Creating Successful Leadership Transition:
A President’s Sourcebook for the
Public Relations Student Society of America

Honors 499

Submitted Spring 1997

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Dr. Melvin Sharpe, Advisor
BACKGROUND

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) is a national pre-professional student organization that prepares college students for careers in public relations. It is the student affiliate of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). There are currently 200 PRSSA chapters with more than 5,500 members nationwide.

The national leadership of PRSSA consists of the National Committee, eight students elected by representatives from each chapter, and two faculty advisors, two professional advisors, and a full-time manager. Each local PRSSA chapter has a president and other officer positions that vary by chapter.

As the National Vice President of Chapter Development for the 1996-1997 school year, my responsibilities included leading national leadership caucuses, organizing chapter development/student firm sessions for the National Conference, and serving as a resource for fundraising and community service projects. Throughout the year, I interacted with over 80 chapter presidents from across the country. In our conversations, I noticed that many of them share similar frustrations and challenges. The biggest frustration that I heard was that previous presidents leave their office without passing on information or helping the new officers become familiar with the organization. New presidents feel overwhelmed and confused, and each year they have to start from the beginning to relearn the responsibilities of the presidency.
I developed the President’s Sourcebook to help new PRSSA chapter presidents understand their role and to help them continue the work of the previous executive board with as little confusion as possible. The sourcebook also contains ideas to help them in the planning process.

**RESEARCH**

To determine the major frustrations and challenges of chapter presidents, I created a survey (Appendix 1) and distributed it at the chapter president roundtable at the 1996 PRSSA National Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. A total of 53 presidents completed the survey. (For survey results, see Appendix 2.) Delegating responsibility, motivating others, strategic planning, and training officers were the areas that presidents cited as the skills they needed to improve the most. I included resources to address these concerns in the President’s Sourcebook.

I spoke with the PRSSA manager and the other seven members of the National Committee to obtain additional suggestions for important resources for the sourcebook.

Finally, I posted an e-mail message on PRSSA-Talk, the organization’s national mailing list, to see if any general members had suggestions on items to include.

**DISTRIBUTION**

Because PRSSA is a student organization with limited funds, I decided to post the President’s Sourcebook on the existing PRSSA home page (http://www.prssa.org.) rather than send a copy to all 200 chapters. Those chapters without Internet access can call national headquarters and request a hard copy of the sourcebook. Not only will this cut down on cost, but future VPs of Chapter Development can easily make changes to the information without having to
reprint the book and send out updated copies. By having the President’s Sourcebook on the Internet, the information is not only limited to chapter presidents. Any of the 5,500 PRSSA members can instantly access the data if they are interested.

I will send sourcebook information to the VP of Public Relations who is responsible for maintaining the web page and posting new information. The information will be available to members on the home page by June 1, 1997.

**SUMMARY**

The President’s Sourcebook will be a valuable tool to help new chapter president’s achieve a smoother transition and plan a successful year. If presidents follow the suggestions listed in the sourcebook, they can prevent their chapters from losing valuable information and from having to start over every year.
## Appendix 1
### PRSSA Leadership Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What year are you?</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Other: __________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been a PRSSA member?</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>2 yrs.</td>
<td>3 yrs.</td>
<td>4 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What office(s), if any, did you hold in your chapter before becoming president?</td>
<td>Vice-president</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Historian</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many members are in your chapter?</td>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>16-30</td>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>51-75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt confident in my role as president when first elected:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The president before me helped me prepare for my role</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the history and mission of PRSSA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of scholarships available through PRSSA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of competitions available through PRSSA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of conferences available through PRSSA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know my chapter's strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know where to go for help with problems in my chapter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable contacting a national committee member for help or advice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our chapter has younger members interested in becoming PRSSA leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our chapter encourages younger members to assume leadership positions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of the following skills do you think you need to improve the most? (Circle all that apply)
- Time management
- Public speaking
- Delegating responsibility
- Strategic planning
- Agenda setting
- Motivating others
- Training chapter officers

How do you prefer to receive PRSSA information? (Circle all that apply)
- PRSSA-L Mail
- World Wide Web
- Other: ________________

Did you attend a leadership caucus this fall? | Yes | No |

Why or why not? ________________________________________________________________________________

Would you have attended a caucus if there had been one in your area? | Yes | No |

What is the single most important leadership need of new officers? ________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2
LEADERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

53 total chapter presidents surveyed:
♦ 42 seniors
♦ 9 juniors
♦ 1 sophomore
♦ 1 graduate student

Previous positions: (some students have held more than one previous position)
♦ 12 - Vice president
♦ 7 - PR Director
♦ 5 - Treasurer
♦ 5 - Secretary
♦ 18 - None

Average number of years in PRSSA: 2.26 years

Overall results:
(All results are based on a five point scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).)

I felt confident in my role as president when first elected ........................................................... 4.0
The president before me helped prepare me for my role .......................................................... 3.0
I understand the history and mission of PRSSA ......................................................................... 4.1
I am aware of scholarships available through PRSSA ............................................................. 4.0
I am aware of competitions available through PRSSA ............................................................. 4.3
I am aware of conferences available through PRSSA ............................................................. 4.4
I know my chapter’s strengths and weaknesses .......................................................................... 4.3
I know where to go for help with problems in my chapter ..................................................... 3.8
I feel comfortable contacting a National Committee member for help or advice .............. 3.9
Our chapter has younger members interested in becoming PRSSA leaders .................. 3.7
Our chapter encourages younger members to assume leadership positions .................. 4.3

Results for presidents BELOW senior level: (star indicates lower score than above results)

I felt confident in my role as president when first elected .................................................... 3.8*
The president before me helped prepare me for my role .................................................... 3.0
I understand the history and mission of PRSSA ............................................................. 4.0*
I am aware of scholarships available through PRSSA ............................................................. 3.5*
I am aware of competitions available through PRSSA ............................................................. 3.8*
I am aware of conferences available through PRSSA ............................................................. 4.1*
I know my chapter’s strengths and weaknesses .......................................................................... 4.3
I know where to go for help with problems in my chapter ..................................................... 3.8
I feel comfortable contacting a National Committee member for help or advice .......... 4.0
How do you prefer to receive PRSSA information?: (they could choose all that applied)

- Mail - 79%
- PRSSA-Talk - 51%
- WWW - 36%

In which of the follow could you improve the most?: (they could choose all that applied)

- Delegating responsibility - 47%
- Motivating others - 47%
- Strategic planning - 45%
- Training officers - 36%
- Time management - 26%
- Agenda setting - 17%
- Public speaking - 15%
President's Sourcebook

PRSSA
Public Relations Student Society of America
Dear Chapter President,

The responsibility of being a chapter president is hard to comprehend until you find yourself in the position. While the job is time-consuming and challenging, it’s very rewarding to see your ideas and projects take shape throughout the year.

Even at the beginning of your term, it’s important to begin thinking ahead to the next year. As president, your responsibility is to ensure that your chapter’s future officers understand the organization and continue with the projects you worked so hard on. DON’T LET YOUR EFFORTS GO TO WASTE!

The President’s Sourcebook is designed to keep your chapter running smoothly year after year. With just a little bit of time on your part each month, you can prevent the next group of officers from having to start all over again.

Remember: Your responsibility as president doesn’t end when your term is up. You owe it to your chapter to keep moving forward. Best wishes for an exciting and successful year!

Sincerely,

Angel Spyrou
1996-1997 National VP, Chapter Development
Ball State University
Transition of Officers

Why is leadership transition so important?

♦ It helps outgoing officers put closure to the year.

♦ New officers are anxious to take charge. Take advantage of their enthusiasm.

♦ Smooth transition prevents dead time in the summer and fall where no activities or planning take place.

♦ New officers feel confident in their abilities and resources.

♦ New officers won’t have to start over each year.

What can you do year-round to create a smoother transition?

♦ Begin the year with clear goals and measurable objectives.

♦ Establish checkpoints to evaluate progress toward your objectives.

♦ Ask each officer to give brief updates at general meetings so that members understand the responsibilities and time commitments of each position.

♦ Ask new officers to write out their job description at the beginning of the term so that their duties are clear.

♦ Seek out members that could be good leaders. Make sure they get involved with committees and encourage them to run for an office.

♦ Ask each officer to keep a notebook of everything he/she does. Pass these notebooks on to the new officers. (See: What to Put in an Officer Notebook.)

♦ After elections, find time for the outgoing and incoming officers to meet together. Old officers can talk about general issues and concerns and then the officers can pair up and talk about issues related to each position.

♦ New officers should meet before they leave for the summer to set goals and get to know each other. (See: Planning a New Officer Strategy Session.)

♦ Establish a good filing system.

PRSSA President’s Sourcebook
Let's Get Rid of Management

People don't want to be managed. They want to be led. Whoever head of a world manager? World leader, yes. Educational leader. Political leader. Scout leader. Community leader. Labor leader. Business leader. They lead. They don't manage. The carrot always wins over the stick. Ask your horse, You can lead your horse to water, but you can't manage him to drink. If you want to manage somebody, manage yourself. Do that well and you'll be ready to stop managing. And start leading.

A message as published in the Wall Street Journal by United Technologies Corporation, Hartford, Connecticut 06101
What to Put in an Officer Notebook

• A calendar of events from the previous year
  Include when the event/project took place so that next year’s officers can develop an appropriate time schedule.

• Copies of all PRSSA and university forms (ex: membership forms, space/office requests, financial forms, travel forms, etc.)
  Being able to look at previous forms will save the new officers time and lessen the confusion.

• Samples of everything
  Include items such as speaker names/contacts, meeting posters, thank you letters, meeting agendas, newsletters, membership brochures, award submissions and ideas for National Conference roll call. Also list all recruitment, membership and programming ideas

• List of important phone numbers
  Compile a list of frequently used phone numbers (PRSA liaison, professional advisor, national headquarters, office janitor, etc.).

• A copy of the chapter handbook

• National and chapter bylaws

• Descriptions of officer positions
  Having these in writing will prevent job duties from being neglected or from changing.

• An inventory of everything your chapter owns
  List items such as a chapter camera, banners and office supplies so that they are not misplaced or forgotten when the new officers take over. Also list where each item is located and who is responsible for its safekeeping.

• Meeting protocol
  Include a copy of Robert’s Rules of Order and instructions on how and whom to introduce at meetings (faculty advisor, professional advisor, speaker, special guests, etc.).

• Advice to future officers
  Address any problems that your group faced throughout the year and any suggestions that you have for future improvement. Also list ideas or programs that you did not have an opportunity to implement.

PRSSA President’s Sourcebook
Planning a New Officer Strategy Session

What is a new officer strategy session?
♦ A chance for new chapter officers to get to know each other, learn about the organization, become familiar with policies and procedures and plan goals for the year.

Who should attend?
♦ All new officers, your faculty advisor and your professional advisor. If there is a national committee member in your area, you might consider inviting him/her as well.

When should the strategy session be held?
♦ Plan your strategy session on a Saturday or Sunday soon after elections. You should allow at least four hours.

Sample agenda for a new officer strategy session:

11:00 - 11:30 a.m. Introductions and icebreakers
11:30 - 11:45 a.m. History of PRSSA and opportunities available (National Conference, Assembly, FORUM, Teahan Awards, Bateman, etc.)
11:45 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Discussion of officer roles (responsibilities of each office, faculty advisor, professional advisor)
12:00 - 12:30 p.m. What do we want to get out of PRSSA? What do we want to offer our members?
12:30 - 1:00 p.m. Break for lunch
1:00 - 2:00 p.m. Set goals and measurable objectives for the year (Define evaluation process and check points.)
2:00 - 2:45 p.m. What do we need to start on immediately? (Plan fall recruitment efforts, first meeting and first newsletter.) Delegate responsibilities for summer and set deadlines
2:45 - 3:00 p.m. Create directory of summer and fall phone numbers, addresses and e-mail addresses Wrap up

PRSSA President’s Sourcebook
**Setting Goals and Objectives**

*Why should you set goals?*
- To provide the organization with a focus for the year
- To help with decision-making
- To decide what is most important
- To make the group more organized
- To get all officers thinking on the same track

*What is a goal?*
- A broad statement that describes where you want your chapter to be over a period of time

*What makes a good goal?*
- You have identified what you most want to accomplish
- You have identified goals that can be realistically accomplished
- You have identified goals that address chapter needs and support the PRSSA mission

*What is an objective?*
- A statement that shows how you will achieve a specific goal
- A statement that is realistic and can be measured
- Includes a date by which you hope to achieve results

*What makes a good objective?*
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Compatible (with other goals)

Sample goals for your chapter:
- To increase membership
- To improve chapter programming
- To increase campus visibility
- To increase professional relations
- To enter Bateman
- To win a Teahan award
- To host the regional conference in your area
- To send members to National Conference
- To send a delegate to National Assembly
- To have members apply for scholarships

PRSSA President’s Sourcebook
Examples of goals and objectives:

**Goal:** To increase our chapter’s involvement on a national level

**Objective:** To get 20 members involved in national activities by the end of the school year

**Strategy #1:** To send 10 members to the National Conference on (date)

**Strategy #2:** To find five members willing to participate in the Bateman competition by (date)

**Strategy #3:** To involve at least five members in this year’s national campaign team

**Goal:** To increase the number of members in our chapter

**Objective:** To increase membership by 25% by October 1 and by an additional 25% by March 1

**Strategy #1:** To visit each journalism/communication class and make a presentation about PRSSA during the first two weeks of the semester/quarter

**Strategy #2:** To have an information booth at the summer organization fair on (date)

**Strategy #3:** To send a letter to all new public relations majors by the first week of school
Easy Ways to Recognize Your Volunteers

1. Smile
2. Recognize them in front of the group at meetings
3. Ask for a personal opinion
4. Feature them in your newsletter
5. Offer letters of recommendation
6. Keep challenging them
7. Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements
8. Write thank-you notes
9. Surprise them with a pizza party
10. Nominate them for campus awards
11. Award special citations for extraordinary achievements
12. Utilize space in the newspaper
13. Honor a “Volunteer of the Month”
14. Provide scholarships to conferences or workshops
15. SAY “THANK YOU!”
HINTS ON MOTIVATING VOLUNTEERS

1. Keep things interesting so members will want to stay involved. *(see Programming Ideas)*
2. Study members and determine what makes each tick.
3. Be a good listener.
4. Criticize constructively and privately.
5. Praise in public.
6. Give credit where it is due.
7. Let the members in on your plans and programs at an early stage.
8. Play up the positive but admit to your failures.
9. Be consistent.
10. Keep members informed on matters affecting them.
11. Give members a chance to take part in the decisions.
12. Get to know members personally.
13. Place members on projects or committees where their interests lie.
15. Tell members why an idea was adopted.
16. Make sure that members have adequate support for projects.
Fundraising Ideas

• Sweatshirt/T-shirt Sales
  Sweatshirts and T-shirts with the university name and department ( ______ State Journalism or ________ University College of Communication) have been very popular for many chapters. They also have a large profit margin per shirt.

• Temporary PR Services
  Provide temporary public relations services to professional organizations in your area. Offer to do everything from stuffing envelopes to working with the media at special events. In exchange for your services, ask organizations to make a donation to your chapter.

• Auction/Raffle
  Ask for local vendors/corporations to donate prizes. Sell tickets or hold the auction in a heavy traffic area on campus. (Parent’s weekend is another good time.)

• Public Relations Workshop
  Invite other campus organizations to send a representative to a workshop that will develop their public relations skills. (Many organizations, especially fraternities and sororities, have a designated PR person.) Charge participants a workshop fee and teach them how to work with the media, prepare a crisis communication plan, write a press release, etc.

• Speaker Series
  Bring in local professionals to speak to students about the public relations/communications field. Organize a dinner and sell tickets to the event.

• Networking Directory
  Compile the names of department alumni and public relations contacts in your area. Sell the directory to students.

• “Slave for a Day”
  Faculty, staff or other student organizations hire chapter members for random projects in exchange for a donation to the chapter.
**Programming Ideas**

♦ Speakers
Invite local PRSA members to speak to your chapter about what they do or on topics such as entering the job market, important PR skills or how to get an internship. Ask your faculty and professional advisors to recommend local professionals. You don’t have to live in a big city to get interesting speakers. Find faculty members or campus departments that deal with public relations issues. A political science professor might be able to discuss political campaigns, the sports administration department can offer information about dealing with the sports media and the alumni office can talk about fundraising campaigns or alumni relations. Consider panel discussions with students, faculty and professionals.

♦ Workshops
Instead of a speaker at every meeting, try offering workshops to develop your members’ skills. Reserve a computer lab on campus and hold a technology workshop to learn a new software program, explore the Internet or learn the basics of web designing. Ask members to bring their résumés and/or portfolios and critique each other. Put members into small groups and ask each group to plan a reaction to an imaginary crisis. Have the groups share their solutions.

♦ Socials
Your group will be more cohesive if members enjoy being together. Get together for dinner after a general meeting, plan a holiday party, design a float for the Homecoming parade or organize a weekend retreat.
Recruitment Tips

• Classroom Visits
  Have officers visit journalism/communication classes to make a brief presentation about PRSSA. Talk about benefits (networking, skill development, Associate Membership, scholarships), travel opportunities (National Conference, regional conference, National Assembly) and how to get involved.

• Student Activity Fair
  Set up a booth and have officers available to answer questions. Provide a sign-up sheet so you can gather names and numbers of prospective members.

• Bookmarks
  On paper or cardboard, print double-sided bookmarks with a brief description of PRSSA, meeting dates for the semester/quarter and a contact phone number. Get permission from campus bookstores to put the bookmarks in journalism/communication textbooks before classes start. Distribute them when you make class visits or ask professors to pass them out to students.

• Professor/Faculty Reminders
  Put PRSSA announcements in professor/faculty mailboxes. Ask them to remind students about meetings and activities.

• Letters to Prospective Members
  Obtain a list of freshman or prospective members from your department office or admissions office. Send a letter to the students explaining the benefits of PRSSA membership and invite them to your first meeting.

• Recruit Outside of Your Department
  Don’t limit PRSSA to just public relations majors. Recruit students in other departments such as marketing, advertising, political science, English, speech communication or business.

• Extra Credit
  Talk to faculty members to see if they will offer their students extra credit for becoming a PRSSA member or for attending meetings and events.

• Brochures
  Create a brochure that explains the benefits of PRSSA membership. You can distribute them during class visits and at the student activity fair.

• Newsletter
  Use your first fall newsletter to talk about chapter programs and activities.