. Recognition from one's peers is always meaningful, and very humbling. With the Institute's high standards for our industry, I truly appreciate this recognition.

As a retired trustee of the Institute, I have seen the progress it has made in building the research function as the foundation of our profession. I especially want to compliment Frank Oviatt for his many years of leadership for IPR and our profession.

In considering what to say this evening, I concluded I would take the chance to take a brief look at where our profession stands today.

After nearly 50 years as a practitioner of public relations and related disciplines, I couldn't be more optimistic about the future of what we do.

Every organization, institution, and company needs our skills and expertise to succeed. Our profession is a vital element in society today. Few in this room would disagree.

But I believe with this growth in importance comes something else just as great: the need to act responsibly *and* honestly.

There have always been questions about public relations. It's a profession susceptible to some degree of looseness, both in its definition and in practice. It is not like law, accounting or medicine with well-defined standards and rules. I doubt it ever will be. But we have seen efforts to develop principles to guide how we act.

As an example I cite Arthur Page, identified as the first public relations practitioner to serve as an officer of a U. S. public company. The Society which today bears his name and the Institute are closely aligned. Both reflect the commitment to high standards for our profession.

Ideally we use Page's principles to guide what we provide to our companies and clients. Among other things, Page preached that every institution needs to act in ways that earn the permission of society to operate effectively within it.

We should not forget to apply Page's principles to our profession. We must recognize the need to earn that permission to keep a desirable societal position.

Our Presidential campaign is a reminder of the best and worst of what our profession can do.

On the one hand, politics has helped develop and refine the most advanced methods of what we do every day:

Developing key messages to reach and convince our target audiences that we are the preferred option;

Using every traditional and online tool to communicate those messages;

Putting those messages in contexts most favorable to us;

Defending against competitors and other opposition when attacked;

Using third-party endorsements for our point of view;

Polling audiences to check attitudes, trends, etc., etc.

Political campaigns have often served to pioneer tools and techniques that have been later adapted in business and elsewhere. The massive investments in campaigns; the relatively short time frame; the exceptional talent attracted to campaigns, the phenomenal innovation, all add up to remarkable results. That is certainly true about the election which ended two days ago.

However, what I think we ought to bear in mind, with all the effort to elect a candidate where the end seems to justify the means, we often end up with the question:

What happened to the truth? Was it ever a standard for politics?

The term "Truth well told" is an excellent definition of public relations. Of course, who defines truth is always the issue.

The political process seems to have reached a point where truth seems almost irrelevant. The "spin room" is a remarkable development. Fact checking has become a new sub-industry.

What wins the day is how well the story is spun, regardless of where the truth really lies.

Please don't take this as a partisan comment. I believe this is true across the political spectrum.

There is a clear point when strong advocacy can leave the truth behind. With each new political cycle, that line stretches further away from the truth.

Americans and much of the media seem to accept the "untruths" of politics as a byproduct of a worthy but flawed process. But, as a profession, let's guard against such a cynical view for what we do in the private sector.

To some of you, what I'm saying may come across as a bit naïve. There are those who might argue this is just how the game is played today, and that it is something everyone should understand.

But I would like to caution all of us, who primarily work in the private sector with private enterprises, not to be tempted to drift to close to the spin aspects of politics. Certainly we want to tell our stories in a powerful, convincing way.

In thinking about this, I can't help but turn once again to Arthur Page. His first principle glares at us:

He said simply: Tell the Truth.

So as I accept the Hamilton Medal from the Institute and reflect on the state of our profession, I feel a responsibility to remind ourselves of the need for integrity if we are to live up to our aspirations to play a vital role in society.

Yes, there are positive lessons to be derived from the communications processes in politics, but let's don't let certain cynicisms from the political arena influence us to the point when we complete our work for our companies and clients asking the question: What happened to the truth?

We risk too much if we forget that at the end of the day, truth does rule, no matter how we may try to "spin" it.

Thank you all again for the honor of the Hamilton medal and the recognition you have bestowed upon me.