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2017 Review: The 10 Best Event Sessions

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PAUL HOLMES // 17 DEC 2017 // 9:50AM GMT

Every year, The Holmes Report hosts numerous events, from our PProvoke Global Public Relations Summit in Miami to regional In2Summit events in Chicago, London, Hong Kong, Johannesburg and beyond, and attends many more, including the annual business gatherings in Aspen, Cannes, and Davos. We report on dozens of the best sessions from these events. This roundup features 10 of the best from the past 12 months:

1. **“Caring And Courage Are The Keys To Leadership”**—Aspen Ideas

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2. **“Earning and Saving Are the Keys to Rebuilding” —Aspen Ideas Festival**

“I was a very traditional businessman with a very traditional education,” Barry-Wehmiller chief executive Bob Chapman told a packed room at the Aspen Ideas Festival. He traces the roots of the management approach he repudiated to the industrial revolution: “The model of business that emerged was never about human dignity; it was about wealth accumulation. Business schools studied successful companies, and they defined success monetarily.” In an inspirational presentation, he explained an approach to leadership grounded in the ideas of morality and service, which culminated in a decision to share sacrifice among all employees rather than lay off a portion of the workforce during the recession: “We took one-twelfth of their salary away from them and their morale went up dramatically. They knew they were cared for and they knew their friends would not be hurt.”

2. **“They Think We Are Out Of Touch”—Davos**

Richard Edelman, drawing on his firm’s Trust Barometer research—which last year identified that lack of trust in established institutions that preceded the Brexit and Trump votes—told business leaders at the World Economic Forum that they must not shy away from tackling the rising tide of populism if they are to restore credibility. Arun Sudhman reported on the animated discussion (featuring Financial Times US managing editor Gillian Tett; PayPal CEO Dan Schulman; Campbell Soup CEO Denise Morrison; INSEAD professor of strategy and management Subi Rangan; and UN special adviser David Nabarro) that followed Edelman’s stark admonition that business is widely perceived as being out of touch with the hopes and fears of normal people.

3. **“Finding The Humanity In The Story Of Vietnam”—PRovoke17**

Interspersing advice drawn from 30 years as one of America’s leading documentary producers with clips from her latest work on “The Vietnam War”—created in partnership with Ken Burns—filmmaker Lynn Novick delivered a masterclass on storytelling to a rapt and visibly moved audience at PRovoke17 in Miami. In conversation with Don Baer, worldwide CEO and chair of Burson-Marsteller, chair of PBS, and a member of the board of Ken Burns’ Better Angels Foundation, Novick discussed both the creative process and the approach that helped her to persuade those on all sides of the Vietnam conflict to share deeply personal stories for the critically-acclaimed 18-hour PBS documentary.

4. **“More Firms Consider Selling”—Independent PR Firm Forum**

The vast majority (92%) of independent public relations firms responding to a survey from law firm Davis & Gilbert have been approached about selling and 56% believe it is likely or very likely that they will sell their firms within the next three years. But relatively few are looking to be absorbed by a giant holding company, according to the research, presented by Davis & Gilbert partner Brad Schwartzberg at the Independent PR Firm Forum in Miami. Most firms expressed a preference for being acquired by another independent PR firm, followed by a consulting firm and a private equity firm, results that came as no surprise to panelists including Jim Weiss, founder and CEO of W2O Group; Nijay

Neer, director at India’s Adfactory PR; José Antonio Lorenzo, founding

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hair, director at India's Adactors PR; JOSE ANTONIO LORENTE, founding partner of **Llorente & Cuenca**; and Donna Murphy, global CEO of **Havas** Health & You.

5, “The Diversity Struggle Is Real”—CCNY

Months before the #MeToo movement turned a spotlight on widespread sexual harassment in the worlds of entertainment, politics and business, The Holmes Report partnered with the City College of New York's branding and integrated communications program to focus on the industry's diversity shortcomings. Based on research from associate professor Angela Chitkara, who interviewed numerous agency leaders about their efforts to drive a more diverse workplace, the panel featured CEOs from four agencies: DeVries Global (Heidi Hovland); Grayling (Peter Harris); Ketchum (Rob Flaherty); and **Porter Novelli** (Brad MacAfee). The participants agreed that "diversity drives innovation," and outlined some of the steps they are taking to make their firms more diverse.

6. “To Change Minds, Focus On Framing The Message, Not Facts”—PRovoke17

To change minds, communicators need to focus on finding common ground, emphasizing positive outcomes, and offering immediate rewards, said Tali Sharot, associate professor of cognitive neuroscience at University College London and author of the recently released book *The Influential Mind*, during a session on “Why Facts Don't Unify Us” at PRovoke17 in Miami. Sharot, introduced by Ketchum's global CEO Rob Flaherty, began by explaining the powerful impact of confirmation bias on human thought—which means that facts alone are rarely effective in changing minds. Instead, she said, PR people need to focus on framing optimistic messages and offering rewards, tangible or psychic.

7. “Approach Artists That Share Your Ethos”—Cannes

Brands are still getting it wrong when it comes to collaborating with musicians, Grammy nominated hip-hop engineer and producer Young Guru told an audience in Cannes. The session, entitled 'Talking Tunes and Human Truth', explored how brands can use music to successfully create emotional bonds with their audiences, and Young Guru—now chief music strategist at Omnicom's The Marketing Arm—was joined on the panel by FleishmanHillard London creative director Kev O'Sullivan and Seoul senior account manager Sam Kim. Pepsi's miscalculation with its Kendall Jenner ad, and Mary J Blige's controversial Burger King commercial featured prominently in the discussion.

8. “Diversity Required To Handle Business Disruption”—Davos

Businesses must become "truly diverse" if they hope to navigate profound disruption of their business models and workforces, according to a CEO panel hosted by EY and CA Technologies at Davos and covered by Arun Sudhaman. MasterCard CEO Ajay Banga pointed out that disruption of business is coming from a variety of sources, including regulatory arbitrage and global trade pressure. Companies should seek to shape these changes themselves rather than reacting too late, he noted, but this required "people in your company who are from completely different backgrounds."

9. “Media Can't Back Down From A Fight”—In2 Summit Chicago

The media can't be seen to “back down from the fight” if they want to engage younger readers and viewers in an era of increased polarization, alternative facts and fake news, journalist and entrepreneur Carlos Watson, co-founder and CEO of OZY Media, told attendees at The Holmes Report's fourth In2Summit in Chicago. Watson, who was presenting as part of a session sponsored by Chicago-based agency Olson Engage, founded OZY Media because “we wanted to be the place that introduced you to people and ideas before they reached the mainstream media” he told the audience.

10. “From Earned Media To Earned Attention”—In2 Summit Hong Kong

Earned media is no longer just an effective tactic for brand builders, according to Rupen Desai, executive vice chairman of Edelman's operations in the region, who told attendees at the In2 Summit in Hong Kong that the new challenge is to put “earned attention at the core” of the way brands interact with consumers. Leading a discussion entitled “Welcome to No Brand's Land,” Desai—who spent the past 20 years of his life in the advertising business—said, “I come from a world where attention could be bought, where we discussed deep brand engagement, fans and loyalty, even though none of that connects with consumers in the top-down model.”

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