

SECURITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS — THE FIVE PRs

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Introduction

Allow me to open this discussion with an old question from an old language: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

This question comes to mind perhaps due to the nature of this seminar — a seminar of the people in charge of security who are interested in public relations. Were it the other way around — a seminar of public relations people interested in security — perhaps something different would have cropped up.

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? I think, this is an interesting, if not important, question in the context of the people who are concerned with the enforcement of rules and regulations, law and order. This is a group of people who normally operate and function by authority and command.

Do note that in the above statement I say “normally”. Thus, it is perhaps not always **must necessarily** be so.

But to get back to the question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* This question, presented here in its Latin version, is perhaps about 2,000 years old. So, should the question be relevant to us today, it only shows that what we are doing is neither new nor unique. The issue has been around for a long time. Chances are, it has been around since the beginning of human civilization.

This question is important because “the security people” are the ones who enforce the rules, the regulations, and the laws. They may not — and normally they are not — the ones who make or interpret the laws, but they are the ones given the authority and legitimately allowed privileges and exceptions in the usage of the technologies and means in enforcing these laws. In short, they are special.

Who Shall Guard The Guards?

And thus the question: *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* What does this question mean, really? It is translated thus: “Who shall guard the guards themselves?”

Who or what shall control the controllers? Who shall police the police? Who shall judge the judges? And who shall guard the guards?

This is indeed an important and interesting question. But then, what has it got to do with the matter at hand? What has it got to do with “security and public relations”? At first glance, it may not seem to have any direct correlation with the matter under discussion.

The philosophy behind the concept of security is: (1) to ensure order and proper functioning by constant supervision and regular checking; in short, the goal is safety; and (2)

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to ensure that, should disorder occur, then authority — and if needs be, force — would be used to re-establish order; in short, the goal is, again, safety.

Thus, we can actually conclude that the goal of security is one and the same, that is safety. But it uses at least two different approaches in trying to achieve, establish, maintain, or improve it.

But then, who or what shall ensure the safety of the protecting mechanism; who shall ensure that the security mechanism is itself secure? Who shall guard the guards themselves? If the answer is “other guards”, then the question goes on without end, *ad infinitum*.

So, when we come to the level of the security mechanism, the controller, the guard, the custodian, the protector, we come to the end of our ingenuity in the design of the external security mechanism. But since the concept is **protection** for the sake of order, security, and safety, the problem remains. Who or what then is to control and ensure the safety of this final and powerful protecting mechanism?

What if this security mechanism itself is not secure or goes out of control and goes havoc? With its technologies, power and firepower, if this mechanism goes havoc, no other mechanism can then control it. It may revert to order only if: (1) the mechanism itself, out of its own awareness and desire, righted itself; (2) or, out of its own ignorance or arrogance, destroys itself; (3) or, it is pre-programmed to self-destruct in such a situation; (4) or, it is pre-programmed to self-destruct and re-generate, embryonically, a new security mechanism.

Now it looks as if we are faced with a very complex and difficult problem. But perhaps not so. The fact that human civilization continues to exist is evidence enough that somehow we have managed to handle, if not solve, the problem. But then again, this may be due to sheer luck.

But whatever. Perhaps if we try hard enough, if we search and re-search, we may find the solution, somehow. The vague answer seems already at hand.

If we want security, we must first be certain that our security is secure. Only by being certain in the security of our security can we have real security. In short, “security” is actually “double security”.

- But if we want to be serious about this matter, true security is **triple security**, not double. We must first be secure in our own selves. Then we must be certain in the security of our security. Only after having established this do we have security in the true sense of the concept.

Being certain in the security of our security means we have full trust that our own security mechanism is not going to harm us. In such a situation, then, we feel safe, for should any harm comes our way, it will be blocked by the security. And if the harm is not successfully blocked — that is, if it surmounts or defeats our security — it will, at least, be weakened in the battle, and we would ourselves be forewarned of its impending approach.

But the issue at hand is, in fact, more complicated than the above. We are now at the level of the security mechanism ensuring its own security. For, without this base, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the security mechanism to even think of “public relations”.

Effective public relations, in the true sense, must come from a situation of security. We would not have the interest, energy, nor the time to think even of “private relations” — what more public relations — if we do not feel secure in our own house. The first priority, then, would be to establish security.

If and when everything is in order, it is relatively easy to establish and maintain

security. In peace, security is normally taken for granted. Most people may even forget the importance of security during peace time. But once peace is lost and disorder sets in, then security becomes the first priority.

In a situation of disorder, only when we have a “sense of security”, a sense of having things under control, will we care about public relations. First security; then public relations. Otherwise, the public relations may very well be “public fiction”.

Security

Only the strong can help others. For the strong has more than the necessary power to care for himself and, should he wants, to care for others also. The weak, on the other hand, cannot even help themselves. If you cannot even help yourself, how then can you help others?

So also is the case in the matter of security. Only the secure can ensure the security of others. Like the inability of the weak to even care for themselves, the insecure are unable to even ensure their own security. How then can the insecure, the vulnerable, who cannot even protect themselves, protect and shelter others?

Thus the premise of security is security. The security people must first themselves establish their own security before they can ensure the security of others.

But then, what is security, really?

According to one dictionary, security comes from the Latin word *securus*, a combination between *se* and *cura*. In Latin, *cura* means *care*. The prefix *se* means *without*. (See *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol. 2, 1986, p. 1926).

Thus security means “without care; free from care, apprehension, anxiety, or alarm”. This concept can be applied to “times, places, actions: In which one is free from fear or anxiety” or in which one is free from “doubt or distrust; feeling sure or certain.”

Another explanation of security, as given by the same dictionary, is: “Rightly free from apprehension; protected from or not exposed to danger; safe”.

In short, security means “without care”, “carefree” “without worry”, “safe”. This carefree attitude is based on the certainty that one is being fully protected. Thus, security is the guarantee of safety.

Assuming that the security mechanism, in and by itself and on its own accord, has established its security, those being protected by the security can then be *se-cura* or secure, without worry or anxiety, carefree and safe. With safety ensured, those under protection can live, grow, study, work, enjoy, rest, or sleep in peace.

Public Relations

The word **public** is from the Latin **publicus** — from **pubes**, meaning “adult”, in crossing with **poplicus**, from **populus**, meaning “people”. From this base, **public** is used to mean:

1. pertaining to the people of a country or locality;
2. pertaining to the people as a whole; common, national, popular;

3. done or made by or on behalf of the community as a whole; representing the community;
4. that is open to, may be used by, or may or must be shared by, all members of the community; generally accessible or available; generally levied (as rate or tax);
5. that may be used, enjoyed, shared, or competed for, by all persons legally or properly qualified;
6. open to general observation; existing, done, or made in public; manifest; not concealed;
7. of or pertaining to, or engaged in the affairs or service of the community;
8. devoted or directed to the promotion of the general welfare; public-spirited, patriotic.

Based on the above explanation of the concept of public, all we need to do now is to find out what relation or relations means.

According to the same dictionary (Vol. 2, p. 1786) quoted above, relation (singular, without the "s") means, among others:

1. That feature or attribute of things which is involved in considering them in comparison or contrast with each other; the particular way in which one thing is thought of in connection with another; any connection, correspondence, or association, which can be conceived as naturally existing between things.
2. The position in which one person holds with respect to another on account of some social or other connection between them; the particular mode in which persons are mutually connected by circumstances.
3. The aggregate of the connections, or modes of connection, by which one person is brought into touch with another or with society in general.

Another dictionary (*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged, 2nd. Edition, 1979, p. 1525*) defines relations (plural, with the "s"), among others, as:

1. the connections between or among persons in business or private affairs;
2. the connections between or among groups, peoples, nations, states, etc.

Thus "public relations" is these relations made with the public. Let us check another dictionary and see what it has to say about "public relations".

The **American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language** (1973; p. 1057) defines “public relations” abbr. PR or P.R., as such:

1. The methods and activities employed by an individual, organization, corporation, or government to promote favorable relationship with the public.
2. The degree of success obtained by achieving such a relationship.
3. The staff employed to promote such relationship.
4. The art or science of establishing such a relationship.

The Gatekeepers

Now that we more or less know what “security”, “public”, “relation”, and “relations” mean, we can perhaps talk about “security and public relations”.

In the first instance, is it necessary for the security people to practise “public relations”? Isn’t that the job of the Public Relations Department? They are supposedly the expert, and, more importantly perhaps, they are the ones **paid** by the organization to perform the PR function.

And furthermore, could it possibly be that it is functionally conflicting for the security people to be concerned with public relations? Their job is “security”, not “public relations”. Their job is to ensure the safety of those under their protection, not to worry about “promoting a favourable relationship with the public”.

So, it is none of the security business to promote public relations. But is this so?

Perhaps so. But then, again perhaps not so. Perhaps there is **no choice** for the security people but to practise public relations — good or bad.

The job of the security mechanism is the maintenance of security, guaranteeing order and safety for those under its protection, not to “promote a favourable relationship with the public”. Its job is the promoting of security and matters contributing to its improvement.

The security mechanism should not promote anything if it were at the expense of security. If, for example, in the execution of its duty, the security mechanism has to do it at the expense of PR, then, so be it. If and when there is conflict of interests; or if and when prioritisation is necessary, it is clear what needs to be done.

But then, if certain practices are beneficial to the organization as a whole, and their practise by the security mechanism does not in any way jeopardise the security and safety of the organization, then perhaps it is advantageous for the security people to practise it.

For any organization, there are at least two important first points of direct contact with the public. In short, these are the “gatekeepers” of the organization. They are: (1) those in charge of external communication, and (2) those in charge of security.

Between the two, in terms of public relations, perhaps the “external communication department” is more important. This is so, simply because “external communication” (say, telephone operators) serves two functions — establishing contact with, and being contacted by the public.

But nevertheless, the security people are still among the first personnel of an organization to be in direct contact with the public. It has, therefore, no choice but to practise “public relations”, good or bad.

The security people, therefore, are in a vantage situation should they want to practise good “public relations” which does not jeopardise their main function of guaranteeing safety.

Since the security has no choice but to be in direct contact with the public, it can either promote, maintain, or harm the PR — “the promoting of a favourable relationship with the public” — of the organization.

The Five PRs

If the security people are in themselves secure, there shouldn't be any problem in them practising good public relations. This is, of course, subject to the condition that it will not in any way jeopardise their duty in the maintenance of security.

Having established the above, how then can one practise good public relations?

Well ... who knows for sure? But perhaps, in the final analysis, public relations is nothing but the extension of our private relations.

The term private is here used in the sense of “one's own; individual; personal”. In short, it is concerned with one's own conduct of oneself.

Thus, good public relations is nothing but the practise of the universal human values and virtues. If, privately, we have trained and disciplined our own selves in the practise of the universal human virtues, they will, therefore, naturally and automatically be extended into the public realm.

And thus, if we can develop good private relations, they will then naturally and automatically be extended into the public domain and become good public relations.

For the purpose of this discussion, we have consciously and deliberately chosen just five of them out of many — as food for thought. Or, looking at it reversed, we have divided the one element — that is, the good human being — into just five “virtues”. And these are:

1. Plain Relations: relations that are clear, evident; simple, and readily understood.
2. Positive Relations: relations tending towards what is naturally good and progressive.
3. Pleasant Relations: relations that are pleasing in qualities and manner.
4. Polite Relations: relations that are refine in manners; courteous, cultivated, and cultured.
5. Patient Relations: relations that are calm and forbearing, especially in the endurance of abuse or provocation.

All these will, God-willing, lead to a peaceful and prosperous public relations.