

Recognizing the Personal Value of Accreditation in Public Relations

By Kathleen M. Giery, APR, CPRC

The issue is not why *would you* or why *should you* get accredited, but why *wouldn't* you?

If you've been challenged to justify your position as public relations practitioner, be it to your boss, a prospective client or other departments in your organization, having the credentials of Accredited in Public Relations behind your name might give you all the justification you need.

There are myriad professions -whose practitioners are measured by the value of their credentials. The most common that comes to mind is the CPA, certified public accountant. Would you hire a non-CPA to prepare your annual tax return? Of course you wouldn't. Would you want a non-credentialed architect to design a new addition to your house or a non-credentialed engineer to inspect it? How ridiculous.

These examples give pause to working as a public relations professional without earning our industry's credential – APR. Why would you want to?

The APR is a voluntary accreditation program designed not only to demonstrate an individual's commitment to the public relations profession and adher-

ence to standards of excellence and ethics, but also to advance the profession and unify our practice. Earning this credential separates the wheat from the chaff among professionals, so to speak, and validates that the credentialed practitioners exhibit a superior base of knowledge, skills and abilities.

A Practitioner's Journey

In the early days of my public relations career, I thought the APR was all about getting the certificate, getting recognized at the annual conference, the pomp and circumstance. I was wrong about that; however. Having earned a bachelor's degree in something other than PR, I also knew it was about proving that I had earned the right to call myself a public relations professional and proving to myself and others that I understood the dynamics of the profession. In that regard, I wasn't wrong.

I maximized all that my local FPRA chapter and two others had to offer in

terms of study guides, group sessions, tapes (yes, this was pre-Pod cast) and practice for the oral presentation. I read and reread and read again the text books until I was reciting my notes in my sleep.

Come time for the exam, it became evident that I was not just being tested on my ability to memorize, but rather on my ability to discern the most appropriate answers and solutions to public relations situations. Of all the possible ‘right’ answers, the real test was, what are the ‘best’ answers? Passage of the test relied on knowledge that only would come from experience in the profession, not from a book or a college class. Hearing my name called with APR behind it was my first, true professional accomplishment. And knowing that I sought the credential on my own – my boss had no idea – was a tremendous personal accomplishment.

When You Are Ready

The minimum standard for sitting for the APR exam is five years of practice in the public relations profession. Most practitioners haven’t hit their career strides by then and may even have a limited repertoire of experiences under their belts; that could either be one’s deterrent - or his motivation.

I wouldn’t encourage anyone to sit for this exam before he is ready, but once he is, I’d say not to waste another day. Go get accredited.

If you’ve spent the first five years of your career doing the same function – in other words, getting one year of experience five times over – then it’s high time to expand your professional horizons and take on new challenges that will introduce you to other areas of public relations. You won’t be well-positioned to sit for the APR exam if you only can draw on the experiences of writing releases and creating printed tools.

On the other hand, if you’ve had the good fortune of myriad experiences implementing the gamut of public relations functions and understand not only the importance of the PR formula but also how to implement it, you likely *are* well-positioned to start preparing for this exam. FPR and its chapters, as well as the Universal Accreditation Board, offer a wide variety of study aides to help you through the process.

Armed with an APR

So you studied and passed. Now you’re Accredited in Public Relations. You’re an APR. Where’s the value? Where’s the payoff?

If you haven’t already let your employers know the value of this credential, you share it with them. You put it as a requirement in your job description and those of staff who work for you. You share it with your clients and incorporate it into every client pitch. You draw the distinction between an accredited public relations professional and one who isn’t.

That’s not to say, automatically, someone who does not have the credential is less experienced or capable – clearly not; however, there is much to be said for someone who puts themselves through a voluntary credentialing process – it’s not easy, mind you – to better their own career.

There are so many practitioners out there – maybe you’re one of them – who shrug off the APR by saying it won’t matter to their current boss or won’t get them a raise. That very well may be the case, but are they going to let that stop them from bettering themselves professionally? That simply makes no sense. It’s fool’s logic.

By entering into a voluntary process of professional credentialing, you’re telling your *future* boss that you cared enough to take yourself to that next level. And

another five to 10 years down the road, after you've established yourself as public relations counselor and earned your spot at the board table, you'll do it all over again with the CPRC – the Certified Public Relations Counselor exam.

As long as we are employed, there truly is no end to professional development; it could be argued that it doesn't end with retirement, either. We wouldn't decide one day that we don't need any more seminars or conferences, don't have to read any more

books or journals, don't need association membership or that there is no value to board positions with the organizations that govern our respective specialties. We keep looking for those new opportunities that will make us grow as practitioners, and as FPRA Founder, Col. John Dillin, APR, CPRC, would say, that 'help us do our jobs better.'

So, truly, the issue is not why *would you* or why *should you* get accredited, but why *wouldn't you*?

About The Author



Kathleen M. Giery, APR, CPRC, is the director of public relations for LifeQuest Organ Recovery Services, the federally designated organ donor program for northern Florida. She has been a member of FPRA for 14 years and has served in many leadership

positions including state president, Counselors'

Network chair and the Florida Public Relations Education Foundation chair. She has twice been named FPRA Member of the Year, the only member of the Association to hold that distinction. She currently serves on the faculty of the national Donor Designation Collaborative and on the Association of Organ Procurement Organization's Public Relations Council. Although she makes her home in Gainesville, she travels widely, most often to indulge her passion for antique hunting.

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