

Association for Surgical Education: Presidential Address

# The anatomy of reputation: an Association for Surgical Education priority

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In preparation for this address, I thought, “What could I possibly say to such an impressive group of scholars?” I thought of this organization and what it has come to mean to me in terms of my own academic career. I thought of how much the Association for Surgical Education (ASE) has changed since I first came to a meeting as a clinical clerk. I thought of its evolution as an organization and how it has just wrapped up its first 3-year strategic plan, a strategic plan that set the direction for this organization’s past 3 presidents and Boards of Directors.

As the ASE prepares for its second strategic plan and sets the direction for the next 3 to 5 years, I thought I would share with you my thoughts on reputation: why our reputation is so important, what constitutes our reputation, and how we can further develop and strengthen the ASE’s reputation in the context of the ASE’s upcoming strategic planning process.

My address is entitled “The Anatomy of Reputation: An ASE Priority.” I have used an anatomic metaphor because I want us to dissect and really understand what reputation is. Why an ASE priority? Because the ASE’s reputation as “the go-to organization for all things surgical education and surgical education research” is a distinctive competitive advantage and one that we need to further leverage and capitalize on.



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How we are perceived by our peers, colleagues, and students is important to each and every one of us. We want to be known as outstanding surgeons, effective teachers, excellent researchers, and visionary leaders. We do not want a reputation as a bad surgeon, poor teacher, underperforming researcher, or ineffective leader. We are concerned about our reputations and we actively manage how our peers and students see us, whether we know it or care to admit it.

We care about what our peers think of us as surgeons. We track and report on our experiences, new procedures we develop, and awards we receive for service excellence. We care about how our colleagues perceive our research. We track and report on our grants, publications, and peer-reviewed presentations. We care about our image as teachers and educators. We track and report on our teaching effectiveness scores, quality of educational products and services, and the teaching awards we receive. We care about how we are perceived as leaders in our universities, hospitals, and professional organizations. We track and report on our leadership positions, changes we have brought about, and our leadership awards.

We also care about our relationships, with fellow surgeons, educators, researchers, and leaders in our institutions and beyond. We each have built powerful professional social networks. These networks of important relationships form the very foundation of our professional reputations. Increasingly, surgeons are using social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook to communicate to the world who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Our professional reputations are our most crucial asset. It takes years of hard work to build our own reputations. We also know that our reputations are fragile. We all know of surgeons who, through one act or deed, have damaged their reputations, sometimes irreparably. As such, we guard our reputations carefully.

Like surgeons, organizations also are concerned with how they are perceived by the outside world. In the for-profit sector, large corporations have come to appreciate how important reputation is to their bottom line. In the not-for-profit sector, universities and academic organizations also have come to see how important reputation is to their mission. Universities in particular, now ranked globally on the basis of reputation, are rethinking their strategies around reputation.

Corporate executives understand that reputation builds competitive advantage for their companies. Reputation is a crucial asset, and chief executive officers (CEOs) know that their company's reputation is one of the company's most valuable assets entrusted to them. Damage to corporate reputation is the top risk concern of CEOs globally. In the private sector, a company's reputation is estimated to be worth about 4% to 5% of sales each year. Lastly, more than half of the largest 150 companies in the United States have a dedicated budget for reputation management.<sup>1</sup>

Reputation adds value to the actual worth of an organization. In financial terms, market capitalization is often

greater than the liquidation value of a company's assets. Reputation also has value for not-for-profits such as universities and academic organizations. A strong reputation helps a university attract the best faculty and students. A strong reputation helps a professional organization attract members, partners, and donors. For academic organizations, reputation is a crucial asset, an important differentiator, and should be managed strategically. Academic and professional organizations, which strategically manage their academic reputation, will maintain their competitive advantage.

So then, what is reputation? Simply speaking, reputation is the sum of impressions held by an organization's stakeholders. It is an opinion about that entity held by the entity's stakeholders. In other words, reputation is "in the eyes of the beholder." Stakeholder relationships built on trust are the very foundation of any individual's or organization's reputation.

So how does any organization, including the ASE, go about further building or strengthening its reputation? We start with the foundation of reputation and ask ourselves who are our stakeholders? Freeman<sup>2</sup> (1984) defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objective." Some of the ASE's stakeholders include our members, students, residents, fellows, member organizations, industry partners, and strategic partner organizations and societies.

There are 3 basic ways people build relationships with organizations: (1) direct experiences, (2) communications from the organization, and (3) third-party communications.<sup>3</sup> All of us are here this week attending the ASE meeting; we are having a direct experience with the ASE as we attend various workshops, meetings, paper presentations, and plenary sessions. Each of us will form an opinion and leave with a perception of the ASE based on these direct experiences. Ideally, we will leave with an image of the ASE as an organization that values excellence in surgical education research. We will leave with an image of the ASE being "the go-to organization for all things surgical education." The second way stakeholders build a relationship with the ASE is through the communication they receive from the ASE. This includes e-mails, newsletters, our Web site, to name but a few. Through these communications, we impart on our stakeholders a sense of who we are and what we do. Lastly, and I would argue one of the most important ways of building a relationships, is through third-party communications. When each of you returns to your respective organizations and people ask you, "How was your meeting in Orlando?" and you tell them, "It was amazing—the ASE is truly 'the go-to organization for all things surgical education,'" and as such, you will leave these people with an impression of the ASE. In essence you will have helped further build the ASE's reputation.

In summary, like any organization, all of the ASE's stakeholders have opinions, perceptions, or an image of the ASE. The sum of all those images comes from, or is equal

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