

Johnson, B. (2012). *The Little Red Book of PR Wisdom*. Dee Why Beach, Australia: Deep Line Books.

Reviewer: Heather Smith, Lecturer in Public Relations, University of Southern Queensland

Award-winning journalist Brian Johnson has delivered a compact and no-nonsense book that makes for essential reading for both aspiring and seasoned public relations professionals. *The Little Red Book of PR Wisdom* teems with helpful tips, industry insights and fresh ideas about how to understand, and work with, the media. Unlike many professional self-help guides, this one contains a generous dose of wit and real-world examples that make it an enjoyable and compelling read.

The author has had an extensive media career spanning radio, television, magazine, newspapers and websites. He has provided editorial public relations services to many leading organisations in the private and public sector, from 60 Minutes to *Penthouse* magazine, and Lifeline to the National Trust. He has also been a consultant to various government agencies at all levels on campaigns from tourism and health to homelessness and hospitals. His hands-on, wide-ranging professional experience shines through in the numerous personal anecdotes that pepper the bite-sized chapters.

For experienced public relations practitioners this book will be a refreshing reminder about what to do, and not to do, when it comes to the important work of media relations. Even if you consider yourself a media veteran there are bound to be a few gems among these pages to tweak or recharge what you do and how you do it. Its use of accessible language to articulate the relationship between public relations and the media could be useful for educators when having similar discussions with students.

The ten sections pack a lot in for only 230 pages. They cover everything from basic assertions about public relations and the media to the art of telling a great story and how to get noticed in the media jungle. Writing and pitching the media release plus nailing the interview also make an appearance although with a fresh take. The 'top tips' and 'golden rules' generously provided throughout are particularly handy and double as mental reminders that can be easily referred to again at a later time. Real journalists, producers and editors offer constructive and, in some cases, brutal advice in the recurring pull-out special 'Feedback from the frontline'.

If you think this book is old news because it deals with traditional methods to achieve media coverage then think again. This book doesn't shy away from social media. In fact, the largest section is dedicated to this ever-important, fast-moving new world and openly describes it as a game-changer for public relations. While all the sections are valuable this one is a must-read no matter what your level of experience. It also features commentary by two social media experts both of whom are based in Australia. Indeed, apart from a few classic case studies and real world examples, the content of the book has a distinct Australasian flavour which will be appreciated by many readers looking for a culturally-relevant perspective.

Some readers may find the book's tone a bit too frivolous and lament its 'sound bite' style. No doubt others will find this a refreshing departure from the common text-book approach. Admittedly the book is light-hearted but it is obvious that this was the author's intention. When read in this spirit, it makes for both a pleasant read and a rewarding professional development experience. For students and early career professionals navigating the multifaceted business of public relations, the book's practical, easy to understand and down-to-earth media advice is likely to elicit sighs of relief. Finally there is a user-friendly guide that decodes the media. For everyone else, it is exactly as it says: a little red book of PR wisdom.

About the reviewer: Heather Smith lectures in public relations at the University of Southern Queensland and is the owner/principal of a Queensland based public relations consultancy. She has extensive experience in public relations, media and marketing across numerous sectors including education, local and state government, finance, energy, natural resources and not-for-profit. She is a member of the Public Relations Institute of Australia.