

**2010 Atlas Award Presentation  
On International Public Relations**

***“Diversity: what it means – and what it could mean – in the global society and the  
global public relations profession”***

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***“Diversity: what it means – and what it could mean – in the global society and the global public relations profession”***

*In Walnut Creek, California, and in other places in that state, there are many thousands of walnut trees that strike a visitor as very strange. These trees have a dark bark about a quarter of the way up their slim trunks and a much lighter bark from that point upward. The trees are hybrids. The lower sections are Native American walnut which develop strong root systems even in inhospitable soil. The upper parts are English walnut grafted on because of their superior ability to bear nuts. The trees are among the most productive in the world.*

– Foreword, “An American Journey”, John Paluszek, American Ethnic Press, 1981.

A professional recognition as significant as the Atlas Award, that is, one bestowed by colleagues for “lifetime achievement”, requires that the recipient be humble and grateful. And, indeed, I am humbled and grateful in full measure because I now travel in the wake of many very accomplished and distinguished predecessors.

But an Atlas Award also requires a great deal of reflection – careful thought about the choice of a life-learning that you want to share with all who will listen. You want to seem wise, visionary and relevant. So choose carefully.

Well, why choose “diversity”? Surely there have been, and will continue to be, a plethora of excellent studies, commentaries and programs examining this crucial subject – both within the public relations profession and, of course, in local, national and international discourse. Most of these, rightfully, make the case for justice and equal opportunity for the individual, “the business case” for organizational diversity, or both.

But what of the *diversity of ideas* and the great potential social benefits of blending those diverse ideas? Ideas that, when blended, beget new political, economic and social systems. Blended ideas that contribute to harmony and cooperation and progress through dialogue and consensus, difficult as that may be? And what of the role of public relations and communications in such critical interaction? There’s not enough discussion at that level. So where is the bridge from discussion of individual diversity to institutional and societal diversity?

*The New York Times* and *Newsweek* to the rescue! Here is the *Times* in a recent promotional exclamation on its commitment to diversity:

***“Great organizations [and they might also have said, “great nations”] thrive and grow on a diversity of thought and ideas.”***

And Newsweek adds, tellingly:

*“To be creative requires divergent thinking (generating many unique ideas) and then convergent thinking (combining those ideas into the best result)” [emphasis added].*

Columnist Tom Friedman, presenting that Newsweek gem, added this for his readers: “And where does divergent thinking come from? It comes from being exposed to divergent ideas and cultures and people and intellectual disciplines.”

So California’s hybrid walnut trees stand as a metaphor for what can also happen in global sociology. That’s because cultural anthropologists have told us that a merger of *cultures* can produce a strong, influential and lasting society. A hybrid, if you will. Think Greco-Roman. Or, perhaps, the epitome of cultural blending, America.

**Yes, over time, cultures do evolve. Nations do change. Societies and their political and economic systems do develop.**

**And often, over time, public relations – in theory and in practice – can help in such transitions.**

Is this a fitting subject for a 2010 Atlas Award presentation? Is this something relevant to the international public relations portfolio and canon? I will put the case to you that it is. And more than ever, it is relevant in this age of evolving information and communications technology (ICT) that is transforming global society.

The critically-important confluence of today’s communications technology and ideas relating to global and regional issues is well addressed in this quote by my friend, David Holdridge, president of the consulting firm, Bridging the Divide: It is from his recent article in the newspaper, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, written shortly after David’s recent return from having spent six years as a peace and justice consultant in the Middle East:

*“Sovereignty is not what it used to be...Now...the new technologies and a youth fed up with a century of war and despair are, silently but inexorably, creating the union that eluded the Baathists, [and] the Integrists. They are, in historic proportions, going online. They are accelerating daily the great trade in ideas over the World Wide Web.”*

*-The Daily Star Lebanon, September 21, 2010*

“Accelerating daily the great trade in ideas over the World Wide Web”. How does public relations fit into this kind of world?

I contend that “the case for public relations” in this global social evolution rests on a very solid foundation, a central concept of professional public relations. It was, I believe, first articulated by Alan Center at a Public Relations Society of America conference several decades ago. Alan said that a true profession must generate a fundamental social benefit. For medicine, it’s health. For law, it’s order. And for public relations, it’s harmony.

Harmony. That may sound ethereal, presumptuous, or even arrogant, or naïve as a public relations objective or outcome. But it is none of those. It is actually accurate and quite scalable.

If we truly operate ethically at the interface between an organization and society ... if we genuinely apply communications to build reciprocal relationships ... if the resulting dialogue generates cooperation between buyer and seller, employer and employee, government and citizens and – yes, between and among nations – then harmonies follow.

The Global Alliance For Public Relations and Communication Management is attempting to make this case in our new “Stockholm Accords” program. The “Accords” now being discussed by public relations professionals around the world, present a new articulation of the critical role of public relations for organizational success in the evolving digital society.

### **Overcoming formidable obstacles**

Cooperation in the global society – difficult to achieve? Certainly. Elusive? No doubt. Sustainable? Often. Formidable obstacles exist. A quick scan of a selected literary spectrum can be daunting:

The late Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his 1993 book, “Pandemonium”, presented the dimensions of cultural diversity on the planet. Citing a study by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, he wrote that “we can estimate that there are 6170 languages [sic] spoken in the world at this time.” Which led him to this conclusion: “The challenge is to make the world safe for, and from ethnicity.”

Fast forward to today: Of course, from such a diversity of cultures there emanate many deep, long lasting – and, tragically, violent – clashes. Focusing briefly on perhaps the most existential of these today, “Islam and the West”, can help us understand a defining divide of our time. Here is some context from journalist Eliza Griswold’s new book, “The Tenth Parallel – Dispatches From The Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam”:

*“For more than five centuries in Southeast Asia, Christians and Muslims have gone through periods of peaceful co-existence and moments of intense competition and conflict, which have usually begun as a scramble for economic power in a political vacuum”.*

Even in the face of that rather discouraging context and today’s many daily distressing headlines, I choose to be like the ingénue in the musical “South Pacific” – a “cockeyed optimist”. Despite dispiriting ideological violence, unending international tension and the dissonance that echoes in today’s greatly fragmented yet increasingly polarized media, there are nevertheless persuasive voices that encourage two-way communication, dialogue and, ultimately, mutual understanding.

One such influential voice is that of Valin Nasr, a Tufts University professor who recently wrote that in our interconnected world – again, over the long term, – economic integration may well trump some critical ideological differences. But he has said it much better than I, so I quote:

*“... there is a vital but unseen rising force in the Islamic world – a new business-minded middle class – that is building a vibrant new Muslim world economy ... and their distinct blending of Islam and capitalism is the key to bringing lasting reform and to defeating fundamentalism ... They are the people the West can and must do business with.”*

“The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class and What It Means For Our World” – Valin Nasr, Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc., 2009

That point of view resonated with me when I visited the beautiful Blue Mosque in Istanbul last year. Because at the main entrance of this architectural marvel, these words of the Prophet are inscribed in white calligraphy:

*A merchant is the beloved of God.*

Interestingly, a few decades ago, in a very different culture and idiom, Vernon Walters, an American general-turned-diplomat, offered this very compatible point of view:

*Let us work to make the world so economically-interdependent that war will go out of style.”*

And for those of us in public relations, the sentiments of one of our own – Shameem Abdul Jalil, a member of the Global Alliance Board who is a banking executive in Kuala Lumpur and a devout Muslim – may resonate even more directly:

*“Managing diversity is not an easy agenda, but implementing the right public relations strategies ... promises optimism. No one can deny the vital role public relations plays in ensuring that communities reap the benefits of diversity through building bridges rather than barricades. This applies to multi-ethnic relations within a given nation or across borders*

*“... I support this Islamic response to diversity and pluralism...The middle ground – neither apologetic nor rejectionist is – actually the best hope of the twenty first century in realizing better relations all round ... The Qur’an is inclusive in spirit viewing truth and knowledge in all forms as the common property of all human beings regardless of their origins.”*

### **The Public Relations Effect**

Can public relations professionals, in our day-to-day work, help connect the cultures – the societies – that generate these thoughts? Maybe not every day. Maybe not directly. But with the creativity and the instinct for harmony inherent in professional public relations we can certainly make a contribution.

There is a particularly stimulating opportunity here for international public relations professionals. It’s in the area of public diplomacy and international exchange programs.

One of the best examples with which I’ve been involved is the “Arab and American Business Fellowship” run by Business For Diplomatic Action, a private-sector initiative composed of leaders from public relations, advertising, academia, government and civil society organizations.

The Arab American Fellowship Program is an exchange in which young business leaders from the Arab world and American counterparts visit each others’ business organizations and communities learning not only business philosophies and operations but, importantly, each others’ cultures as well.

For a “cockeyed optimist”, there is even more fundamental encouragement. Author Robert Wright, in his iconic “win-win” book, “Non Zero”, provides long-term assurance. *Really* long term. He traces in great detail the long “upward arrow of human history” – the gradual, not unbroken but nevertheless inevitable, growth of human cooperation and interdependence. The coming of today’s interdependent global society, Wright tells us, “has been so probable as to inspire wonder.”

Martin Luther King said it more succinctly: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Wright also pays due respect to technology as a stimulant of interdependence: “... the liberating upshot of some new technologies – information technologies, in particular – is one of the cheerier themes in the unfolding of cultural evolution.”

[And here’s a relevant quick trip into the metaphysical: Jesuit anthropologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the coming “Noosphere”, eerily predictive of the Internet and Wikipedia, as described by Wright: “...the electronically mediated web of thought that had taken crystalline form by the end of the second millennium. This is a mind to which the whole species can contribute, and a mind whose workings will have consequences for the whole species – epic consequences of one sort or another.”]

### **Global interdependence – indisputable**

Perhaps. But of course we have to descend from the 40,000-foot intellectual level and get practical. It is now indisputable that global interdependence prevails – for good or for ill. As an optimist, I choose “for

good”, proudly accepting the designation of “globophile” (joining “The First Globalists”, John Zogby’s description of today’s young adults, 18 to 29 years old.)

Some evidence of our multi-polar world where diverse ideas are converging to re-shape geopolitics, business, and virtually every social institution:

- We are increasingly, linked by trade, capital flows, development, tourism, environment, energy and other resources and, of course, information/communication technology. Unfortunately, we are also connected by epidemics and other natural disasters, crime, terrorism, ideological conflict and global issues in environment, natural resources, immigration and poverty.
- Capitalism: Yours, Mine or Ours? The choice among economic systems is no longer limited to “laissez faire, free market capitalism” (Ayn Rand and Milton Freedman), current democratic, mixed-economy capitalism and authoritarian, state capitalism (China). Now comes a possible blend, “Capitalism 4.0”, a projection of Anatole Kaletsky, editor-at-large of *The Times of London*, in which “smaller, smarter governments” would partner more effectively with the private sector.

Which will become the “new normal”?

- Multilateral institutions and rising national powers are re-shaping global finance and economics. The traditional Group-8 of influential national economies has morphed into the Group-20. The new Basel III agreement mandates greater capital reserves for banks around the world. “Brick” used to mean a humble building material; now “Brick” signifies the fast-growing economies, and influence, of Brazil, Russia, India and China.
- In 2009, the international share of revenue at six major U.S. tech companies ranged from 82% for Oracle to 50% for Cisco. Coca Cola reported that in the first quarter of 2010, about three-quarters of its revenue came from outside North America. Burger King is owned by a Brazilian group of investors while Seven Eleven convenience stores are the property of a Japanese investment consortium.
- Business zeitgeist: What was once essentially a European concept, “Corporate Social Responsibility” (or “Sustainability”), has swept across the globe. Some six thousand companies (and, I’m happy to say, Ketchum is one of them), have pledged to operate according to the United Nations Global Compact principles in environment, human rights, labor rights and transparency; to maintain membership in the Global Compact, these companies must file annual “Communications of Progress”.

The annual “social report” now published by a reported 4,000 companies may soon be fully integrated into the annual financial report that is mandated by most national financial regulatory bodies. A powerful new consortium of international professional societies, The International Integrated Reporting Committee, is committed to make this happen.

- Education: A key finding of the University of Maryland 2009-2010 “first study of how public relations students are being educated around the world” (conducted for The Global Alliance and the Commission on Public Relations Education and sponsored by The Public Relations Society of America Foundation): “Although we found that curricula are shaped somewhat by each country’s history, politics, economics and social values, there is still a common core of course work that parallels the five-course model adopted by the Commission on Public Relations Education.”
- And, of direct interest to those of us in public relations, several major international counseling firms are now generating half, or more, of their revenues and profits internationally.

## Public Relations, A Global Profession

And what of the diversity of ideas *within* the global public relations profession?

First, let's agree that public relations "travels well". Its central idea – applying communications to build or maintain reciprocal relationships – is protean. It relates to a natural, very human proclivity. Associated with that characteristic is that public relations is adaptable to many political, economic and social systems. So, the central concept, i.e. *relations with the public*, is manifested with many variations that relate to tradition, custom and law around the world.

For many years, I have had the great benefit of traveling the world over on behalf of my very supportive employer, Ketchum, for the Public Relations Society of America and as an officer – and most recently, chair – of The Global Alliance For Public Relations and Communication Management.

Here are only a few of many possible examples of diversity in public relations practice around the world that have greatly impressed me:

- **Dubai:** The Mideast Public Relations Association, a Global Alliance member, requires that its Associate Members, analogous to PRSA's "Young Professionals", commit to at least ten hours of continuous professional development each year of their membership.
- **China:** Universities teaching public relations mainly prepare their students to represent China favorably on the world stage. Events like the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai World's Fair represent great opportunities for the students to apply their talents.

Also, Ketchum now has six offices in China. This "capitalist invasion" is no doubt causing Mao to turn over in his grave; and it's likely a dervish-like spin because one of our key services is presenting transparency counsel for Chinese government-owned companies who have decided to seek capital on international stock markets.

- **Vietnam (Yes, that Vietnam):** Even as public relations principles take root in Vietnam, cultural traditions heavily influence its practice. For example, fearing that Vietnamese youth will be negatively influenced by social media and Western culture that glorify personal fame, the government has blocked Internet sites such as Facebook and is developing its own social networking platform.
- **New Zealand:** At Waikato University, the public relations major is taught in The School of Management.
- **Indonesia:** A leading university in Jakarta has developed an introductory public relations course for professionals in other disciplines – accounting, finance and marketing – who plan to remain and grow in those disciplines.
- **Canada/U.S./South Africa:** Accrediting bodies in these countries are sharing information as they work toward developing a public relations *entry-level* credential.
- **Brazil and Puerto Rico:** Public relations professionals must be licensed by the government in order to practice.
- **Austria:** The national public relations association has a Corporate Social Responsibility Lab "to strengthen the association's CSR and its responsibility to claim a major role in CSR for the PR profession."

- **Russia:** A few years ago, I attended a celebration in St. Petersburg marking the tenth anniversary of the introduction of public relations education in that country. Faculty and students from Russian universities travelled from the far reaches of that country – as distant as Vladivostok, seven time zones away – to participate in the celebration.

The Global Alliance’s “Country Landscapes” project, accessible on the GA website at ([www.globalalliancepr.org](http://www.globalalliancepr.org)), presents in-depth profiles on such diversity of public relations practice in some twenty-two countries around the world.

All of this having been said, is there a “sound-bite summary” for so broad and deep a topic? If there is, it’s the simple mantra The Global Alliance projects continually to our members and other professionals in seventy countries around the world:

**We can – and we must – all learn from each other.**

And in doing so, as we continue to share the diverse ideas that are powering progress in the global society – as well as in our profession – we’d do well to remember the advice offered by Dr. Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, who addressed this year’s Global Alliance World Public Relations Forum in Stockholm:

*“Public relations have become even more crucial ... provided global and other issues are addressed in the framework of all stakeholders.”*

One adds to the counsel of so distinguished a leader with caution. But it does seem appropriate to conclude this year’s Atlas Award presentation with this:

Let us embrace change. But more than that, let’s help lead such change in a positive direction by applying the principles of public relations. And let’s proceed in the context of a global profession contributing to a global society that is diverse yet interdependent and progressive.

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### **About the 2010 Atlas Award Recipient – John L. Paluszek, APR, Fellow PRSA**

John L. Paluszek, APR, Fellow PRSA, is senior counsel at Ketchum, specializing in reputation management and corporate responsibility. He also is chairman of The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, PRSA liaison to the United Nations, and a member of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, as well as The Commission on Public Relations Education.

Paluszek, who was PRSA president and COO in 1989, has held many offices in the Society and has received numerous professional awards. In 1988, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, he represented PRSA in the first U.S.-Soviet Bilateral Information Talks in Moscow, and East-West Public Relations Summit in Vienna, Austria. In December 2002, he chaired the plenary session on communications at the Berlin United Nations Global Compact Forum and, in April 2004, addressed the Paris Global Compact meeting, “Sustainable Consumption.” He has lectured on corporate responsibility and reputation management at 10 U.S. colleges, as well as at business conferences on four continents.

A former journalist, Paluszek has written many commentaries for business and academic journals. He is the author of “An American Journey,” his immigrant family’s multi-generational memoir, as well as “Organizing for Corporate Social Responsibility” and “Will the Corporation Survive?”

Paluszek has a Bachelor of Arts from Manhattan College, where he is a trustee-emeritus.

### **Atlas Award Recipients**

**1995 – John M. Reed, APR, Fellow PRSA, United States**

**1996 – José Rolim Valença, Brazil**

**Taija Kohara, Japan (Special Posthumous Award)**

**1997 – Harold Burson, APR, Fellow PRSA, United States**

**1998 – Lawrence G. Foster, APR, Fellow PRSA, United States**

**1999 – Dennis Buckle, Great Britain**

**Jacques Coup de Frejac, France**

**2000 – Gavin Anderson, United States**

**2001 – Barbara M. Burns, APR, IPRA Fellow, United States**

**2002 – Göran E. Sjöberg, Sweden**

**2003 – Daniel J. Edelman, APR, Fellow PRSA, United States**

**2004 – Sylvan M. Barnet, Jr., United States**

**Arthur Reef, United States**

**2005 – Betül Mardin, IPRA Fellow, Turkey**

**2006 – Manuel Alonso M., Mexico**

**Mike Okereke, Nigeria**

**2007 – Jack Bergen, United States**

**Loula Zaklama, Egypt**

**2008 – Ceyda Aydede, Turkey**

**2009 – Michael Morley, United States**

**2010 – John L. Paluszek, APR, Fellow PRSA, United States**

## **About the PRSA International Section**

**History and Goals:** Through professional development, networking programs and Chapter outreach initiatives, the PRSA International Professional Interest Section serves the professional needs of PRSA members entering, or currently engaged in, the growing practice of international public relations. Further, the Section, established in January 1994, provides a forum and network for the exchange of information for practitioners worldwide and acts as a resource for PRSA members whose professional work may require global or country-specific PR expertise.

**Membership:** The Section is open to public relations professionals worldwide who are involved in or who have an interest in international public relations and who belong to PRSA. Of the Section's membership, more than 10 percent work and live outside the United States. For more information on becoming a member, visit the Section's web site ([www.international.prsa.org](http://www.international.prsa.org)).

### **The International Section 2010 Executive Committee**

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