



## *Reasonable Voice*

### **Legal Counsel and Communications Strategist: Best Combination During a Crisis**

Over the past several years, I often found myself advising CEOs and other senior leaders as they navigated confidential, difficult situations that resulted from abrupt organizational changes, professional misconduct, hazardous materials incidents, product or service failures, cybercrime, natural disasters... or what seemed to be just plain dumb luck.

I've come to realize that in a fast-paced, digital world, these events now go viral at lightning speed. How they are managed and what is communicated can make the difference between the survival or destruction of an organization's reputation.

And that doesn't always mean just spilling your guts.

It's not unusual for organizations facing sensitive or difficult circumstances to seek trusted counsel from both their attorneys as well as public relations professionals. What is unusual is to have them work cooperatively together on behalf of the client.

Early in my career, I would watch my traditional public relations colleagues advise their companies to go public early and provide all the information possible on a given sensitive matter... while the organization's attorney might advise their client to say nothing, speak to no one, and offer only "no comment" to anyone who inquired.

Neither approach seemed very strategic to me, nor focused on the best, long-term interests of the organization. I promised myself that if I were ever in a position to impact how sensitive and crisis communications were done, I would find a way to work closely with legal counsel in a team-approach to ensure the business legal strategy was preserved, while at the same time protecting and advancing the organization's reputation and good name.

Certainly, there are highly-charged situations - like lawsuits - when an organization has to be extremely careful what they say publicly. However, it's often possible to offer some information while protecting the privacy of those involved, and to state that given the ongoing legal proceeding, comments will need to remain limited. That all makes sense, and sounds a lot better than wielding "no comment" as the standard line.

Both disciplines have your best interest in mind. However, to get the best combination of legal counsel and communications strategy, don't be afraid to call them into the same room or conference call to find that common sense, common ground.

You and your organization will have a better outcome as a result.

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