

With 15 years of professional experience, Kristen Skladd is aware of the ethical issues in public relations.

“As a PR professional, you always want to make your client look really good,” Skladd said. “You want to put them in the best positive light, so they can grow their audience— grow their bottom line more or less. But sometimes, the things that they might do aren’t the best.”

Skladd is a public relations specialist and the founder of [KMS Group](#), an agency specializing in public relations, writing, and social media.

Although Skladd works in public relations now, she started her career in journalism. She graduated from Oakland University with a bachelor’s degree in journalism and began working at a digital publication.

After eight years of working in journalism, Skladd decided that the extensive stressful hours were no longer for her. She had been working alongside public relations professionals and learned about public relations in college. Skladd decided she’d make the switch. She moved from metro Detroit to Florida and started her career in public relations.

“The best part of PR is using your journalism skills too, like writing press releases and writing press kits. Pitches are a work of art. I mean it’s really nice that everything transfers,” Skladd said.

In public relations, professionals are expected to work with ethics. According to the [Public Relations Society of America's](#) code of ethics, public relations professionals serve the public good and therefore must have a level of public trust and operate ethically.

One of the most common ethical dilemmas Skladd faces in public relations is transparency.

A couple of weeks ago, Skladd met with a potential client who wanted to repair his image after receiving negative press. While searching for the client online, she found sexual harassment lawsuits against him.

“I was like, ‘I don’t want to be involved in this,’” Skladd said. “I want to paint him in the best positive light, but is it ethically right to say, ‘No he didn’t do this stuff,’ when he probably did?”

In this case, Skladd said if she were his publicist, she would have him acknowledge the issues and let the public know he has learned from his mistakes. Continuing to deny the information would collect more bad press.

“Transparency and making your client look positive is a very fine line,” Skladd said.

In a crisis management situation, Skladd said it’s important to use transparency to protect a client and stand behind ethics.

“It goes back to transparency, making sure that your audience can connect with you and that’s by being truthful and not about lying,” Skladd said.

One of the most difficult ethical issues Skladd faced occurred when she started applying for jobs in public relations. Her top choice was a PR firm close to her new home in Florida. The business allowed her to visit the office and job shadow for a day.

An employee at the firm told Skladd about a past product they had represented. Diet pills. She said the employee explained how they brought in models, who were starved for two weeks, and claimed to the public that the diet pills made them skinny.

The PR firm had misled the public about the product and hid information to sell more diet pills.

“Yes, you might make news positive, but this was ridiculous. It was honestly like just taking people’s money and no shame at all,” Skladd said.

It was difficult for Skladd to turn down the company since it was the top choice on her list, but she “knew that was right and didn’t want to be involved with that.”

Even with the challenges that can arise, Skladd enjoys working in public relations.

“I really like getting the word out, like putting a megaphone behind my client,” Skladd said.

“Some of them are doing such cool things and no one knew about them before. They need to get in front of the right audience.”