

Agustí de Uribe-Salazar, president of Gabinete Uribe

'We have to make an effort to uphold precision in our work'

Agustí de Uribe-Salazar is one of the pioneers of public relations in Spain, a profession he embarked upon in 1964. Since 1977 he has chaired the Gabinete Uribe de Relaciones Públicas, a consulting firm that has been recognised with one of the most important prizes at both domestic and international levels. Agustí de Uribe-Salazar was the president of the Spanish Public Relations Group, a board member of CERP (an alliance that brings together professional public relations companies from European countries), founder and president of ADECEC (state employers' association of PR firms) and founder and assistant dean of the Association of Advertisers and Public Relations of Catalonia.

What types of industries are encompassed within public relations?

Over the years, the definition of public relations and its scope of action has varied greatly. Some years ago it was only involved in event organisation. Over time, the public relations sector has started to gain greater importance. First with the creation of more companies and consultancies and, secondly and very important, through educating students in this field at universities.

Who hires public relations firms?

Today, everybody. There is no single sector or industry that needs it more than others. Job placement takes place in industry and commerce, at public administrations and political parties and NGOs. In other words, it trickles down to all sectors very homogeneously. Furthermore, it is an occupation that is growing in all sectors. When you used to start at a company, there wouldn't be anybody working exclusively in public relations. There was nobody and they didn't even have any idea what it really meant. Today, they know what it means and this also means that if they hire you, they know perfectly well what they can ask you to do and what they can't.

What training do public relations employees need?

It is obvious that they need training in all communications techniques, just like advertising agents. Then, there are methodologies and techniques that are specific to our sector, such as for example group cohesion, event organisation, conflict resolution, etcetera. What really sets us apart from advertisers is that our objective is individuals, unlike advertising agents, where they aim at the group. We can reach groups through the individual.

What can you never forget in public relations?

Thinking about the rest. This is the most important thing in public relations. In advertising, I won't say they don't think about everybody else, but they think more about the product, about sales and about money. We don't think about money, we think about opinion. Our playing field is fundamentally public opinion and, starting with public opinion, what is best for internal and external communications.

What are the trends in the sector of public relations?

We tend towards specialisation. Man used to orchestrate who we were in the beginning, that we should do everything and we had no other remedy but to learn to do everything. Today that has changed. For example, our firm has specialists in event organisation, in group cohesion, in conflict resolution, etcetera. There are specialists that are later assisted and accompanied by junior executives, people who are in

training and gradually learn about these specialisations.

Do you think the profession needs to be reorganised?

Yes, that is one obligation we have. Like any young sector that has undergone extraordinary growth in few years, there comes a point in which it has to go back and stabilise and make the roots go deeper. Trees are pruned every year and they have to be cut back so that the roots are stronger and they grow more. I think that these times of crisis are good for doing all this pruning and making the sector continue its road to growth with greater solidity and precision. There has to be some introspection, seeing what things need to be strengthened and not ceded in any of our specialities.

This pruning you talked about, is it necessary because of intrusions into the profession?

Entry barriers to this profession are very thin, almost anybody can get a start in public relations. Remember that one of Bernais's sentences was 'Today, any moron can call himself a public relations agent'. Unfortunately, it has already reached this point. For example, today the subject of event organisation has taken on a 'curious' dynamic, because everybody does events. Everybody wants in on the game and you can see outrageous atrocities, above all in subjects as strict and serious as protocol in our profession. You can see protocols that truly inspire fear and see them at all levels. We have to make an effort to uphold seriousness and precision in our work.

What advice would you give somebody who wanted to have a career in public relations?

The first piece of advice is that they start off working with the very best professionals. They have to take their first '10,000 hours of flight' at the side of great professionals to be able to fill their shoes later. The most important thing is not the economic perception-reception, but rather the perception of knowledge. If they are excited about working in a profession with great dignity and precision, the only thing they should do is roll up their sleeves and look ahead. Because I am convinced that there is still a long road to improvement, polishing and ending up having a profession with even more prestige than it currently has.

Noteworthy quote:

'I think this time of crisis is good for pruning and assuring that the sector continues to keep growing more solidly and precisely'

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