

March 5, 2015

Steve Perry  
Bench & Bar of Minnesota  
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Minneapolis, MN 55402

Dear Mr. Perry:

In “Crisis Communications & Social Media: The Game Just Got Tougher,” the author provides readers with a thorough and well-documented review of the new communications and media scenarios that lawyers should be aware of to help their clients manage both reputation and legal risk. This article offers helpful “how-to’s,” and I write to offer one more element that should guide every crisis communications strategy.

Social media crises indeed present special challenges compared to the crises of yore – their flames are fanned by elements often beyond the control of even the best-prepared organization. PR crises today unfold not just in the newspaper tossed on our driveway every morning, but erupt in our virtual world, and they seemingly live forever on Google.

While these modern-day crises are unique in their potential for having a wider reach if not deftly and quickly managed, these crises are just like those playing out in traditional media in one important way: they involve real people, and they impact real people’s lives – their safety, health, well-being and dignity.

Indeed, the new media crises of today require the same thoughtfulness, nuance and strategy as they did a decade past. The core questions to ask in the midst of a crisis remain the same: 1) who is affected; 2) how have they been affected; 3) what do they need; 4) when do they need it; and 5) what can/should be done to address those needs?

Not to say that there aren’t distinct strategies and tactics that absolutely must be deployed when facing down a reputation crisis unfolding in a more complicated media landscape – those best practices and planning are absolutely critical to responding to and managing a fast-moving crisis.

But all the expertly executed checklists, policies, crisis plans, and best practices in the world will fail utterly if there lacks one critical element – an intelligent sensitivity and full understanding of the issues we are wrangling and how they impact our humanity.

Whether it is a spontaneous and inappropriate tweet gone viral, a deluge of negative comments to a company Facebook post, or poorly guided decision making by a NFL team, it is the humanity that must be the foremost consideration of any crisis management plan.

The classic example of an epic miss of this important consideration was British Petroleum's series of gaffes during the Deepwater Horizon rig oil spill. Too many to recount all here, two bear noting. Tony Blair's "I want my life back" will go down the Annals of Extreme Insensitivity given the 11 people who died as a result of the explosion and the countless individuals whose livelihoods were forever impacted by the spill (not to mention the extreme environmental degradation). And the "we care about the small people" comment by BP's chairman did nothing but dig their public relations grave a little deeper.

During any crisis, the central question is this: How does this affect the sympathies and frailties of us as humans?

My advice to clients in crisis often includes this reminder: "It's not about you. It's about everyone around you."

Sincerely,



Stacy L. Bettison, ESQ.