



Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation

HASTINGS & PLEADWELL, LLC

Mentor -> Student -> Mentor

“You know you have success as a mentor when your protege or student is successful and becomes, herself or himself, a mentor for others.”

-c.a. dickson, 2002.

Mentoring was bottom line for Barbara A. Hastings, mentor for partner Barbara A. Pleadwell. The two women are known as “Bah,” Barbara A. Hastings, and “Bap,” Barbara An Pleadwell, by friends and clients trying to distinguish between the two Barb(a)ras. They have continued to mentor students and aspiring business women in the Hawaii community through the years. The firm of Hastings & Pleadwell LLC [hastingsandpleadwell.com] thrives in the collaborative partnership of the two women.

Barbara A. Hastings

Hastings was the youngest of eight children. She came from a hardworking family. Her father died when Hastings was about three years old and her mother supported the family. A native of Philadelphia, Hastings moved to Hawaii in her early 30s. By then she was a single mother with a young daughter. She had attended college, seeking a degree in theology, but she never finished her degree. She had been a reporter for the *Trenton* (New Jersey) *Times*. It seemed that she was always a woman in male dominated fields.

Hastings was a former reporter for *The Honolulu Advertiser* and communication director for the Hawaii Department of Health. She was known in both places for developing and delivering new programs and products to advance the communication needs for the two organizations and for building new award-winning editorial features for the media.

This case was written by Carol Anne Dickson, PhD of the University of Hawaii (USA) as a contribution to the Project entitled “Innovation in Entrepreneur Development in APEC”, conducted under the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Human Resources Development – Capacity Building Network (CBN). The case was developed with the cooperation of Barbara A. Hastings and Barbara An Pleadwell solely for the purpose of class discussion. The cases are neither designed nor intended to illustrate the correct or incorrect management of the situation or issues contained in the case. No part of this case can be reproduced, stored or used without the written permission of the author(s) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

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Hastings has often lived a life on the edge of controversy. She has received local and national recognition for her writing, campaign strategy and crisis management. Working for mainland papers for 11 years and *The Honolulu Advertiser* for 12 years, she concentrated on writing on science, health, energy and the environment. Despite never having finished a baccalaureate degree, she won a fellowship to Stanford University for professional writers on energy and the environment. She entered public relations in 1990 and was the highest paid government agency public information officer in the state of Hawaii.

As director of communication for the state Department of Health, Hastings oversaw the public outreach of more than 80 programs, including environmental protection divisions, hospitals, behavioral health programs and health education. She developed both crisis and public awareness communication plans, including statewide community meetings. She was instrumental in garnering public support for many pieces of health-related legislation.

Hastings led disaster communication efforts during Hurricane Iniki and handled public relations during the visit of then First Lady Hillary Clinton who was in Hawaii to research on health care reform. Hastings set up the Honolulu "Health Care Reform" forum, one of a handful of forums that the First Lady Hillary Clinton conducted nationally. Setting up the forum included orchestrating and handling all national media traveling for the President and First Lady.

From 1992 to 1994 Hastings served on the board of directors of the National Public Health Information Coalition developing strategies and procedures for national and local outreach. Just before H&P was founded, Hastings was asked to evaluate and recommend changes for the communication strategy of the California Medical Association.

Taking on issues of one of the most controversial groups in the Hawaii community, Hastings successfully overhauled the communication strategy of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). She assisted and successfully supported OHA through challenges ranging from trustee elections to attacks on OHA's ceded land revenues. Hastings rebuilt OHA's public information staff and products.

Through it all, Hastings taught journalism and communications courses at Chaminade University where Pleadwell was an outstanding student. At that time, in the mid-1990s, Hastings owned a small communications company named Hastings House.

Barbra An Pleadwell

Pleadwell was nurtured by a hardworking island family of astute entrepreneurs who operated a bar and restaurant on the Ipan Beach in Guam. Her father was, by turns, a concert promoter, bringing such performers as The Commodores to Guam. He worked with well known promoter Tom Moffat in Hawaii. He distributed merchandise to the military commissaries and post exchanges in Guam and eventually opened a retail gift shop in his Ipan Beach bar.

Throughout her childhood, Pleadwell exhibited entrepreneurial tendencies. At about age ten, Pleadwell led her Girl Scout troop in cookie sales, employing friends and family to help sell the cookies. Soon, from about age twelve and through her teen years she partnered with her mother in a year-round micro-business - making and selling baked goods, and then buying baked goods from others, repackaging them and selling them to businesses, door-to-door and at Christmas crafts fairs on Guam. She also “sold” her housekeeping and errand-running abilities to neighbors after school. When times were slow in the cookie business, Pleadwell continued to be involved in the family bar and restaurant business on the beach in Guam. After graduation from high school Pleadwell worked as a journalist for the *Guam Business News* and the *Pacific Daily News*.

Pleadwell went to Honolulu to attend college. At Chaminade University, as an 18-year old freshman taking a senior level communications class, Pleadwell encountered Hastings in her role as teacher. Hastings remembers Pleadwell as the youngest student in the class, who, Hastings claims, scowled at her from the center of the first row of students. Pleadwell claims she was not scowling but instead was just “intent” on getting all she could from Hastings as a teacher who was clearly very knowledgeable and competent in her field. Hastings does admit that she was a know-it-all kid who, as the young editor of the monthly Chaminade campus newspaper, fired the entire staff for incompetence. She produced the newspaper entirely by herself for a few months.

While a student at Chaminade, Pleadwell was entirely self-supporting and worked several jobs. She sold T-shirts and shorts in Waikiki. She was a tutor at a small school known as Phonics Plus and she was a restaurant and bar waitress. Pleadwell registered her first “grown-up” business at the age of 20. Hastings suggested that if Pleadwell started her own business, Hastings could hire her as an independent contractor to write and produce newsletters for the health department.

Hastings had never completed a Bachelor’s degree herself and she urged the hardworking Pleadwell to continue her education. When Pleadwell graduated from Chaminade University she enrolled in a Master’s degree program in American Studies at the University of Hawaii.

Pleadwell has translated award-winning academic excellence into professional excellence. She graduated with honors from Chaminade University with a Communications degree, and received an MA in American Studies from the University of Hawaii. After graduation from Chaminade, she was hired to teach publication management courses at Chaminade and did so for five years.

Barbra Pleadwell has earned a reputation for building strategic alliances that last. She engages key audiences; connects people, business and organizations to serve H&P clients and the community. Her multi-media savvy spans all vehicles for communication: print, radio, television, online, word of mouth, direct mail, environment promotion and more. In addition to producing outstanding communication tools, she is an experienced negotiator of media partnerships and advertising budgets. She has maneuvered a major state agency through media crises, designed or revamped a number of publications, and launched major media

campaigns. In 1995, Pleadwell carried the Hawaii Director of Health through his controversial confirmation hearing when anti-abortion activists and pro-gun advocates launched protests against him.

A short time after Hastings & Pleadwell was launched, Pleadwell was among the youngest to be honored by *Pacific Business News*, in their first Forty Under 40 Awards in 2000. The following year, she received Small Business Hawaii's 2001 Young Entrepreneur of the Year award. H&P has implemented a successful internship program through Chaminade and other universities with H&P student learning the communication business from the ground up.

Pleadwell is active with the Junior League of Honolulu, and won its Active Award in 2001. She is program chair for the JLH's high profile *HerStory* women's conference in its fourth year. She is responsible for securing the participation of Dr. Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, for the 2004 conference.

Emergence: The Firm of Hastings and Pleadwell

In 1996, Hastings and Pleadwell merged their freelance businesses, House of Hastings and Pleadwell Inc, and started a full-service communication firm with two offices in Hawaii, one in Honolulu and one in Hilo. The relationship between the two women had grown from student and professor to friends to collaborative professionals and partners. The two merged their personal and professional ideals, their concerns for client services and their business acumen.

A Good Fit

The two-woman communication firm was founded with clear ideals: provide excellent, thoughtful and customized public relations for select clients. The key to sustaining healthy accounts for the pair had been attention to compatibility between Hastings & Pleadwell and the potential client-business. Before submitting proposals, the Hastings & Pleadwell firm spent a considerable amount of time interviewing the principals on philosophy and doing a fair amount of due diligence.

I called a business reporter about a story she had written which focused on a potential H&P client. I wanted to know what her impressions of this person were," said Pleadwell. She asked me in disbelief, 'You mean you are deciding whether or not you want their business?'

Past experiences educate today's performance. The H&P team learned early on that the time spent examining a potential client- business was critical to the long-term success of the firm. The partners have resigned critical accounts when they determined that the relationship was not a good "fit" and had the potential to falter. They have taken hits since the beginning of their business in the interest of maintaining the overall health of the firm and serving all clients with an even, honest and fair communication strategy. Their relationships and communications with business clients and for business clients is honest, forthright and transparent.

Pleadwell, a former freelance writer and spokeswoman, and Hastings, spent a lot of time as “clients” of public relations firms before starting H&P. “We know first hand what the perception of PR firms can be—good and bad,” said Hastings. “We base our success on very clear goals and truly partner with our clients to meet them. We don’t ‘do’ PR for our clients,” adds Pleadwell. “We train the company’s employees, educate their leadership, and build the organization’s capacity so that we can warrant their belief, experience and investment in Hastings & Pleadwell.”

Both Hastings and Pleadwell relate that they are restless without a steady stream of change and innovation. They credit the team’s entrepreneurial spirit to this constant pursuit of excellence. This spirit can be traced to the time they spent working for others as well as for themselves. The H&P team is hard driving. They say they learn from each other, their employees and clients every single day, constantly refining their approach to diverse issues with clients and in service to the community.

Hard work and lessons learned pays off. H&P’s hard work has paid off with substantial recognition in the professional community, including: an Ilima Award of Excellence from the International Association of Business Communicators for internal communication developed in 2001 for the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*; Pele Awards of Merit in 2002 for the cover of *Potluck: Stories that Taste Like Hawai‘i*, and in 2001 for the *Waikiki Improvement Association’s 2000 Annual Report*, and in 1999 for a campaign for Laser Eye Institute; Koa Hammer Award from the Public Relations Society of America for *Waikiki Improvement Association’s 2000 Annual Report*. H&P also edited and designed *Shaping Hawai‘i: The Voices of Women*—which was published by Goodale Publishing, winning an honorable mention in the 2000 Ka Palapala Po‘okele Awards.

Both individually and as a team, the two women are resourceful, bright and feed on each others ideas...even when they fiercely disagree with each other. They have built an energetic, creative, hardworking support team of about five employees.

Hastings & Pleadwell has been hired for projects by three local media outlets and one national media group to oversee their public communications. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* retained the partners to launch the revised daily paper after Canadian newspaper mogul David Black purchased the daily newspaper. They have also advised a nascent national publication on style and promotion. Both partners, Barbara A. Hastings and Barbra An Pleadwell, work directly on all accounts.

In 2002, the federal agency National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) retained H&P for an extensive statewide public relations, community outreach and event coordination effort. This year, the firm has been contracted by the City & County’s Department of Environmental Services to improve its public image while managing projects such as the state’s curbside recycling program, and issues surrounding illegal dumping and wastewater treatment.

The partners have worked on staff with two of the most controversial government agencies in the state: the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) and the Health Department. They have done contract work for the state’s Health Department, the Department of Human Services, and for the Department of Agriculture, where

Hastings served as a consultant during 2000-02 for the task force trying to resolve the controversial alien species issues for Hawaii airports. Hastings & Pleadwell boasts a client list that is representative of the diversity in Hawaii's business community. Because every industry has its swells and dips, a company dependent on just a few major clients can be at significant risk. H&P's client list is impressive: Hawaii's fifth largest law practice, Hawaii's leading laser eye surgeons, Hawaii's top modular building company, the city's environmental services department, a nonprofit dedicated to early childhood issues, among others. Hastings & Pleadwell as a unique, boutique firm with a holistic approach to developing image and articulating issues, strives to maintain a steady group of select clients as diverse as this list. The firm has a sound reputation for serving clients through comprehensive and sophisticated strategies, from crisis communication to building a brand.

Giving back to the community. Being big fans of the Girl Scouts, Hastings and Pleadwell credit the organization with providing them with critical profit-loss savvy and business skills at a young age. Today, the partners volunteer "talk story" time with the Girl Scouts to acknowledge their continuing development of young girls. Both women also serve on various boards and in various community organizations.