

The Problem with "Embedded" Journalists

"The last time he was a 'committed' Journalist, but now a 'high-flying' Public Relations executive". Are these areas the same?

The Government - in its realization of a need for a stakeholder relations management function - has opened lots of doors for 'communication experts' to help get its message across. This is to be commended and is indeed in line with a couple of the principles outlined in "Batho Pele, People First" strategic framework.

However my problem arises when Journalists (mainly trained in writing/reporting) are approached to fulfill - and expected to deliver on - the Public Relations function. Whilst these two certainly meet somewhere, they are NOT the same.

Many trained Journalists have left their field (reporting) to be Communications Executives/Spokepersons/Media Liaisons/PRs - all at the expense of Public Relations field. The fact is, Public Relations includes the function of communication through Media Studies & Communication Science. But PRs are NOT Journalists, nor are Journalists PRs. When Journalists are made PRs, the entire PR function is, in most cases, overshadowed by Media Liaison (including Advertising) - which are generally parts of the PR function.

The result, of course is objectives not being met; the PR function being compromised and a general lack of consolidated approach to the PR function (PR function scattered all-over the company/organization). Events management in another department; CRM in another; Sponsorship/Fundraising in another; CSI in another; with the only thing in the "PR" department being Publications, with the publicity hungry Media Liaison Manager at the helm. These functions should all be in one department, but the strategic direction needs to be coming from the (well-rounded and experienced) department 'head'.

We cannot relegate this function to mere publications management. It is a support service function that should proactively hold things together during crisis and celebration. At the hands of skilled individuals, this function can earn the company/organization millions of rands, even dollars/pounds through its proper execution.

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