



## Steve Hannagan: Prince of the Press Agents and Titan of Modern Public Relations

**Michael K. Townsley**

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*Hannagan's career is a model for following one's natural calling. Accounts of his agility at straddling the sometimes fine line between journalism and publicity deliver insights into navigating this complex territory.*

Michael K. Townsley's *Steve Hannagan* is a unique hybrid: in part a carefully researched and documented biography of a renowned press agent, it is also a guide to his best publicity practices.

Through a highly detailed account of Hannagan's youth, family, and Irish heritage, the book reveals the shaping of the journalist's career. When, as a determined teenager, Hannagan persistently approached a newspaper editor for a reporting job, that career gained momentum. Early anecdotes covering everything from his interest in sports figures to his easy hobnobbing set the stage for his future success as a charismatic press agent. With its behind-the-scenes views of the newspaper world during the first half of the twentieth century, the book is a valuable historical record of a time prior to seismic journalistic shifts.

On-point descriptions impart Hannagan's keen understanding of what stories appeal most to editors and readers, explaining how he so easily transitioned into work in public relations. Hannagan's career is a model for following one's natural calling. Accounts of his agility at straddling the sometimes fine line between journalism and publicity deliver insights into navigating this complex territory.

As a strong visual complement to the text, historical black-and-white photos draw attention at key intervals. The evocative images of Hannagan and his family, friends, and colleagues reinforce and expand on the narrative of his star-studded life. From photos of his work shaping the image of Miami Beach and Sun Valley to his final travels in Cairo, the images capture Hannagan's early exuberance and later exhaustion.

Questions about Hannagan's romantic relationships are addressed late in the book, from failed marriages to a derailed relationship with the actress Ann Sheridan. They communicate Hannagan's overriding sense of emptiness, which stands in stark contrast to his stellar professional success. Through a lengthy account of his death from a blood clot while traveling through Nairobi in 1953 and the ensuing difficulties transporting his body back to the United States, profound sorrow is evoked. Even though more than 1,500 people attended his funeral, the bitterness Hannagan expressed toward the end of his life carries weighty emotion as a conclusion.

In an appendix summarizing "The Hannagan Way," a clearly categorized list presents the notorious press agent's enduring legacy of effective strategies and good marketing practices. The comprehensive entries highlight many important points about good business judgment and the value of entertaining storytelling. The book's strong finish makes an indelible mark while simultaneously prompting thoughts about the necessary components of a truly meaningful and satisfying life.

ANDREA HAMMER (August 23, 2018)

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