Public Relations Entrepreneurs –
Satisfaction, Motivations, and Challenges

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Abstract

To further explore the areas of satisfaction, motivations, and challenges among public relations entrepreneurs, 21 students in a public relations entrepreneurship course at California State University, Fresno conducted 75 in-depth interviews with public relations entrepreneurs with 25 or fewer employees throughout the United States. Those surveyed were largely satisfied with their entrepreneurial ventures and with the size of their firms. Greatest achievements cited were successfully running their firms, representing major clients, and being a good employer. Motivations for pursuing entrepreneurship included a yearning for freedom, flexibility, and a long-held desire to be their own boss. Challenges noted were time management, managing employees, and finances (billing, rate setting, and collections). An overwhelming majority (94%) indicated that they would become public relations entrepreneurs all over again, though 48% believe they have no balance between their personal and professional lives.

Introduction

An entrepreneur has been described as “one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise” (Woolf, H.B., 1980, p.378). The public relations field is full of entrepreneurs – solo practitioners and others running public relations firms. The U.S. Census Bureau lists the number of public relations agencies (firms) as 6,563 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). Those currently practicing in the field – close to 400,000 according to some researchers’ estimates (Falconi, 2006) – could be considered potential entrepreneurs, as the typical
path for public relations practitioners includes some time in the field working for someone else before to becoming one’s own boss.

While public relations entrepreneurship is not new, as public relations firms have been around since the early 1900s, the study of public relations entrepreneurship appears to be, as few studies can be found, and those found are recent. Hazelton and Rayburn (2005, 2007), for example, are among those that have conducted studies; theirs relate to solo public relations practitioners. The growing interest in studying public relations entrepreneurship from an academic perspective could partially be due to a shift in mindset of the public relations entrepreneurs themselves. Croft (2006) has suggested that “This new breed of entrepreneurs are more serious about the business of the business than were their predecessors. They are in business to make money and they want to see their hard work rewarded” (p. xiv). Increased interest in studying public relations entrepreneurship could also be related to the growth in entrepreneurship education in general and its burgeoning body of research.

Public relations entrepreneurs who are not solo practitioners, especially those with firms that have 25 or fewer employees, have been largely ignored by existing research. Little is known about their levels of professional satisfaction, motivations, and challenges. This study begins to explore the world of public relations entrepreneurship in an effort to create knowledge helpful to those who are already public relations entrepreneurs, as well as those looking to embark on the adventure. This study, along with others, will provide a body of knowledge useful to current and future public relations entrepreneurs, strengthening the industry and leading to increased success.
Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted regarding employee satisfaction, motivations, and challenges in general, and in fields other than public relations. Hertzberg and his colleagues’ (1959) work on the duality theory of motivators and hygiene factors is among the most oft-cited research. They identified six factors, called “motivators,” that can increase job satisfaction – achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. They also identified six challenges, called “hygiene factors,” that can decrease job satisfaction. These include company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with supervisor, work conditions, salary, relationships with peers, personal life, relations with subordinates, status, and security (Hertzberg, 1959).

Satisfaction

Smerek and Peterson’s conceptual model suggests that job satisfaction is contingent upon three factors: “(1) whether a job meets expectations, (2) is close to an ideal job, and (3) how satisfied a person is with their job” (p. 234). Among the conclusions that emerged from their study of non-academic university employees, variables related to perceived work environment are more important than personal characteristics or job characteristics in predicting job satisfaction. The work itself was found to have the most powerful and signification predictor of job satisfaction, and opportunity for advancement and responsibility were also significant predictors (Smerek and Peterson, 2007). In their study of licensed social workers, Cole, Panchanadeswaran and Daining...
(2004) found that perceived quality of supervision and perceived workload were predictive of job satisfaction. A study of the hospitality industry found that the work itself, supervision, and promotion determine the level of overall job satisfaction (Tutuncu and Kozak, 2007). When workers in any field, including entrepreneurs and those working in public relations, are satisfied with their jobs, they tend to be happier and more productive.

**Motivation**

Regarding motivation, Skemp-Arlt and Toupence (2007) describe motivation as the mechanism that reduces the distance between a person’s actual state and desired state of being. Motivation includes “concepts such as need, incentive, reward, reinforcement, goal setting, and expectancy” (pg. 28). Maslow’s view of motivation is based on his established hierarchy of needs: basic physiological, safety, and security; social affiliation/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). His theory contends that when lower-level needs are met, higher-level needs emerge. Hartog and Belschak’s 2007 work found a correlation between commitment to the organization and personal initiative, and team and organizational commitment are also relevant.

Specific to entrepreneurship, researchers have identified several motivators for embarking on one’s own business enterprise. These include the desire for the freedom that comes from self-management and potential monetary rewards (Kemelgor, 1985). Environmental alertness (the ability to recognize and exploit opportunities) is among the motivators uncovered by Das and Bing-Sheng (1997). Other factors they discovered include “need for achievement,” “tolerance of ambiguity,” “internal locus of control,” and “risk propensity” (pg. 70). Other research has found
that many entrepreneurs have entrepreneurial parents (Dyer 1994), that entrepreneurship can be a response to a life event, such as a layoff or dissatisfaction with a current work environment due to downsizing (Miner, 1997 and Ennico, 2003), and that, among women, the desire to balance work and family often leads to entrepreneurship (Demartino and Barbato, 2003). A qualitative study of ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom found that a lack of satisfaction in working for others, the need to be one’s own boss and achieve more, and the prospect of higher earnings were the main motivators for their entrepreneurial ventures (Hussain, et. al, 2007). This research also found that graduates from non-business disciplines were more likely to engage in entrepreneurship.

Challenges

Regarding challenges, Reynolds and Whigham-Desir (1995) established case studies that suggest solutions to four identified challenges to growing a small business. The challenges they identified include keeping a marketing strategy current, rapid expansion, partner disagreements, and breaking in to new markets.

According to Dedhia (1995), other challenges to entrepreneurship arise from changes in the political, social, economic, cultural, and business environments. Such changes include “customer demand and satisfaction, corporate image an culture, quality level of product and service, profitability and satisfying shareholders/stakeholders, management of change, global market and competition, government rules and regulations, environmental impact,
communication, new technology, workforce diversification, and information management” (pg. 266).

While the existing body of research in satisfaction, motivation, and challenges is useful, none of it relates specifically to public relations entrepreneurs. Looking at these areas with a specific industry in mind provides a more finely-tuned perspective that becomes more valuable to those who are practicing in or looking to practice in the field. Specifically, as university courses in public relations entrepreneurship continue to emerge, research specific to public relations entrepreneurs will provide faculty with a solid base of data from which to teach. Currently, California State University, Fresno is the only college and university that has introduced a public relations entrepreneurship course into its curriculum. As such, this study attempts to broaden knowledge in this area by attempting to answer the following research questions, which encourage current public relations entrepreneurs to reflect on their thoughts regarding the path of their business and the size of their business with regard to number of clients and employees (satisfaction), explore why they became their own boss and how they chose the size of their business (motivations), and discuss challenges and ways to overcome them (including the oft-discussed work/life balance challenge):

Satisfaction research questions

RQ1: How satisfied are public relations entrepreneurs with the sizes of their companies?

RQ2: What do public relations entrepreneurs believe are their favorite parts of running their business?
RQ3: What do public relations entrepreneurs believe are their greatest accomplishments?

RQ4: Knowing what they know now, would public relations entrepreneurs do anything differently with respect to their firm?

*Motivation research questions*

RQ5: Why do people become public relations entrepreneurs?

RQ6: How do public relations entrepreneurs decide on the size of their companies?

*Challenges research questions*

RQ7: What do public relations entrepreneurs believe to be the most challenging aspects of running their own business?

RQ8: What do public relations entrepreneurs believe are their greatest mistakes?

RQ9: How do public relations entrepreneurs overcome professional disappointment?

RQ10: How do public relations entrepreneurs achieve work/life balance?

*Methods*

*Sample*

A total of 75 public relations entrepreneurs were interviewed for this study, with 48% being male, 49.3% being female, and 2.7% not answering the question. Two-thirds (66.7%) were married, 32% were unmarried, and 1.3% of the respondents did not provide this information. Regarding children, 57.3% of respondents had at least one child and 41.3% did not, with 1.3% missing data. About a third (32%) worked for a public relations agency prior to going out on their own, 18.7% worked “in-house” for one organization, and 34.7% worked both in-house and
for an agency, with 13.3% missing data. More than 8 in 10 (81.3%) say they will never work for anyone else again and 12% said they would, with 1.3% missing data. Of respondents, 41.3% are sole proprietorships, 28% are corporations, 22.7% are classified as limited liability companies (LLCs), and 6.7% are partnerships, with 1.3% missing data. Almost half (49.3%) are members of the Public Relations Society of America and 48% are not, with 2.7% missing data. Just about two-thirds (65.3%), have a mentor and 34.7% do not, with no missing data. Respondents work an average of 49.77 hours per week. They average 6 employees, with a range from 0 to 25. They had an average of 13 clients, with a range from 2 to 42. Table 1 provides additional information about the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of time respondents worked in public relations before opening up own firm</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Worked in Public Relations</th>
<th>Response %</th>
<th>Response total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 Years</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Years</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 Years</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 Years</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 Years</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+ Years</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

In-depth interview questions were developed by the professor and students in a public
relations entrepreneurship class at California State University, Fresno during the spring 2008 semester. Each of the 21 students were trained in interview techniques and was assigned a city, state, or region, and charged with conducting in-depth interviews with public relations entrepreneurs with 25 or fewer employees. The following states were represented in the study: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, and Washington. Public relations entrepreneurs in each area were located through online searches. In total, 75 interviews were conducted between March and April 2008. Most interviews were conducted by phone, with a few in-person, and a few via email. Participation in the study was voluntary and individual responses were kept confidential.

**Measures**

The question set was created using a compilation of questions the students developed based on what knowledge they wanted to acquire from public relations entrepreneurs. (Script and survey instrument are found in Appendix A.) The questions were pre-tested on local public relations entrepreneurs. The survey was comprised of 41 questions, 16 of which were intended to generate quantitative responses and 25 of which elicited more in-depth, qualitative answers. These questions were generated to answer the research questions mentioned earlier in the text. Interview questions included, “Are you satisfied with the size of your business, or would you like to change it in some way?”, “Why did you start your company?”, “How did you decide on the current size of your company?”, and “What are the most challenging parts of running your own PR business?” Each researcher followed the same script, in accordance with the regulations
of the Human Subjects Review Board at California State University, Fresno. Basic demographic information was collected. Open-ended, in-depth questions followed the demographic questions. These items focused on the respondents’ motives for being public relations entrepreneurs, motives for the size of their firms, and keys to their success as business owners. Information was also sought regarding how they market their firm, advice for future public relations entrepreneurs, and how they achieve balance between their personal and professional lives. Each interview took approximately 35 minutes to complete. Notes on each in-depth interview were transcribed for analysis.

Results

Satisfaction with Public Relations Entrepreneurship

In exploring research question 1, how satisfied are public relations entrepreneurs with the sizes of their companies, it was found that a majority of the public relations entrepreneurs interviewed were satisfied with the size of their businesses. According to the quantitative portion of the survey, sixty-three percent are satisfied with the size of their business and 28% are not, with 9.3% missing data. However, during the in-depth interview portion of the survey, this percentage jumped to 94% satisfaction (of those that responded): 39 of those interviewed said they were completely satisfied with the size of their company, 27 entrepreneurs said they were satisfied with the current size of their business but would like to see their firms grow in the future, and only four public relations entrepreneurs were not satisfied with the size of their companies. Two of them wanted to shrink their businesses, while the other two wanted to grow their firms. As one such entrepreneur voiced, “Grow or die, that’s the rule.”
Of the public relations entrepreneurs that were satisfied but would like to see future growth, several explained that they wanted their companies to grow to meet the current market demands: “We have grown as the client base has grown. I never envisioned we would be this large, and we are still growing.” Others felt they could grow because their businesses were more established and that they had a better understanding of how to manage a firm. A few mentioned that future growth was dependent on revenue and/or the continuance of individual contact with clients.

Several common themes developed in looking at research question 2, which explores what public relations entrepreneurs believe are their favorite parts of running their business, which is closely related to job satisfaction. Some respondents listed more that one favorite, and responses are quantified in Table 2. Public relations entrepreneurs across the board enjoyed being independent and the freedom to be one’s own boss, including having creative control over business decisions, being directly rewarded for business successes, and having the ability to run their firms as they see fit: “I’m an independent person and I like doing things my own way.”

Respondents also noted flexibility as a favorite element in running their own businesses, especially in terms of the ability to set working hours around their busy schedules or time with their families. Many public relations entrepreneurs also enjoyed the challenge and variety of their jobs, helping others, and working with people, as did this respondent: “[My favorite parts are] the flexibility and variety of work. I am never bored, my clients are first class, and I feel like I add value to others’ day and/or company. I get paid according to how hard I work, and love meeting new people in the industry.”
Several common threads were found while exploring research question 3, what public relations entrepreneurs believe are their greatest accomplishments. Several noted that starting and managing their own successful business was the best thing they’ve ever done as a public relations entrepreneur; others mentioned serving major clients, being a good employer, making good business decisions, and helping in the community. Sixteen people cited major clients as the best thing they did as a public relations entrepreneur. A majority of these clients were celebrities or well-known firms – one interviewee even had the opportunity to represent a Pope – but some business owners noted that simply keeping their clients happy was their biggest accomplishment.

Another popular answer was developing great employees and providing jobs for people.
Comments included, “The best thing I’ve done is develop professional employees. Every one of my former employees will tell you that this was the best, most rewarding job they ever had,” and “I love watching the team grow in skills and experience whether they are currently employed with [my business] or have moved on for bigger and better opportunities. My relationships have been long-lasting and I am proud to play a small role in the development of such talented individuals.”

Some of the business decisions that were noted as great accomplishments were in regard to financial decisions, hiring and firing of employees, and making changes to the company’s size. One noted that they needed to shrink their number of employees to keep their business more manageable; others felt they needed extra help running their firm and took on more employees.

Entrepreneurs who felt that helping out in their communities was their biggest accomplishments often served non-profit organizations or charities, “We help organizations that really need help. They have a story to tell, but don’t know what to do to call attention to their work.” Others helped clients with marketing or internal issues: “[I] helped a client get out of some serious internal problems and get them back to being a respectful company.” Some interviewees also noted they enjoy helping startup companies grow to meet their goals.

In answering research question 4, knowing what they know now, would public relations entrepreneurs do anything differently with respect to their firm, 94% of those interviewed indicated that they would do it all again. This indicates that they are very satisfied with their jobs, their firms, and the choices they have made in getting involved with public relations entrepreneurship. While most public relations entrepreneurs said that they would not have
changed anything with respect to their firms, five themes emerged from those who would have championed change. Ten percent of those who wanted to do something differently wanted to deal with problem clients in a different fashion. An additional 10% said that they would have started networking earlier to build a larger client base. Another 10% felt that they would have benefited by working at their agency longer before becoming public relations entrepreneurs.

Of those who would change something related to their firm, the reverse was also true; another 10% of respondents felt they should have started their business sooner. Finally, 10% of those who would make changes mentioned that they should have “listened to their gut feelings more” with respect to their companies, instead of relying on the advice of others. Answers are quantified by response in Table 3.
In exploring research question 5, why people become public relations entrepreneurs, several factors emerged and many respondents listed several reasons. (Answers listed by number of responses are included in Table 4.) First, many entrepreneurs had wanted to be their own boss for a long time; it had been their dream to own their own businesses. Second, many entrepreneurs mentioned that they had started their own businesses because it had been a shrewd business decision at the time. Third, several public relations entrepreneurs started their own businesses because they had been laid off from their previous place of employment and preferred starting their own business to finding a new job. These findings are also consistent with existing
literature about motivations for becoming an entrepreneur.

| Table 4 |

*Why respondents chose to become a public relations entrepreneur*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer (some respondents had more than one answer)</th>
<th>Response total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always wanted to be an entrepreneur/be own boss</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable timing/good business decision at the time</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to be “in charge”</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted the challenge of running own business</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility, freedom, and/or independence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to choose their own clients</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminated from previous employment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw a need/niche to fill</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to make more money</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to help people</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a passion for public relations that was secondary at an agency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-six of those interviewed had always wanted to be an entrepreneur. Several of these respondents had friends or family members who had been or still are entrepreneurs, which influenced their decision to start their businesses. “My family is full of entrepreneurs and I always knew I wanted to be one as well, I just had to decide what line of work I wanted to do,” said one respondent, “Once I got into PR, I knew it was for me, because I wanted to be around my interests and this was a great way to do that.” Another respondent had similar feelings. “I always wanted to be self-employed. It was during an economic recession and it was hard to find a job. I always wanted flexibility and autonomy.”
Twenty-five respondents said they became public relations entrepreneurs because it was a smart business decision and the timing had been favorable. “[I] decided that if I was doing it for someone else and wasn’t getting paid well, why not just do it for myself and not get paid for a while, but start to build something,” said one respondent. Eight people started their business after their employment had been terminated at their previous job.

Several public relations entrepreneurs said they were frustrated working for someone else because they had little or no creative control and were not given proper credit for their efforts. One respondent noted, “I wanted to get into the business for myself, and I hated having to take directions and do everything without all the rewards.” Fifteen people said they became entrepreneurs because they wanted to be in charge. Another 13 said they wanted the challenge of running their own business. Other reasons cited by respondents for becoming public relations entrepreneurs included wanting to do a better job or make more money, being compelled to fill a niche or market demand, having a love for the business, and desiring more freedom, flexibility, and independence. Respondents also said they enjoyed being able to choose their own clients and help people. One entrepreneur simply stated, “I wanted to explore my own desires and dreams.”

In regards to question 6, several themes developed in terms of what determines the size of public relations entrepreneurial businesses. The most common response, with about 1/3 of the respondents (22 individuals) was that market demand is ultimately what determines business size. Additionally, several business owners noted that owning a small business was the best because fewer employees and clients are easier to manage. Comments included, “I didn’t decide it, the market did, based on clients,” and “partly the market… it’s easier to manage with fewer
employees. I can make as much money personally without the overhead liabilities.” Another said, “Supply and demand. It depends on what is needed. We don’t want to be huge because we are more able to manage things better the way we are now.” Others said that staying small allowed them to continue being “hands-on” and personally involved with their clients. A few mentioned that they preferred to keep their businesses smaller so that they would not have to lay off any employees. Flexibility was also a factor. Another commented, “We didn’t want to be responsible for employees and their livelihood. We wanted to benefit from the income. We both had young kids at the beginning and wanted to have flexibility in our jobs.”

Challenges for Public Relations Entrepreneurs

For research question 6, what do public relations entrepreneurs believe to be the most challenging aspects of running their own business, three categories were found: time management, employee management/hiring, and financial challenges. Very few entrepreneurs mentioned being alone and not under a corporate umbrella as a business challenge, though a few mentioned that keeping up with changing technology was an issue. Financial challenges included collecting fees, charging enough, and paying taxes. Others also mentioned that the inconsistency of paychecks was a financial challenge. Also, managing the financial aspects of a public relations business seemed a relatively common problem. Some respondents gave more than one answer, and challenges are listed by number of responses in Table 5.
While the vast majority of public relations entrepreneurs agreed that being one’s own boss is a great experience, it often means you are also the boss of others. Hiring and firing of employees was cited as a business challenge, along with various administrative managerial tasks, such as taking care of employees and scheduling employee time off. For many public relations professionals, finding a loyal and reliable staff was the biggest challenge. As one respondent said, "Managing people [is a challenge]. I love my job; I just don't love the business."

The final major challenge to public relations entrepreneurs was time management. It is difficult for many public relations professionals, especially those who work long hours and have many clients, to juggle business scheduling and also set aside time to be with their families.
According to one entrepreneur, "Managing my time on a day-to-day basis is the toughest part."

Three themes emerged in examining research question 8, what do public relations entrepreneurs believe are their greatest mistakes – those involving employees or partners, those involving clients, and those involving finances. Mistakes involving employees was a common answer when it came to mistakes. Many entrepreneurs commented that they did not go with instinct when hiring or kept an employee on for too long. “[A mistake] early on: not being decisive in changing some staff and firing people, following instinct.” Another issue with employees was letting friendships get in the way of business. Taking on a partner also fell into this category; as entrepreneurs expressed that a partner was not good for them or their firm.

Issues involving clients was also a common thread in the answers for this question. Many said that they took on a client that they disliked or were not passionate for and that hindered their work and the relationship. “[My biggest mistake is] continuing to work with people who I don’t like and who lack a moral compass.” Usually, the public relations entrepreneurs took on these clients as an opportunity for publicity or more money, but soon ended up regretting their decisions. “[My biggest mistake was] taking a client I hated because it was a big chance for me to get big press and it turned bad fast.” Others expressed remorse for passing a client on or referring them to another firm that did not satisfy the client’s needs.

Eleven people reported financial mistakes. The most common financial mistake was charging too little for services. Many entrepreneurs felt they had underestimated themselves and not charged an adequate amount for their assistance. In addition, one entrepreneur said that their biggest mistake was not hiring an accountant soon enough.
Research question 9 explored how public relations entrepreneurs overcome professional disappointment. During the course of this study, it was found that the most common answer (from 41% of those interviewed) was that entrepreneurs bounce back from a professional disappointment by learning from the mistakes made and moving on. Several mentioned that they remember not to take the professional disappointment personally. Also, although the interviewees analyze what might have gone wrong, they prefer to focus less on their failures and more on their successes and future prospects. Illustrative comments included, “I just remember what I have achieved and put into prospective that you can’t win them all,” and “I analyze why we failed and how we failed and I try to make sure that we don’t make the same mistake again next time. I usually don’t like to focus on failures too long though. It brings down our morale. I’d rather celebrate success stories.”

Several respondents also mentioned that they try to relax, talk to a friend, spouse, or family member, schedule time off from work, exercise, or participate in a game or a sport to get their mind off their disappointment. Others felt the need to jump immediately into the next project. As one respondent said, “[I] cover up for lost ground, and do so in a hurry! [I] prove I can do excellent work ASAP, and put in an extra effort.”

In exploring research question 10, how public relations entrepreneurs achieve balance between their personal and professional lives, it was found that almost half of those interviewed (48%) felt that they had no balance. (A complete list of answers by number of responses is found in Table 6).
This feeling of no balance was largely attributed to hectic schedules and long work weeks. The average number of hours worked per week was 49.77, with the range from 5 to 100. Males tended to work more hours per week than females, approximately 53 hours per week as opposed to approximately 46 hours per week. An independent samples t-test was conducted and found differences approaching significance in how many hours males (M= 53.22, SD= 16.73) and females (M= 46.46, SD= 12.79) work per week in their public relations businesses, t (71), 1.94, p=.056.

While the public relations entrepreneurs who felt they had a balance between their personal and professional lives noted it was “with great difficulty,” most attributed this balance to compartmentalization and scheduling, as indicated by this respondent’s comment: “When you

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**Table 6**

*How respondents achieve personal/professional balance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer (some respondents gave more than one answer)</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt they had no balance, said it was hard, had no personal life</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling separate time for work and family/personal time</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaves work at work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes time for what is important to them</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relies on support from family and friends</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have other ways to achieve balance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at home or while on vacation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga/exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes sure family comes first</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns off phone/computer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalizes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembers why they work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are at work, be fully at work. When you’re with your family, be fully with your family. And keep commitments to your family as religiously as you do meetings with your clients. Maintain a detailed schedule to allow all this to happen.” Separating “work time” and “family time” was considered important to achieving balance. As one interviewee pointed out, people have only one family and many clients. The flexibility of choosing one’s own hours also helped public relations entrepreneurs achieve balance, especially those with children. As one respondent indicated, “Family always comes first. My clients understand that I’m a mom and I need to take my kids to school and appointments. Other than that, my clients sometimes come before me, especially when it comes to my fun.”

Several of those interviewed mentioned that scheduling regular vacations, leaving the country, or being away from technology were good ways to achieve balance. Respondents said things like, “Leaving the country where phones and computers do not work is the best way. Or I have to have my husband force the phone away.” Other interviewees noted that exercise, yoga, or being involved with sports helped, “I work out a lot. You need to be in good shape to work many hours and survive in this crazy business.” Some public relations professionals mentioned that young businesses required more time than established ones to get off the ground, but that one must guard against “burn-outs.” Another answered, “There is no down time when you own your own business.”

**Study Limitations and Areas of Further Research**

While the study points to some themes and provides insight into the satisfaction, motivations, and challenges of public relations entrepreneurs, because it was a qualitative study
one may not extrapolate the findings to the entire population. In addition, not all states and major population centers were represented, and further research should try and cover the geographic areas not researched in this study. A further limitation was using students as the research surveyors. While trained extensively, it was the first time many of the students had conducted this type of research. As such, there were pieces of missing data (i.e. not all interviewees answered all of the questions).

As far as future research, additional analysis of the other data gathered in this study would be of value, especially those questions regarding keys to success in public relations entrepreneurship. In addition, further and more deeply probing research questions of public relations entrepreneurs with firms of different sizes would add to the growing body of knowledge regarding public relations entrepreneurship.

**Conclusion**

Of those surveyed, public relations entrepreneurs are largely satisfied with the size of their businesses, with many looking toward future growth. Areas of satisfaction included the flexibility, independence and freedom to be one’s own boss, having creative control over business decisions, being directly rewarded for business successes, and having the ability to run their firms as they see fit. Other areas that bring satisfaction included the challenge and variety of their client-base and helping their clients succeed. Major accomplishments included starting and managing their own successful business, serving major clients, being a good employer, making good business decisions, and helping in the community. Motivations for being a public relations entrepreneur included a long-time desire to be their own boss, taking advantage of a good
business opportunity, and the preference of starting their own firm after being laid off rather than finding another employer. Challenges cited were time management, employee management, and the financial side of running a business. Work/life balance was also an issue, as 48% of those interviewed felt they did not have balance. The vast majority (94%) of respondents indicated they would become public relations entrepreneurs all over again, although many would do things a little differently.

While these results were specific to the public relations field, study findings could also be useful for those teaching small business entrepreneurship, as many small business owners face some of the same issues, regardless of their “product.” Challenges in the areas of human resources in particular seem to be fairly consistent across genre, based on the study data paired with the literature. Additionally, lack of quality information or assistance regarding business partner selection seems to be common theme as well. Also of note should be the similarities in motivations for entrepreneurship between public relations entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs in general.

While some of the study results mirror the general entrepreneurial research regarding the areas of satisfaction, motivations and challenges, there are some differences to notes as well, pointing to some issues that might prove to be more specific to the field of public relations entrepreneurship. Particularly in the area of challenges, where the majority of respondents pointed to areas of finance (billing, collecting, setting a fee structure, etc.). This data should encourage educators to provide opportunities to obtain this knowledge, as well as encourage entrepreneurs to seek this information – ideally prior to opening up their businesses.
This glimpse into the world of the public relations entrepreneur could prove to point the way for additional research, adding to the body of knowledge and aiding in curriculum development. In addition, future public relations entrepreneurs can use the advice and comments gleaned from this study to better prepare themselves for starting their own businesses. Through analyzing challenges and successes, and learning from mistakes, business owners can better serve their clients, become better employers, and achieve greater job satisfaction.
References


Appendix

Once person is qualified as the business owner, and the business has 25 employees or less . . .

Hello. My name is ________________, and I am a student at Fresno State. I am working with one of my professors, Betsy Hays, on a study about success factors and challenges encountered by public relations entrepreneurs and would like to invite you to participate. I would like to interview you about your business—the interview will take about 36 minutes. If you have time, we can certainly conduct the interview now, or we can schedule a time that is more convenient for you. Of course, your participation is voluntary and your answers will remain confidential when we present the results of this study. With this in mind, please be truthful and accurate with all of your answers.

This study is being conducted in compliance with the Human Subjects Review Board at California State University, Fresno. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact Prof. Hays at any time. Would you like her telephone number or email address?

(559)278-6154. bhays@csufresno.edu

Thank you for your participation.

----------------------------------------
1. Title: ______________________________
2. Sex: M/F
3. Are you married? Yes/No
4. Do you have children? Yes/No
   a. How many? ______________________
   b. How old? ______________________
5. How long had you worked in the PR industry before starting your firm?
6. Did you work for an agency or in-house or both?
   ______ agency
   ______ in-house
   ______ both
7. Do you think you’ll ever work for someone else again? Yes/No
8. How many employees does your firm have?
   a. If more than one, what was the job title of the first person you hired?
9. When did you start your company?
10. Why did you start your company?
    a. Any other reasons?
11. How did you decide on the current size of your company?
12. Are you satisfied with the size of your business, or would you like to change it in some way?
    a. If so, in what way?
13. Where do you see your business in five years?
14. What type of legal entity is your business? (i.e. sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, corporation, etc.)
15. Are you a member of PRSA (the Public Relations Society of America)? Yes/No
16. How many clients do you currently have?
17. Where do your clients come from?
18. How do you market your firm?
19. What are your favorite parts of running your own PR business?
20. What are the most challenging parts of running your own PR business?
21. What was the best advice you ever received about running your firm?
22. What advice did you wish someone would’ve given you?
23. What is the best thing you’ve done as a PR entrepreneur?
24. What was your biggest mistake?
25. How do you define success with respect to your company?
26. To what do you attribute your success?
27. What advice do you have for a budding PR entrepreneur?
28. What traits do others need to possess to become successful PR entrepreneurs?
29. How do you, personally, bounce back from a professional disappointment?
30. How do you achieve balance between your personal and professional life?
31. Do you have a role model/mentor?
   a. Who?
   b. Who do you look up to?
32. Knowing what you know now, would you do it all again?
   a. What would you do differently?
33. On average, how many hours per week do you work?
34. Anything else you’d like to add?

Thank you very much for participating in our study!