

MASTERING BUSINESS FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Insights and Advice from the
C-suite of Leading Brands

Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators is a gem and a must-read for anyone aspiring to lead communications for any organization. It makes clear that to be a top communicator today you have to be a business leader first, mine data and relationships, and find ways to transform strategy into relationships and results.

— *Mike Fernandez, Chief Executive Officer,
U.S., Burson-Marsteller*

Matt and Ron are on a mission: To make sure PR's next generation is schooled in the foundations of business and thus regularly asked into the "room where it happens." Through chapters contributed by many of today's most successful communicators, along with observations by leading C-suite executives, their newest book will go a long way towards helping students — as well as those building careers — easily and more fully understand business at the intersection of strategic communications. I used their first book in my classroom at Boston University. I will use their new one, too.

— *Ray Kotcher, Professor of the Practice,
Boston University College of Communication
and Non-Executive Chairman, Ketchum*

Wow! What an outstanding read! Featuring stories and insights from the best of the best in the industry, *Mastering Business For Strategic Communicators* must be required reading for students and practitioners alike in any area of business, communication, and public relations.

— *Tina McCorkindale, Ph.D., APR,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Institute for Public Relations*

An indispensable collection of career-defining insights from an unbelievably impressive group of battle-tested business leaders. This will quickly become mandatory reading for me and my team, and a constant travel companion.

— *Torod Neptune, Worldwide VP Communications and
Chief Communications Officer,
Lenovo Group, Ltd.*

Backstopping every C-suite are their strategic communications leaders, counseling businesses on how to increase shareholder value, maintain trust in a crisis, and enhance reputation. *Mastering Business* provides a front row seat as to how diverse companies navigate the communications land mines populating our ever changing media landscape.

— *Barri Rafferty,
Partner and President, Ketchum*

Mastering Business is a succinct, readable and compelling work. It does a wonderful job capturing the way the profession has evolved and how it might look in the future. The insights here from Jeff Winton, Chuck Greener, Tony Cervone, Kathy Beiser and many other true giants in the field present a blueprint for those who want to be trusted advisors with a seat at the table where business decisions are made. It is an essential read for anyone pursuing a career in communications.

— *Bill Heyman, Executive Recruiter,
President and CEO, Heyman Associates*

I've recommended Ragas and Culp's first book, *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators*, to dozens of professional colleagues and have made it a central textbook for my students.

I can see now that I'll need to make room for their new book, *Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators*. This compilation of perspectives from some of the top names in strategic communications is remarkably timely and thorough, and should be on the top of the reading list not only for communications professionals, but for C-Suite leaders who want to truly understand the role that communications plays in helping them achieve their business purpose.

— Matt Kucharski, *President,
Padilla and Adjunct Professor,
University of Minnesota School of Journalism and
Mass Communications*

Ragas and Culp's new book provides sound recommendations and actionable steps young communicators can take to make sure they are prepared and able to show maximum value in their roles. Through an excellent collection of relevant stories from some of the world's top communicators, their book is less about earning a seat at the table and more about keeping it throughout your career.

— Matt Tidwell, *Ph.D., APR, Program Director,
Master's in Integrated Marketing Communications,
University of Kansas*

In a rare collection of contemporary essays from high-ranking professionals in the field, Ragas and Culp offer students an insider's look at how corporate communications experts guide their companies to meet opportunities, manage change, speak the truth and lead. This book — through its research, arguments, testimonials and concrete examples — will be indispensable to readers in accessing the practical business insight necessary for succeeding in today's corporate communications jobs.

— María Len-Ríos, *Ph.D., Associate Professor, Public
Relations, Grady College of Journalism and Mass
Communication, University of Georgia*

Ragas and Culp provide an extensive follow-up to their first book, *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators*. This new book delivers what the title promises: sharp insights from today's leading communication professionals in the C-Suite. With a glossary, list of resources, and engaging writing style, the book will be a valuable trove of knowledge and inspiration for students as well as current professionals aspiring to the C-suite.

— *Tim Penning, Ph.D., APR,*
Professor of Advertising and Public Relations,
School of Communications,
Grand Valley State University

The masterful leaders of business communication have done it again. Ron Culp and Matt Ragas put out the no-nonsense handbook for enterprise communicators — and for those of us teaching new-wave students — on the reality of sustaining stakeholder values. On this base, they're now giving us direct, succinct and highly readable counsel from leaders in corporations and organizations on what works and what's changing in enterprise strategies to sustain and strengthen critical stakeholder connections.

— *E. Bruce Harrison, Professor, Graduate Studies,*
Master's in Public Relations & Corporate
Communications program, Georgetown University

The modern communications professional not only needs to be familiar with the “business of business,” but rather they need to be able to understand what the marketing, finance, accounting and other departments contribute to their organization's well-being. Culp and Ragas' *Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators* takes that next step from their previous book by providing real-world advice from legends and experts in the field that already have that seat at the table. Any communications

professional who wants to become a top-level executive needs to read this book.

— *Kenon A. Brown, Ph.D.,*
Assistant Professor and Graduate Coordinator,
Department of Advertising and Public Relations,
The University of Alabama

Mastering Business is a great resource for young professionals who aspire to advance to management positions. I especially appreciated the inclusion of views from other members of the C-suite such as operations, human resources, legal and CEOs. The advice the CCOs provided is grounded in their personal experiences, which they freely share. I would highly recommend this book for young professionals, students, and especially courses in management and leadership.

— *Marlene S. Neill, Ph.D., APR,*
Assistant Professor, Journalism,
Public Relations and New Media Department,
Baylor University

Ragas and Culp have produced an eminently useful guide to the business of strategic communication. We hear first-hand from leading practitioners what it means to be a strategist-advisor to the C-suite, speaking the language of business and adding bottom-line value. *Mastering Business* is our seat at the table — and a glimpse into the future of the discipline.

— *Jesse Scinto, Associate Director for Curriculum*
Development, MS programs in Strategic Communication,
Columbia University

In *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators*, Ragas and Culp gave PR students and rising professionals across the country a roadmap to understanding the critical business skills that would put them on the path to getting a “seat at the table” when key decisions are made. With *Mastering Business*, they bring forward the perspectives and life lessons of some of the most respected leaders in corporate communications, giving us not only an engaging read but also a master class in what to do once you have the seat at the table, and more importantly how to keep it. It’s a must read for anyone who wants to be a CCO or plans to work with one.

— *Ken Kerrigan, Executive Vice President,
Weber Shandwick, and Adjunct Professor,
MS in Public Relations and Corporate
Communication program, New York University*

Mastering Business clearly spells out the skills inherent in the business acumen of top leaders. If you hold a high-level communications role within an organization or have ever aspired to such a position, you would be well served to spend next weekend reading *Mastering Business*, a thought-provoking and brilliant book.

— *Timothy Lent Howard, Ph.D.,
Professor of Public Relations,
California State University, Sacramento*

Writing and persuasion is no longer enough. In order to be successful, today’s communication professionals *need* to have a solid understanding of the world of business. With the essays presented in this book, Ragas and Culp have brought together a venerable “who’s who” of communication executives from across industries and business sectors. The keen wisdom and practical insights they share will prove invaluable not only to students of strategic communication but also professionals already in the industry.

— *Nathan Gilkerson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor,
Strategic Communication,
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Marquette University*

Who else but seasoned CCOs could transform the complexity of business management into straightforward, engaging stories that synthesize years of corporate communications wisdom? *Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators* is a must read for aspiring communicators looking to break into the corporate world.

— *Christopher Wilson, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor, Public Relations,
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Brigham Young University*

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Insights and Advice from the
C-suite of Leading Brands

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to our better halves, Traci and Sandra,
and our students, who inspire us each and every day,
and are the future leaders of our field.*

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The future of the public relations and strategic communications fields is in good hands in part because of the excellent academic and professional groups in our profession, and the dedicated leaders and volunteers that guide these organizations. We wish to thank the following associations and centers for all they do: Arthur W. Page Society and Page Up, The Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communications, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), Business Marketing Association (BMA), Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), Corporate Communication International, International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC), Institute for Public Relations (IPR), International Communication Association (ICA), The Museum of Public Relations, National Investor Relations Institute (NIRI), The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, the PR Council, PRSA Foundation, Publicity Club of Chicago (PCC), Public Relations Society of

America (PRSA) and Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), and USC Center for Public Relations.

Matthew wishes to thank his parents and family for instilling in him a love of learning at an early age. Whether it was an early interest in history (his mom will tell you he tried to write the history of the world), reading, writing, the news media, politics, or the world of business, all interests were encouraged and supported. He didn't just read or watch business news growing up, but, thanks to his parents, he was able to track a real portfolio of stocks and follow their performance. He was also given nothing but encouragement around his entrepreneurial business ideas and his work in start-up companies — some that succeeded tremendously, while others crashed and burned. Either way, his parents were always there to encourage his latest and greatest. Matthew also wishes to thank the mentors that have enriched his professional and personal development, including Edward P. “Ned” Grace III, Spiro Kiouisis, and Ron Culp. Take note future communications leaders: Ron shows that “work hard and be nice” is the right way to lead.

Ron also thanks his DePaul colleagues and other educators who so warmly welcomed him into academia after a long career in corporate and agency roles. As a self-described “pracademic,” Ron appreciates the encouragement and support being given to increasing experiential opportunities for both students and those teaching them. To that end, he wishes to salute the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations for its role in bridging gaps between educators and professionals. Like Matt, Ron also thanks his mentors and friends, many of whom are no longer with us — the late Betsy Plank, Dan Edelman, Al Golin, and Jack Raymond. They and others have had a huge influence on his life and career. Ron also thanks colleague and friend Matthew Ragas and hundreds of other mentees who have been so instrumental to his life and career. Each and every one has proven that mentorship,

indeed, is a two-way street. These future leaders of our profession are doing things each and every day that make him proud.

Finally, thanks to you, the reader. Your interest in business acumen and strategic communication leadership will not only benefit you and your career, but the overall stature of the profession and its ability to create value for both business and society as a whole.

Matthew W. Ragas
Ron Culp
Chicago, IL.

PREFACE

Strategic communication increasingly means business.

Recognition is growing among communication professionals, educators, and organizational leaders that — for communications departments and agencies to provide the most value to organizations, their stakeholders, and society as a whole — strategic communicators need to be *business people with an expertise in communication*.

Let this last sentence sink in for a moment, as it represents a paradigm shift of sorts.

Fortunately, inside many large organizations the communications function increasingly has gained the trust of members of the C-suite on advising these senior leaders on “what to do” — policy setting — and not just “what to say” or “how to say it.”

The role of being both counselor and advisor — rather than simply that of a skilled communications technician — demands greater business acumen, not just for the chief communications officer (CCO) or senior agency professionals, but for mid- and junior-level team members who help support these leaders. The entire profession and, in fact, society as a whole benefits when more pros improve their fluency in the language and essentials of business, thereby better shaping and communicating purpose and strategy across an enterprise and outside of it. It is perhaps a misnomer to label the field “strategic communications” if professionals are well versed in technical skills, but lack a strategic business management perspective.

The good news is that we have seen firsthand how agencies, in-house teams, and university communication programs are

placing a greater emphasis on building business acumen. The very positive response by professionals and educators to our first book together titled, *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators: Creating Shared Value for the Organization and Its Stakeholders*, is heartening. Reader feedback on *Business Essentials* placed a particular value on the illustrative quotes in the book drawn from original interviews with senior leaders in the field. Business concepts and terminology — and the value of investing in gaining such knowledge — become much more tangible when they are illustrated with real-world stories.

This book, *Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators: Insights and Advice from the C-suite of Leading Brands* builds upon this feedback and the continued evolution of the profession. Strategic communicators have a unique vantage point across both the enterprise and society as a whole. As such, communications leaders are increasingly being asked by the C-suite to serve as conveners, collaborators, and integrators *across departments and functions*. To fulfill such a mandate, communicators need not just general business acumen, but a rich understanding of the major departments and functions that make up the C-suite, such as marketing, finance, human resources, investor relations, corporate strategy, legal, data science, and technology.

As such, *Mastering Business* brings together many top senior communications leaders in the field who generously share both their insights and experiences learned while working with specific C-suite functions and C-level executives. We have purposely drawn contributors that come from a wide range of backgrounds, industries, and geographies to provide a diversity of thought and experiences. Collectively, these contributors help drive the business strategy and protect the corporate reputations of brands that are worth many billions in market value, employ tens of thousands of people, and produce products and services used by millions of people.

Alongside each contributor essay, you will find a short “Career Spotlight” Q&A with this industry leader. In addition, to provide a valuable “outside/inside” perspective, each essay also includes a “C-suite View” response authored by a C-level executive that is a current or former colleague of the contributor. We think you will find these outsider viewpoints illuminating.

We thank these “Masters of Business” for graciously sharing their insights and experiences, and for helping to advance the body of knowledge. Collaborations between educators and practitioners are still far too rare. We offer this book in the hope that it will inspire future such collaboration.

FOREWORD

Matt Ragas' and Ron Culp's first book together, *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators*, addressed the fundamental truth that understanding how the business works is the price of entry for success in strategic communication.

Their new book, *Mastering Business for Strategic Communicators: Insights and Advice from the C-suite of Leading Brands*, takes the conversation to a new level. Here, we learn how to work across the enterprise with senior leaders who are subject matter experts. Being able to function as a peer — sometimes leading, sometimes following, always collaborating — requires an ability to think strategically about business challenges and a command of the soft, interpersonal skills that distinguish the best leaders. This book contains the stories of successful senior communicators who have mastered both.

When I led strategic communication at Aetna, the company had a near-death experience. The board brought in a new CEO, Jack Rowe, who was determined to turn the company around with a new strategy, a new operating model, and a transformed culture. I supported his focus on quality health care and his ideas about making the company more responsive to physicians and patients, and more focused on facilitating quality health care outcomes. But Jack was replacing most of the senior team and I was taking nothing for granted.

I was called into Jack's office just a few weeks after his arrival and half-expected that he was going to tell me I was out. Instead, Jack said, "I want you to lead the culture change initiative." I was

shocked. It wasn't my expertise and I hadn't a clue how to go about it.

The task was immense. Aetna was a 150-year-old company with an entrenched, risk-averse, process-oriented, insurance company culture. It had recently acquired an entrepreneurial, process-averse company and the merger of the two businesses had led to a bitter culture war.

We had to lose the allegiances to the previous entities and think through objectively what cultural attributes would be needed to support the new strategy and operating model, both of which were simultaneously under development. We asked ourselves, *who owns the culture?* The answer: no single executive or department — not HR and not even the CEO. We *all* had to own it *together*.

I formed a partnership with my close colleague, Elease Wright, who led human resources, and consultant Jon Katzenbach. To lead the work, we created an ad hoc Council for Organizational Effectiveness. By Jack's edict, every line and staff organization in the company had to be represented by a senior executive. It was my job to bring along everyone — even the foot-draggers — by gradually building small successes into bigger ones.

Fortunately, my background working in politics and at IBM had prepared me well for the kind of collaboration this task required. I had learned you need three things:

1. *Have a clue:* You must understand the business. In this case, I had to learn how the culture impacted operations and strategy. You may never be as knowledgeable as the functional experts, but if you can't understand and think strategically about complex topics, you will be marginalized.
2. *Have guts:* All enterprises have a tendency to develop group-think. We work together, understand each other, and share the same experiences. That's a strength, but when change is

necessary, it takes courage to stand up against the conventional wisdom.

3. *Have woo*: Okay, I know that woo is a verb, but I like *Strengthsfinder*'s definition: "People with the strength of WOO have a great capacity to inspire and motivate others." Building alliances with battle-hardened executives requires the skills that communicators should be really good at: *active listening* and *thoughtful persuasion*.

Our council met monthly, gathering input from across the organization and creating a new mission statement, a set of values and operating principles. Most important, we built commitment to the new culture through both processes and dialogue. Employees were skeptical at first, and there were pockets of resistance. But our enterprise-wide approach developed evangelists throughout the organization who kept us focused and committed. By the time Jack and I left six years later, the company had rebuilt its pride and its financial success.

Matthew and Ron bring the deep knowledge of successful educators and practitioners to this project. They have assembled here a set of essays from some of the world's leading communicators that illustrate how to work effectively with senior business leaders across departments and functions.

This is a timely contribution, because corporate communication is more critical to the success of the enterprise than ever before. Strategic communication leaders must rally support *across the enterprise* to build a corporate character that makes the organization worthy of trust, and simultaneously must enlist the entire enterprise to build authentic stakeholder engagement.

You will want to keep your copy close at hand as an essential resource.

Roger Bolton
President
Arthur W. Page Society