

Nov 04, 2016 by **Daryl Copeland**

## Getting Down... [1]

*"There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it."*  
Lord Acton

Notwithstanding a conviction still popular in certain circles to the effect that diplomacy is a special calling or vocation, there is nothing sanctified about it. To cope with the myriad requirements of effective practice in the 21st century, diplomats have to chill out and loosen up.

While there will always be a place for confidential negotiations and formal exchanges, globalization has caused the centre of diplomatic gravity to shift out of the chancellery and into the street. Very often, this will mean going retail, and, more particularly, taking diplomacy public, swimming like a fish in the sea of the people rather than flopping around like a fish out of water. The transformed international security environment, among other things, requires no less.

Pedigree, decorum, set piece exchanges and credentialism won't cut it here; experience as a world traveller is likely to get you much further ahead than a stack of ivy league degrees.. The requisite qualities of today's diplomat include a critical consciousness and inquiring mind; an appreciation of diversity and taste for adventure; an enterprising spirit and the courage of one's convictions. In the memorable words of my colleague Chris Westdal: brains, spine and stomach. As a networker and knowledge worker, the public diplomat becomes an agile agent with access to critical information sources, navigating pathways of influence which others can't chart or manoeuvre through. Boring deep into the interstices of power or operating unconventionally, often outside of their traditional metropolitan comfort zones, diplomats, through dialogue, can connect directly with the proximate drivers of insecurity - anger, resentment, humiliation, alienation. In this way insights can be gained into the possible actions and potential consequences of those harbouring such feelings.

The implications for intelligence collection are profound.

And the domination of information flows, or data dumping, will never substitute for using communications as an interactive social platform upon which to construct relations based on confidence, trust and respect.

In the words of my friend and former diplomat Francois Taschereau, now Director General of the Montreal office of Edelman PR: "The name of the game today is about giving up control, sharing, exercising transparency to create conversations around subjects of mutual interest. Being at the centre of a conversation is what enables one to drive an agenda." Public diplomats use the tools and tactics of public relations - a commitment to continuing conversation, the identification of shared objectives and relationship building - to connect with populations at both the mass and elite levels. Practitioners count on the effective use of networking and advocacy - as opposed, for instance, to a demarche at the foreign ministry

followed up by a diplomatic note - to shape public opinion and in so doing help to move host governments towards desired ends.

Public diplomacy, then, is most effective when meaningful exchange finds demonstrable expression in policy development and changed behaviour. In other words, PD works when the feedback loop is complete and it becomes an integral part of the policy development process, reflecting core values such as integrity (i.e. saying and doing are consonant) and mutuality (win/win).

All told, this is the future of diplomacy and it is an ambitious order. The reach of the vision does not exceed the grasp of those implicated, but again, if foreign service officers are to become globalization managers and foreign ministries globalization entrepôts, then there is much to be done.

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