



In honor of a PR legend

2/12/2016

Steve Barrett, PRWeek



As PRWeek's PR professional of the 20th century Harold Burson celebrates his 95th birthday, editor-in-chief Steve Barrett looks back on some of the wisdom and achievements of the great man.

Harold Burson turns 95 on Monday and I can't do anything better to recognize this milestone than reprise some of the words I have written about him in the past few years.

My first major interaction with Harold was in 2010 when I had the pleasure of interviewing him on stage at PRWeek's annual conference. He captivated delegates with timeless advice about the importance of writing,

networking, having a wide business grounding, and not being a bluffer. You can see the interview [here](#).

The following year, Harold turned 90 and we presented him with a commemorative cover at the gala party held to celebrate his milestone. The gathering of Burson alum and industry luminaries were full of fantastic stories about working with Harold and I especially enjoyed hanging with some of the Mad Men-esque colleagues who helped him build Burson-Marsteller back in the day.

In 2012 Harold was honored by the PRSA Foundation with its Paladin Award and gave a provocative and funny speech to some of the most powerful people in the industry, reminding everyone that business should be about social responsibility, not just shareholder value, and that in the long term nothing comes without a price.

He noted that "Wall Street analysts became the ones who set companies' earnings goals, but CEOs need to return to the goal of serving the greater good of our people and our country." This is a theme that still resonates and it is difficult not to agree with Harold's theory that public trust in business will not return until that happens. Another year on, and Harold was inducted into the PRWeek Hall of Fame. I remember interviewing him on stage and asking whether he had any regrets about selling his firm to Y&R, which ultimately led to it becoming part of WPP. His eyes twinkled as he said he had eaten breakfast with WPP CEO Martin Sorrell just that morning and was on great terms with the most powerful person in global marketing and communications.

And in 2014 our colleagues in the UK put Harold on their cover with a great profile of the man they dubbed the "Godfather of modern PR," detailing his journey from covering the Nuremberg trials in Europe after the Second World War, to setting up his iconic and eponymous firm Burson-Marsteller in 1953, to establishing the template for modern PR alongside peers such as Dan Edelman, Al Golin, and David Finn.

The Sorrell anecdote was typical Harold for me: Diplomatic, timely, and still networking into his 90s. How appropriate that his 95th birthday falls on Presidents Day – all the best to you sir from everyone at PRWeek.

Read more here»<http://www.prweek.com/article/1383428/honor-pr-legend#jFh6Pv84gYHTGD7L.99>