



John Wiley Hill (1890 - 1977)

During a 50-year career that spanned public relations' earliest days to its international development, John W. Hill was an inspiration to public relations practitioners for the vision and judgment he brought to client counseling and for his high standards of ethical conduct. His legacy lives on through the New York Chapter's premier award, the John W. Hill Award, presented by Hill & Knowlton.

His philosophy is as relevant today as it was when he began. For example, Hill described three essential requirements for public relations: integrity and truth; soundness of policies, decisions and acts, viewed in the light of the public interest; and the use of facts that are understandable, believable, and presented to the public with imagination.

Following 18 years as a reporter, editor and financial columnist, Hill made a career move to public relations in 1927. That year, he opened the doors of his own public relations office in Cleveland, Ohio, and developed an early clientele of banks, steel manufacturers and industrial companies in the Midwest – a base he actively built upon until his death five decades later.

The firm became Hill & Knowlton (H&K) in 1933 when Hill brought in Donald Knowlton, the public relations director of a client's bank that had closed in the Depression. A year later, Hill moved to New York City to counsel the American Iron and Steel Institute, establishing the company's headquarters here, while Knowlton maintained the firm's Midwest office in Ohio. Despite the poor economic climate, the young firm prospered as organizations sought access to the firm's track record of success in public relations and John Hill's wisdom and guidance.

H&K's early move into international markets was the fulfillment of one of Hill's dreams for the business. H&K was the first American PR firm to establish an office in Europe in order to take advantages of opportunities created by the European Economic Community. He set the direction in establishing H&K as a global firm, and his successors have made it a reality.

Hill's former colleagues and clients talked warmly about his legacy, often referring to him as a pioneer. He emphasized teamwork and strove to create networks of accomplished professionals. He was a deeply likeable man, with a marked aversion to flamboyance. Throughout his life he repeatedly expressed disdain for those he called "the great I-am's."

Today, John Hill's core values remain fundamental to the practice of our profession: integrity, quality of service, continual learning, and solid judgment.