

# 2

## PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY STANDARDS AND ETHICS

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Learn basic definitions for ethics, morals and values within the PR profession.
- 2.2 Understand the role and relevance of ethics in public relations.
- 2.3 Apply ethical standards to a scenario that presents a moral and/or ethical dilemma.

This chapter's introduction was written by Dr. Lois Boynton, associate professor in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her teaching and writing focus on ethics and professionalism in public relations and media. Prior to academia, she worked 14 years as a journalist and public relations/advertising practitioner.

### INTRODUCTION: THE ETHICAL WRITER

*Dr. Lois Boynton*

Trust is the public relations writer's currency. Ethical practices can build and nurture trust. But violating basic ethical tenets can quickly erode the faith stakeholders have in your brand and organization.

Key messages take many forms on multiple platforms to help organizations build relationships with investors/donors, customers, employees, communities, policymakers, influencers and reporters. Professional organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America and International Association of Business Communicators have developed member ethics codes to guide practitioners, and the vast majority of large companies have formalized ethics codes. Provisions are pragmatic: Be honest and transparent, respect client confidentiality and avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Some of the ethical challenges PR writers face include:

## Advocating Ethically

Public relations is an advocacy function, but advocacy does not mean lacking in factual information. On the contrary, PR writers should ensure information they provide is accurate and not intended to deceive stakeholders. As humans, we may make an occasional error; we are ethically obligated to take responsibility and correct erroneous information.

## Speed

Our 24/7, hurry-up culture is a breeding ground for shortcuts and errors. It's embarrassing to discover a typo in a fact sheet. But consequences multiply if you lift a passage from another source and neglect to cite it, resulting in (hopefully) unintentional plagiarism. In a rush to complete a task, a writer might employ patchwriting. As ethicist Kelly McBride (2012) explains, "Rather than copying a statement word for word, the writer is rearranging phrases and changing tenses, but is relying too heavily on the [original] vocabulary and syntax." Such carelessness is a breach of hard-earned stakeholder trust.

## Transparency

Transparency can create ethical challenges for PR writers. Intentional deception — also called lying by omission — deliberately misleads stakeholders into making uninformed decisions that benefit the organization. However, not all information is for public consumption. There are ethical reasons for maintaining confidentiality of proprietary information such as trade secrets, inventions, passwords, marketing data, some personnel records, and client contracts.

## Ghostwriting

According to ghostwriter Teena Lyons (n.d.), "[A] ghost is simply helping an author voice what they want to say in a clear, engaging way. The knowledge/ideas/memories belong 100% to the person who has the name on the cover . . . and all I am doing is helping get it on the page." The client-ghostwriter relationship must be grounded in ethics, from the strategic intent of the message to the platform on which it is presented. Transparency is essential: Does the audience understand who created or contributed to a speech, tweet, blog, brochure or other materials? Speechwriting is perhaps the most accepted ghosting practice. We don't really expect the president to stand at a podium and announce, "I'm now going to read a speech that Fred wrote for me . . ." But do we have different expectations for social media posts, blogs or even quotes? An executive may ask you to "make up" her quote for a news release. At minimum, any statement you draft should accurately reflect the executive's beliefs; ensure this by getting the executive's approval.

## Working With News Media

Working with news media may involve some tensions, since journalists espouse objectivity. However, it's a symbiotic relationship — reporters cannot cover everything that's newsworthy; they rely on ethical public relations practitioners to keep them informed and help them

access subject matter experts (SME) within their organizations. When writing materials for news media — releases, pitches, FAQs, backgrounders, etc. — practitioners should understand news values and routines, which can help engender trust with reporters and avoid unintentional misfires such as gift giving, for example. Although the PRSA Code of Ethics (Public Relations Society of America, n.d.) permits “nominal, legal, and infrequent” gifts, the Society of Professional Journalists (2014) Code of Ethics advises reporters to decline gifts, which might be perceived as attempts to influence news coverage.

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In PR, you’ll hear one message over and over — know your stakeholders. Learning about the richness of communities and cultures is a lifelong process; it starts by knowing your own biases and assumptions. PR writers must be cognizant of word usage, which affects how we portray or frame issues and individuals. But as editors of “Conscious Style Guide” (n.d.) state, “the goal is not to be nice, inoffensive, or politically correct; even language intended to be inclusive and considerate might offend. If you’re interested in using language consciously, then clarify your intentions and evoke and provoke skillfully” (“About,” n.d.).

These are just a few of the ethical issues you’ll confront in your career. Welcome to PR writing!

### 2.1 — STANDARDS FOR PR

The Institute for Public Relations defines **ethics** within the discipline to include values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication. Every PR trade association or advocacy organization also has its own statement that offers additional guidance to practitioners about the expectations and boundaries of professional conduct.

Establishing industry standards serves to level the playing field for all participants — whether experienced executives, freelance consultants or entry-level novices — and to protect the interests of those who are served by the profession.

As a point of reference, the Associated Press publishes a statement of news values and principles in each of its stylebook hard-copy and online editions. Some of the highlights include:

- We abhor inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortions. We will not knowingly introduce rumor or false information into material intended for publication or broadcast; nor will we distort visual content.
  - We always strive to identify all the sources of our information.
  - We avoid behavior or activities that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.
  - We don’t misidentify or misrepresent ourselves to get a story.
  - When mistakes are made, they must be corrected.

- The policies set forth in these pages are central to the AP's mission. Any failure to abide by them could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, depending on the gravity of the infraction.

Source: *The Associated Press Stylebook 2020-2022* (55th ed.). (2020). Associated Press, pp. 498-499.

Several professional association **codes of conduct** and **ethics codes** are included in the Chapter 2 Appendix (in their original, unedited form) to familiarize future PR professionals with the range of ethical standards and guidance created for individuals whose employment derives from communication-focused industries. Included are statements published by the International Public Relations Association, Public Relations Society of America, International Association of Business Communicators, and American Marketing Association. Finally, a Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) pledge with a signature line and date line is also included for students who are planning career paths in public relations. See Figure 2.1 for a visual about ethics, morals, values and integrity.

## 2.2 — ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

In public relations, the increasing demand to deliver results and outperform the competition also fuels the ethical challenges that confront PR professionals who pledge to operate in an ethical and honest way. The very nature of public relations and its ubiquitous moral gray areas makes it necessary to address the importance of ethics within the practice.

**FIGURE 2.1** ■ Four-Way Sign With Ethics, Morals, Values and Integrity



Persistent and not-so-secret negative perceptions about PR representatives and their oft-times questionable relationship with the truth must be confronted and overcome by consistent and observable ethical behavior by all members of the public relations community. There is no justifiable reason that difficult clients, complex campaigns and impending deadlines should upend communicators' ability to create and promote content, manage strategic relationships and messaging, and advocate for client causes in a way that is honest and infused with integrity.

Certainly, every individual enters a PR career or professional journey with their own set of beliefs or values. The next step is to ensure those guiding principles align with the professional standards and codes of conduct for this desired profession. Three pillars of industry expectations and standards in public relations shape the narrative and the spirit of how PR professionals should conduct themselves. They are ethics, morals and values — each of which will be defined and explained in this chapter.

## Ethics

Throughout this section, the term *ethics* is referenced as a standardized code or system that has collective implications on entire industries or groups of people. In general, ethics offer guidance for understanding and acting in ways that are perceived to be right versus wrong, whereas morals lend more toward perceptions of good versus bad. Ethical conduct is expected and required in countless professions, especially industries that have strict rules or regulations, where violating them can result in criminal liability and other severe consequences that may include fines, penalties, disbarment, etc.

For all intents and purposes, public relations is an unregulated industry. Compliance with the professional standards and codes of conduct is voluntary, with minimal consequences for misbehavior or noncompliance. With few rules and countless competing interests, the PR industry is ripe for potential corruption and misconduct. However, self-governance and shared accountability are frequently used to support a system of checks and balances to keep members of the professional community operating in accordance with generally accepted standards and practices within the industry. See Figure 2.2 for a visual about ethics.

## Morals

Does working in PR with less-than-scrupulous clients make someone a bad person? Is telling a partial truth — while omitting a small but damaging detail — considered lying? Is framing content in a way that positively impacts a client but negatively affects their competition wrong? Is “borrowing” a colleague’s winning pitch idea to advance a personal career move considered cheating if the colleague is thanked or acknowledged during the presentation? The morals someone applies to their life and decision-making process are often influenced by a personal and evolving moral code that informs their view of the world and their role in society. The opening questions in this section might have completely different responses and rationales depending on the moral codes of the individuals being asked.

Morals come into play when making determinations about behavior that is considered good or bad. Though morality is difficult to legislate or manage, these individual and often intensely personal guiding principles help people operate effectively within greater society by conforming

FIGURE 2.2 ■ PR Ethics Graphic



to standards and norms that the majority of people deem acceptable and appropriate. Morals often align with upbringing, as these core principles and values are often embedded during the early formative years and then shape the way individuals see and process the world around them.

## Values

The term *values* can best be explained as a self-defining concept that reflects what an individual deems as having worth or significance in their decision-making process. What do they think is the most important factor that influences and shapes their behavior, thoughts and actions? What do they care about? What motivates them to take action in one direction versus another? What do they “value”?

A practitioner’s unique set of values may influence decisions when it comes to, for instance, elevating money over life purpose in selecting a career path. If money is the primary motivating factor, it is easy to anticipate and understand how someone will view a situation or make a determination about the appropriate actions to take. In contrast, if fairness is the motivating value for a PR professional, that might lead them to focus more on doing quality and meaningful work for less money, because providing excellent service at a fair price — versus an immense profit — is more important. Many PR agencies, organizations and corporations publish a values statement to reaffirm their commitment to principles that influence the entity’s priorities and practices.

## Honesty and Integrity

Built on the bedrocks of ethics, morals and values are the principles of honesty and integrity, which become evident through actions and practical application. Honesty and integrity are two metaphorical sides of the same coin, which, when spent within the realm of professional conduct, purchase a lot of goodwill and credibility in professional development. At its essence,

honesty is about telling the truth in a straightforward and forthright manner, not grudgingly or as a last resort. In a proactive sense, honesty is about truth, but it also reflects the absence of dishonesty; it is thus not built solely on random or sporadic truth but also devoid of misrepresentation and falsity — elements that breed distrust. Honest communication in public relations means honoring words that are spoken and following through on commitments made. In addition to spoken words, honesty is about interpersonal dealings and conducting oneself in a way that is free from deception or misrepresentation. Honesty at its optimal level also lends itself to building a reputation of being trustworthy enough to hold client confidentiality and keep it at the forefront as a standard operating procedure.

Within ethical considerations, public relations and communications professionals may be asked if facts and the truth are the same thing. The answer is no, because the framing, skewing or misrepresentation of facts can result in dishonest communication. Even if information is technically factual, it can be generally dishonest; thus, it is the communicator's responsibility to make sure the presentation and distribution of information is done in such a way that it maintains and reflects honest and ethical standards of practice.

**Integrity** is a way of life and doing business, built on unwavering and resolute principles of honesty, morality, ethics and consistent adherence to strong personal values that are applied without question or coercion. Professionals who operate with integrity often gain the trust and admiration of others because they are reliable in their approach and steadfast in their professional conduct. It is often said that integrity is what someone does when no one is watching. Furthermore, integrity is on full display when people act in a virtuous and upright manner regardless of the situation or the circumstances — and regardless of whether acting or responding in a different way might be more beneficial. For them, integrity is not negotiable, and it serves as its own reward.

## 2.3 — NAVIGATING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Ethical challenges permeate public relations because there are so many temptations and high-stake opportunities at hand. As purveyors of information, PR practitioners often have advance access to valuable details that can put them at risk of insider trading if used inappropriately. Additionally, the prevalence of special events as an aspect of creative campaigns presents access to premiums, gifts, tickets and high-dollar incentives that are easily accessible and subject to abuse. Unfortunately, leveraging access to celebrity clients for personal gain, taking advantage of client-funded expense accounts, and utilizing confidential content for professional advancement are not unusual occurrences within the PR world. The ongoing responsibility for PR professionals is to maintain their standards of ethics, morals and values and to conduct themselves in a way that elevates the status of the profession as a whole.

### Why the Industry Needs Ethical PR Practitioners

Without ethical standards, the public relations industry becomes a freewheeling circus of misinformation, disinformation and fraudulent claims, where anything goes and self-serving opportunists can corrupt communications at will. A large swath of PR responsibility rests with advocacy work for clients and elevating perspectives or voices that are often overlooked or ignored. A commitment



to honesty, transparency, loyalty, fairness and expertise serves as the guardrails that keep the PR train on track and prevent it from swerving too far off the path or crashing altogether.

The PR industry is better when practitioners and clients experience and express mutual respect, trust and commitment to getting a job done well. The ability to set a high standard and then meet it is a powerful example for other professionals and industries to follow. Ethics in PR are not optional; they are mandatory and necessary.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

Ethics, morals and values are the foundational principles for effective public relations activities, and they also establish clear standards for professional conduct, which helps to provide a level of security and protection for clients who entrust confidential information to PR practitioners. Ethical systems guide right or wrong behavior, while morals help individuals act in ways that are inherently good or bad based on societal standards. Values are motivating factors that determine how individuals make decisions, based on their priorities and desired outcomes. Together these guiding principles provide a framework that instills confidence for individuals in the PR profession and those they serve. Most communications and PR trade organizations or professional associations have a written code of ethics or code of conduct to help guide how practitioners operate within that profession. There may be penalties or negative consequences for professionals who do not adhere to these standards. With emerging technology and constant innovation — along with faster and newer ways to create and disseminate information — it is important that professional ethical codes be reviewed and updated frequently to remain relevant as safeguards for the industry.

## KEY TERMS

codes of conduct  
ethics

ethics codes  
integrity

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do communications organizations need to publish codes of conduct?
2. What type of ethical dilemma do you find most challenging?
3. What are some potential results or consequences when ethical standards are not followed?

## WRITING EXERCISES

1. You and your roommate are both interning at different PR agencies for the summer. Both companies are competing for a new account and both made the short-list of finalists to make an in-person presentation. Both of you have been assigned to assist on the pitch



teams at your respective agencies. The roommate's agency is favored to win because of their successful track record and innovative approaches. After work, you happen to notice that your roommate left their laptop open while they stepped out to take a dinner break, and a draft version of the pitch presentation is within view. What decision do you make next? Do you close the laptop and walk away? Do you take a quick look, just to size up the competition? Do you take a deep dive and give your team an advantage — because your roommate shouldn't be so careless with important information? Finally, is your decision influenced at all if the contract is worth \$1 million versus \$20,000?

2. Create your own code of ethics for a small PR agency with nine employees.
  - What are the leading ethical principles you want to incorporate into the policy?
  - How will the code of ethics be enforced?
  - What are the penalties for violating the code of ethics?
  - How and where will you communicate the code of ethics to existing and new employees?
  - How can you encourage adherence to the code of ethics?

## APPENDIX: CODES OF CONDUCT AND CODES OF ETHICS FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

The following guidelines delve into many of the ethical considerations that anchor the PR profession. While exploring the varied landscape of professional and organizational codes of ethics in the public relations industry, these codes and standards also emphasize the moral compass that guides strategic decisions and communication practices, ensuring integrity and trustworthiness within the profession.

### International Public Relations Association Code of Conduct

Launched in 2011 the IPRA Code of Conduct is an affirmation of professional and ethical conduct by members of the International Public Relations Association and recommended to public relations practitioners worldwide.

In the conduct of public relations practitioners shall:

1. Observance
  - Observe the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
2. Integrity
  - Act with honesty and integrity at all times so as to secure and retain the confidence of those with whom the practitioner comes into contact;
3. Dialogue
  - Seek to establish the moral, cultural and intellectual conditions for dialogue, and recognise the rights of all parties involved to state their case and express their views;

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4. Transparency  
Be open and transparent in declaring their name, organisation and the interest they represent;
5. Conflict  
Avoid any professional conflicts of interest and to disclose such conflicts to affected parties when they occur;
6. Confidentiality  
Honour confidential information provided to them;
7. Accuracy  
Take all reasonable steps to ensure the truth and accuracy of all information provided;
8. Falsehood  
Make every effort to not intentionally disseminate false or misleading information, exercise proper care to avoid doing so unintentionally and correct any such act promptly;
9. Deception  
Not obtain information by deceptive or dishonest means;
10. Disclosure  
Not create or use any organisation to serve an announced cause but which actually serves an undisclosed interest;
11. Profit  
Not sell for profit to third parties copies of documents obtained from public authorities;
12. Remuneration  
Whilst providing professional services, not accept any form of payment in connection with those services from anyone other than the principal;
13. Inducement  
Neither directly nor indirectly offer nor give any financial or other inducement to public representatives or the media, or other stakeholders;
14. Influence  
Neither propose nor undertake any action which would constitute an improper influence on public representatives, the media, or other stakeholders;
15. Competitors  
Not intentionally injure the professional reputation of another practitioner;
16. Poaching  
Not seek to secure another practitioner's client by deceptive means;
17. Employment

When employing personnel from public authorities or competitors take care to follow the rules and confidentiality requirements of those organisations;

#### 18. Colleagues

Observe this Code with respect to fellow IPRA members and public relations practitioners worldwide.

IPRA members shall, in upholding this Code, agree to abide by and help enforce the disciplinary procedures of the International Public Relations Association in regard to any breach of this Code.

This code was formally adopted by the IPRA Board 5 November 2010 and launched in 2011.

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*Source:* International Public Relations Association. (n.d.). *IPRA codes*. <https://www.ipra.org/member-services/code-of-conduct/>

#### PRSA Code of Ethics

The PRSA Code of Ethics applies to PRSA members. The Code is designed to be a useful guide for PRSA members as they carry out their ethical responsibilities. This document is designed to anticipate and accommodate, by precedent, ethical challenges that may arise. The scenarios outlined in the Code provision are actual examples of misconduct. More will be added as experience with the Code occurs.

PRSA is committed to ethical practices. The level of public trust PRSA members seek, as we serve the public good, means we have taken on a special obligation to operate ethically.

The value of member reputation depends upon the ethical conduct of everyone affiliated with the PRSA. Each of us sets an example for each other — as well as other professionals — by our pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct.

Emphasis on enforcement of the Code has been eliminated. But, the PRSA Board of Directors retains the right to bar from membership or expel from the Society any individual who has been or is sanctioned by a government agency or convicted in a court of law of an action that fails to comply with the Code.

Ethical practice is the most important obligation of a PRSA member. We view the Member Code of Ethics as a model for other professions, organizations and professionals.

#### PRSA MEMBER STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL VALUES

This statement presents the core values of PRSA members and, more broadly, of the public relations profession. These values provide the foundation for the Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviors and decision-making process. We believe our professional values are vital to the integrity of the profession as a whole.

Advocacy. We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent. We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

**Honesty.** We adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with the public.

**Expertise.** We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships among a wide array of institutions and audiences.

**Independence.** We provide objective counsel to those we represent. We are accountable for our actions.

**Loyalty.** We are faithful to those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest.

**Fairness.** We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media, and the general public. We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression.

### **PRSA CODE PROVISIONS OF CONDUCT**

#### *Free Flow of Information*

Core Principle Protecting and advancing the free flow of accurate and truthful information is essential to serving the public interest and contributing to informed decision making in a democratic society.

#### **Intent:**

- To maintain the integrity of relationships with the media, government officials, and the public.
- To aid informed decision-making.

#### **Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Preserve the integrity of the process of communication.
- Be honest and accurate in all communications.
- Act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which the practitioner is responsible.
- Preserve the free flow of unprejudiced information when giving or receiving gifts by ensuring that gifts are nominal, legal, and infrequent.

#### **Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- A member representing a ski manufacturer gives a pair of expensive racing skis to a sports magazine columnist, to influence the columnist to write favorable articles about the product.
- A member entertains a government official beyond legal limits and/or in violation of government reporting requirements.

### Competition

Core Principle Promoting healthy and fair competition among professionals preserves an ethical climate while fostering a robust business environment.

**Intent:**

- To promote respect and fair competition among public relations professionals.
- To serve the public interest by providing the widest choice of practitioner options.

**Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Follow ethical hiring practices designed to respect free and open competition without deliberately undermining a competitor.
- Preserve intellectual property rights in the marketplace.

**Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- A member employed by a “client organization” shares helpful information with a counseling firm that is competing with others for the organization’s business.
- A member spreads malicious and unfounded rumors about a competitor in order to alienate the competitor’s clients and employees in a ploy to recruit people and business.

### Disclosure of Information

Core Principle Open communication fosters informed decision making in a democratic society.

**Intent:**

- To build trust with the public by revealing all information needed for responsible decision making.

**Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Be honest and accurate in all communications.
- Act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which the member is responsible.
- Investigate the truthfulness and accuracy of information released on behalf of those represented.
- Reveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented.
- Disclose financial interest (such as stock ownership) in a client’s organization.
- Avoid deceptive practices.

**Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- Front groups: A member implements “grass roots” campaigns or letter-writing campaigns to legislators on behalf of undisclosed interest groups.
- Lying by omission: A practitioner for a corporation knowingly fails to release financial information, giving a misleading impression of the corporation’s performance.
- A member discovers inaccurate information disseminated via a website or media kit and does not correct the information.
- A member deceives the public by employing people to pose as volunteers to speak at public hearings and participate in “grass roots” campaigns.

*Safeguarding Confidences*

Core Principle Client trust requires appropriate protection of confidential and private information.

**Intent:**

- To protect the privacy rights of clients, organizations, and individuals by safeguarding confidential information.

**Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Safeguard the confidences and privacy rights of present, former, and prospective clients and employees.
- Protect privileged, confidential, or insider information gained from a client or organization.
- Immediately advise an appropriate authority if a member discovers that confidential information is being divulged by an employee of a client company or organization.

**Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- A member changes jobs, takes confidential information, and uses that information in the new position to the detriment of the former employer.
- A member intentionally leaks proprietary information to the detriment of some other party.

*Conflicts of Interest*

Core Principle Avoiding real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest builds the trust of clients, employers, and the publics.

**Intent:**

- To earn trust and mutual respect with clients or employers.
- To build trust with the public by avoiding or ending situations that put one’s personal or professional interests in conflict with society’s interests.

**Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Act in the best interests of the client or employer, even subordinating the member's personal interests.
- Avoid actions and circumstances that may appear to compromise good business judgment or create a conflict between personal and professional interests.
- Disclose promptly any existing or potential conflict of interest to affected clients or organizations.
- Encourage clients and customers to determine if a conflict exists after notifying all affected parties.

**Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- The member fails to disclose that he or she has a strong financial interest in a client's chief competitor.
- The member represents a "competitor company" or a "conflicting interest" without informing a prospective client.

*Enhancing the Profession*

Core Principle Public relations professionals work constantly to strengthen the public's trust in the profession.

**Intent:**

- To build respect and credibility with the public for the profession of public relations.
- To improve, adapt and expand professional practices.

**Guidelines:**

A member shall:

- Acknowledge that there is an obligation to protect and enhance the profession.
- Keep informed and educated about practices in the profession to ensure ethical conduct.
- Actively pursue personal professional development.
- Decline representation of clients or organizations that urge or require actions contrary to this Code.
- Accurately define what public relations activities can accomplish.
- Counsel subordinates in proper ethical decision making.
- Require that subordinates adhere to the ethical requirements of the Code.
- Report practices that fail to comply with the Code, whether committed by PRSA members or not, to the appropriate authority.



**Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:**

- A PRSA member declares publicly that a product the client sells is safe, without disclosing evidence to the contrary.
- A member initially assigns some questionable client work to a non-member practitioner to avoid the ethical obligation of PRSA membership.

Access the online PRSA Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Values at PRSA Code of Ethics, <https://www.prsa.org/about/ethics/prsa-code-of-ethics>.

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*Source:* Public Relations Society of America. [n.d.]. *PRSA code of ethics*. <https://www.prsa.org/about/ethics/prsa-code-of-ethics>.

**PRSSA Conduct Pledge**

I pledge to conduct myself professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public, fellow members and to the Society; to improve my individual competence and advance the knowledge and proficiency of the field of public relations; and to adhere to the articles of the Member Code of Ethics and Conduct by the PRSSA National Committee.

I understand and accept that there are consequences for member misconduct, up to and including membership revocation.

I understand that members in violation of the PRSSA Code of Ethics and Conduct may be further barred from PRSA membership.

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*Source:* [n.d.]. PRSSA code of ethics and conduct. <https://www.prsa.org/prssa/about-prssa/ethical-principles>.

**International Association of Business Communicators**

As a professional communicator, you have the potential to influence economies and affect lives. This power carries with it significant responsibilities.

The International Association of Business Communicators requires its members to agree to the IABC Code of Ethics. This code serves as a guide to making consistent, responsible, ethical and legal choices in all of our communications.

**IABC'S CODE OF ETHICS**

1. **I am honest.** My actions bring respect for and trust in the communication profession.
2. **I communicate accurate information** and promptly correct any errors.
3. **I obey laws and public policies;** if I violate any law or public policy, I act promptly to correct the situation.
4. **I protect confidential information** while acting within the law.

5. **I support the ideals of free speech**, freedom of assembly, and access to an open marketplace of ideas.
6. **I am sensitive to others** cultural values and beliefs.
7. **I give credit to others for their work** and cite my sources.
8. **I do not use confidential information** for personal benefit.
9. **I do not represent conflicting or competing interests** without full disclosure and the written consent of those involved.
10. **I do not accept undisclosed gifts or payments** for professional services from anyone other than a client or employer.
11. **I do not guarantee results** that are beyond my power to deliver.

#### IABC'S CODE OF ETHICS IN PRACTICE

IABC requires its members to embrace these ethical guidelines in their work and to sign the following statement as part of the application and renewal processes: I have reviewed and understand the IABC Code of Ethics.

Access the online International Association of Business Communicators Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators at <https://www.iabc.com/About/Purpose/Code-of-Ethics>.

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*Source:* International Association of Business Communicators. (n.d.). *IABC code of ethics for professional communicators*. <https://www.iabc.com/About/Purpose/Code-of-Ethics>.

#### AMA Statement of Ethics

The American Marketing Association commits to the highest standards of ethical norms and values. We recognize that the marketing community not only serves organizations but also acts as a steward of society in creating and facilitating the transactions and experiences that drive the greater economy. In this role, all stakeholders of the community are expected to embrace the highest ethical norms and values implied by our responsibility to society.

#### ETHICAL NORMS

As Marketers, we must:

1. **Do no harm.** This means not only consciously avoiding harmful actions or omissions but also striving to benefit all stakeholders and society at large. We must embody high ethical standards and, at a minimum, adhere to all applicable laws and regulations in the choices we make.
2. **Foster and maintain integrity.** This means striving for transparency and fairness in all aspects of the marketing ecosystem.
3. **Embrace ethical values.** Foster and maintain integrity. This means striving for transparency and fairness in all aspects of the marketing ecosystem.

**ETHICAL VALUES**

Values represent the collective understanding of what the community finds appropriate, desirable, and morally acceptable. Values also serve as the criteria for evaluating our own personal actions and the actions of others.

**Honesty**

- Be truthful in all situations, at all times, and with all stakeholders, rejecting any manipulation, coercion, or approaches that negatively affect trust.
- Offer valuable solutions that reflect the intentions stated in communications and interactions.
- Honor explicit and implicit commitments and promises.

**Responsibility**

- Acknowledge the social obligations to stakeholders that come with increased marketing and economic power.
- Consider environmental and societal stewardship in our decision-making.
- Strive to exceed industry or legal standards in the protection of private or sensitive information of customers, employees, and partners.
- Recognize and accept the consequences of our marketing decisions and strategies.

**Equity**

- Build a diverse marketing workforce and support inclusive marketing practices by valuing and embracing individual, cultural, and ethnic differences.
- Recognize the needs of, and commitments to, vulnerable market segments as well as those individuals not familiar with marketing and others who may be historically disadvantaged.
- Never stereotype anyone or depict any group (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc.) in a negative or dehumanizing way.
- Make every effort to understand and respectfully treat buyers, suppliers, intermediaries, and distributors from all cultures.

**Transparency**

- Strive for a spirit of openness in all aspects of the marketing profession.
- Communicate clearly with all constituencies.
- Accept and acknowledge feedback from customers, colleagues, and other stakeholders.
- Take appropriate action to explain and mitigate potential significant risks or other foreseeable outcomes that will or could impact any stakeholder.

- Fully disclose any information that might affect interactions or decisions within the processes or protocols related to marketing.
- Avoid participation in conflicts of interest.
- Appropriately recognize the contributions of others to marketing endeavors, such as consultants, employees, and coworkers.

### Citizenship

- Fulfill the economic, legal, philanthropic, and societal responsibilities that serve stakeholders.
- Value the role that marketing plays in business and society.
- Strive to protect the ecological environment and communicate sustainability efforts and aspirations honestly and transparently.
- Give back to the community through volunteerism and charitable donations.
- Contribute to the overall betterment of marketing and its reputation.
- Compel all partners to ensure that trade and production is fair for all participants in the marketing ecosystem.

### IMPLEMENTATION

We expect those associated with the AMA and the marketing community at large to be courageous and proactive in the fulfillment of the explicit and implicit promises contained in this Statement of Ethics.

This Statement of Ethics is part of a broader AMA Code of Conduct that contains Behavior Expectations for anyone who interacts with or within the AMA community. The AMA upholds compliance with the Behavior Expectations through the reporting mechanisms and disciplinary procedures contained in the Code of Conduct.

However, the AMA does not have the resources to adjudicate compliance with the Statement of Ethics in all areas within the marketing community. Thus, it is intended as an aspirational statement to motivate and inspire the marketing community to commit to upholding the highest standards of ethical norms and values.

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Source: American Marketing Association. (n.d.). *AMA statement of ethics*. Retrieved May 31, 2024, from <https://myama.my.site.com/s/article/AMA-Statement-of-Ethics>.

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