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Book review

3 **John A. Koten (Ed.), *Building Trust: Leading CEOs Speak Out—How They Create It, Strengthen***
 4 ***It, and Sustain It*, Arthur W. Page Society Inc., New York, 2004, hardcover, 349 pp., \$ 24.95.**

5 Trust, ethics, integrity, values, accountability. . . whatever term you want to apply about acting honor-
 6 ably while making a profit, the ethical imperative is as hot a topic as I have seen it in my 30 years as a
 7 journalist and business publication editor. From the boardroom to the pressroom to the academy, all eyes
 8 are focused on the trust that has been lost in corporate America's ethical character.

9 Into this roiled atmosphere comes *Building Trust*, an impressive book from the Arthur W. Page Society.
 10 It is a collection of 23 commentaries by corporate chieftains on how they are addressing the ethics
 11 crisis that has gripped the business world. The authors of the essays are big guns – CEOs of IBM,
 12 Johnson and Johnson, General Motors, Verizon Communications, and Pfizer, among them. The leaders
 13 of Germany's Siemens and SAP give the book some global extension, and Marilyn Carlson Nelson,
 14 chairman of Carlson Companies (Radisson Hotels, T.G.I. Friday's restaurants), adds the diversity of a
 15 female perspective as well as that of the head of one of the largest privately held companies in the United
 16 States.

17 They all say what you might expect a corporate statesman should say when confronting an ethical
 18 morass. A representative sampling:

- 19 • “Business integrity. . . means obeying the internal moral compass that we all have, so that in each
 20 situation we face in our business life, we consciously choose to do what we believe is right and reject
 21 what we believe is wrong.” – Fred Hassan, CEO of pharmaceutical company Schering-Plough Corp.
 22 (p. 28).
- 23 • “The absence of scandal is not synonymous with integrity. True integrity means doing everything
 24 possible to live up to each of our values all the time.” – Frederic M. Poses, CEO of industrial products
 25 maker American Standard Companies Inc. (p. 50).
- 26 • “Decision-making when faced with an ethical dilemma is easy. Do the right thing. Always.” – Alexander
 27 M. Cutler, CEO of global manufacturer Eaton Corp. (p. 70).

28 There is no doubt that they mean what they say. These are principled men and women. They are also
 29 practical executives. They know and worry about the damage that an unprincipled action can do to a
 30 company's reputation and, for sure, its stock price. But GM CEO Rick Wagoner does remind himself and
 31 the reader of Adlai Stevenson's cautionary note, “It is often easier to fight for a principle than to live up
 32 to it” (p. 113).

Building Trust does fight for its principles. The essays are compelling, particularly when the authors delve into specific sticky-wicket situations that challenged them to “walk the talk.” Eaton Corp.’s Cutler, for example, forthrightly addresses in his chapter how two of its senior managers falsified test results to meet a targeted shipment timetable. Other authors survey the reputation wreckage from a more elevated attitude, but are nonetheless informative about steps to take to repair the widespread damage.

Each chapter follows a formulaic approach: a well-organized and well-written unit of personal commentary from the chief executive, accompanied by an extended bio of the author and detailed description of the corporation. A 30-page appendix reproduces the mission statements of nine of the companies involved, making for a useful supplement to the CEO’s presentation.

It would also be expected that the individual essays are clean and crisp, since the CEOs likely drew upon a close internal or external communications counselor to hone their contribution. The serious, statesmanlike intensity of each contributor’s essay lends a certain uniformity of style to the book. That sameness is thankfully relieved with the occasional chapter that takes the reader down a more colorful anecdotal path. Michael Eskew, CEO of package deliverer UPS, almost brings a tear to the eye with his tale of company values in action. He traces how a UPS driver, going on no more documentation than a name on an unaddressed label, took it upon herself to track down a soldier on a sprawling military base to deliver the letter. Inside the letter was a money order and a handwritten yellow note which read, “Make me happy. Come home for Christmas. Love, Mom.” More than luck hit this no longer camp-bound soldier and his loving Mom; it was a remarkable display of a company’s ethos, as Eskew explains, not of “How do I make customers loyal to my company” but of “How do I make the company loyal to my customers” (p. 262).

Building Trust comes into a crowded, some might say saturated, marketplace of corporate ethics books, conferences, seminars, workshops, journals, and sundry publications targeted at reforming the sinners among us. What importantly distinguishes this book is its reverential drawing upon the Arthur W. Page Principles as a template for its exploration of ethics in action. The book’s chapters are grouped under one of the following Page Principles that is most illustrative of the authors’ stance:

- Tell the truth.
- Prove it with action.
- Listen to the customer.
- Manage for tomorrow.
- A company’s true character is expressed by its people.

A compelling feature of this book for both newcomers to public relations as well as veteran practitioners is the opportunity it offers to get acquainted with the storied Arthur Page, his namesake principles, and the organization that proudly carries his name today as a conduit of higher-order guidance. That’s reason alone to add this book to your library.

But *Building Trust* deserves consideration by all practitioners. Here is an elite group of business leaders making an eloquent case for running an ethical organization. What better case for the role of public relations in managing and protecting that reputation of being an ethical organization?

Talk about bookends: I began reading *Building Trust* on the day when the *Wall Street Journal* headlined a story, “Citicorp CEO Pursues Culture of Ethics,” and finished it on a day when Temple University, where I teach a public relations course, headlined a front-page piece in its *Temple Times* newspaper, “School of Business Puts Focus on Corporate Ethics.” Many more headlines are sure to come. It is good to have a

76 book like *Building Trust* helping do what it can to reset the moral compass and argue for PR's essential
77 role in reputation management.

78 James Kristie*

79 *Temple University School of Communications and Theater*
80 *Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA*

81 *Present address: 1845 Walnut St., Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA

82 Tel.: +1 215 405 6081; fax: +1 215 405 6078

83 *E-mail addresses:* jkristie@directorsandboards.com, jkristie@temple.edu

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