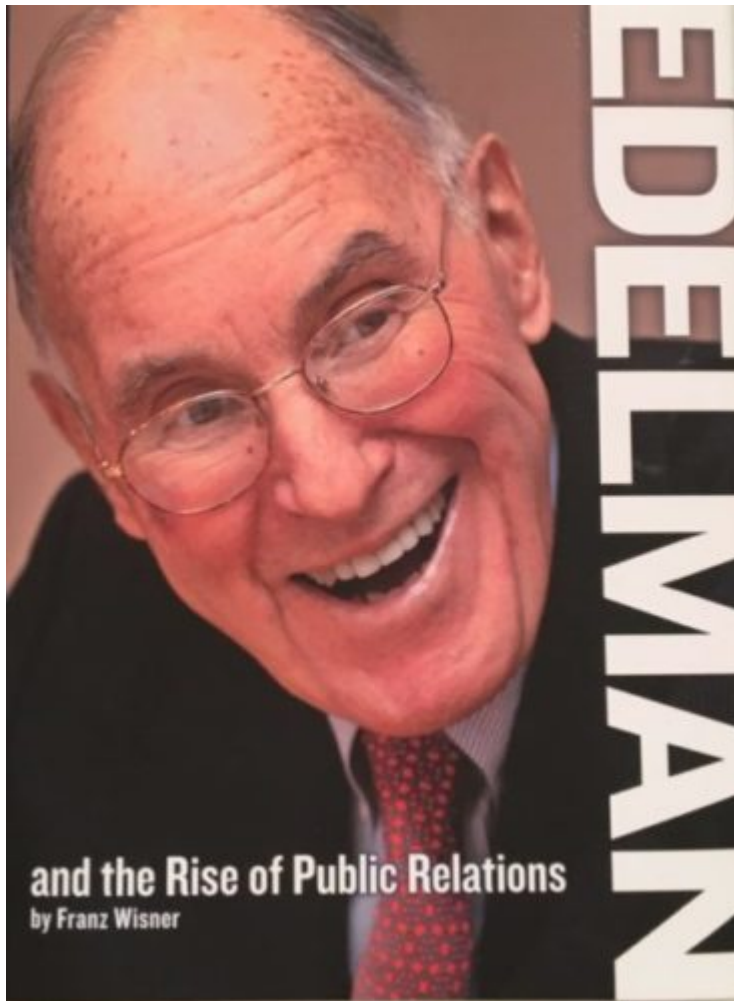


An Inside Look at Daniel J. Edelman's Vision and Legacy



Wendy Glavin, Founder and CEO, [Wendy Glavin Agency](#)

We all know [Edelman](#), the largest global communications marketing firm, its distinguished creative reputation, and its long list of prominent clients, including Unilever's Axe brand, The American Lung Association, PayPal, and GE, among others.

But, Monday night at Edelman's 65th Anniversary Founder's Day Event at Baruch College, co-sponsored by CCI and the [Museum of Public Relations](#), we felt as if we were part of the Edelman team during the tribute to the late Daniel J. Edelman, a pioneer in modern [public relations](#), and his late wife Ruth Edelman. Richard Edelman, president and CEO of

Edelman, and his siblings, Renée and John, and daughters Tory and Amanda, and nearly 175 Edelman managers and alumni and industry executives participated in the celebration.

Museum Director Shelley J. Spector, welcomed the PRSSA chapters, and other PR professionals around the world who were watching the broadcast on Facebook Live, and the Edelman family at-large.

Shelley explained the museum's role of bringing PR history to life, and making it relevant for today's generation. She reflected on Dan's career. Dan is credited with creating the field of marketing public relations, using publicity with product spokespersons to sell a company's products and services.

The event marked the launch of a three-month exhibit at the Museum of PR, housed at Baruch College's Newman Library. The exhibit contains Dan's clip books, with hundreds of placements for the firm and its early clients: the Toni Home Permanent, which featured the Toni Twins in the first-ever media tour, which Dan is credited with inventing; and Sara Lee cheesecake, which Dan helped to launch. Other of the firm's early marketing clients included Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Star-kist, which brought the debut of Morris the Cat. Shelly held up Dan's dictaphone, the technology of Dan's time. The exhibit also contains video of Dan, during which he describes decoding Nazi propaganda during World War II.

Richard Edelman stood at the podium, and said, "I kind of expect Dan to walk in here. Ruth too. He'd stand up here and say, "Kevin, what did you do today. What clients did you expand today?"

Richard invented the practice of "communications marketing," which is not just a reversal of marketing communications. When Richard was inducted into the Arthur Page Hall of Fame in 2014, he said, "Communications marketing

speaks to the need for brands to operate with a clear mission and purpose, inviting participation from the community... being responsive in real time, and offering an ongoing value engagement.”

In an Edelman video shown at the event, Dan was quoted as saying that PR uses a much more intellectual approach than advertising. In the early days, the industry used to be all press-related. PR has come a long way.

On the occasion of Edelman’s 60th anniversary, Richard said, “Many entrepreneurs dream of building an empire. My father established it because he understood the power of broadcast. In the beginning of marketing, public relations played its own distinct role from advertising. No one thought that PR made a difference in sales.

With Sara Lee, Edelman showed that PR can impact sales. Within several months of being hired, Dan and his team secured a *Wall Street Journal* story, “Sara Lee Builds Baking Bonanza on Heaping Slices of Quality.” Overnight, the small bakery had enormous orders. CEO Charlie Lubin concerned about food transport, created a new light-weight aluminum pan to freeze the cakes.

Dan and his team created a new industry model for publicity which encompassed direct collaboration with the CEO and a company’s sales force. Dan said, “They didn’t think that the work they did had to contribute to sales of the product.”

Earned media coverage in top women’s magazines, created strong consumer interest in the company’s products. Dan believed industry trade publications were important and connected with supermarkets, distributors, bakers, and wholesale media. Consumers were targeted too at a food conference, and through a plant tour. “Public relations was worth 100 times the advertising in establishing the success of Sara Lee,” Lubin said.

Next came bowling. Inventor Fred Schmidt created a vacuum-powered device to retrieve bowling pins before rearranging them into a triangular formation, which threatened their #1 sports competitor, Brunswick. After countless failed attempts to join forces with Schmidt, American Machine Foundry, another competitor, bought the machine, developed a pin setting machine of its own and hired Dan.

Dan and his team developed stories for business publications, including *Fortune*, AP, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*, and emphasized the need for a deep understanding of the media. This led to bowling becoming a family pastime.



Photo credit: Sharlene Spingler

Dan spoke out for causes, including the American Seat Belt Council, and fought for mandatory seat belt laws with the Senate Commerce Community, and through the media. In 1974, American Seat Belt Council President Charles Pulley said, "There wouldn't be a seat belt industry without Edelman."

Edelman expanded its specialties from consumer and product marketing, to sports marketing, public affairs and issues management, including taking on the country of Finland and founding the Fin Facts Institute to provide tours for VIPs and the media to change the U.S. perception of the country as a satellite to the Soviet Union.

By the mid-1970's Edelman's team included Dick Aurelio in New York, John Meek in Washington, D.C., and Michael Morley and David Davis in London. Edelman's client list grew with new thinking, new capabilities, constancy, continuity, editing, and always honing the proposal. Edelman invented litigation PR.

In the video, Richard spoke about the ideology of public relations always being in the public interest: "Why are we here, who are we representing, and what are we doing. My father brought integrity to the business in 1952."

His mother Ruth Edelman tried to work in the firm, and said to her husband Dan, "I'm one of a hundred. I'm number one at-home." Dan said that "Ruth deserves a lot of credit. She always had good ideas." Dan stayed active in the firm, even as chairman, editing proposals and staying on top of the state of business across all the geographies. He used to say to his staff, "I'm not trying to take your job. I want to help you."

On the occasion of the firm's 60th anniversary, Ruth quoted Dan. He used to say, "It is great to be the largest firm, but we must always strive to be the best firm."

During this celebration of Dan and the agency he launched 65

years ago, Richard asked Edelman alumni to stand, and speak about the time when they first joined the firm. After listening to all the wonderful personal stories, all I could think about is, I wish I worked here.

Jennifer Cohan, president, Edelman New York, led a panel discussion with: Russell Dubner, president and CEO, Edelman U.S. David Davis, former vice chairman, Edelman; and Richard Edelman. She asked, "What was the best advice Dan ever gave?"

David said, "We always talked business. Whenever I'm asked what is the best advice, selecting best is not doable because what are we comparing it to? The notion that you built a relationship with a client, wasn't us. Dan's approach was to get under the skin of the client. To understand what they wanted to do as individuals, and as a company. His overarching messages were:

1. Win every pitch.
2. Always serve the client: 150% at least
3. Never lose a client
4. Perseverance, and don't give up."

Jennifer asked Russell what Dan meant when he said, "Everyone's an account executive." Russell said he joined Edelman because of his father's friend, Les Parducci, then president of Weight Watchers, who said, 'You should go into public relations. Talk to Rich Adelman.' Adelman, Edelman? I joined, started answering the phones, and learned what it meant to be account executive on day one. Talk about the importance of longevity. We do work in social media, creative content, influencer, and learn from our clients as much as we learn from each other."

"Being open to a divergent set of views. Bringing together different people," he added.

Jennifer asked Richard what Dan would think of Edelman

today? Richard said, "My dad would be interested in the idea that we don't all have to be account executives. We can be creative; 600 of our people are in that area. We're a higher order of intellectuals."

My father used to say, "Go get 'em kid, this is not advertising," Richard added.

Be inclusive. Be brave. That was Dan Edelman.

As an attendee, and a communications professional, I felt honored to be there. The event was a look back in history, raw and uncut, full of emotion, and extremely moving. I learned about the inner workings of Edelman, its values, philosophy, business style, and the way they felt about their employees. Making their employees feel valued, is the key to effective leadership and customer collaboration.

After hearing so much negative publicity over many months, I felt reenergized about what I do for a living. Often public relations professionals, like myself, feel that the profession is mainly about the pitch.

As Richard reminded us all, public relations are about integrity, entrepreneurship, decency, hard-work, creativity, and citizenship. What profession could be better than that.

After the event, we were treated to drinks, hors oeuvres, and the book, "*Edelman and the Rise of Public Relations*," by Franz Wisner. I read the incredible story in one night. Excerpts are included.



About the Author: Wendy Glavin is Founder and CEO of Wendy Glavin Agency, based in New York City, offering marketing, public relations, and social media. Wendy is a 30-year veteran of corporate, agency, consulting, and small business ownership. Wendy has worked across a wide variety of B2B2C industry sectors, and is a published writer and guest speaker. Email her at: wendy@wendyglavin.com