

# **CORPORATE REPRESENTATION**

By Bryce Harlow

Published by The Bryce Harlow Foundation  
Washington, DC  
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## ***FORWARD***

**T**hose of us who represent corporations in Washington know that Bryce Harlow is something special. He has had an extraordinary career in both the private and public sectors, and throughout it all he has enjoyed the respect, admiration, and, yes, affection of allies and adversaries alike. And he has been mightily effective.

Bryce came to Washington in 1938, after graduating from the University of Oklahoma. He spent the next three years on Capitol Hill, as Assistant Librarian of the House of Representatives and as secretary to a member of Congress. From 1941 to 1946, he was an Army officer on the staff of General George C. Marshall, retiring as a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve.

He returned to Capitol Hill in 1947 to take a position on the professional staff of the new House Committee on Armed Services; from 1950 to 1951, he headed up that staff. In 1952, he went home to Oklahoma City to become vice president of the Harlow Publishing Company.

Bryce's stay in Oklahoma lasted only until 1953, when he joined the White House staff. From 1953 to 1960, he served President Eisenhower in a variety of capacities -- as Administrative Assistant to the President, Special Assistant to the President, and Deputy Assistant to the President for Congressional Affairs.

It was in 1961 that Bryce began the association that was to establish him as the unofficial dean of Washington corporate representatives: He opened the first Washington office for Procter & Gamble. For the next 17 years, until his retirement in 1978 as Vice President-National Government Relations, he set the standards -- of integrity, wisdom, savvy, and eloquence -- that his colleagues in the business of

representing business try daily to meet. Not that this period was without some additional public sector activity on Bryce's part; he took leaves of absence from 1968 to 1971 and from 1973 to 1974 to serve as a senior advisor to President Nixon -- first as Assistant to the President, then as Counselor to the President with cabinet rank.

Bryce was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1977. Four years later, he received from President Reagan the nation's highest civilian award, the Medal of Freedom.

In June of 1981, about 250 of Bryce Harlow's friends and business colleagues assembled for a dinner in his honor -- a gathering to mark not only his four decades of exceptional public and private service, but also his special contributions to the profession of corporate representation. The proceeds from that dinner became seed money for the Bryce Harlow Foundation, which was incorporated in 1982 as a non-profit organization exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

The missions of the Foundation are to enhance the national interest by promoting better understanding and cooperation between business and government and to establish, conduct, and otherwise advance educational programs designed to improve and help professionalize business-government relations. It is in furtherance of these missions that the Foundation has established a series of monographs --- Essays on Business-Government Relations --- to be distributed to educational institutions, corporate managers, government officials, and members of the press.

We are delighted that the first essay in this series is by the man himself, Bryce Harlow. As is his wont, he goes right to the essence -- why corporate representation is important, what activities it encompasses, and what qualities and disciplines it requires. There is nobody in America better qualified to speak to these matters than Bryce.

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# CORPORATE REPRESENTATION

By Bryce Harlow

**T**he role of corporate representation in Washington – in, that is, what has come to be known rather grandly as the policy-making process -- has never been widely understood. As the reader may suspect, I have a few thoughts on the subject (and on any number of other subjects as well, but they will have to await another occasion). I cannot hope with a single essay to treat all the details or to dispel all the myths and simplisms about corporate representation that have emerged over the years. But there may be value in presenting a few highlights, and there is certainly no harm in trying to dispel some of the illusions.

My starting point is a very simple proposition that just happens to run counter to much of what one reads these days: Business is not a malign influence -- something evil called a special interest that harms the public interest. Think about it: Business is an indispensable pillar of our prosperity, of our strength as a nation, of our capacity to provide opportunities for mobility in our society and for the fulfillment of individual potentials. In short, business is at the heart of America's well-being.

It follows, I believe, that corporate representation is a profession worthy of talented people. Those who are effective and principled advocates of the interests of their companies and of the business community as a whole help government arrive at better-informed and, therefore, potentially better decisions. Good representatives of good business contribute a great deal to good government.

I do not use the word "profession" lightly. One of the points I most want to convey is that corporate representation in Washington is becoming, and needs to be, highly professionalized -- that it involves and requires a multiplicity of skills, knowledge, and sensibilities as well as an unassailable character. Any corporation large enough to have need of Washington representation is likely to be beset by a confusing array of complex and sensitive policy concerns within the jurisdiction of a daunting jumble of government agencies and congressional committees. A Washington representative whose expertise is limited to a refined understanding of social small talk and various techniques of self-ingratiation is not likely to do well or last long in this maelstrom of

issues, institutions, and powerful national figures.

And make no mistake about it: What happens in Washington is often so critical for corporations that they simply cannot risk reliance on amateurs to fend for them. Corporations have learned this the hard way. The increase over the past two decades in the federal government's regulatory and legislative activities has been paralleled by a rapid growth in the number and quality of corporate representatives deployed in Washington -- and in the number of trade associations and other business groups that have found it prudent to move their headquarters to the capitol city. So just what is it that the many corporate representatives now in Washington do to earn their keep? And what qualities and habits of work are needed to be a successful practitioner of the art and science of corporate representation? Being a methodical fellow, I will address the first question first.

## ***THE JOB OF A CORPORATE REPRESENTATIVE***

**M**uch of a Washington representative's time is spent in intelligence-gathering --- anticipating, monitoring, and interpreting policy developments of possible or future concern to his company. The remainder is spent trying to affect those developments deemed by the company to be of particular importance.

In 1961, when I opened Procter & Gamble's Washington office, corporate representatives along the banks of the Potomac were not nearly as numerous as they are now. Indeed, until Procter took its gamble on me, it had never had a full-time Washington representative. At the outset, my tiny outpost was charged with keeping close tabs on events unfolding in Congress and the executive branch -- and with helping Procter's top people decide which matters required their attention and presence. As the office evolved and expanded, we began to do as well as look-- to become players as well as observers. The task of tracking all of the developments that Procter had a significant stake in was itself quite a challenge. We drew upon personal contacts, association intelligence, trade journals, magazines, the wire services, newspapers, congressional reports, and so on. No small amount of our awareness, I should add, was obtained from specialists back in the firm's home offices who spotted in

professional reports of various sorts mentions of this or that governmental occurrence too arcane to be noted in conventional Washington sources. Having been apprised of such nuggets of fact or rumor, we in Washington would then set about verifying their authenticity and ascertaining their significance.

**T**he matters that we had to oversee ranged the federal spectrum; such was the breadth of the company's activities and concerns. We kept our eyes trained on the Federal Trade Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communications Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and a generous assortment of cabinet departments, including Labor, Commerce, Treasury, HEW, Agriculture, State, and Defense.

In the meantime, up on Capitol Hill a roiling, contentious, and unpredictable organism called the Congress consumed a great deal of our time and attention as well. There were dozens of congressional committees and scores of subcommittees to be mindful of, and at any one time a goodly proportion of them, we found, were considering or preparing to consider bills of immense significance to our company -- or conducting investigations of potentially similar consequence. In addition, we had to watch a large proportion of the 535 individual members of Congress -- each rough, tough, and independent; each reporting only to his Maker and his constituency (and not necessarily in that order); each quite capable of a sudden, unexpected assault on the company for good reason, bad reason, or no reason at all.

As must be obvious, there was so much activity to be overseen that not all of it could be kept under constant scrutiny. Our priorities were set by the firm's management, according to the relative importance of particular matters to the company as a whole.

**W**here the corporation's interests were critically affected, we did more than report; we acted. Our efforts typically involved out-and-out lobbying of members of Congress and their staff members or jawboning senior officials of the executive branch. Oftentimes, we would conduct our advocacy jointly with other companies, either on an ad hoc basis or through a trade association. We

were frequently buttressed by the personal participation of company leaders and experts, flying in from Cincinnati or elsewhere when the going got too rough.

The importance of coordination in attempting to formulate a viable policy on governmental matters cannot be overstated. One aspect of this is coordination of activities within a firm. A Washington office must be able to work freely, unhampered by intermediate layers or channels, with its company's top officers, its technical experts, its advertising and press relations people, and its field personnel to achieve maximum impact. If key people within the corporation are not working together toward an agreed-upon objective – or worse yet, if they are pulling in different directions – the prospects for success can be considerably diminished.

There is another type of coordination, noted above, that is also vital – coordination among companies with similar interests in an issue. It usually takes a good deal of cajolery – and sometimes requires some top-level discipline -- to create a united front out of anarchy, but the time and angst involved are well worth investing. The hard truth is that when business really tries, when it is fully unified and raring to go, it never loses a big battle in Washington.

## ***DOING THE JOB WELL***

**W**hat follows is a list of some of the characteristics that are in my judgment needed to be a good -- that is to say, an effective -- corporate representative in Washington. The list could be expanded, but I doubt that it could be contracted; these are qualities that I think are just plain crucial.

### **Integrity**

The coin of lobbying, as of politics, is trust. One's word is one's bond. Habitual truth telling and square dealing are of paramount importance in this profession. If a corporate representative lies, misrepresents, or even lets a misapprehension stand uncorrected --- or if he cuts his corners too slyly -- he is very quickly dead and gone, never to be resurrected or even mourned.

## **A Willingness to Work Hard**

Representation of any major company, done right and well, is invariably a grinding, around-the-clock task. It may look simple and easy to people on the outside, but those doing it know that it is a tough, devouring job that leaves precious little time for goofing off.

## **Adaptability to Change**

The environment in which corporate representatives operate is agonizingly mutable. The formal and informal rules of the game undergo frequent and sometimes subtle modifications; problems and issues are in constant flux; and public perceptions and attitudes flutter about wildly. And, lest we forget, key participants in the policy process turn over with alarming celerity. No sooner does a ranking official profess to see merit in a company's position than that official resigns, dies, gets transferred or fired, or is beaten in an election. The whole painstaking process of education and persuasion then has to be started from scratch with the official's successor. A corporate representative who cannot roll with such unpredictabilities will soon start shoveling smoke, become futile, and vanish from sight and mind.

## **Humility and Perspective**

A Washington representative needs to recognize and accept the fact that whatever it is that he represents is much more important to the political animals in town than his own personality and atmospheric. A good politician looks right through a corporate representative to the power package behind the beseecher; he wants to know, and is busy calculating as the representative makes his pitch, how the representative's company and its employees might help or hurt him in his never-ending fight for political survival. If a company can neither help nor hurt, its representative's persuasive powers would have to be as irresistible as Jean Harlow's once were for him to prosper.

## **An Understanding of the Process of Government**

A corporate representative needs to have a clear fix on how the government actually works -- how the pieces fit together, how things get done. The best way -- though not the only way -- to learn the finer points of the mechanics is to work inside

the apparatus for a while. The real tricks of the government trade are not written down; they have to be absorbed through experience. Many an amateur in this business has committed hari-kari without even being aware of it, by violating an unwritten rule of conduct or behavior.

### **A Capacity to Assimilate Details**

The issues that a corporate representative must deal with are often highly technical; minute changes in legislative language or in numbers can be crucial; and nuances can be telling. It is important that a corporate representative be able to comprehend, communicate, and manipulate the seemingly small matters that can oftentimes have very substantial effects on corporate competitiveness and profitability -- and that he not be hesitant to solicit expert help from his company or elsewhere when that becomes essential.

### ***A FEW FINAL WORDS***

**C**orporate representation is sometimes dangerous, often frustrating, and always time-consuming and difficult. It calls for an unceasing effort to educate and motivate current and potential allies -- and to discourage and befuddle foes. It requires the coordination of personal visits, telephone calls, and letters from top management; the flexing of political muscle in the home districts of particularly recalcitrant members of Congress; the fine-tuning of press relations and advertising; and, throughout, a dogged determination to prevail. That may sound tedious and vexing and grim. But for the right person, corporate representation can also be fascinating, challenging, immensely satisfying, and -- on balance, most of the time -- fun.

***Published by The Bryce Harlow Foundation***

***1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 107***

***Washington, DC 20036***

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