



**Notes from the Lunch & Learn Forum
Of Campaigns & Corporations: Communications Strategies from Other Professions
November 29, 2017**

Speakers:

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NOTES

General press relations tips

- **Condense your message.** Know how your target audience consumes info and match that style/format. No one reads white papers. A double-sided one-pager with a chart is more likely to be read.
- **Authenticity is key.**
 - Especially in a crisis, avoid corporate/bureaucratic speak. It sounds inauthentic.
 - In general, explain things the way you would at a dinner table.
- **Less is more.** Including less in your official comments gives you more control. With a page-long release, the reporter will pick and choose what they want, but if you only give one line on-the-record, they're likely to use it.
- **Skills over seniority.** Sometimes the best spokesperson is not the most senior official -- it is the best communicator.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Before talking to reporters or doing an interview, PRACTICE. Do a run-through with a colleague.
- **The value of 3rd party validators** (AKA stakeholders)
 - Much of the added value of these comms firms is that they identify and recruit 3rd party validators
 - Benefits: they seem more authentic and can be your champions
 - Build and keep these relationships

- How to make use of them: Once you have them on your side, offer them to reporters, who are often scrambling to find any credible voices to give on-the-record comments.
- **Tailor your message.** When you have different messages for multiple target audiences, identify niche comms channels and tailor the message to that channel/audience. Messages can't contradict each other, but different aspects can be highlighted depending on the audience and delivery method. This isn't optional due to the splintering of the media. Thirty years ago you could reach everyone in America with one ad on three channels. Not today. You have to engage with multiple audiences to get a critical mass.
- **You can't win 'em all.** There are some audiences that will always be critical. Accept that and focus your attention and energy on your key strategic audience.
- **Live interviews are better.** Whereas a taped interview allows the editor to shape what you say, a live interview gives you more control.
 - Principals need to have the discipline to stick to the message in a live stand-up.
 - TV takes practice and training. It's not hard, but don't put someone who is untrained and uncomfortable in front of the camera.
- **Engage everyone.** Even though you may consider a media outlet as "fringe", if you do not engage you completely cede the space to their narrative with their audience.

On press relations in difficult situations

- **Build relationships with journalists in advance.** It builds rapport and opens informal information channels. You don't want your first communication with them to be in reaction to their bad article.
- **Talk on your terms.** When speaking to a reporter on the phone, the moment you find yourself on shaky ground or creating new talking points on the fly, GET OUT. Follow up after re-grouping and consulting others as needed.
- **Email is your chainmail.** When you're put on the spot, remember the magic words: "Thanks for your inquiry. Please email your questions to me at ____"
- **Take safety in numbers.** When a crisis involves multiple stakeholders, if someone is already addressing the media in a way that is advantageous to you, let them continue and avoid talking yourself.
- **The crisis is not an opportunity.** It's a crisis, and will be bad for your organization's public affairs. Your job is to make it less bad.
- **Don't make a one-day story a two-day story.** When responding to a bad story, make sure your response itself doesn't become news.

- **Facts vs. emotion.** In the field of public opinion, emotional arguments often trump data-based arguments.

Find the facts that have emotion and use as your hook. We are storytellers, too. Counter a story with a story, not a bullet list of facts.

- **Conspiracy theories and disinformation.** Conspiracy theories will take hold if there is no credible alternative. Video is very convincing—people tend to believe their own eyes. Call into question the credibility of those spreading conspiracy theories. A lot of this takes place outside of the regular news environment in dark corners of the internet.

What feds can learn from political campaigns

- **Be nimble.** You must be able to react quickly to breaking news and take advantage of the quickly moving news cycle, but without losing sight of your core message. Find ways within the bureaucracy to streamline the clearance process so you don't lose time.
- **Keep it simple.** Talk about your work in terms people understand and that relate to their lives. No wonky, procedural language.
- **Innovate.** Campaigns adapt new strategies and technologies quickly. This is hard to do in government, but keep pushing.
- **Be scrappy.** You can be principled and aggressive. You're either on the offense or you're losing.