

Personnel

Kassy Perry

profile

by Daniel Macht

Kassy Perry has made her public relations firm Perry Communications into a multimillion-dollar success. The Sacramento Public Relations Association is honoring their peer, Thursday, with a lifetime-achievement award. Perry recently spoke to Capitol Weekly about working with Katie Couric, OxyContin-fueled business decisions, and the relative merits of different horse names.

Why did you gravitate to health-care issues?

I grew up at a lab bench in La Jolla. My father is a researcher, scientist and physician who, at age 75, still researches at Scripps. All my summer jobs were at laboratories. One year, I had to remove the spleens of 300 mice. But that was better than my brother's job of delivering buckets of placentas from hospitals.

Given your background in science, why did you go into journalism?

At UC Davis I majored in biochemistry and English literature. After graduation, I stalled. I couldn't decide on medical school or law school. I took an internship at the last minute. The only one available was as an associate producer and writer for KCRA 3. I loved it.

At Perry Communications, you mainly represent companies and organizations drawn from the health-care field. Still, your client list varies from the California State Fair to a private elementary school. How do you choose which clients to take on?

We have a strong ethical, moral compass as far as who we represent. Some people would say, "How can you represent pharmaceutical companies?" However, I know that the pharmaceutical industry is creating the cures that will save our children and our children's children. But, I didn't start out to create just a health-care firm. We very actively—and strategically—work to broaden our client base. I think we sometimes miss out on opportunities to do good work because we're thought of as a health-care firm.

You worked with Katie Couric, whose husband, Jay Monahan, died from colorectal cancer, to fund research and raise awareness of the disease. What was it like working with her?

Katie Couric is one of those women who just wants to get things done. So, it was very easy to work with her. She was also very brave and spontaneous. When I suggested that she have her colonoscopy on the Today show, she said absolutely. Her lawyers and handlers freaked out.

What was the risk?

The risk is associating Katie Couric with your colon. No one wants to think about that area of your body. In fact, when we did some early research there were some older women who kept saying, "I can't

get colon cancer. That's a man's disease." I'm like, "No that would be prostrate cancer. You have a colon?" ... And when

you have a figure like Katie, it made it easier to change Medicare to cover colonoscopies. It made it much easier to get people to say, if Katie can do it then I can do it.



NAME: Kassy Perry

JOB TITLE: Perry Communications Group president and CEO

I heard that you're a competitive horse jumper. How often do you train to do this?

Four times a week. Usually you're out there a couple hours. During the horse-show season we're on the road at least one weekend a month.

When you say "we" that means ...

My daughter Kaitlyn. She competes with and against me. ... In the big-money classes we compete against each other. She's beat me a couple times and I'm sure it is going to happen more often.

What's the secret to your success in horse jumping?

It is probably the same things as in business. I'm not afraid to take a risk. Almost two years ago, I came off when my horse was schooling and broke my back. I was in the trauma unit for 10 days and they said I would never walk again. I think that the stubborn streak that helps me at work is the same thing that helps when riding horses. It's about being consistent and flexible.

When you broke your back, how long until you were working and riding again?

It happened in Memorial Day of '05. I was in the hospital for 10 days, and then I was working part-time in a body cast at home. Thank God for my team because I had some great decisions on OxyContin—that were not good ideas. ... Five weeks after surgery I was back on my horse at a show because my points were dropping in the national standings.

What's the secret to a good name for a horse?

What kind of horse? For show-jumping horses there's usually a catch phrase. There is also much more of a tendency now for horses that are imported from Europe to keep their names, so that their bloodlines show up. My daughter's jumper is called Mozart Z. ... My jumper's imported name was O'Neill, which I just didn't like. So I changed it to the Flying Dutchman because he jumps high, goes fast and is from Holland.



The Experts Expound

Question:

"Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who talks a lot about budget cutting, has raised the pay of four dozen of his top administrators, some by more than 23 percent. One person's salary went from \$133,732 to \$169,500. Is this justifiable?"

Answers

Sure it is. How do we expect to get top-quality people if we aren't willing to pay them? The revolving door of senior state employees is not something that is helping state government. If Perata continues to pay Irwin Nowick almost \$100,000 per year then he has no room to complain.

Posturing answer: This is the same guy who wants to punish kids in the budget. Regular answer: Sign me up, governor.

From a human-resources perspective, the raises make sense. From a political perspective, they could be hurtful. The \$169,500 salary is more than twice the median income for a California family of four.

This move has nothing to do with increasing costs. All the salary adjustments are done within existing budgets. It simply allows managers to pay more for talent from within their current budgets. People doing the same jobs in local government are making 40-percent more than state employees.

Absolutely justifiable! How can you expect smart, talented people to work in leadership roles in government unless they are paid comparably to the private sector. It's been an issue for years with physicians and psychiatrists, and with low salaries you only attract the bottom feeders that can't work anywhere else.

It would be justifiable if the people of California were getting an equal return on their tax investment, but they're not.

Yes. You have to compete with the private sector for talented people. This is the same silly story that runs against every governor and every president of either party. Yawn.

No. But there are so many other things to be more angry at the governor over.

In a word, no. It is the height of political hypocrisy to stubbornly and arbitrarily dish out lucrative raises to favored staff while, at the same time, preparing to slash billions of dollars in critical state services, as is expected in the May Revise. Even Gray Davis wasn't that tone deaf.

How dare you even question Team Arnold? I hope Adam sent you a nasty note ...

What's appalling about it is that this administration tells us they can't afford decent raises for the rank-and-file working people, like the state scientists who toil every day to protect our health and our environment and make this state livable. That's what's not justifiable.

Not when he's asking everyone else to make sacrifices, but it's consistent with this hypocritical say-one-thing-and-do-another administration.

The people from whom we sought opinions: *Andrew Acosta, A.G. Block, Deborah Gonzalez, Don Wilcox, Dan Schnur, Evan Goldberg, Sam Sorich, Karen Hanretty, Jason Kinney, Matt Ross, Mike Madrid, Kevin Spillane, Morgan Crinklaw, Ralph Simoni, Richard Zeiger, Peter DeMarco, Adam Probolsky, Barbara O'Connor, Jeff Fuller, Kassy Perry, Adam Mendelsohn, Ken Gibson, Bill Packer, Jack Pitney, Sandy Harrison, Steve Maviglio, Nicole Mahr, Will Shuck, Bob Hertzberg, Evan Goldberg, Roger Salazar, Mark Bogetich, Matt Rexroad, Tony Quinn, Scout Baugh.*