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### Interview with Mort Kaplan, 2004

Columbia College Chicago

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## M o r t   K a p l a n

*Today is April the 14, 2004.  
This is an interview with Mort  
Kaplan, Professor of Marketing  
Communication and Director of  
Public Relations Studies.*

**So we'd like to start by asking you when did you come to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you here?**

It was 1987. I had a public relations company and I sold it to an even bigger company, Ketchum Public Relations, and I became executive VP of that company for four years of my contract. During that period, I used a lot of Columbia College interns, and I hired a lot of Columbia College interns. That's how I kind of got familiar with the college and a number of them are still out there working in the field, and it's really kind of nice to see that happen. I checked out of the company, cashed in my chips, went to live on a beach in LaHoya for a year. Mike Alexandroff, who was the president of the school, talking with Lya Rosenbloom, who was then the dean, thought that it was time they had a public relations concentration here and so I said nothing doing. I'm out here for a year and during one of my trips to Chicago, Mike and Lya took me to the University Club, and Mike schmoozed me pretty good and said, you know, we would love to have you do this. I think there's all kinds of issues that really require public relations attention.

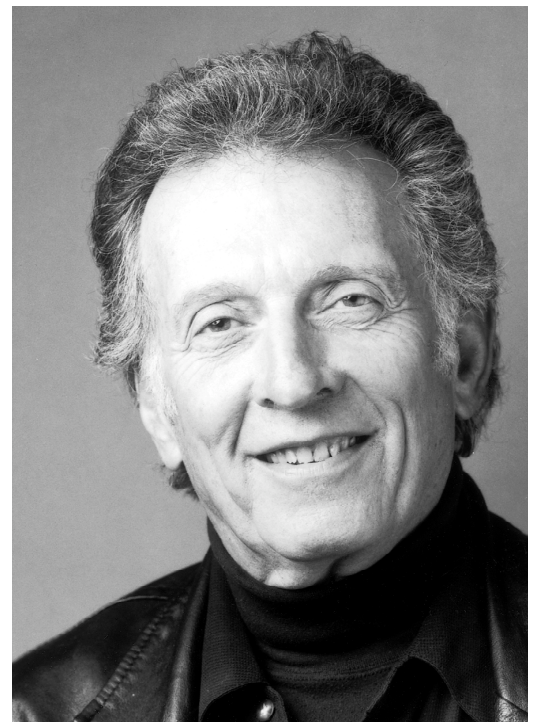
And we talked about things like pro-life versus pro-choice and gun control versus the national rifle

association and environmental issues. And I said, Mike, I promised myself a year out of the caldron and when I come back, maybe then. He said, no, we'll wait for you, and he said while you're out there think about the curriculum, think about the teachers that you would like while you—as only Mike would say—while you're drinking your fresh orange juice, pally. He liked to call people pally, you know, and drinking your fresh orange juice and walking on the beach, think about the program, and we'll wait. And this was April or March I believe of that year, and I came back in September and started the PR program.

That's how I came here, and I had—I can't remember whether I met Mike through Lya or Lya through Mike. I think I met Mike through Lya because I had been the founding president of an organization called the Illinois Arts Alliance, which is still very potent citizens advocacy group. And I think I met Lya during those situation, that circumstance, and she introduced me to Mike and asked me if I had thought about teaching now that I was out of the commercial aspect of the business.

**So they contacted you out—they came after you and through your reputation in the business world and asked you. I'm curious about, if you could expand on Mike saying, you know, giving you your assignment. It sounds like he's saying dream up this and we'll, you know, make sure it happens.** He was very good at that, you know. Mike had this marvelous inventive mind about where he wanted to take the school and

when we had lunch, he really talked about the kinds of things he saw for a PR program. He wanted political stuff. Mike was very, very political. He wanted—and consequently I developed a course called political and governmental public relations, which to this day we teach, and he wanted issues. Interestingly enough issues has become a course. At the time it wasn't a course, public relations issues. I knew what it was that I felt the students needed to learn to have a career. Issues wasn't one of them, but there are so much money now being spent on public relations issues. As I look back, I think how prescient Mike was to have wanted that at that time and it took me probably 12 or 14 years before I put that course in because I couldn't get students involved in it. Well now that's a course. We finally have 13 students in the course and it is going this year, and public relations issues is taught because so much money is being spent on that.



Just think about an issue like casino gambling in Illinois. It's not a product. It's not a service. It's not a company. It's an issue. You know, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops paid I think a half million dollars to a public relations firm to help get the story, the pro-life story out. That's the kind of money that's being spent these days on issues. Not corporate reputation, not companies, not new products, not services issues, and Mike was on to that 18 years ago.

**And then the relation of the issues, and how they're presented, discussed and its impact ultimately on legislation?**

On legislation, on society, on public opinion, the hearts and minds of people, all that so it's interesting. When I think back about Mike talking about issues at that time and talking about the kind and politics and government PR at that time, it's kind of interesting that he had the vision, which he did, to see that that should be incorporated and that it was time for a PR concentration. There weren't a lot of PR concentrations in the country at that time. Now there are, but 18 years ago there really weren't very many. And when I did some research about it, I found all kinds of horrendous stuff.

I talked to a professor at one of the branches at University of Florida, for example, and she had been an English Ph.D. and she hired all English Ph.D.'s. I said there's not a PR course in there, and it's because none of them had any practical experience or knew anything about PR. You know, they were teaching the theory of propaganda, interpersonal communication, all those things that were fine. I don't deni-

grate them, but they certainly were not going to help somebody get a job in public relations.

**Well maybe you could expand on that. So you're coming not from the education academic. You're coming from the business and the application. What did you, when you started thinking about this, what did you identify that needed to be taught? What were the things you were teaching your interns that they weren't getting through their educational (*inaudible*)?**

I'll give you a great example of how a course came up, and I struggled with this and had to convince Lya Rosenblum that it was a course without a textbook or anything like that. I had an intern from Columbia College, and I gave her all kinds of material and I said draft this as a brochure. You know, we need a brochure. I talked with her. I gave her all the information. She came back to me and did a pretty decent job. I sent her back for two or three rewrites. Finally when I said to her okay, we need 5000, 2-color jobs, go do it, she fell apart. She didn't know what to do, and I realized there are so many practical parts of this business that—she could write it, she was good writer and she could follow those instructions, but go and do it. How do I do that? Where do I start? So from that idea I developed a course called public relations resources, the tools of the trade, and the things that can't really be done well in the classroom are done.

A designer and a printer come to the class and talk about so you've got a brochure, how do you find Mr. Designer or Miss Designer? What do we charge? How do you

look for us? How do you bid a job, says Miss Printer. How do you get bids for this? What do you do and that particular course had its incubation in that little assignment. And so the result is we'll bring a photographer, we'll go to a photography studio to see a publicity photographer telling them this is what I need from you to do my job. This is what you need from me. Here is a good picture that a newspaper will run. Here's a bad picture a newspaper will not run and why. I will—we go to clipping retrieval services so that if you send out a press release to 500 newspapers and the boss comes in and said that was a great press release. Who used it? You don't scratch your head and say I don't know. We go to Bacons right down Michigan Avenue where they will show you their media directories, which will allow you to pick out the 500 food editors or sports editors, and they will for \$2.00 or \$200.00 a month and \$2.00 a clipping, read all those publications and send you what was run, done.

So those are things that you can't teach in a classroom, and it's a very practical course. It's perhaps not as theoretically educational as other courses, but it's really stuff that a public relations person needs to know. And the result is that the kids that come out of this program are light years ahead of most other schools because there's nobody teaching courses like that, and so I simply thought to myself, while I was drinking orange juice and walking on the beach, what are the kinds of course that they need? They need a writing course so we have PR writing. They need this course, public relations resources. They need special events, how to

manage and promote special events. You're not going to be in this business without promoting a anniversary, a plant open house, a marathon race, a this, a that. You know, you're going to be involved in special events. How to manage and promote it.

You're not going to be in the business without being able to handle crises. We are in an era, my God, of change, conflict, confrontation, and there's not a day goes by where there's not a crisis and who do people turn to? They turn to the PR people. You know, help us out of this jackpot. What do we do now and so we have a course called public relations cases and crises. We have a course called public relations presentation skills. You've got to be able to present an idea. You have to be able to sell an idea to a journalist, to your boss, for a budget, to virtually anything so it's extremely important and it's important for all students to take that, but this is a course in our department presentation skills that's important. We have a course called public relations for government and politics, and the teachers that I have hired, I wrote all the initial syllabi. I developed all the courses and hired all the teachers, and that was in the very beginning. And since that time, other instructors have come on and adjusted their own syllabus, which is fine, you know, and we've just kind of sailed along and we're very contemporary, very contemporary.

**Where do you find your teachers?**

In the business. I am not a teacher who knows public relations. I am a public relations professional who knows how to teach, and I have made it a point of hiring PR people

who know how to teach not teachers who know something about PR. There's a big difference. Jane Kanepa, who teaches how to manage and promote special events, was special events coordinator for Carson Pirie Scott and has her own special events company. Robin Mattel, who teaches PR crises, was VP of PR for major airlines. Alton Miller, who teaches politics and government, was Harold Washington's press secretary so I've tried to find the appropriate teachers for these niche courses, and I think the result has been, you know, very fruitful.

**How do you—I mean because certainly someone that is successful in PR doesn't necessarily mean that they would be a great teacher. How, I mean, how do you get a sense of—do they try out? I don't know.**

They are trying out when they talk to me and when I talk to them, and, you know, I know who the people in the field are. I can't always get the people that I want. You know, they're working. They've got good jobs, you know, but I can always get them to come over and do guest lectures. So we get a lot of those people that we could never afford to hire, and somehow the people that we do hire, first of all, like most of the departments, we use mostly adjuncts. There are only two full time people in the PR program. That's Alton Miller and me. He teaches PR writings, a number of sections of that, and he teaches politics and government, and now he's teaching an intro course also.

I've taught most of them at one time or another in the beginning, but I find that I need to teach only the PR intro courses now because I need to see how those students are,

the ones that I want to encourage, the ones who come into the pipeline. If I still taught the advance courses, I wouldn't be seeing any of those people. I wouldn't be able to take somebody that I think will have a great career and encourage them to take more PR courses so I wind up giving myself intro classes for the most part now.

**That's interesting because a lot of times teachers will aspire to teach the more advanced or getting the students at that end. So do I.**

**Yeah and but why is it important for you? I mean you see it as kind of mentoring as well and nurturing.**

Right, I see them in their first class so that I can see who I think may indeed have a great career in PR because, you know, we have core courses. They have to take intro to PR, but they don't have to take anything in PR after that. So by teaching those intro classes, I see the ones that I think may have a good career or promising career in PR and I encourage them to do it. In the beginning, it was because I was building a program and I needed to get people taking the other courses. Now that the program is sailing, it's more for that reason getting really good people out there into the field who could be good at advertising or marketing 'cause that's the way we're structured. But I also see them good at PR and they respond to that, and I think they we have a lot of people out there now that are from Columbia College who are doing good PR work.

Just anecdotally, and it doesn't have anything to do with the PR program, but about three weeks ago ABC television interviewed me on the Mel Gibson movie and I said I hadn't seen it. They said we want to talk about the promotion not the movie so I did the interview. And after the interview was over, and this staggered me for its irony, the reporter said to me, you know, I graduated from Columbia College, in the journalism program. And the cameraman said you're kidding, I graduated from Columbia College in the television department. So here we were, the three of us, all Columbia College affiliated, and I thought how wonderful, how typical, and how appropriate for Columbia.

**And Mike Alexandroff is probably looking down and smiling.**  
I'm sure he was.

**Could you, as the founder of the program and the person that Lya and Mike reached out to, could you speak a bit about the history and evolution of the department public relations, marketing communication 'cause I don't, you know, I think that's important to kind of document.**  
Well when I got here, John Turini was the head of the department and, you know, the —

**And what was the department's name, do you remember?**  
It wasn't marketing communication until I'm really not sure. I mean I'm not sure whether it was the advertising department and then they began to (*inaudible*) to evolve, but I know when I came on there was now going to be a PR concentration. And somewhere in that mix, as best I can remember, the name was changed to marketing

communication. It wasn't always marketing communication.

**So it would contain advertising public relation and marketing.**  
And marketing, right, theoretically and actually public relations and advertising are part of marketing, but there were so many jobs and such a distinct discipline in PR and in advertising that the decisions was made to call it marketing communication and have marketing advertising and PR. Even though—if you're out there in the world advertising marketing, I mean sorry, advertising public relations, sales promotion, those are all parts of marketing, but, you know, it works best this way because they are individual disciplines.

**And I want to, before we go, to talk a bit more about the courses that you developed 'cause I think that's interesting, and what the purpose was behind the organization of it.**

It was simply my saying to myself what do I want from someone I want to hire because I probably interviewed 500 people. You know, my own company was pretty big. We had 35 or 40 people here in Chicago, and when I sold and became executive VP of Ketchum, they probably had 7 or 800 people around the country. And I just asked myself what do I expect from somebody that I hire? That's really how I developed the courses. What would I want them to know? And keeping in mind what Mike had in mind, my initial thought was not to have a political and governmental PR. That was too narrow, but I knew Mike wanted that and so I installed that.

The PR resources, as I said, came because I saw what this student could do and what she couldn't do. The crises, I had handled so many crises, you know, in my time that I knew that we're in an era where crisis is communications is really important, and how do you get the crisis behind you? And what are the, what's the importance of the first 24 hours in a crisis, and how do you develop a crisis communications team? And, you know, it just seemed a natural based on what I knew. I also knew PR writing was essential. Writing was essential, is essential. I still think about tweaking PR writing and making it into two courses rather than one. PR writing one and PR writing two, which we may do, but at the moment we have one PR writing class because you can't be in the business if you, without writing, and it isn't just press releases.

People talk about equate public relations with press releases. If I want to book a guest on your TV show, I have to send you a query letter. I have to persuade you. If I want to strategize with you, I have to write you a strategy. You know, if you are, whatever you're doing, if you're trying to influence legislation, if you're trying to roll out a product, if you're trying to recover your corporate reputation, you need a strategy and I need to write that strategy. I need to write a variety of things. I need to write public service announcements. I need to write video news releases so writing is integral to the PR business. Now you don't have to write like James Baldwin or Ernest Hemingway or, you know, the great writers, but you can't be afraid of writing. And I encourage all the students to go to the writing center, to take PR writing, to take composition one, composition two, take as much

writing as you can 'cause it's important, and so it really stemmed from what I began to muse over. What are the most important things I need from somebody who comes in to the business? That's where all these courses flow from.

**How did you feel about becoming a teacher?**

I wasn't sure. I really wasn't sure. I felt that I had the knack because I had given so many speeches and coached so many people in speaking and I still do. As a matter of fact, I just wrote a book called "When You Speak, Do They Listen" on public speaking, and I still do a lot of public speaking coaching. And so felt I was pretty good, but I didn't really know and I had a wonderful experience when I first started and it was a frustrating experience. Students would come in late, which they still do, or, you know, you're a teacher yourself so you know how that happens. And I was very exasperated and I called a friend of mine at the University of California. He was a professor in charge of the teacher training program at the University of California, and we were boyhood friends. And I said, Dick, you know, this is driving me nuts, and his first response was to laugh. And his second was to say just remember, you can't fire a student, and I got a big kick out of it.

And I remember that, but what I started to do in class was to say you're fired if somebody came in like the third time late. I would say you're fired, and I would tell everybody that's what happens when you're out there working. If I can't rely on you to be in here on time, I'm going to fire you. So I would

say that to students. You're fired. You know, Joe, you're fired. You know, clear out your desk, and the first time I did it, you know, they were kind of startled and, you know, stopped in their tracks. I said I'm just kidding, sit down, but let me explain to you. So, you know, I mean he gave me some tips about that and then I just sort of, I took textbooks and I discovered that I was at odds with a lot of parts of the textbooks.

And I have an ongoing relationship with the author of one of the major textbooks in the field because I'm always writing to him and saying this is not right and I think you ought to revise that in your next edition. Well last year he put me in the book as acknowledgement thinking that he was going to get me off his back but of course he didn't. You know, I keep right on going so there are some things that he really should highlight that he doesn't. There are some things that are I think a little at odds with what the prevailing strategy in the field, what the prevailing view is, you know, out there rather than in the textbook.

So I usually do that, and I encourage all my instructors, all our instructors to do the same. Pick the text you're most happy with and then improvise, put your own imprimatur on the class, and I think we all do that. All the teachers I have do that. They're all individualists. They're all professional. They all have good experience, and they all put their own stamp on the class. What else can I tell you?

**What about your teaching style or philosophy, you know, if you could talk a bit about that.**

Very informal. It's very informal. It's peppered with illustrations of my own career versus others. Today, for example, I showed a film of an old Bob Newhart episode where he was a psychologist, and he was mouse trapped in a TV interview by somebody who is treating him very kindly and then when the cameras went on killed him.

**Is that what a mousetrap is?**

Yeah, well, you know, it's a trap and but I showed it by way of introducing a discussion about your responsibility will be to help someone go on television. Somebody who—your boss, your client, your supervisor, somebody who's never been on TV before, and you have to show them how to do that, and then we always, my philosophy is that we always talk about current events in this context. I talked about the president's speech last night, and I asked them to think about it from a PR standpoint. After we talked about PR and television, and they were terrific, you know, one of them said he bridged. Well bridging is a term that we use so that if I ask you what time is it? And you don't want to tell me, you say, you learn how to say well I'll tell you what the time is, but let me tell you why the weather's more important. And that's what the President did last night, and I was so proud of this kid because he realized that the President in responding to the question, didn't really answer the question. Answered the question that he wanted to answer and made the little speech that he wanted to make.

Well that's what you learn how to do, you know, when you're talking so in the Bob Newhart show, he was being killed by this person. And so I asked the class what would you have done and one of the young women said I never would've allowed him to go on that show, and I said good for you. That's the very first thing so we talk in terms of contemporary practice a lot, and I want the students to understand, not regurgitate definitions. I mean they have to have definitions. I have to give exams 'cause that's the way we keep score, but I want them to get their arms around it and understand it. And I don't care whether they give me a definition back that I have given them as long as their definition is such that I understand that they know what it is. That they know the answer. They may not put it into the words that I want, but they know the answer and that's fine with me. I want them to understand.

Also I'm a great believer in encouragement. I mean I spend more time on encouragement and on ethical practice because I want them to know that public relations is a business where it's very hard to measure creativity in the classroom. And it's very hard to measure energy and initiative and the kinds of things that can help you succeed in public relations so even though you may not have scored as well as you would like on an exam, don't think that to mean that you can't have a good career in PR because it's just not true because of the reasons that I set forth. So I have a very encouraging style. I let a teacher go because he was too cynical. He was a very good teacher

and a very good professional, but I said I can't have you discouraging the students like that and I let him go. I think that's important.

I think ethics is important because we are in a business, in PR advertising too but certainly in PR, where the ability to manipulate, the ability to mischaracterize, the ability to spin, if you will, is so prevalent that I want students to understand you have to draw a line somewhere, you know, and you cannot—it's okay to say this glass of water is half full, if you're in the PR business, the same way it's okay for the journalist to say it's half empty because that'll sell papers, but you cannot you lie. You've lost your credibility and you're credibility is the most important thing that you have in dealing with your publics, you're various publics, whether it's stockholders, whether it's employees, whether it's the press. Certainly no matter who your stakeholders are, you must as PR people maintain your credibility. You are the conscience of the organization or you should be. You are the guardian of the reputation of the organization, and I guess that's a long way of answering a short question about my philosophy of teaching.

**Can you tell me a bit about your students? What were they like when you first came in the late 80's and how have they changed?**

I think they're much sharper. I think they're smarter. I also think in some ways they might be a little more cynical. They're much more interested in money. I don't deprecate that. I think that's fine. I think that there's just so much more communications vehicles now then there was 18 years ago. There was

no Internet and that's two sides of a coin. It's good and it's bad. It's good because there's so much more information available to them. It's bad because it becomes a crutch. They're not reading newspapers like they used to. They're not paying as much attention to that as they used to because you didn't have an Internet so you watched television or read the newspapers. There's so much more reality television and that kind of crap going on today that deflects them from what they really ought to be paying attention to. I do ask that they watch TV and read the newspapers and listen to the radio differently. Let them filter it through their public relations lens so they can see what at PR inspired story was versus a regular news story, and I think they're sharper today.

I also think they still don't really know what public relations is. Who does until you've been exposed to it, and some of them have a misunderstanding of what it is. I think, when I first started here, I think the level of student just wasn't as high as it is now. It just wasn't. Why is that? I'm not sure. I'm just not sure but it's not. I will say I think there were more minority students at that time, and I think possibility the cost of going to school today has whittled that out. I think it's lamentable. I think we need to have, being true to Columbia College and what it is, we need to actively recruit minority students and I'd like to see that done.

**Could you speak a little bit about that relationship of a public relations to the larger school and the mission of Columbia College?**

I think there is no department, no concentration that speaks more to the mission of the college than public relations. If we're talking about the phrase that everybody uses, the only part of the mission statement everybody uses, authoring the culture of our times, who's going to do it? But the public relations professional who is in fact developing issues is in fact working on environmental issues, working on governmental issues, working on legislation, working on the things that in fact author the culture of our times. That's what public relations is all about especially when you get away from the narrow focus of the reputation of my corporation or the introduction of the Frisbee or that type of thing so that becomes important.

**And so as kind of the extension of that idea or ideal of authoring the culture of your times, I mean has the college changed or have you been able, again with that relationship between PR at Columbia and Columbia College, has the relationship changed at all?**

I don't think the relationship has changed. I think Columbia is as true to that now as they were then. I think the difference is they're able to do that now more than they were able to do that then with the advent of new courses and new concentrations and expanded curriculum. I think the possibility exists for us to do it better now than then. Just the mere advent of a public relations program, you know, allows us to do more of that without even respect to other

departments within the school. So I think that has, I think that mission has remained, but I think the wherewithal to accomplish it has become better.

**What—could you talk about some other challenges that the college has faced since you came that you think are particularly important?**

I think restructuring is probably, you'll probably hear that all the time, but that's probably because it's so true. You know, before restructuring there was one dean and they were, and as the school grew there was still one dean. And as it continued to grow there was still one dean, and I will say that both the deans, Lya Rosenblum and Caroline Latta, did Herculean jobs. You know, I used to have a boss in the PR, my first PR job who used to say I can't be at three weddings with one fanny, and yet these deans were expected to do all of that. And so I think restructuring gave us the ability to get things done, to break bottlenecks, to do things that—well the growth of the school has been enormous as a result of that so I think restructuring has been something extremely important from that standpoint.

**You mentioned Caroline Latta and you mentioned Lya Rosenblum a couple of times, two very important female figures at Columbia, but Columbia's also come under, over the years, some criticism of well emphasizing diversity and opportunity that it has been as strong an opportunity for women. Can you comment on that or what is your—**

I think that's, I think it was true. I don't think it's true anymore. I think there's been a big breakthrough. In fact when Margaret Sullivan became chair of our

department, she was a candidate that I was in complete support of, and I was on the committee. And boy, I'll tell you if I ever reached the heights of oratory, it was in her behalf because I thought she could do the job and she has. She's been phenomenal.

**Was there resistance? Did you feel—**

No, I didn't feel there was resistance because she was a woman. I didn't feel that. There was just natural resistance because there were other candidates that people wanted, but I never felt it was that. I don't know why it happened that way. I mean maybe you've got a better idea than I as to why it happened that way. I talk about turning the tables on an interviewer, but I never felt that was the case. It just, it happened and I'm delighted that that changed 'cause it certainly has.

**And when we look back again since you came to Columbia, what other issues do you think Columbia has had to face or continues to face?**

Open enrollment. In fact, one of the things that I used to do a lot of when a crisis developed, when something happened, I used to get a call from Mike, from Lya, from John Duff, from Dr. Carter, you know, come and let's talk about, give me some advice. And I remember one very specifically when I think John Duff was still the president, and there was the usual crisis about open enrollment, usual criticism coming to us about open enrollment. And I met with Bert Gall at the time, and Bert, and there were a couple other people in the room and I can't remember,



and they said we're going to have to promote again, you know, how we stand on open enrollment. Any ideas? And I said I have one idea that ought a shut everybody up.

I said find me a handful of students who couldn't get into any other school who have become really successful. Can you do that? Bert said you bet we can, and they found a couple of students. I mean one was a young African American male who was I think sales manager for a major radio station who was making about a quarter of a million dollars a year who said he couldn't get in anywhere except Columbia. And then there was a young woman who also had a big job somewhere who couldn't get in anywhere, and I said get them ready, get them ready to testify wherever you want them testify to speak wherever you do, and find some more, and that was the kind of thing that I would usually get called in on. You know, we got a problem from a PR standpoint, any ideas, and I wound up doing a lot of that.

**Well that anticipates my next question, you know, that I was going to ask you. Have you ever worked for Columbia in your professional capacity, but as a consultant? It sounds like you have.**

No. Well I mean I have informally on issues that I don't think we ought a talk about.

**Okay.**

And sure, I mean why would they go outside, you know, when here I am, you know, and that, I don't mean that to sound egomaniacal. But I mean I've had all that experience so, you know, sure, I was only

too happy and still am to make whatever contribution I can in that context.

**And any advice like I'm thinking now today a current issue certainly is staff organization and recently (*inaudible*) we had the unionization of the part time faculty here at Columbia. When you talk about crisis management, without maybe being specific, but just your views on some of these issues that the college faces as it grows.**

Well I mean are you talking specifically union questions or any kind of questions?

**Or relationship between staff and administration and with looking at the part-time example that was their, ultimately that was the solution to organizing (*inaudible*).** Right, I'm not sure I'm confident about addressing that issue to tell you the truth. I'd have to think some more about that and this isn't a time to think so.

**Okay, I want to, before certainly the end of the interview, I would like you to talk a bit about the Illinois Arts Alliance and your role in that because that certainly is, addresses issues that are close to the heart.**

It also addresses my relationship with some memorable people here like Fred Fine and well I had my public relations company. I had always been involved in arts and culture just as a personal passion. I'm very passionate about theater, about music, about, you know, literature, and that kind of thing, but I had a PR firm that was a real kind of knock them down, drag them out, you know, issues, political campaigns. I've handled about 30 political candidates for senate, for governor, for all that, and there

was a movement afoot to cut the arts council budget during a time of budget crisis in Illinois. And a lot of arts organizations got together and said we've got to head this off, and we need somebody who knows politics and the arts. And somebody suggested me, and these organizations called me and there were about a 100 of them meeting at the cultural center one very freezing day. And I was at a convention in Las Vegas, and they called me there and said we're going to meet, you know, Monday. We'd like you to head the Illinois Arts Alliance, a fledgling organization we have an idea about forming, and I flew back and I said nobody's going to be there. You know, it was like zero.

I got off the plane. I took a cab to the cultural center. I walk in the room. There had to be a 100 people representing different arts organizations. I said oh my God. You know, this floored me and they said you know politics, you know government, you know PR, you know the arts, we want you to be the founding president of an organization. It wasn't even the Illinois Arts Alliance at that time. It was just a group of people who got together and we did, and we stopped them cold. You know, the arts council budget was saved. It gave us the impetus to begin the Illinois Arts Alliance, and I had met Fred Fine earlier through his partner Frank Freed. They had Triangle Productions and I met Fred one day just prior to the Illinois Arts Alliance because Frank was a friend of mine. Said bring your kids to see a show. My kids loved a group called Sha Na Na, and they were sold out. So I met

this person who was the most improbable looking rock impresario Fred Fine, and he took my children up to the light booth to watch the show. That's where I first met Fred and then I met him again in the Arts Alliance context.

And we became very good friends to the point where when Fred was nominated for culture commissioner of the City of Chicago and there was a hue and a cry about his communist background, I organized a rally of all the arts organizations who demanded to be heard at testimony in his behalf. And we had about 50 organizations testifying and one of the great anecdotes that I remember about that testimony here are the aldermen sitting up there hearing testimony from all the arts organization. We're talking about the importance of having Fred and so on while they were thinking a communist background, you know, bull, and here comes Esse Kupcinet, Irv Kupcinet's wife, and she testifies on behalf of Fred. And then she starts to sit down and she thinks better of it. And she goes up back to the mike and says and by the way, Irv feels this way too. It was a wonderful, wonderful appendage to her comment. She wanted those aldermen to know that Irv Kupcinet supports him too and by the way, Irv feels that way too. And Fred and I became very close friends and collaborators 'cause he was very active in the Illinois Arts Alliance, and I served as president for several terms, and of course today it's a huge, powerful, potent organization with big budget doing wonderful things.

**And I mean that's interesting too because you talked earlier when you were being interviewed about the Mel Gibson movie that kind of Columbia triage there. Do you think that Columbia had a significant influence impact on Chicago, the arts?**

Oh absolutely.

**And if you could give, you know, some examples.**

Well I think that triage was one of them. I think that Columbia with programs like it has, the (*inaudible*) program, the editorial cartoons, the semester in L.A., that we have where we've developed our own here also, we have an opportunity to impact industry. I think Columbia with our music center, with the programs that we put out, the photo gallery, I mean all of that stuff is terribly important to the City and helps to stamp Columbia as a leader in the arts community as well as fulfilling its mission as a college. I think they're that perhaps more than we even realize. Columbia stands out as a contributor to the culture of the City probably. I can't think of another school that does more.

**Do you, are we still the most well kept secret or do you think Columbia's name is—**

I think that's a myth. I really think that's a myth. I do not think we are. I think that those of us who are here always want people to know who we are, and we're disappointed when they don't. And if somebody doesn't recognize us for what we are, I still object to that. I still get teed off when I hear somebody say oh, aren't you the, you're the theater school or the radio school or something like that. Well you can't expect everybody to know that. Do I want us to be known better? Yes. Do I want us to be

known more widely out of Chicago? Yes. Would I like us to be known internationally? Yes. Do I want us identified as the best communications art school in the country? Yes. I think it's been a myth that nobody knows who we are. I mean we've got almost 10,000 students there. Somebody knows we're doing something right.

**What do you think is the biggest challenge for Columbia in the future?**

Managed growth. I think there's a limit by capital equipment, by real estate, by our ability to absorb students. I think that's going to become a problem. Can we take care of 20,000 students? We certainly can't do it now. What's our plan? How are we going to manage that growth? We have space problems. We have real estate problems. I mean not problems, but challenges certainly if we're going to and I think we're up to meeting those challenges. You know, we're still buying buildings next door to the Wabash building in order to accommodate that, to accommodate our students who want to come from out of state. And I find particularly in our department and probably true of all over the school, we find students who are arriving from everywhere and I think that's fascinating. I think it's because of a lot of reasons. We have teachers who do what they teach. They've heard about us. You know, they like the atmosphere here. We have a great reputation for being interactively creative with students. They like the small classes. They like the hands-on, a lot of reasons so somebody knows that and they keep coming, but I would say probably managed growth is probably the biggest problem from where I sit.

**And what do you think are some of the most positive changes that have taken place at the college?**

Well I said I think restructuring has, I think separating us into schools as part of that restructuring is a very positive change. I think it creates some affinities that allow us to do certain things with other departments within our various schools that I think all goes well for our future. The idea of combining courses, having dual courses, using instructors from other parts of our program, I think that's become very helpful in the context of restructuring. And I simply think we've, we're becoming big league, and I think as a result of all of that those things that we have talked about has taken this—I don't know what the enrollment here when I started was. I got to believe it was probably 4,000, something like that, and as I said we're bursting at the seams now. And I think a wide variety who's—I also think the quality of our instructors is really good.

You know, I've met so many people here from other departments during that long period that I've been here and I'm just impressed. I'm impressed and also because the classes are small, the teachers can be dedicated. You know, I think teachers, college teachers, college professors by large are dedicated. Why would they go into it otherwise? I think that dedication is knocked out of them by having 400 students in a class or having to see 800 students in your program. I think the fact that we are small allows the dedicated teacher to stay dedicated.

**You mentioned Fred Fine and we're kind of winding down, but are there any other people that come to mind when you think about Columbia, when you think about your tenure here?**

Well I mentioned Mike. I mentioned Lya. I mentioned Fred, people who are no longer here. Interestingly enough I think there was also one guy, Bob Thall's predecessor, John Mulvany, was a very creative guy. I used to fight with him like cats and dogs. He had a philosophy, not a philosophy. He was an original thinker, and I used to argue with him about a lot of things but I never lost my respect for him. He would tell you it's night outside, and he would give you nine reasons for it when you saw the sun shining. And so that could be infuriating, but you had to deal with him at that level. You had to deal with him at an intellectual level, and I found him very engaging in that way. Who else that's no longer here?

Yeah, Daryll Feldmeir, who headed the journalism department. Daryl was I believe the managing editor or the editor of the Chicago Daily News, and he came here to head the journalism department and he was just terrific. He was smart, he was compassionate, he had been the editor of a major daily newspaper, and when he came here to head the journalism program, he brought all that knowledge and wisdom with him and an ethic. And he was beloved by the people of the Daily News, and he had an all too short career here. You know, he was here for a time, but I don't know how long he was here actually.

**Can you repeat his name?**

Daryll, D-a-r-y-l-l, Feldmeir I believe was his last name. I think I'm pronouncing it correctly. I didn't know him extremely well because he was in the journalism department. I knew him well enough to have that kind of regard for him. I knew John Turini very well. John had been—I knew John when he was in the advertising business. He was Margaret Sullivan's predecessor as chair of the department, and John had a Ph.D. in, from the University of Chicago in market research and had had a very successful career in the advertising business. He was a memorable character.

Nat Lehrman, who also became head of the journalism program, I knew at Playboy when he was at Playboy, as I knew John Tureny when we were out in the field working together all of—not together, but I knew them all. We had a collegial relationship when I was in the PR business. Nat was at Playboy, John was at Edward H. Weiss and then Lee King and Partners Advertising, and interestingly enough we all came here, and we continued a semblance of the relationship that we had had in the real world. Real world, I find myself using—I never used to use real world till I got to Columbia College because that's what students talk about. What's it like in the real world? So it's become part of my vocabulary.

**How do you stay fresh or abreast of what's going on in the real world as you know—**

I still do consulting and thank goodness Columbia has a policy that encourages that because I think if you were asked to simply

do your teaching and your administering and your counseling, I don't think I could keep up with that. I read all the journals. I belong to the trade associations. I encourage all the instructors in my program to do the same, and I do a considerable amount of consulting. I pick and choose. I don't want to be tied up in a project that's going to impinge on school, but fortunately at this stage of the game when I'm no longer a wunderkind but a gray eminence, I'm picked for my brains and my strategy and I can do that. I don't have to spend hours over a computer or that type of thing so I'm able to do that, and I find that I'm doing that a lot with a lot of different people, you know, public officials, organizations, issues management, you know, that kind of stuff where a good idea is.

I tell my students, come up with a good idea. There's a business that pays a premium for a good idea. You know, I used to I look on the casino issue interestingly because I used to represent the Village of Rosemont years—in fact, I named the Rosemont Horizon the Horizon. And, yeah, and I said, you know, tell my students a good idea is worth its weight in gold. You can make a career out of being an idea generator, and when I represented the Horizon and I told them you got to be prepared for this too and this is why you have to take presentation skill training, I came up with the idea, brought the design to the board of trustees, and they hated it. They hated it. One of them was a, the local barber, one of them was a real estate person, and they weren't the most sophisticated people in the world. Good

people, but it's a small town. And then the mayor walked in, Don Stevens, who was the mayor then as he is now, and he said the Horizon, I love it. And I felt like a guy who was going down for the third time, you know, and I had these flip charts and drawings and I still kid him. I said if you didn't walk into that meeting that day, no matter how persuasive I was being, this place would not have been the horizon. Well now it's not.

I'm a little upset about it because I used to take my kids and my grandchildren by and say I named this place. Well now the United Center or not the United Center, All State gave them a ton of money to change the name so it's no longer. But I was a big man with my family because I had 20 tickets to everything they did there, and, you know, but part of the experience of my instructors in the program and myself is you can bring into the classroom so many illustrations that make the point that you're trying to make rather than memorizing something from a textbook. You know, if I talk about crisis communications and the things you have to be prepared for, I can talk about it in the context of a crisis. When the Rosemont Horizon was being built and beams fell and killed workmen and the rumor went around that the place would never be safe because the jets flying overhead would make it unsafe, what do you do? And I asked them what would you do and that engages them in an entire discussion about how we handle crisis communications and what we do. So I think all of the instructors in the program are able to do that, which makes the program so real rather than textbook driven. It's reality driven.

You know, when Robin Mattel who had handled PR for airlines talks about crisis, he knows what he's talking about. Airlines are going to crash. They just don't know when, where, and why, and he talks about that and talks about crashes that he's handled. And Dorothy Brown talks about presentation skills and the need for that. She talks about how she did that for the American Medical Association and used to try to talk to doctors about how to talk to patients in English rather than in medical speak so, you know, I think that's the value of what we do in the program as we have it.

And I want to add one gratuitous thing, if I may. You asked, you know, what are some of the things that I'm proud of. I'm proud of the students that are out there working in the field now, but we also have an organization, the public relations students society of America, and they won first prize nationally from around 200 colleges and universities in a public relations program for organ donor awareness. And they went to the meeting of the public relations society of America, brought back 1500 bucks and a trophy, and one of the judges told me that the creativeness of the program, they beat 200 colleges and universities that they were trying to decide between the last two finalists. And they gave it to Columbia College because the students took their presentation, wrapped it in dry ice, put it in an organ donor cooler, and mailed it to the judges, and that's, that tipped the scales. One of the people said have you ever had a more creative presentation? Organ donor awareness program sent to

us in an organ donor cooler, and I still am proud of that. You know, that was just a couple years ago that they did it, and by the way, the guy who was president, the young man who was president of the club, is now working for NBC PR in Los Angeles, and I really feel old today 'cause I got a call this morning from a mother whose daughter was in one of my classes and she wanted to tell me she was in my first class here at Columbia College. A mother and daughter, yeah, how about that?

**Really. That's gratifying.**

Yeah, very much so she sent her daughter here. Sure, so that feels good.

**Well we're at the end, but I do want to ask you one more question or two. Have you ever been tempted to leave and why do you stay at Columbia? What keeps you here?**

No, I've never been tempted to leave. I think what keeps me here is the fact that this is a school that gives you a wide birth, and I think if I were told to teach a course this way or if I had any kind of strictures like that I'd be gone in a heartbeat because as I said, you know, I cashed in my chips from a company that bought me, and I was living on a beach. Well obviously I wasn't going to spend my life as a beach bum, but I wouldn't have to spend it at Columbia or any other place if I didn't have the kind of latitude to do the kinds of things. I've installed courses like, you know, no other school has. You know, the dean said okay, you know, okay, doesn't sound particularly academic to me, but if you say it's important to, you know, career, fine.

I've been given that and given that encouragement to continue to counsel and do those kinds of things. And the people that I have met here, it's a very collegial atmosphere. I taught at Northwestern. I taught at the Medill School while I was, still had my PR program. I taught graduate students writing, PR writing in the journalism school at Medill, and I also did a lot of guest lectures at the University of Chicago and at Loyola and was invited to, you know, become adjuncts there. I just—Columbia is right for me as I think it's right for a lot of people who feel as I do about it.

**Well I want to thank you very much for your time.**

You're welcome. Who doesn't like talking about themselves?