Ivy Lee

Today Public Relations is considered maintaining a public image for high profile people, business or organizations. It is thought of as a practice that helps popular figures from getting into trouble in the public eye. There are so many examples that come to mind when thinking of modern day public relations, the most popular being when celebrities make bad decisions. In this case a public relations team is hired that represents them in the public or helps them with what they say in front of the media. Public Relations is very important to so many businesses and individuals. I will share with you where this practice or theory begin, who was the first to start public relations was, and what principles were behind the first concept of public relations. These are things that anyone who is studying public relations would want to know but through my research I have found the answer and who the brilliant mind was behind what is considered public relations.

Ivy Lee was born on July 16th, 1877 in Cedartown, Georgia. He was brought up in a very religious family being that his dad was a Methodist minister. Lee had a normal childhood; he attended a local school while his mom took care of housework. After high school graduation, Lee attended Emory College located in Atlanta, Georgia. There he attended classes and worked for the school newspaper, it wasn’t there though that Lee knew what he really wanted to do. After a couple years at Emory, Lee enrolled at Princeton University located in Princeton, New
Jersey. It was there that Lee found his love for writing. He once again worked for the school newspaper, he found himself writing columns, articles and stories, and he absolutely loved it. Once Lee graduated from Princeton.

Since Ivy Lee is called the “Father of Public Relations” you would think his first job straight out of college was in Public Relations but it was not. Lee’s first opportunity was a gig at the New York American. This was local newspaper gained a lot respect because it covered the economic depression that ran throughout the decade. Here he was a journalist; he reported and wrote about current issues that faced the American economy. It was great because there was always new news. Every day something different happened with the economy, citizens wanted to read what he wrote and here he really found out a talent that he had. Newspapers really struggled through this time because they were costly and the American people just couldn’t afford them because of the economic fallout. He then went on to land jobs at the New York Times and the New York World doing the same thing, writing about news and current events that went on is society. The New York Times was founded by a man named Henry Raymond. Lee took a particular interest in this newspaper because it was one of the first newspapers that focused strictly on news.

**Literature Review**

Many examples that express what a great ambassador Ivy Lee was to Public Relations. In Eric Goldman’s *The Emergence of the Public Relations*, Ivy Lee early life is talked about and also he expresses how Ivy Lee’s declaration of Principles is applied to modern day Public Relations.

---

1 Goldman, Eric F. Two-Way Street. The Emergence of the Public Relations Counsel. Boston: Bellman Publishing Co., 1948
practitioners and how many of the same philosophies that were used in Ivy Lee’s time are still used today. Also Ivy Lee said that this statement was considered the “groundwork” for public relations. On another side in ² Ivy Lee was a decade ahead of his colleagues by Michael Turney how Ivy Lee established the American Red Cross is shared and famous accomplishments he produced is expressed. The American Red Cross is the greatest disaster relief organization in the world and Ivy Lee was the brilliant man behind it. Ivy Lee’s college days are reflected upon in ³ Arthur Page Society, what he did at Princeton and how it shaped him into the great mastermind that he was. Page says how Lee participated in the schools newspaper and this is where he first developed his public relations skills. He then graduated to write for newspapers around New York. In the New World Encyclopedia article titled Ivy Lee. ⁴ Dictionary of American Business Leaders by John Ingham. Ivy Lees early childhood can be read and then one of Ivy Lee’s greatest accomplishments can be learned about. This was the Colorado Coal Mining Campaigns and how he shared information to local newspapers about what was going on during the coal strike. Ingham also describes how Ivy Lee wanted his obligation to be to the people and how any news that is going on in the United States should be brought to the attention of the people. They have a right to know and it is people like himself that have the obligation to bring that news to the attentions of them. ⁵ Kirk Hallahan explains in Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers Response to the 1913-1914 Colorado Coal Strike how Ivy Lee’s first real public relations breakthrough was

² Turney, Michael. “Ivy Lee was a decade ahead of his colleagues.” <http://www.nku.edu>
the Colorado Coal Strike and how he reported information the newspapers about what was going on.

One of Ivy Lee’s greatest accomplishments was the writing of the Declaration of Principles. A statement that drives public relations to this day. In Karen Miller’s *Understanding Ivy Lee’s Declaration of Principles*. She says how this statement is considered the starting point of modern public relations and how modern day public relations people still go by these statements. Public Relation did evolve throughout the years though and in Michael L Herman, *The (R)evolution of Public Relations*. The evolution of public relations is described, beginning with the practices by Ivy Lee and the practices of modern day practitioners and how they are similar and different. An article in our textbook titled Sherman Morse is probably my favorite. This article gives a great understanding of not only Ivy Lee’s early life but what he did for Public Relations and just what kind of brilliant mind he was. It really talks though about his Colorado project and how that showed people that he was great at what he did. The article *Rise of the Image Man* by the journal titled Economist also talks about that, how the Coal mining project was a big step in the career of Ivy Lee. Quotations were found at websites such as *worldofquotes.com*, *bookings.com*, *thinkexist.com* and

---

10 “Ivy Lee Quotes, Quotations and Sayings” www.worldofquotes.com
11 “Famous Quotes by Ivy Lee” www.bookings.com
12 “Ivy Lee Quotes” www.thinkexist.com
Quotes from Ivy Lee himself allow me to get a feel of what kind of person he was. Things that a person says can tell you a lot about their character.

I had a great deal of luck by finding personal papers from Ivy Lees work. These included papers and material from the public relations firm of Ivy Lee and his associates. Also documentation of his public relations theories and practices were found. These included articles, writings, public relation material and photographs. Princeton.edu and the Ivy Ledbetter Papers were the source to just that. His legacy is something to remember, this can be read in Ivy Lee by sourcewatch.org. Here how Ivy Lee is remembered is explained and how he is thought of in the modern day. Ray Eldon Hiebert edition of the story of Ivy Lee and the development of public relations gave me a unique perspective on why Ivy Lee went in the Public relations direction. It’s hard to find a timeline of someone’s life, particularly of someone’s career but Ivy Lee by bookings.com, Ivy Lee public relations timeline by google.com and Public Relations by kipnotes.com allowed me to gain vital information on Ivy Lee beginning with his career in 1905 all the way to the end. I wanted to be able to get really in depth on one of Ivy Lee tasks. I choose the Colorado Coal Strike. In order to do this I have to reach out to the

---

13 Ivy Lee Quotes. www.quotessup.com
14 Ivy Ledbetter Papers 1915-1916. <Princeton.edu>
15 “Ivy Lee” www.sourcewatch.org
17 “Ivy Lee” www.bookings.com
18 “Ivy Lee Public Relations Timeline” www.google.com
19 “Public Relations” www.kipnotes.com
New York Times 1915 article \(^{20}\) *In the Hot Seat: Rockefeller Testifies on Ludlow* and \(^{21}\) *Ivy Lee Letters* in the Columbia University Library Archival Collection. These were great they allowed me to focus on this particular case involving John D. Rockefeller and Ivy Lee. Ivy Lee also worked on the Pennsylvania railroad project and for this I dug into the \(^{22}\) *Ivy Ledbetter Papers: Pennsylvania Railroad*. Timothy O’Brien \(^{23}\) *Ivy Lee Spinning Frenzy: P.R’s Bad Press* and Mickie Kennedy \(^{24}\) *The Origin of the Press Release and its importance to Public Relations* gave me incite one how Lee looked at projects he was about to take on and also is thought process before those tasks, I also got information on John D. Rockefeller. Also the importance of the press release and how much it meant to Ivy Lee’s career. Britannica Online’s \(^{25}\) *Ivy Ledbetter Lee* told me more about the life of Ivy Lee.

These twenty-five sources were great in my search for information about Ivy Lee, leading me to facts, practices and methods by this famous American public relation practitioner. They gave me a better understanding of the great things that Ivy Lee did and how he changed Public relations as we know it today. The evolution behind public relations is just amazing and Ivy Lee had a big part in it. He thought about it different and these works allowed me to gain the knowledge I needed to in order to write this paper.

During the Colorado Coal strike of 1913, coal operators hired Lee to represent them. What Lee did was create “handouts” that he gave to newspapers that explained facts of the


\(^{21}\) “Ivy L. Lee Letters.” Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections

\(^{22}\) “Ivy Ledbetter Papers: Pennsylvania Railroad” www.princeton.edu


strike and what future plans were. Newspapers criticized Lee and accused his of trying to
manipulate them, this lead Ivy Lee to one of the greatest pieces of work he ever did, this was
the *Declaration of Principles*. This was published in 1906. This was a document written by Ivy
Lee himself that protected news sources saying that all information is accurate and it is in the
best interest of the public to know about it, even if the newspapers don’t like it. If they don’t
want to use the information than they don’t have to but it should still be brought to the public’s
attention. This was so important at this time because for one, nothing was ever said regarding
information to the public and two, there was so much controversy regarding information that
was shared between the public and news stations. All Ivy Lee did was state that all information
said was going to be true because it is an obligation that public relations professionals have to
the public to get true news out. If newspapers don’t like it, they don’t have to use it but as long
as the public was getting honest and true information than that was all that matters.

Part of the declaration of principles says "In brief, our plan is frankly, and openly, on
behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply the press and public of the United
States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to
the public to know about." This is such a strong quote by Ivy Lee because it shows his
commitment to the public in making sure that they get accurate news. He wanted to be known
as somebody who was trustworthy and honest even if that meant that people hated him. He
knew that, that was going to be the way into the public’s hearts and that is what he wanted. If
he could get the people happy then they would want to see his work or they would respect him
enough that if he represented someone then he would be able to get them out of trouble.
Either way he would be winning and in a field where success is determined by the public then according to Ivy Lee that equals a successful career.

At the time Ivy Lee’s views were seen as revolutionary. Gaining the Public’s confidence was what he wanted to do and he did just that. Modern day Public Relations is based off just these principles. Even though there are many different types of Public Relation it is all based on accurate news and saying the truth, even if sometimes it is hard to do or it is considered negative in the public’s eye. Ivy Lee changed the way news was brought to the public just by a brief but brilliant statement. To this day it is a statement that all Public Relations is based off and goes down as one of the greatest statements ever said.

Ivy Lee had many jobs starting out as a journalist for newspapers in New York but his public relations career started in 1903 when he took a job working for the citizens union and a publicity manager. Here he managed what was going to the news and overlooked how the citizens union was being represented. He then took a job at the democratic national committee and after doing that for a while he team up with George Parker and created the United States third ever public relations firm, this was called Parker and Lee. Parker and Lee was very successful, it started out slow but it quickly enjoyed success. Its clients were the Pennsylvania Railroad Company in 1906. This company was in a public controversy because it denied valuable information and interviews to journalist. Parker and Lee also represented the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. This may be one of their biggest and most historic clients because they helped solve the highly controversial 1915 Coal strike where Lee famously wrote the Declaration of Principles. They even went to the extents of working to end the American trade embargo with
the Soviet Union and representing the German company IG Farben. The company died after four short years though and Ivy Lee was on his own. In 1912 he was hired full time though working once again for the Pennsylvania railroad and on the Colorado Coal Strike. It was so important though because it was the first time in history that a public relations person was put at an executive level position. Here he relayed information to newspapers about the strike to let them know what was going on. This was where Lee became famous and it was his most successful job he had in his life. His last accomplishment came in 1919 when he founded the public relations counseling office Ivy Lee and Associates. This had much success in representing smaller companies.

Ivy Lee once said, “Don't worry if you don't complete everything on the schedule. At least you will have completed the most important projects before getting to the less important ones.” This was very true in Ivy Lee’s life and like stated earlier one of his most famous works was the Colorado Coal Strike or also known as John D. Rockefeller and the Ludlow Massacre. The year was 1906 and Colorado coal mine workers were on strike because of minimal pay and unsafe working conditions. The owners were upset because they didn't want the press to know, in fact they wouldn’t even talk to the president about the situation, but workers had already began talking to them and to make matters worse they were telling the press why they were on strike. Ivy Lee was hired by John D. Rockefeller, an owner who wouldn't communicate to the public about what was going on. The workers demanded more money and safer working conditions and since the company kicked all of them out of their company-owned houses, they started living in tents. When the company guards shot down and lit the tents on fire, killing 40 workers and wounding 100 the situation was then tagged the Ludlow Massacre.
Even though Rockefeller knew this was going on he denied having anything to do with it and once again he didn’t want to have anything to do with the miners and failed to meet their demands. This is where Ivy Lee was at his best. He convinced Rockefeller to talk with the miners and learn to understand them. Rockefeller even did things like dancing with the miners wives just to get on the good side of the angry miners. Ivy Lee being the brilliant mind that he was took pictures of this and published them in local newspapers and magazines. He did this in order to build Rockefeller’s reputation and it worked. Rockefeller then met the miner’s demands and the problem was solved. The reason this was such a success for Lee was because he learned much from this problem. He realized that the public can not be fooled and the best thing to do was to be honest with them and let them know what was going on. Also the best thing to do is to be open with reporters, if they ask a question just answer it the best of your ability. These learning steps for Ivy Lee lead his to write the Declaration of Principles.

We can learn so much from what Ivy Lee did or what his life was about, but we can’t thank him enough for what he taught us about Public Relations. There are so many little things that one man shared about a practice that no one before him knew. From his childhood all the way up to the Colorado Coal Strike, Ivy lee dazzled the world with his way about solving issues. He always seemed to find a way that no one else could. His Declaration of Principles still have a direct impact on Public Relations practitioners to this day. What was said in that brief statement called his Declaration of Principles holds the key for a successful public relations career. It wasn’t known at the time but would come to be the main philosophies behind the practice known as public relations. It is still read and followed to this day. It’s hard to think that one man could have such an impact on society but Ivy Lee did. There are not many people in this world that can take a theory of something and have the guts to just absolutely add their own twist into it, actually just rewrite it. That’s what Ivy lee did. It was almost like the world didn’t know what public relations was until Ivy Lee. News sources, the government, and the people did not interact well until Ivy Lee showed us that there was a way that information was
supposed to be passed along. He proved his brilliance with projects such as the Pennsylvania Railroad, IG Farben and opening practices such as Parker and Lee. He taught us that there always is a different way to accomplish something and it might take some thinking but in the end it will be for the better. Ivy Lee was an innovator and a thinker, he always put his mind to the test and it always prevailed. It seemed like when things went from bad to worse, Ivy Lee just got better. I mean after a massacre, who could make the public forget about it in such a short time? He found the relationship between the new sources and the public and told us what it should be. The last thing he did was found the American Red Cross, he was always doing something. At age 57 in 1934 his life ended. A brain tumor was too much to handle for this mastermind. For such a short life he accomplished many things. He left a legacy that not many practitioners in history have. Every person that goes into the profession of public relations tries to mimic Ivy Lee. A modern day public relation practitioner still reads his theories and guidelines and hopes that he can influence generations like Ivy Lee did. He will always go down as one of the great, if not the best public relation personal of all time.