

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

Dear colleagues,

[Together 250](#) asked me as the CEO of the Page Society to consider writing this letter to our community as the United States of America (USA) celebrates its 250th birthday. So as I reflect on this milestone, I do so through the lens of my family's story and my experience as a leader.

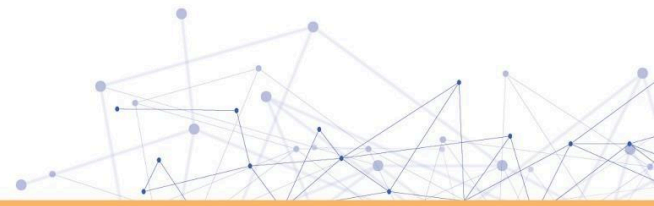
My ancestors fought for liberty through the American Revolution, American Civil War, through the Civil Rights Movement, through the Women's Rights Movement, through the DEI movement, working across generations to gain, regain and expand rights, to move our democracy closer to its ideals.

My paternal ancestors, men of African descent, fought in the American Revolution earning their freedom. They were granted land in North Carolina and voting rights, only to see those voting rights stripped from their descendants in 1835. Their stories embody both the promise of America being realized and the agony of the dismantling of progress once attained. Their lineage is left with the unfinished work of realizing its ideals.

I am also a maternal descendant of Anarcha, an enslaved African American woman, who was subjected to experimental surgeries without her consent. Though history long-celebrated the physician who performed those procedures as the "father of gynecology," today, Anarcha herself is increasingly recognized as a "Mother of Gynecology," a symbol of resilience, dignity and the enduring pursuit of justice. Ironically, the last plantation during her enslavement belonged to a cousin of Thomas Jefferson who helped write the Declaration of Independence. Her story reminds me that the American promise has always been both aspirational and unfinished.

I write this as a communicator, educator and leader who now has the privilege of serving as the CEO of the Page Society, a global community of senior communications leaders committed to helping improve business and society. Our members strive to uphold the Page Principles: leading with truth, action, listening and stewardship as they counsel CEOs and organizations around the world.

The chief communications officer has a unique strategic role and a unique responsibility to help organizations build trust, navigate complexity and strengthen the relationships that enable



institutions and societies to thrive. In many ways, these same skills: listening, engaging diverse perspectives and leading with integrity, are essential to the health of any democracy.

Page is a global organization with about 20 percent of our members living and working internationally. Although my reflections are rooted in USA beliefs, the themes of leadership, citizenship, trust and shared responsibility resonate far beyond our borders.

The individuals working in the practice of public relations, corporate affairs and corporate communications, can use this unique opportunity to pause to reflect on the 250th birthday of the USA as it relates to our professional lives wherever we work and live in this ever- so- interconnected world.

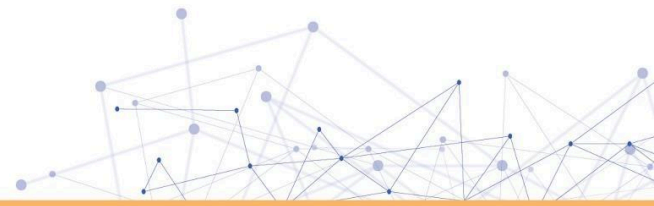
As the USA commemorates its 250th anniversary, I find myself returning to the promise embedded in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" and are endowed with unalienable rights to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".

For me, this milestone is not simply an opportunity to celebrate victories and accomplishments. It is an invitation for leaders to reflect on progress and to assess our current stewardship of these foundational truths. Viewing the American experiment through the lens of the Page Principles offers a unique framework for evaluating our responsibilities as business leaders in this experiment of democracy.

The integrity of our national character is the cornerstone of the Preamble of The Declaration of Independence. As the Page Principles remind us, we must "tell the truth" by providing an accurate picture of our nation's ideals and actions. However, reflection is insufficient. We must also "prove it with action". After all, a nation's true character—like that of any institution—is defined far more by what it does than what it says.

As we commemorate 250 years, we are called to ensure that our collective actions align with the promise of equality, proving our commitment to liberty not just in rhetoric, but in consistent practice.

As leaders, we must be brave to speak truth to power, but also speak truth to our diverse stakeholders, demonstrating through our actions that our commitment to improving business and



society is real. And when we fall short as an organization, we are transparent, learn from our mistakes and move forward to pursue these ideals.

The "enterprise" of our democracy succeeds when we "listen to stakeholders". The Preamble speaks to universal rights. To honor these, we must actively engage a diverse range of voices through inclusive dialogue. Recognize that not everyone sees, feels or experiences these self-evidence of equality. In our professional and personal lives, we must remember that our actions influence the future of this American democracy experiment. Our decisions and policies should reflect the diverse values, experiences and aspirations of all people.

Looking toward the next quarter-millennium, we must "manage for tomorrow" by anticipating challenges, embracing change, and generating goodwill. This responsibility belongs to all of us—citizens, educators, business leaders and nonprofit leaders alike—because a nation's true character is expressed by its people. The strength of the American experiment rests upon the words and deeds of every individual, each acting as an ambassador of the ideals enshrined in 1776.

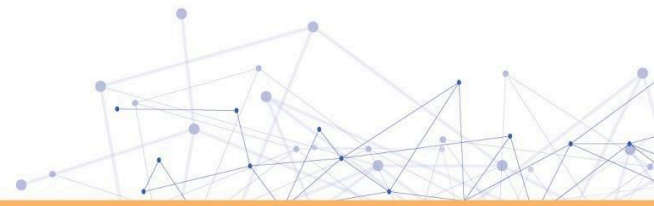
Finally, this enduring endeavor requires us to "remain calm, patient and good-humored". Navigating the complexities of a nation requires reasoned attention and steady leadership, especially when crises arise, when disagreements emerge, when polarization threatens the unity necessary for the States to remain United.

My ancestors did this and their descendants, including me, are beneficiaries of their perseverance. I remain hopeful and committed to this democratic experiment called the United States of America, despite the challenges of today.

As we mark this 250th anniversary, we renew our commitment to the enduring promise of America. Not through words alone, but through truthful action, active listening, and stewardship for future generations. The work is unfinished, but I remain hopeful that together we can continue moving closer to the ideals that inspired our nation's founding.

Your partner in improving business and society,

Rochelle Ford, Ph.D., APR
CEO



Page Principles

Page members regard these principles as the guidelines by which they, and indeed all communications professionals, should undertake their role. Page has evolved significantly over the past 40 years, but we still believe that the Principles our founders compiled in service of our mission hold very true today.

They developed the Page Principles on the basis of the lifetime of work of Arthur W. Page, including speeches and writings. While Page did not write them himself, our founders believed it was important to capture, honor and promote the tenets by which he practiced public relations. Page members regard these principles as the guidelines by which they, and indeed all communications professionals, should undertake their role.

The Page Principles:

1. Tell the truth.

Let the public know what's happening with honest and good intention; provide an ethically accurate picture of the enterprise's character, values, ideals and actions.

2. Prove it with action.

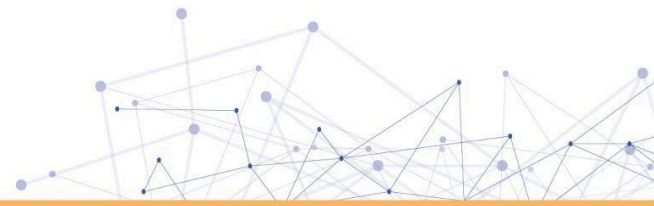
Public perception of an enterprise is determined 90 percent by what it does and 10 percent by what it says.

3. Listen to stakeholders.

To serve the enterprise well, understand what the public wants and needs and advocate for engagement with all stakeholders. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about stakeholder reaction to the enterprise's products, policies and practices. To listen effectively, engage a diverse range of stakeholders through inclusive dialogue.

4. Manage for tomorrow.

Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.



5. Conduct public relations as if the whole enterprise depends on it.

No strategy should be implemented without considering its impact on stakeholders. As a management and policymaking function, public relations should encourage the enterprise's decision making, policies and actions to consider its stakeholders' diverse range of views, values, experience, expectations and aspirations.

6. Realize an enterprise's true character is expressed by its people.

The strongest opinions — good or bad — about an enterprise are shaped by the words and deeds of an increasingly diverse workforce. As a result, every employee — active or retired — is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to advocate for respect, diversity and inclusion in the workforce and to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners and public officials.

7. Remain calm, patient and good-humored.

Lay the groundwork for public relations successes with consistent and reasoned attention to information and stakeholders. When a crisis arises, remember, cool heads communicate best.