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Page Society's Bolton looks to boost PR profile in C-suite

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As Roger Bolton commences his presidency of the Arthur W. Page Society, he talks to **Craig McGuire** about his plans to advance the group's principles

Roger Bolton has a busy 2006 ahead of him. Recently appointed president of The Arthur W. Page Society, Aetna's SVP of communications is mulling strategies for tackling diversity and gleaning more members from among the Fortune 100.

Bolton plans to retool the programs the society offers its members, while aggressively promoting its principles to the CEOs of the world.

Bolton, 55, succeeds Tom Martin, SVP and director of corporate relations at ITT Industries, who served as president of the Page Society for the past two years. Bolton has been a member of the organization since 1996, and served as treasurer until this appointment.

PRWeek: As treasurer for the society, this appointment is quite a promotion. Was it something you aspired to?

Roger Bolton: It is not the kind of thing you seek, there's no campaigning. You don't say, "I want to be the next guy." It just, well, it just comes to you. But yes, it was something I aspired to, because I am a huge believer in the mission and value of the Page Society and I saw an opportunity to continue the progress made in recent years.

PRWeek: On a personal level, how satisfying is it?

Bolton: This is the kind of thing that represents the pinnacle of a professional career. It's rewarding and inspiring. To be recognized by your peers is more of a validation of your career than even recognition of the work you do for your own company.

PRWeek: As the previous treasurer, you certainly are hitting the ground running.

Bolton: I do feel that as a result of my role as treasurer, I have the advantage of having intimate knowledge of many of the inner workings of the Society. Because of this closeness, I have a good appreciation for the progress we have made in recent years, as well as the possibilities that remain.

PRWeek: What are your primary objectives?

Bolton: One important objective I have is more foundational, related to improving what's already here. This extends from the programs and services we provide our members, to our initiatives to achieve a broader and more influential membership base.

PRWeek: In terms of increasing membership, where do you want the growth to

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come from?

Bolton: We have increased membership and want to continue to do that, but we still have tremendous opportunity to further penetrate the Fortune 100. I would also like to see more of a representation among the Global 100. We have a few international members, but nowhere near where we should be. [Membership grew 26.9% from 253 total members at the end of 2000 to 321 members at the end of 2005, while spending increased 86.7% from \$591,277 in 2000 to \$1,103,538 for 2005, according to Bolton.]

PRWeek: What other membership-related opportunities will you address?

Bolton: I would like to see us improve the diversity of the members. We have a real opportunity in this area.

PRWeek: What is your strategy for increasing diversity?

Bolton: When it comes to diversity, we have only just begun to scratch the surface in this profession, including corporate PR. The answer is to really find ways to have a more profound impact on diversity in corporate PR.

PRWeek: Are you considering any specific initiatives?

Bolton: To help develop a future generation of chief PR officers with diversity in mind, a lot of the focus today is on scholarships for minorities to PR educational programs. I think these are wonderful programs, but I also think we are missing an important opportunity, in that we also need to focus on the people that are already in PR roles. They have the potential to be chief PR officers.

We need to create special programs for them to develop the skills to take on these challenging roles. Over time, we will find ourselves with a richer, more diverse Page Society membership as a result, and have a much stronger impact. I think such programs would be an excellent addition to scholarship programs, which are also very valuable.

PRWeek: How do you plan to make an impact on the everyday lives of your members?

Bolton: I want to continue to improve the quality of the programs for members so that they are more effectively prepared to succeed as strategic consultative members of the corporate management team.

To achieve that, you can expect to [see us] expand and enhance our programs, including the upcoming spring seminars, the annual conference, the regional meetings. These are not necessarily new initiatives, as Tom's leadership moved us into these areas already. We will look to initiate programs that will create a stronger pipeline of better prepared future communications officers.

PRWeek: What is your driving philosophy?

Bolton: We need to foster a better understanding among CEOs and other C-suite executives and corporate boards of directors of the value of the Page Principles, and the appropriate role in the senior management suite of a corporate PR officer.

PRWeek: How does that play today in the boardrooms of corporate America?

Bolton: There needs to be a better understanding among CEOs, which I feel is tied directly to the ultimate objective in advancing the mission of the Page Society.

We must advance the role of the chief corporate PR officer in formulating management policy. We need to work at the programs we develop to help us all do better jobs, keep up with best practices, and we have to identify opportunities to work with the C-suite so that they can see the full potential of what this role is like when it is done well.

PRWeek: What other challenges are your members facing?

Bolton: The issue that is so critically important in corporate management suites and boardrooms is corporate trust. An unfortunate series of corporate scandals in recent years has led to crisis of confidence in American corporations and undermined corporate trust. CEOs need to have a full appreciation of the value of this, and I think our members can have a powerful impact in this area.

PRWeek: What would you like your legacy to be?

Bolton: I'd love to be able to say when I am done that we have made progress in these areas I discussed. My predecessors, the ones I worked closely with [Martin, David Drobis, and James Murphy], all succeeded in achieving progress for the Society. If you go back seven years to Tom and Dave and Jim's leadership, coinciding with my intimate involvement with the board, I think the Page Society has made great strides.

I want my legacy to be inexorable progress towards more programs that affect members and broader influence among opinion leaders, particularly corporate leaders, all aimed at fulfilling the mission of improving the role in policy making and management for our members.

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