

June 2012 Newsletter

Jeff Ansell News & Views

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EVENTS Calendar

On June 24, I’m delivering a presentation at the IABC 2012 World Conference in Chicago.

2012’s International Association of Business Communicators conference will give attendees a look to the future of strategic communications. One of this year’s keynote speakers is Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

This year’s conference will provide attendees with valuable insight into how to approach and adapt to the global business environment between now and 2015.

Presentations will cover a variety of topics designed to help you become a better communicator.

I presented last year and also hosted their prestigious Gold Quill Awards Ceremony.

This year, my presentation on Monday, June 24, is entitled; “Say It Like You Mean It”

Hope to see you there! If you attend please make sure you drop by to say hello.

IABC World Conference info
<http://jeffansell.com/wordpress/iabc-2012-world-conference-in-chicago/>

Say It . . . Like You Mean It
http://www.jeffansell.com/TIPS/V_Body_Language.html

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1.) LABATT BLUE IT . . . OVER MAGNOTTA BLUE

Spokespersons must control their emotions during a crisis. Fear is your enemy.

Labatt Breweries learned that the hard way recently. Instead of drawing on good media sense, the company reacted in panic regarding a photo of accused murderer, and alleged cannibal, Luke Magnotta, who posed on his Facebook page holding a Labatt Blue bottle of beer.

When the Montreal Gazette ran the picture, Labatt threatened to sue.

Next to Hitler, someone like Magnotta is the last person you'd want associated with your product, so why make the situation exponentially worse by drawing attention to it? Threatening to sue a news media company even at the best of times is probably the worst strategy anyone can take, but doing so while the entire world is watching puts your company's reputation and share price in jeopardy.

The best way to control your emotions is to be prepared for all eventualities. When crisis hits, it is way too late to check the playbook to decide on a course of action. When you're dragged onto the world stage you need to react instinctively, and draw on experience so you can concentrate on the facts and emotions of the issue, and not be distracted by your media technique.

It's too late to practice your swing when the ball is coming right at your head.

Statistics reveal that most companies will eventually experience a crisis. Lightning however, usually only strikes once. That means many spokespersons won't have firsthand experience dealing with catastrophic events. You don't have the luxury to learn as you go, so you have to get it right the first time every time. The only way to gain the experience you need is through the eyes of someone who has been in a similar situation. Training is irreplaceable when you haven't actually been in a crisis. CEOs often instinctively delegate risky media moves to anyone around them who they think can handle the situation, or who can take the fall. Don't be the latter.

Panic takes many forms. It can overwhelm you in an instant when you're caught off guard by a reporter, or it can seem like you're moving in slow motion as you watch news reports roll in over the course of a few hours. Quite often the people around you, some may even be your superiors, place incredible pressure on you to make a decision. The people giving you advice are often not qualified to effectively handle news media, but panic has taken hold of them too. It is at times like this your leadership skills and media handling expertise are put to the test.

And as I relate in my book, "When the Headline Is YOU," resist letting lawyers make emotional decisions.

Reporter Dan Gardiner wrote, "It's curious that a corporation (referring to Labatt) with a sophisticated understanding of the psychology of brands could be so incredibly dumb." <http://tinyurl.com/7h8z9h2>

BTW, Magnotta was also photographed wearing a very famous icon on his t-shirt. I'm not going to tell you who it is though, because I truly applaud the icon's company for a job well done. They knew how news media and the public would react, and smartly chose not to respond in a Mickey Mouse manner and light the fuse. Instead, they coolly handled what could have easily exploded into their media crisis.

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2.) MISQUOTES – ROMNEY, THAT’S NOT WHAT I SAID

“I didn’t say that!” is one of the most over-used lines from politicians and spokespersons.

Unfortunately, “Yes you did” is the most common retort from reporters.

Regardless of the reason, if you said it, someone will remember it, and repeat it over and over to either promote or criticize you. It’s the latter that can, and often does destroy a career.

How you say what you mean is harder than most people think. You can’t just show up and expect to win over your audience. It takes forethought and knowledge of how to clearly communicate. You might have the best of intentions, but when the words leave your mouth reporters can interpret what you say in the manner that suits their purposes, not yours.

It’s even worse today than yesterday, because now your words live in infamy on Facebook, on websites, Twitter, and every social media platform now known or devised in the future.

One of Mitt Romney’s most famous, or infamous quotes, depending on how you look at it is, “My sons are all adults and they’ve made decisions about their careers and they’ve chosen not to serve in the military and active duty and I respect their decision in that regard. One of the ways my sons are showing support for our nation is helping me get elected because they think I’d be a great president.”

Romney also has a bad habit of trying to use humor to deflect questions that make him feel uncomfortable, just like comedians claim they did in high school to keep from getting beat up or to be more popular. It might work for a gifted few, but on the professional career path it can be suicide. Iconic politicians like Bill Clinton have a humorous way with words and effectively use comedy to deflect criticism, but for the other 99%, humor is very risky.

Instead of relying on ill designed, or worse, impromptu comedy to get your message across, it’s best to know how to diffuse an issue without making your words a target for ambiguous interpretation.

Once you say it, it becomes part of your persona, and there are reporters and websites that will guarantee your words live on well past your natural life.

Mitt Romney Quotes

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/mittromney/a/romneyquotes.htm>

Barack Obama

"No, no. I have been practicing ... I bowled a 129. It's like -- it was like Special Olympics, or something."

<http://tinyurl.com/3paog3>

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3.) HOW FACEBOOK & GOOGLE SHAPE YOUR NEWS

Most people do not realize they look at news through a filter.

Eli Pariser, a viral communications specialist and author of “The Filter Bubble” contends we are currently experiencing a passing of the torch, thanks to Facebook and Google, from “human gatekeepers/news

editors,” to “algorithmic gatekeepers.” He maintains that the news you receive online is subtly manipulated to feed you information you want to see, and not what you need to see.

Unfortunately, Pariser is right, and if you pay attention you can easily see this trend for yourself.

Pariser closely studied how social news media communities like Facebook and Google feed you information based on your previously expressed interests. For example, if you regularly search for info about the Republicans, search engines will feed you results heavily skewed in this direction.

It might sound benign, and you might think, “PERFECT!” finally someone understands my interests and I don’t have to wade through a ton of information from Democrats to find facts to support my perspective.

Unfortunately, this type of monogamous news focus serves only to narrow your vision, not expand it.

Even worse, corporate and political communicators know how to manipulate this feed and game the system, which tricks you into thinking you’re getting the info you need to make an informed decision.

When you combine this subtle manipulation with the strategies reporters employ to get you to say what they want you to say, you can see it’s incredibly important to have well developed communication skills so you can think on your feet and focus not only on the content, but also on how you deliver your message.

The deck is stacked against you on every level, so show up prepared.

See for yourself what Eli Pariser contends in this Ted Talk video <http://tinyurl.com/cktczd8>

Media Training Pitfalls - <http://tinyurl.com/3hqmkdp>

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4.) RICHARD MAXWELL STUDIO TOUR OF JA & A

Richard Maxwell is a media trainer and a voice and presentation coach at Jeff Ansell & Associates.

A former award winning broadcaster, Richard has worked for large media outlets including Sirius XM Satellite Radio and the CHUM Radio Network.

Richard manages our Media Strategies Phone Tune-Up Training Program
<http://www.jeffansell.com/Services/PhoneTuneUps.html>

Learn more about Richard’s background here . . .
http://www.jeffansell.com/About-Us/Bio_Richard_Maxwell.html

Take a Tour of our Training Studio with Richard . . .
http://www.jeffansell.com/TIPS/V_Studio+Tour.html

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5.) PUBLIC ARCHIVE OF NEWS SITE HOMEPAGES

Ben Walsh, who works as a programmer and reporter at the LA Times, recently launched a website called “Past Pages” that serves up homepages of over 70 news websites around the world.

It's an amazing research tool you can use to simultaneously see what a diverse cross section of news companies are focusing on around the world.

Is your Eco activity or scandal big news in New York and London or Beijing?

Go to PastPages.org to find out. <http://www.pastpages.org/>

More about Ben Walsh <http://palewi.re/who-is-ben-welsh/>

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6.) ROOKIE REPORTERS COOK SEASONED SHERIFF

A twenty year old reporter thrusting a camera and microphone in your face is harder to intimidate or fool than you might think. Young journalists work incredibly hard to expose corruption, sometimes without the support of, and even against the will of their editors and producers.

Youthful exuberance brings with it the will to prove oneself. I know, I was in this position as a Cub reporter many years ago - <http://www.jeffansell.com/TIPS/V+Investigating+Corrupt+Doctors.html>

Recently, two young and relatively inexperienced reporters launched an investigation into the criminal activities of their town Sheriff, and what they discovered and reported surprised people everywhere.

Samantha Swindler and Adam Sulfridge worked seventy hour weeks over several months to break the story and expose corrupt Kentucky Sheriff Lawrence Hodge who was convicted of selling illegal guns and drugs, and is now serving fifteen years in prison.

As Reported by 60 Minutes <http://tinyurl.com/7mv5z2y>

Nieman Reports at Harvard <http://tinyurl.com/6k53k6g>

A Conversation with Samantha Swindler <http://youtu.be/9qQkJkxap64>

In the early 80's I hunted and researched Nazi War Criminals living in North America. In 1982, Paul Appleby and I published an article in TODAY Magazine documenting our horrific findings about Nazi war criminal, Haralds Puntulis.

The story appeared in eighteen newspapers, and was read by 6 million people.

Here's an archived copy of our original story - <http://tinyurl.com/6vqr6pl>

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7.) DO CORPORATE LAWYERS HAVE TOO MUCH INFLUENCE?

Lawyer Philip Howard feels "The land of the free has become a legal minefield."

Howard, who practices law in New York City and is author of "The Collapse of the Common Good" claims that law has become too complex and that lawyers have too much influence with CEOs when it comes to reputational matters. The problem is that lawyers are paid to be mindful of the court of law, as opposed to the court of public opinion, especially as it relates to crisis.

Lawyers often argue against apologizing because they feel it is an admission of guilt.

In my book, "When The Headline Is YOU," I include a 10 step process to convince lawyers to do the right thing when faced with a PR crisis.

An attorney might save you \$100 million in a court of law, but is it worth losing \$500 million in lost sales?

My philosophy is to apologize when appropriate, and make it clear you feel the pain of the people who have suffered as a result of the actions of your company. You also need to make it clear you will immediately take steps to ensure you've genuinely learned from the crisis.

It's also important to know that many legal jurisdictions have passed the APOLOGY ACT, which states that just because you apologize, it doesn't mean you admit guilt.

I address this issue at length in one of my podcasts and encourage you to carefully consider the philosophy of your company before a crisis hits. If you feel there is a need to change how your company interacts with the public, contact me and I'll give you a few tips on how to help protect your reputation.

Philip K. Howard's Ted Talk about Corporate Lawyers and Legal Complexity
http://www.ted.com/talks/philip_howard.html

I spoke at length on this subject to the Boston CEO Club. You can listen in here.
<http://www.jeffansell.com/TIPS/Podcasts/CEO+Club+Clip5.html>

I was interviewed recently by Pablo Fuchs for an article published in CCCA - Canadian Corporate Counsel Association magazine. We covered a variety of topics regarding the challenges of lawyers becoming involved as spokespersons during a time of crisis for their clients.

You can read the CCCA article here - <http://tinyurl.com/85mskwr>

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8.) FINGER FOUND IN ARBY'S FOOD - VP CLAIMS COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

When 14 year old Ryan Hart bit into his Arby's sandwich and found a piece of a human finger, it didn't make him feel any better when John Gray, Arby's VP of Corporate Communications said, "Arby's wants to reassure customers that we are committed to providing quality food in a safe and healthy environment."

It reminds me of the story of a plane crash, and the first thing the airplane's spokesperson said was "Trust me, our planes are safe."

Defending your company in such an egregious manner is a Trust Violation. Yet, corporate spokespersons do it every day. Someone who has been hurt by your company, either emotionally or physically, wants to know you understand the pain they suffer. Plus, everyone reading, hearing or watching the story also wants to know that the company that caused the pain takes genuine, unconditional responsibility.

What Mr. Gray did was to try to shift focus away from the pain the victim felt, and instead have people think about the "alleged" good job Arby's is doing.

It's not about YOU. It's about the victim!

My book, "When the Headline is YOU" addresses this issue in detail. In it I write, "Trust is not something you can simply tell people to have. Trust is something that must be earned. And when that earned trust is violated, people must be provided with reasons to once again believe you, presuming they ever did in the

first place. When a spokesperson tells people, “Trust me,” it actually has the opposite effect. Instead of encouraging trust or confidence, it sends off a smarmy signal that puts people on high alert.”

Here’s just one version of the Arby’s incident on Yahoo – note the almost 10,000 comments.
<http://tinyurl.com/cdcpwl3>

I did a quick Google search of the phrase that contains Arby’s VP response, and on the first 30 pages found over 300 mentions of the insensitive response by Arby’s. Gray’s quote is going to live on in infamy forever. You can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube. <http://tinyurl.com/6pasrly>

Charlie Bit My Finger
http://youtu.be/_OB1gSz8sSM

The people we train recognize how important it is to stay in good communication form, and many of them value the importance of a “refresher” course we offer called the MediaStrategies Phone Tune-Up ;
<http://www.jeffansell.com/Services/PhoneTuneUps.html>

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9.) CRITICAL ISSUES DEMAND PROPORTIONAL PREPARATION

There is a direct correlation between the sensitivity of the issue and the level of preparedness required by a spokesperson. If the issue is of great public concern, the spokesperson has a significant obligation to not only know the facts surrounding the issue, but also needs to know how to professionally deliver the company’s message in an effective manner. You can’t just show up with superficial facts and wing it.

You need to deliver your message in a manner that responsibly represents your company.

Selective video editing can make even the most prepared spokesperson look bad, but when you combine biased editing with a spokesperson who hasn’t prepared properly, or who does not have solid media training, the results can be catastrophic.

For example, Aubrey McClendon, CEO of Chesapeake Energy during a heated debate with an angry crowd, endeavors to have the Boston Globe support his side of the argument by challenging the audience to invite the newspaper to report on what he claims are false accusations leveled at his company. McClendon ended his challenge by saying, “It will be one helluva good story if we’re killing people,” only to have someone in the audience quickly ask how much money the energy company paid the Boston Globe, to which he smiles and begins to answer. Unfortunately for McClendon, creative editing cut short his reply. Arguing with and challenging an angry mob is always a mistake.

Mainstream news media is much smoother in how it edits and leverages sound bites, but this amateur-like video, which has had over 5,500 views, and is part of a Bank of America Lecture Series from Harvard, chops it up mercilessly to make McClendon look as bad as possible.

It’s quite likely McClendon thought the lecture series was going to be a walk in the park, so he didn’t prepare properly. Instead he walked into a hornet’s nest that generated considerable negative attention.

You can watch the video here;
<http://youtu.be/e8OSqf77iG8>

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10.) PRESIDENT OBAMA CHASTISES JOURNALIST

President Obama sometimes has a tough time talking to reporters.

Immediately after an interview with Brad Watson of WFAA TV, and while his microphone was still live, Obama tersely warned Watson, "Let me finish my answers the next time we do an interview, all right?"

President Obama can get away with being a bit snarky with reporters because of his unique position, but even he can't push it too hard. The better solution when you are asked the same question over and over is to breathe normally and not lose your cool, which for the most part is what Obama did throughout the interview. It wasn't until the interview was over that he let his guard down and mistakenly assumed his comments at that point were off the record. They are not. Everything you say is fair game.

Journalists use many tactics to wear you down. Another trick to get you to say what you don't want to say is to ask you a question that comes out of left field. After the reporter signals the end of the interview, they also sometimes ask one last question as you are preparing to stand up or move away. It is often this question that sinks your ship. For example, a reporter will ask ten questions about the colors of the lilies in your florist shop, and you feel good that you've represented your company responsibly. But just as the interview seems to be ending they ask you how many cats die each year across North America from eating lily bulbs. You thought the interview was over, so you innocently reply "Not very many." The next day the headline reads, "Florist Admits Plants Kill Pets!"

It's never good to argue with a reporter, chastise them, or assume the interview is over.

Here's a video clip of Obama chastising Watson <http://tinyurl.com/3nph6og>

While we are on a political note, The Charlotte Observer interviewed me recently for my observations regarding the same sex marriage controversy over Amendment One, which was part of the presidential primaries in North Carolina. I told the Observer, "Clearly, companies need to carefully think through the short, medium and long-term consequences of their social and political policies. If a company is not determined to ride out the criticism . . . it's best to lay low and pass on taking a stand."

You can read the article here . . . <http://tinyurl.com/7gshhur>

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11.) COVERT PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN TARGETS JOURNALISTS

Reporters are often accused of being overly critical of their subjects, of putting words in spokespersons' mouths, and also of malicious misquoting.

Recently however, a USA Today reporter and his editor became the victims.

Creating and distributing misinformation is a fact of business today, and it goes hand in hand with disruption techniques used to undermine companies and destroy reputations and share prices.

The following is an example of the length some communications professionals will go to in order to obscure facts and undermine reputations. It's also a testament to how important it is for everyone on both sides of the news business fence to be well trained and to pay attention to details.

As reported widely, a communications company admitted to acting independently to create a series of websites designed to discredit USA Today reporter Tom Vanden Brook, and his editor, Ray Locker.

Brook and Locker recently published a story about Pentagon propaganda contractor, Leonie Industries, a communications company that received over \$120 million in Pentagon contracts over the last 4 years.

USA Today reported that Camille Chidiac, one of the previous owners of Leonie, admitted he set up and managed web sites and a social media presence meant to negatively impact the reputation of the USA Today reporter and editor. He said he was upset over a story they did about him and his former company.

Chidiac claimed to have opened online discussion forums and placed USA Today articles about the Pentagon in them to attract people interested in military issues. Brook and Locker also discovered Facebook and Twitter accounts opened in their names, of which they claim to have no connection. Someone also made extensive Wikipedia entries about the USA Today staffers.

Online reputation experts claim it was a sophisticated attack on USA Today, their reporter, and editor. Chidiac claims he acted completely independently of Leonie, and also asserts he was no longer a partner at the time of his indiscretion.

You can read the entire story here – <http://tinyurl.com/cngrnm>

That's it for this edition of News & Views.

I hope you found it informative and valuable.

Sincerely,
Jeff Ansell

Be well . . .

P.S.

My book, "When the Headline Is YOU" can be ordered at a variety of places online and from your favorite bookstores, including Amazon, Borders, Barnes & Noble, Chapters, Indigo, & also directly from my publisher, Jossey-Bass. <http://www.jeffansell.com/TIPS/When-the-Headline-Is-YOU.html>

It captures my decades of experience as a media coach and reporter, and is designed to help people understand and interact effectively with news media.

If you haven't purchased it yet and you're not even sure if YOU need my new book, check out our animated trailer to help you decide. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xhwd6tly1ao>

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Jeff Ansell & Associates
69 Yorkville Avenue, Suite 300, Toronto, Ontario CANADA M5R 1B8

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