

December 1987

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: What to Do When the Investigative Journalist Calls

Perhaps the most frightening telephone call to receive is the one from an investigative reporter, a local "I-Team," or a national news program like 60 Minutes or 20-20. Here is an important "first thoughts" checklist to precede your actual response strategy:

- Mike Wallace doesn't call first. It's usually someone from the program's production staff or someone involved in "research" calling about a company issue, idea, product, problem, customer, employee, or vendor.
- There is usually no story if no one talks. Reporters really know very little about you or your company. Unless you or someone else decides to talk, developing a story can be very difficult -- not impossible, but difficult.
- Analyze your situation; make sure that you're really a part of the story. If you are only being asked to comment on something in your industry, your business environment, or a political situation, you may not be the focus of the story. If you aren't involved, you have the option of not responding. You can choose to stay out of the story.
- Identify, designate, and train one spokesperson to handle the entire matter. Also prepare a back-up spokesperson.
- Immediately let the entire company know that you've been contacted, the nature of the information, and the questions asked. Identify your spokesperson and encourage those who might be contacted by the media to talk with the designated spokesperson. Those hurt worst first by bad publicity are your employees. Help them help you.
- Tell your friends, too. Most image and reputation crises are not caused by the media, our competition, or our enemies, but by well-meaning friends who either didn't know or should know better. As they try to defend or explain your actions, without meaning to, they can turn a slight injury into a fatal accident.
- If you really are a crook, they'll find out.

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