

April/May/June 1993

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: Reducing the Media's Power -- Part II* : In Adversity, Behave With Credibility

Your credibility is the most powerful manager of media power. Unfortunately, the toughest part about credibility is recognizing that you don't have it and that you can't declare it. Credibility is conferred on you, your company, your products, your issues by those directly affected. Cleverly worded brochures, news releases, and speeches are not the foundation on which to build credibility.

Behavior based on fundamentally sound decisionmaking and positive actions, from the public perspective, is what leads to credibility.

Even when things go wrong, there is a seven step pattern of behaviors which can help obtain public forgiveness and rebuild credibility. Those steps are:

1. Voluntarily admit that mistakes have been made.
2. Explain why the mistakes occurred (no matter how stupid they were).
3. Show/say/demonstrate contrition and sincere concern.
4. Agree to take the steps necessary to fix.
5. Ask for help from the victims; accept counsel from the community and third parties.
6. Promise to never let it happen again.
7. Find a way to pay (do penance); alleviate/remediate.

Numbers one and six are generally the toughest to accept. But, which would you rather believe and trust, the organization that says, "There's a little risk with everything . . .," or the one that says, "We're committed to achieving zero accidents, zero defects, zero risk"? The biggest benefit of following this model is that it controls and sometimes dramatically reduces the tough follow-up questions the media and those audiences most directly affected will ask of you. Behave with credibility.

When something bad occurs, organizations lose their credibility because they do the exact opposite of these seven steps. They deny. They obfuscate. They're arrogant. They stall. They delay. They avoid responsibility. They threaten to sue. The reality is that organizations who need to retrieve their credibility will carry out each of the seven steps in some order (some times with great pain) as a part of their reputation recovery process. Behave with credibility.

* Adapted from *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies That Reduce the Media's Power*, copyright 1992, James E. Lukaszewski. Copies may be obtained by calling or writing Issue Action Publications, 207 Loudoun Street, S.E., Leesburg, VA 22075-3115, (703) 777-8450.

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