

Stuart Applebaum

Emeritus Executive Vice President
Corporate Communications
Penguin Random House

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Five decades back, not long out of Queens College, I sat in the office of then Knopf head Tony Schulte, and told him I would like to be considered for the open Publicity position under Bill Loverd and Jane Friedman.

Flash forward 52 years. I write to let you know I am stepping down as Emeritus Executive Vice President, Corporate Communications, Penguin Random House, on September 30. I am bowing out with immense gratitude for the privilege of having served you this past half-century-plus, as Publicity Assistant, book Publicist, Bantam Publicity and Public Relations Director, Spokesman, Chief Communications Officer, Vice President, Senior Vice President, and Executive Vice President, at Alfred A. Knopf, Bantam Books, Bantam Doubleday Dell, Random House, Penguin Random House, and as the longest-serving employee in North America for our shareholder Bertelsmann.

I made my decision at the beginning of this year, known before today to a very few of you because I don't favor long goodbyes for myself. I know many of you were expecting me to be among you forever, and for a long while, so did I. Next week, I celebrate my diamond birthday. I feel fine, and I am still performing at my peak, full tilt, full time, Monday-Sunday. But diamonds are not always forever. It's time. I don't want to be on the job when, inevitably, I start slowing down, begin repeating myself jabbering corporate speak, and misremembering significant company stuff.

Over time, I have been humbled repeatedly by many of you telling me how I got a lot accomplished on our behalf. But I also screwed up plenty.

When I was a kid Bantam publicist, I was in a big hurry to prove myself, and to get promoted. I was brash, and often petulant, and obnoxious, loudly saying things that didn't need saying aloud by me. Over time, I earned the promotions, which helped me to grow-up, shut-up, and step-up.

Might I recall a few of those step-up memories?

In 1982, flying with Alberto Vitale and Jack Romanos to Michigan one wet afternoon to try to convince an unwilling Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca to write his autobiography for the baby Bantam Books Hardcover imprint. He didn't tell us no. Back in the office, next morning, being told by Mr. Romanos to write a detailed letter to Lee, further pitching us as the publisher of what ultimately became the head-spinning, three-million-copy Bantam hardcover, seven-million-copy Bantam paperback—and the impetus for corporate CEOs non-stop calling to want us to publish their memoirs, too.

Around that time, I had fun creating publicity juggernauts for our near-concurrent #1 bestselling “What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School,” by Mark H. McCormack, the high-flying, million-selling General Chuck Yeager, and the Iacocca autobiographies. The Bantam Hardcover imprint became known as the “House of Hits” (New York magazine), and Bantam forever shook off its image as “just” a mass-market paperback reprinter. We now had a permanent, prominent place on the hardcover publishing landscape.

I am honored by the opportunity I was given to set the English-language communications planning and to implement the internal and external attention for two publishing history-making Bertelsmann acquisitions:

its purchase of Doubleday in 1986, and the subsequent formation of Bantam Doubleday Dell. In 1998, its buying Random House, and the integration with Bantam Doubleday Dell to create the new Random House.

I recall, in 2012, sitting at my 1745 Broadway desk during Hurricane Sandy for 32 straight hours to make sure we got out the word worldwide about the newly announced merger of Random House and Penguin.

I still remember tangling, solo, on the phone, with Roy Cohn over the provenance of the Iacocca acquisition. (He abruptly stopped calling.) Losing my beloved author Shirley MacLaine's luggage on her book tour in the Cleveland airport (the airline eventually found it). Standing by haplessly as General Schwarzkopf got splattered with fake red blood by a protestor at his Seattle Costco memoirs signing (we beefed up security). My 50-year Passion Project: "Riding the river" with Kathy, Beau, Angelique, and Louis L'Amour, for decades best known somewhat dismissively as a writer of popular paperback westerns, as he gradually became acknowledged as one of America's most widely read #1 bestselling hardcover novelists, and whose death, in 1988, made page one of The New York Times.

And going through what all our publicists eventually experience: the crushing disappointment when a newly published title, despite a great publicity campaign, does not catch on with readers.

In the late eighties, I had to set aside my book publicist duties and publicity department leadership once I was put in charge of the internal and external communications about and for Bantam Doubleday Dell, then Random House, and the first year of Penguin Random House. I was responsible for presenting our corporate news and policies, and explaining and advocating our vision and values, and sometimes excusing our actions. I mostly enjoyed it, especially trying to make the promotion memos read extra joyously, and the exit ones less stressed.

But my enjoyment from the challenge of publicizing our books, and speaking up for our company, doesn't fully explain why I have stuck around here for more than a half-century. Simply put, it's because of you, my dear colleagues. Working with you every day not only gives me structure and routine. It motivates me to accomplish more better, as I try to rise to your level of excellence and achievement.

I will miss this, as I will my senior membership in the Corporate Communications and Social Responsibility team, under the exceptional leadership of My Supervisor, Claire von Schilling. It is a knowledgeable, committed, get-it-done group, whose head brings out the best in us every day.

And there is Stacy Matulewicz, my collaborator and all-in-all for almost thirty years, whose experience, creativity, service-mindedness, and unflappability so many of you regularly benefit from. I could not have accomplished a quarter of what I have done without her.

So now what? Or as the Cole Porter song asks, "After You, Who?" I will continue running my solo Stuart S. Applebaum Giving Foundation, now in its 22nd year. Intend to stay healthy. Will try to go to bed every night, and wake up every morning, without my respective last and first thoughts being about PRH. Am curious to know how well that will play out.

I'll close with giving you my post-September 30 e-mail:

ssapplebaum@gmail.com

Hope I can navigate my g-mail app to answer should you write.

Thank you for these once-in-a-lifetime 52 years.

Ever at your service,