

SELECTIVE ENGAGEMENT: A POWERFUL STRATEGY FOR MANAGING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS DESTINY

Selective engagement is a mindset. It's a communication strategy stressing focus, control, and patterns of action that target the most appropriate audiences and constituencies in the most useful and appropriate ways (from their perspectives). In a novel way it controls the access of those who anoint themselves as arbitrators, detractors, critics, or saviors.

You choose when and with whom you communicate. So long as your intentions, behaviors, and expectations are honorable, you can take and maintain control of your own communication environment. Selective engagement means the process you choose should be based on the outcomes you seek to achieve coupled with the expectations and the best interests of the audiences and constituencies you intend to affect. The strategy is to engage, but on **your own terms**.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SELECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

1. Act to control, to contain, and to manage your own communication.

Most communication and reputation problems start locally and can best be addressed locally, at least at first. The scope of coverage is a strategic decision that you and your client control until you let it get out of control. Part of the art here, of course, is to recognize when a story is national or international by nature, or when a story is simply much larger than its location. The strategy is to keep the visibility as close to the site of the problem as possible. Victims are there; employees are there. Manage so that the story can stay there.

2. Always let opponents and critics speak for themselves. (Avoid media goading to comment.)

Critics need your aggressively negative, defensive responses to generate the energy necessary to keep their ideas in the news. You have absolutely no obligation to respond to anything said by any critic, opponent, or antagonist. Quite often, if left to their own devices, critics, opponents, and antagonists will say and do things that reflect just how unfounded, goofy, or invalid their criticisms tend to be. Their over-the-top behavior invalidates their positions. Avoid needless rebuttal, commentary, or response. Shut up.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."