

Join Julie Livingston, founder and president of WantLeverage Communications and host of PR Patter, a series of talks focusing on relevant topics in marketing and public relations today, in conversation with Anthony D'Angelo, director of Newhouse's master's program in communications management, and of a new academic offering called the Financial and Investor Communications Emphasis.

D'Angelo's career has included public relations leadership roles in the corporate, agency and not-for-profit sectors, most recently for ITT Corporation and previously for the St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation, Magna International, United Technologies and Sage Marketing Communications. His writing and commentary on public relations and strategic communications have been featured in *The New York Times*, *BusinessWeek*, the *Financial Times*, *USA Today*, *CNBC*, *Reuters*, *Forbes*, *Sports Illustrated*, *AdAge* and other outlets.

Learn more with Livingston and D'Angelo about the impact of artificial intelligence in public relations, the importance of human intervention when using artificial intelligence such as Chat GPT, and the meteoric growth of AI in everyday business.

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Edited Transcript:

Julie Livingston:

Hey everyone. Happy Wednesday. I'm Julie Livingston, president of WantLeverage Communications, and I have a special edition of Julie's PR Patter today because I have an amazing guest. Welcome Tony D'Angelo. Tony is a PR fellow and he joined the New House School of Syracuse University, where I went to graduate school. He joined their team as a professor of practice and public relations in 2015. In 2016, he was named the Director of the New House School Master's Program and Communications Management, and of a new academic offering, which is pretty exciting, called the Financial and Investor Communications Emphasis. Tony's career is really stellar. It included public relations leadership roles in the corporate side on the agency side, and for nonprofits most recently for, for the IT corporation. And before that, for St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation, Magna International United Technologies and Sage Marketing Communications. His writing and commentary on public relations and strategic communications continue to foster thought in the field, which is so critical. One of the things I love about being in PR is the ongoing learning from people like Tony. His thought leadership has been included in top tier media outlets, including the New York Times, the Financial Times Reuters, and many others. He was a regular contributor to the Wall Street Journal's, crisis of the Week column, an editor of the book, *75 Years of Impact and Influence: Places and Moments in Public Relations History* published in 2021. Tony served as the co-chair of the Commission on Public Relations Education and was the Public Relations Society of America's National Chair in 2018. Wow. Thank you for being here, Tony.

Anthony D'Angelo:

Thank you for your generous introduction. It's a pleasure to be with you.

Julie Livingston:

We have a really juicy topic today, and that is the impact of AI, artificial intelligence on public relations. I feel like this revolution has already started and it's here and there's no going back. As you've said, Tony, we're all being impacted by the advent of AI in our daily lives. Whether we practice it in public relations or not, but in particular in our field— in marketing and communications. It's really had an impact on everything that we do and will continue to do, to have that influence and we have to change and evolve with it. I know for myself, and I'm sure people in the audience will agree that when you look for restaurant recommendations, it's all powered by AI, right? In my public relations work, I'm using AI for speech to text translation, especially using so many Zoom meetings and wanting to capture my client's authentic voice in my communications, and in my writing, I do a lot of my work on LinkedIn for executives as a ghost writer and, and content strategist. Really capturing those exact words that they say is very important to me. The speech to text feature is really critical and there are so many other components of AI that we're now using. I have a few questions for you. AI has exploded on the scene. Should we be excited or should we also be biting our nails and be getting worried?

Anthony D'Angelo:

Little bit of both. Julie, first of all, you're right, the genie is out of the bottle. AI is not coming down the road. It's here right now. The speed at which adoption and uptake is stunning right

now. Chat GPT is being adopted at a faster rate than TikTok, and TikTok blew everybody's mind. Wow. Right? Here we are talking about TikTok as yesterday's technology. Can you believe that? It's not, but you know Chat GPT was introduced not even four months ago. Now I can tell you here on the faculty at the New House School, I get daily emails about how to deal with Chat GPT. By the way, I am honestly excited about the potential of artificial intelligence. I'm also wary, so I hope my council would not feel petrified about this, but learn about it and be wary. Be careful about potential misapplications, because those are out there and they'll happen at a huge scale, which can really be kind of daunting.

Julie Livingston:

Right? Nothing can really replace what we do as humans in the communications field, right? We still have to heavily proofread and really craft our messaging so it sounds authentic. I mean, look, the AI stuff I've been practicing, I've been trying out Chat GPT and it's wild. I mean, it's just wild, you know? And the information that pops up from it sounds pretty good. There are nuances as we know, as professional communicators, the nuances of the language of using colloquialisms and authentic verbiage from real people. It cannot take the place of that. Would you agree?

Anthony D'Angelo:

I would think so. A couple of observations— I'm playing around a lot with Chat GPT, and by the way, with graphics programs like Dolly Two that generate art, right? Just as quickly as Chat GPT generates text. My observation about Chat GPT is that it always sounds like an authority, doesn't it? Whatever it spits out sounds very authoritative. It's not necessarily great on nuance or empathy. There is, I think, a distinction to be made there.

Julie Livingston:

I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's going to save us time in a lot of ways, right? For certain things that communicators do in terms of, you know, media monitoring and customizing media pitches in certain ways. But we still have to look at that communication before it goes out because it's those nuances that really signal our credibility as professionals.

Anthony D'Angelo:

You're absolutely right. I think, first of all, human intervention is important, right? Especially when you consider all the ethical implications of AI. Think about what would happen if one of your clients you were working on a broadcast with, and by the way, the broadcast could be written by Chat GPT, and it could be broadcast by a human avatar that looks as real as you do. What if there was a deep fake that became part of that?

Julie Livingston:

Right?

Anthony D'Angelo:

What if that deep fake damaged a business? What if the news media reported that deep fake as fact? Who do I see about that? It's a very important question, and I think that's why human

intervention is still gonna be key. I also think the printing press did not replace handwriting. The loom did not replace weaving and sewing, and the calculator didn't reduce your and my requirement to learn long division. Right? It made those things a lot easier and enabled them to happen at scale. I'm hopeful that artificial intelligence frees us up for higher level activities so that the Chat GPTs and other programs help us do things much, much more efficiently. I would love never to write another bibliography. I'm hopeful that after I write something, I tell Chat GPT to write a bibliography, and it does that for me.

Julie Livingston:

I mean, that's amazing. That's the perfect application for where it's more factual and not based on nuance and the nuance of language. Do you think that our jobs in the communications field are in jeopardy at all? How will they change over this coming period of time?

Anthony D'Angelo:

First thing I want to say, not a soothsayer. I mean, this is part of the trepidation that we feel where I'm not convinced that anybody truly knows where we're going with this new technology. One of the things about artificial intelligence programs, right? The bots— they learn from each other. They get smarter as they're exposed to data. People like Stephen Hawking, for example, had very dire warnings about where that could take us as a society. I think that's important. I heard a saying though, and I wish I could cite the source. I guess I should ask Chat GPT for the source, but it is that we won't be replaced by bots, but we'll be replaced by other humans who know how to work with the bots. I think that's true, right? One of the things that kind of blows my mind about this is that we're in the business of relationships. We manage public relationships, and I think one of those relationships now that we're going to have to manage is with artificial intelligence beings and synthetic images. As sci-fi as that sounds, there is a relationship there, and we're going to have to decide how we do projects together.

Julie Livingston:

Something we learned at New House is that public relations must have a seat at the management table in order to be effective. How will this affect our credibility in some way? Will it make it harder for us?

Anthony D'Angelo:

A couple of things. I think first of all, not if we're the ones to bring a robust discussion about AI to the C-Suite, right? I think we have to take responsibility for doing that. I was reading this morning that already CEOs are using AI programs to say... I'm making this up, but I'm about to launch this new product. What can go wrong? Right? If you have an AI assistant that can tell you that I think of it as a really powerful thought starter, right? Or I'm about to give a speech to this audience with this point of view. What are the key takeaways? Give me three bullets that I need to hammer home in this speech.

Julie Livingston:

I love that. I have actually been using Chat GPT to help me fight writer's block. I mean, someday, you know how it is— some days you sit there by the computer and you're like, oh my

God, how am I gonna write this byline article, or this press release, or this bio? It just isn't coming out. It has definitely helped, and I have to amend what I get, but it's that little boost that sometimes you need to get moving forward.

Anthony D'Angelo:

I wrote an article a couple weeks ago for the International Public Relations Association.

Julie Livingston:

Oh, yes. I'm going to share that link, actually.

Anthony D'Angelo:

I asked Chat GPT to help me with the article, right? What I asked was how can AI enhance the practice of public relations? I won't read this to you, but it gave me in about three seconds, personalization and tailoring messages, automation of things like media monitoring, content creation, analytics of data and insights, reputation management, managing online reputations by identifying and responding to crises before they escalate. Then I asked, okay, what are the potential dangers of AI and PR, lack of transparency, bias and discrimination, security risks, loss of jobs, ethical concerns? The answers it provided weren't necessarily enough for the article, but it definitely got my wheels turning. As I've become fascinated with this, it's been great to have the help.

Julie Livingston:

It totally is. I had a day like that yesterday where I was just stuck, I just hit a wall in writing something for a client. I got into the Chat GPT, and it didn't erase the writer's block completely, but it got me a little further than I was.

Anthony D'Angelo:

The New York Times published a piece in November and online, and what they did was they customized an AI program to show images of faces. You call it up and you see a face, and again, it looks as real as yours or mine, but it's synthetic, right? What it allowed you to do was make it older or younger, change the shape of the eyes. All these different things change a man into a woman, right? All that sort of stuff. It was so realistic that, you know, at first it was incredible. I thought to myself, well, you know what, if I need to do a brochure, I guess I can throw away the model release forms that I need to have humans sign. I can just use these images, right? At the same time though, if I'm doing a company brochure, and let's say my whole company is middle-aged white guys, right? Oh, I'll make up a bunch of diverse people and put 'em in my brochure, which— I'm not okay with that.

Julie Livingston:

Because again, it's not authentic.

Anthony D'Angelo:

It's not authentic, right? It's up to me to make the ethical decision, but knowing that there are bad apples everywhere in a lot of industries, the potential to do something unethical and to

amplify it at a global scale is kind of mind boggling. We really need to be careful. The other thing is, the technology is moving so fast, like with a lot of other technologies, the legislation can never catch up. Who's gonna regulate this? How will legislators catch up to this again, globally, right? In a digital social world, all communications are global. So the implications are really huge. And the speed is just meteoric.

Julie Livingston:

I mean that they're going to have to catch up pretty quickly in the legal field for sure.

Anthony D'Angelo:

Yeah.

Julie Livingston:

You're in your classroom today, and you've got your students with you behind you, which is so great. I wish I was a student again, in some ways.

Anthony D'Angelo:

Come back to your doctorate, Julie!

Julie Livingston:

You never know. I might. How do you recommend that people who have been in the field a while can dip their toe in the water? What do you recommend to your students today who are probably a little bit digital natives for the most part— how do they get up to speed? I guess I'm assuming that they have a little less trepidation about it.

Anthony D'Angelo:

I don't know. We're going to talk about that after we conclude our podcast this morning as a matter of fact.

Julie Livingston:

We have five generations in the workplace today, working side by side. Absolutely. Everyone is going to have a different orientation and attitude about this. How do you get into it?

Anthony D'Angelo:

Fortunately, it is quite easy to search for Chat GPT to search for Dolly Two, to search for Google Duplex and other programs that are out there and simply go in and play around for free. Right? None of us can pick up a major outlet— you know, the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. There are articles today about AI and where it's going because there's a real sense of urgency. This is not something that you need to do in the future. I think we need to do it now.

Julie Livingston:

Yeah. So set your Google alerts for AI articles.

Anthony D'Angelo:

The capabilities truly are interesting. I think we'll do it. I know that you know, there is a PRSA webinar program next month about AI. I know that it's going to be a topic of discussion at the Institute for Public Relations and the Global Alliance and other organizations like that. The resources are there. I'm going to quote a colleague of mine Martin Waxman, who's a terrific consultant in the Toronto area. I attended an AI presentation that he gave in June of last year. Here's his guidance for PR professionals to understand what AI is and develop an ethical approach to it, manage risks and reduce bias. Because AI programs are biased. They are only as good as the data that they get, right? The people that provide that have their own biases, build your own protocol to assess the available AI tools that are out there. You can, you can have, there are thousands of news articles being written today with AI, right? Assess them, determine how you might employ them, how you can broadcast them, how you can develop graphics for them. And then, think like a data scientist. Because you really have to consider how data moves through the internet and through the metaverse, because this is where our communications experience is migrating.

Julie Livingston:

Everything that you're saying rings so true with me. I think it harks back to really what a great communications professional does. We must be excellent at critical thinking, our authenticity, and our communication.. Although this is a fantastic tool in many, many ways, it's going to change our lives basically. But it really will have a great impact on what communicators do. I think that continuing to fine tune our individual sense of critical thinking so that we can maintain that credibility at the management table and really act as sort of the educators for the organization on what AI can do and can do, and around the ethics, the ethical approach to it is going to be so important going forward.

Anthony D'Angelo:

Fortune favors the strategists and the critical thinkers, and I don't think the requirements for that are going away at all. In fact, they're increasing. We're going to have to exercise those muscles in a very different medium. Because what I think is fundamentally different is these are systems that learn. Several years ago, Microsoft debuted a bot named Tay. Microsoft unleashed Tay on the world, and it was supposed to be sort of a friendly virtual assistant. The problem was other bots corrupted Tay and Tay ended up live on the internet. Criticizing celebrities, right? Saying all these awful things. I remember one in particular was Ricky Vez, right? Tay said that Ricky learned totalitarianism from Hitler or some, some bizarre thing. They had to shut Tay down. So the points of interaction are not necessarily humans of ill intent. It could be these intelligent agents. That's another dimension. I'm still wrapping my human brain around that. I think we all have to.

Julie Livingston:

I think we're, we're actually at time. It felt like two minutes. This was so delightful. Thank you so much. And to your students in the background, go get 'em. We're waiting for you. We're excited for that next generation of professional communicators to rise up the ranks. Have a great day, and we'll see you next time on Julie's PR Patter.

Anthony D'Angelo:
Thank you, Julie.