

Nov 04, 2016 by [Alvin Snyder](#)

Part Two: What if the President Requested Your Public Diplomacy Advice? ^[1]

Here is more from those who played along with our fantasy of receiving a call from the president -- this or any president -- who then asks advice on how to improve America's public diplomacy.

As President Theodore Roosevelt once observed, those who choose to go "in the arena" experience both "victory and defeat," and we have, each of us, had our share of the latter, but happily some of the former, so why not share our experiences for those now in the arena?

Our initial posting of comments from battle-wisened hands were published even as additional remarks came forward.

And so this is to submit further comments from those who served (some still serve) their country as PD practitioners, in and outside government, women and men who know about victory and defeat for a worthy cause, first hand, as President Teddy Roosevelt had said.

Someone in the arena now -- more than one arena, actually -- is Sherry Mueller, who serves as both president of the National Council for International Visitors citizens group and co-Chairperson of Co-Lead, the Coalition for American Leadership Abroad, which coordinates several non-governmental organizations involved in exchanges. Ms. Mueller underlined the theme of many recent comments transmitted to us by public diplomacy veterans, apolitically. And that is, public diplomacy can be most effective when practiced "people-to-people," and over the long-haul, not as a quick fix.

Ms. Mueller said, "At its best, public diplomacy -- whether conducted by PAOs and other official diplomats or by the citizen diplomats in the United States who host exchange program participants -- is a long term investment in building relationships. These relationships constitute a web of human connections that provide a more receptive context for other interactions -- negotiating a trade agreement, crafting a security arrangement, or tackling a global problem.

"America's tattered image abroad was captured in a devastatingly stunning graphic on the cover of the May 29 *New Yorker* that depicted Uncle Sam without a face. The extent to which the United States has "lost face" is profoundly disturbing. No wonder we yearn for a silver bullet solution. However, we would use our sadly limited resources for public diplomacy more effectively if we candidly acknowledged that there is no quick fix. There is only gradual, cross-generational reclaiming of our ideals and communicating them to others around the world on a person-to-person basis.

"A key dimension of public diplomacy advice to the president must be to champion and support citizen diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy is the concept that the individual citizen has the

right -- even the responsibility -- to help shape U.S. foreign relations, 'one handshake at a time.'

"Some Americans are already active citizen diplomats. Many are volunteers who belong to nationwide networks of nonprofit organizations such as the National Council for International Visitors, People-to-People International, Sister Cities International, and Friendship Force International.

"Citizen diplomats give their time, leadership skills, and dollars to support international exchange programs of all types. They are among our greatest assets in the battle for "hearts and minds" of people around the world. As noted long ago by the authors of *The Ugly American*, a novel still relevant, 'American citizens are the best ambassadors a country can have.'"

Former Foreign Service Officer Stanley Zuckerman, who now produces documentaries for public television, stressed the importance of media exchanges.

He wrote that "As far as democracy building is concerned, it would be wise to revert to the approach of inviting as many journalists, academics and politicians from the Middle East to witness our democratic institutions in action."

Retired Foreign Service Officer Fred Coffey also noted the important personal interaction in public diplomacy. He said the reason why America is not understood abroad "lies in the void between genuine public diplomacy and public relations' branding. Public diplomacy is an inexact science slowly developed officially since before WW II. Its embryonic but valid thesis was to reach opinion leaders with ideas and constructive dialogue. Dialogue means earning credibility followed by listening, learning and then persuasive discussion and mostly in the local language. This is not done by one liners from Washington. Credibility is built by developing and nurturing meaningful contacts in our field posts while employing the valuable tools of outreach which include exchanges, hi- tech information centers, books, exhibits, special programs for journalists, professional local staff employees, etc. A credibility base is essential. Without credibility, public diplomacy becomes public relations, oft-times shallow and in the mid- and long term, counter productive."

Perceptions from outside media observers abroad are always valuable, of course. Jonathan Marks, former long-time creative director of Radio Netherlands, cautioned against a quick fix for America's PD, which was a common thread seen in prior comments.

"I'm not sure (PD) needs a single propaganda blitz," he wrote. "Global networks will quickly spot what's going on and work out a counter strategy. In fact, since distance is dead, an approach whereby you share Voices of Americans, rather than a single Voice of America would show that the U.S. can be culturally sensitive."

And Mr. Marks included an afterthought: "Oh, and revise the policy of making all foreign journalists get a visa to visit the US -- the US consulate in Amsterdam demands 20 dollars to get a question answered or an appointment.... What a change from the days of USIA libraries."

All this carries forth the spirit of what President Teddy Roosevelt believed was essential for American public diplomacy: "(The) chief of blessings for any nations is that it shall leave its seed to inherit the land."
