

How This PR Pro is Creating a More Joyful Planet

Spector Lives Her Purpose by Using PR as a Force for Good



Patrice Tanaka
Founder & Chief Joy Officer
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Patrice Tanaka, Founder & Chief Joy Officer of Joyful Planet LLC, interviews people who are actively living their purpose and leveraging their greatest talent, expertise and passion to help create a more joyful planet. This interview spotlights Shelley Spector, President of Spector Corporate Communications.

PT: Shelley, what I love and admire about you is how you're fully living your purpose in both your personal and professional life. You are an amazing force of nature: wife and business partner with your husband Barry Spector, devoted mother, successful entrepreneur, brilliant PR practitioner, beloved professor, author, preserver and protector of PR history and nurturer of next-generation PR professionals.

Shelley, will you share your life purpose with our readers please? Most people, including leaders, have not determined their life purpose and/or cannot distill it down to a succinct, concrete statement. You're among the less than 20 percent of leaders who can.

SJS: My purpose in life is to invent new ideas to make the world a better place and awaken developing, young minds to grow and think big. I love inventing new ideas to help my

clients grow. I also love discovering new ways to strengthen our profession's role in the world. Most important, I love inspiring young people about using PR as a force for good in society.

PT: How did you arrive at your life purpose, which we both agree leverages our greatest talent, expertise and passion in service of people and planet?

SJS: Ever since I was a kid, I loved inventing new ways of doing things, mostly in response to problems affecting people around me. While many of those, looking back, were just whims that would never see the light of day – such as a restaurant chain for picky eaters, serving pizza, Frosted Flakes, Chow Mein and hot dogs – they were all attempts to solve real-world problems. When I was nine, in response to a growing rivalry between the two fourth grade classes, I started a newsletter to help reconnect all the kids again. I invited kids from both classes to submit articles or illustrations. It was so popular it lasted into the fifth grade. (This is when I also learned how to touch-type.)



Shelley Spector, President
Spector Corporate Communications

I think it was Jack Canfield who said that you can find your life purpose by identifying what it is that gives you the most joy in life. So inventing new ways to solve old problems was what has given me the most joy. And then teaching younger professionals how to harness their own creativity and invent their own ideas, compounded this joy for me many times over.

PT: Once you determined your purpose how did you begin to (more) actively live it? What did you do?

SJS: It takes just a moment to have an idea. But to put it

into action involves an enormous dedication of time, resources and unwavering commitment to getting it done. You make a lot of personal sacrifices; you live in a state of exhaustion; you get challenged by powerful people. You get rejected; calls go unreturned. But you push through it all because you believe in your idea with all your heart and soul. You will sacrifice what you must in order to bring your idea to life.

Such was the case after 9/11, when thousands of people were trapped inside their buildings with no access to information or instructions about what to do. The traditional way of getting notified about such emergencies was through the Emergency Alert System, over radio and TV. But what happens when the electricity gets knocked out? And land line phones go dead. The only device that could have worked were cell phones. But that morning, they couldn't be used because the overwhelming number of voice calls blocked the whole cell system. It's estimated that more than 1500 lives could have been saved had they had the proper information that day. That's half the number of victims.

The idea for a solution came to me a few days later, seeing for the first time my own children typing into their cell phones. This was the early days of texting, and only teenagers seemed to be doing it. What if there was a way to broadcast text messages to hundreds, even thousands of people at once? Since texts – otherwise known as short message service, or SMS – had a much, much narrower bandwidth than voice, then conceivably, all these alerts could get through instantly to the people affected. I worked with my husband, Barry, and a software developer, to develop a prototype of the mass SMS broadcast system. We called it WirelessWarning. We designed a logo and set up a web site. The lawyer insisted we apply for a patent. Then we started presenting it to the Office of Emergency management, the Mayor's office and eventually even set up a meeting at the White House.

I dedicated most of my time back then to getting buy-in for

the system. I was even giving it away to the government at no cost. It was still a hard sell. But if my purpose in life was to see to it that good ideas get put into action then this is what I had to do.

Over the years, I got three patents for WirelessWarning. But more important, mass text messaging is being used around the U.S for all kinds of emergencies, from hurricanes to school shootings.

PT: Did knowing your purpose in life change what you do in your professional life in any way? Or, in your personal life?

SJS: As I incorporated my purpose into all aspects of my life, I became increasingly confident in my ability to recognize a good idea when I had one.

Long story short: When our children were two and three years old, we felt it was high time we went on our first family vacation. We chose the Embassy Suites hotel in Palm Beach, believing we'd have a well-deserved quiet and relaxing week around the pool.

We were proved wrong the first moment we got into our hotel suite.

The kids immediately took the room apart. My son popped out the glass from the coffee table. My daughter filled up a glass with water and popped that into the microwave. Barry and I spent the first hour of our vacation pulling objects away from the children, removing all glass and knives, and concocting a way to keep the microwave door locked.

Once the kids fell exhaustedly to sleep, Barry turned to me and said, "Maybe there's a marketing opportunity here." Indeed there was! By morning, we had created an outline for a PR campaign that would make Embassy Suites the first childproofed hotel chain in the country. I presented the idea to the hotel manager. His reaction was, "When can we have the press

conference?”

A year and a half later, the FamilyFriendly program would win the Gold Creativity in Public Relations Award.



Shelley Spector at the PR Museum's
PR Women Who Changed History Event

From my earliest days in the PR field, I knew that PR could be practiced with stronger, deeper and meaningful ideas. The field was far more than counting clips or analyzing clicks, or “getting good PR.” I felt that if more and more people practiced PR strategically and developed big, bold new ideas for their clients, we could help raise the

stature of a field terribly misunderstood and unappreciated.

Edward Bernays taught that PR was an “applied social science,” and he had the case studies to prove it. After meeting him in the mid-eighties, my husband, Barry and I, started videotaping him at his home outside Boston over the next 10 years of his life. He recounted on tape the campaigns that made him famous – we call them “Eddie’s Greatest Hits.” He explained in a very intellectual way the derivation and practice of his ‘two-way street’ philosophy.

I began taking these tapes on the road, showing them to corporations, classes and seminars. The response I would typically get would be, “Wow. I never knew PR could be practiced like this.” These videos became the underpinning of the classes I would eventually teach at NYU and Baruch College.

One day, when he was 101, Eddie asked if Barry and I would set up a museum dedicated to preserving the history of public relations. He would give us artifacts, posters and books, everything that the Library of Congress didn’t want. We

immediately jumped at the opportunity, without hesitation, (although in retrospect, we should have taken more time to discuss how we'd go about doing such a thing. After all, what did we know about building and curating museums? Nothing.) How could we not say 'yes'? After all, this is the Father of Public Relations giving us a very important – and, potentially – life-changing mission for us, and something we felt could be vitally important to our industry.

Along the way, as we grew the collection, we expanded the mission from documenting the growth of the PR profession to also demonstrating the use of PR in changing history, especially when it came to its use in social movements. That has led to an extraordinary series of events honoring the black, Latino and female PR pioneers who have been left on the sidelines of history.

And what if this new way of thinking about PR could help raise the industry's stature in the world? And what if it could at the same time, help make "heroes" out of client companies and the students that I taught?

Thus
“public
relations
for the
public
good”
was
born:
using
our
talents,
skills
and
instincts
as PR
practitioners



Panel, exhibit and networking reception

Thursday, February 1, 2018, Joseph I. Lubin House, 11 East 61st Street, New York, New York, 6:00 pm.

Learn about the extraordinary PR pioneers you never learned about in school. Meet social activist Ken Morris, descendant of both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, who will present the many communications lessons that may be learned from these pioneers. Listen to a fascinating panel of industry leaders as they discuss the need for diverse role models for today's young professionals. Panelists include Dr. Rochelle L. Ford (chair, public relations department, Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University); Dr. Denise Hill (Elon University); Judith Harrison (Senior Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion, Weber Shandwick, and president of the PRSA Foundation), Professor Donald Singletary (President, The Singletary Group), and Mike Paul (President, Reputation Doctor).

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to make the world better (not just get more publicity). I want companies to know that they can use public relations to bring about social change in their communities, to make stronger, more authentic connections with their employees and customers. And they can do so without calling it “CSR” or framing it as “sustainability.” They can do so just because it’s the right thing to do. And if they invent a new way of achieving this – a program that is not self-serving or promoted just to make them “look good” – then it can make news, and be heralded by customers. Let the program be discovered naturally by the internal and external communities. You are doing this for the public good, and not for the promotional value.

I want students to know that the skills they’re acquiring now

can be used to promote causes they're passionate about, and think about creating PR campaigns that can help change the world for the better. It gives them a new perspective on PR, and provides them with a deeper, more meaningful purpose. And society could benefit as a result.

In one class at Baruch, I had the students all write chapters about the underlying public relations strategies that were used in various social causes, from civil rights to anti-smoking campaigns to labor rights – historical subjects that they were passionate about. We turned this into a book, published in 2015, called “Public Relations for the Public Good.”

It presents to all of us in PR the possibility that we can make a difference in the world, to improve the causes we're passionate about.

PT: What is the result of knowing and actively living your life's purpose? Is there a power that comes from being informed by your life's purpose so that you can more actively live it?

SJS: Keeping that purpose in front of me will help get me through even the most disheartening of times, in and out of the office. I often write it up on a Post It and attach it to my monitor.

Although it's hard to do, I try to reframe bad experiences as learning opportunities. If I look back at my life, I see that the greatest periods of growth happened while trying to get through crises. But keeping your eye on the prize – aka, fulfilling your purpose – you are much more likely to turn these crises into opportunities to learn. And believe me, I've had my share of such opportunities.

PT: What are your greatest hopes and dreams for the life purpose you have chosen?

SJS: I hope to inspire more young professionals to discover their own life purpose, and then choosing to live it as best they can at work and in their personal lives. They need to take charge of their lives, find fulfillment in the work they do, and feel joy using their own gifts and skills to the max.

PT: What do you think you would be doing now if you hadn't determined and then actively begun to live your purpose?

SJS: If I didn't have a purpose I wouldn't have felt empowered to take risks, battle the naysayers and take the easier path. My purpose has given me the courage to take the "road not taken" and not the "path of least resistance."

PT: How important do you think it is for individuals to discover their life's purpose? And, do you think businesses would be wise to help employees discover their purpose because purpose-driven employees certainly help to drive purpose-driven organizations?

SJS: As much as every person on the planet should have a life purpose guiding them, so too, should every company, a higher purpose than just making this or that or providing such and such service. It shouldn't be the "typical" high falutin' corporate mission or vision statement either, but something much more authentic, and proven with action and behavior.

It would also serve companies well to invest in supporting their own employees to discover, and live, their purpose. I think that, after health insurance, this could be the best benefit a company can provide employees.

PT: What advice would you give others about discovering their life's purpose?

SJS: Take the time to sit down with a professional coach. Don't go it alone. Discovering your true purpose in this life is far too important.

About the Author: *Patrice Tanaka is a serial entrepreneur, having co-founded three award-winning, PR & marketing firms and, most recently, Joyful Planet, a Business & Life Strategy Consultancy. "Through Joyful Planet, I am doing what I love and do best, leveraging my creative, problem-solving talent to help individuals and organizations discover and actively live their purpose to unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their lives, in their businesses and in their communities," says Patrice. This is the subject of Patrice's new best-selling book, Beat the Curve, co-authored with world renowned management consultant and coach, Brian Tracy, and other business leaders. Her chapter is entitled, "Live Your Life's Purpose and Unleash Your Joy." Connect with Patrice@JoyfulPlanet.com and via LinkedIn/Patrice Tanaka and Twitter/Patrice Tanaka.*