

The Makings of a PRO: Nature vs. Nurture **By Doris Lim**

As mentioned in the previous articles, public relations practitioners are expected to become “oracles” - to be able to solve all problems, possess wisdom beyond others and have powerful insight into things yet to happen. These, dear readers, are an exaggeration of what the bosses of PROs want them to be! However, PR psychic channels aren’t so easily accessed as one would like to believe.

Generally, there are two sets of attributes which constitutes a PRO – nature and nurture. “Nature”, represents in-born personality traits of a person, while “Nurture” refers to the person’s experiences which has shaped and ‘educated’ the person over the years. To visualise it, imagine placing a PRO’s “nature” and “nurture” on a weighing scale, and see which side the scales tip towards. Which brings us to the question: which determining factor carries more weight when it comes to unearthing the ideal PRO – nature or nurture?

Natural Born Instinct

Is there such a thing as being “a natural” at what you do? How much of a person’s character can be measured by intrinsic values which makes him stand out from the crowd? To quote an old saying: some people have it and some people don’t. You can sense a PRO when he or she is around - the way they articulate their thoughts, and the tinge of confidence in the tone of their voices. Bill Cantor, owner of a New York based executive headhunting firm specialising in PR, compiled a list of ten “must-have” traits for success in as a PRO:

1. Able to respond to tension
2. Possess individual initiative
3. Curious and inclined to learning
4. Has energy, drive and ambition
5. Practices objective thinking
6. Has a flexible attitude
7. Want to do service to others
8. Friendly
9. Comfortable with versatility
10. Lack of self-consciousness to put others ahead

It is impossible for someone to have ALL the above. But if you score more than half of what's listed, you can safely say that you fit the profession. Employers in the PR industry should seriously consider using personality tests in the customary job interview. Some scientifically proven ones can be obtained from the Internet for a small fee, or the company can even create a customised test to gauge the candidate's 'fit' with their corporate culture.

Another "nature" quality that features strongly is to know more than one language. Though some might argue that languages can be acquired, therefore part of "nurture", but consider this: by "nature", Malaysians speak at least 3-5 languages or dialects when interacting with the people around us. Living in a multi-lingual society has made it "second nature" for us to switch from one language to the other effortlessly. You will find that strangers loosen up if you communicate with them in their day-to-day lingo. It's a fail-proof ice-breaker and should not be overlooked when building rapport with your contacts.

Nurture thy nature

Have you heard of the "University of Life"? It's the most important educational institute that we shall ever encounter. Value your lessons from your "classes": our years in educational institutions, mentoring by our supervisors at work, learning the ropes of the industries which we've worked in, conducting background research on our clients, working with the media, mingling around in our social circles, etc. We don't get subject exemptions from this University, and more often than not, we learn it through meticulous fieldwork and spend lots of time perfecting our skills.

This University is unique because it doesn't impose a time or age limit. We can even learn as many subjects as we want, for as long as we want to. In return, we "pay" our tuition fees by using the skills that we've learnt by contributing to society.

Analogously speaking, we are "nurtured" by the environment that we place ourselves in. Most of the time, it is a conscious choice, compared to "nature" whose qualities we couldn't choose. Therefore, proper "nurturing" requires a pro-active individual who seek further improvement and enhancement in his or her line of work. One of the most basic "nurture" factors which we can choose is academic qualifications. We can choose to enhance our skills and knowledge by attending post-graduate courses such as Continuous Professional Education (CPE) or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes.

The Scale of Two Qualities

As we progress in our work and social life, we realise that the only way to be successful in what we do is to understand the symbiotic relationship that our “nature” and “nurture” shares. If by “nature” we lack a certain skill, we should “nurture” that skill through active knowledge-seeking. Since we can choose the “nurturing environment” in which to grow in, we should understand our “nature” well before deciding which environment we are most suited to. Lastly, the key to enlightenment (and lower blood pressures) - avoid a clash by learning how to balance the scale of our “nature” and “nurture” qualities. Practitioner know thyself!

This is part of a series of PR articles by IPRM to demystify the many myths surrounding the public relations profession, and enlighten readers about the varied facets of the PRO's job. IPRM welcomes feedback at matrixid@unifi.my attention to Doris Lim, IPRM EXCO .