

October 2010 Newsletter

Jeff Ansell News & Views

My new book "When the Headline Is YOU: An Insider's Guide to Handling the Media" was released yesterday. The book has been a number of years in the making and I am excited to finally be able to tell you it is NOW AVAILABLE!

This special newsletter will give you an inside look at how the book came about, and also share with you some of the secrets within its pages.

"When the Headline Is YOU" can be ordered at a variety of places online and from your favorite bookstores, including Amazon, Chapters, Indigo, Borders, Barnes & Noble, and directly from my publisher, Jossey-Bass.

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're not sure if YOU need my new book, check out our animated trailer.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xhwd6tly1ao>

The following paragraph always leads off my newsletters because it concisely explains the challenges people face every day when trying to communicate their message to news media.

"Everything you're exposed to in media is just someone else's interpretation of issues and events, so view it with an open mind. Skillful communication with media and in presentations can make all the difference in how your message is reported and received. It's a complicated mix of delivery and interpretation, and an ability few truly master, yet it is a skill anyone can learn or improve."

The excerpt below is from the introduction of my new book. It takes the sentiment in the message above, to a much deeper level;

"Answering questions from reporters is risky business. Though a media interview may feel like a straightforward conversation, it actually represents a contrived and manipulative dynamic. Knowing how to talk to reporters is like learning a new language; a language that bears little, if any, resemblance to everyday conversation. It is a mistake for anyone to believe otherwise. It may seem as if speaking the truth should be enough to build credibility and trust, but that's rarely the case. Exposing oneself to media scrutiny requires more than simple candor and honesty. It requires knowledge, training, and a keen understanding of how reporters write the news." . . . end of excerpt

"When the Headline Is YOU" goes straight to the core of communicating with news media in our modern world. Communication has changed radically over the last few years, but there is still one constant humanistic dynamic; how a person or company delivers a message, and how others interpret it.

We are all subject to deeply ingrained behavioral traits, and no matter how much, or quickly technology grows or changes, the method of delivering a message, and how it impacts us is still the same. How we react is buried in our genes lurking at a reptilian level in our subconscious.

Contrary to what many people think, citizen journalism, blogs, and Twitter have not made it “easier” to be understood. New media has, in fact made it incredibly more complex and confusing, and that is exactly why clarity from the outset is so important. My book addresses clarity at a base level.

Now, more than ever, it is critically important how you sculpt your message, and how you interact with and deliver it to news media. It is a learned skill.

Topics for this newsletter represent each chapter of my book:

- 1.) HOW “WHEN THE HEADLINE IS YOU” CAME ABOUT
- 2.) WHAT IS NEWS? – GOOD QUESTION - WHAT IS LIFE?
- 3.) YOU ARE THE STORY – YES YOU
- 4.) HOW TO ADMIT BAD NEWS - CAREFULLY
- 5.) CRAFTING COMPELLING MESSAGES
- 6.) DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE
- 7.) WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH
- 8.) WHAT IF’S – EXAMPLES & SOLUTIONS

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FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER - <http://twitter.com/JeffAnsell>

My New BLOG - <http://jeffansell.com/wordpress/>

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- 1.) HOW “WHEN THE HEADLINE IS YOU” CAME ABOUT

WHY I wrote the book is simple. I wanted to share with you what I’ve learned over the years, and I wanted to do it in a way that is easy to understand.

Too many misconceptions exist about how journalists report the news, so I wanted to clear up a few very harmful myths. For example, reporters aren’t out to get you. Their job is to tell a story. It is up to you, and how you manage your interaction with reporters that dictates whether you will end up looking like a good guy . . . or a monster. It is possible to turn even the most horrific crisis into an opportunity that places you and your company in a better light.

I’ve contemplated writing this book for a long time, especially since I left journalism. There was one particular situation that convinced me to leave the business, and the situation that caused me to do so still disturbs me.

Here’s an excerpt from my book describing what happened;

“It was a slow news day and the producer of the six o’clock news was upset because we did not have a good lead story to open the broadcast. All we had as a possible lead story was a stabbing that had taken place.

Then, a half hour before we went on air, the assignment editor came on the loudspeaker in the newsroom and announced that there was good news—the stabbing victim had died. My colleagues in the newsroom erupted into a cheer.

Now they had a lead story for the six o’clock news.

That was the day I left journalism.” . . . end of excerpt

Everyone has pivotal moments in their life, and if you’re lucky you might even have a few. I’ve been lucky in this respect, although Samuel Goldwyn believed that the harder he worked the luckier he got. I agree.

Managing your interaction with news media is work, and luck has little to do with it. There is a formula, albeit a very complicated one, but if you learn a few secrets of the industry you will have much better results.

I had a great deal of support writing the book, especially from my co-author, Jeff Leeson, a talented writer based in San Francisco. I’m also grateful to Ray Day, Vice President, Communications for Ford Motor Company” for writing the Forward to my book. My thanks go out to Jeff and Ray.

A Podcast that addresses WHY I wrote the book
<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-406612.html>

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2.) WHAT IS NEWS? – GOOD QUESTION - WHAT IS LIFE?

Both are complicated, and I’m not sure which is harder to define.

News is everywhere, and, as I wrote in my book, the business of news is a full cycle process that includes “how it is made, reported, and interpreted.”

Another brief excerpt from “When the Headline Is YOU”

“News stories usually fall into categories such as good versus evil, winners and losers, bad decisions, irony, rumors, the unusual or absurd, offensive comments, uniformed politicians, and failed jokes.

The current model for media training is broken because it calls on spokespeople to ignore questions and repeat “key” messages. Each time a nonresponsive message is repeated a layer of credibility is stripped away from the speaker.

The most effective way to deal with the media is to be honest and responsive.”

It is especially the case when dealing with news media in the face of a crisis that has full potential to negatively impact you or your company.

Why? Well, it is the reporter's job to ferret out the truth, and if they get the feeling you are deceiving them, even in the smallest way, their radar goes into full alert, and you just became a prime target.

I was a guest last night on CBC's Lang & O'Leary Exchange. Amanda Lang and Andrew Coyne (filling in for Kevin O'Leary) went right to the heart of how executives screw up their careers during a crisis situation. My segment starts at 45:10 - <http://tinyurl.com/2ft95q3>

Wayne Hurlbert, Blog Business World, also interviewed me recently and asked about the NEW approach to PR; <http://tinyurl.com/2b6l3mo>

Looking for a SPEAKER or Media Trainer at your next function?
Contact me: <http://www.whentheheadlineisyou.com/jansell-speaking.htm>

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3.) YOU ARE THE STORY – YES YOU

News can happen to anyone, and how you come out of it is proportionally related to how you manage yourself.

If you are prepared, level headed and responsible you have a good chance of turning a negative event into something that places you or your company in a more favorable light. It's not to say you will come out of it unscathed, but at least you won't be DOA, and you'll live to fight another day.

In this chapter I cover the importance of being careful what you say. This piece of advice sounds obvious, but it is way harder to do than everyone thinks. Reporters are trained to bring out the worst in you. They do it every day in a wide variety of contexts, and you are just another pawn in the grand scheme of their careers. Every word that comes out of your mouth is fair game for a quote. Learn to make it positive for you.

I also address the truth about "off the record." My advice is to not say anything off the record you wouldn't say on the record.

I cover a number of other issues in this chapter in great detail such as, Image Consciousness, Know What Others Are Saying About You, Know How You Come Across, Building Trust, What's the Right Thing to Do, How to Get Your Lawyers on Your Side (they always want to stay silent, but I know through experience it is often a mistake), Look to Your Values, The Value Compass (this is a BIG issue I cover in great detail and if you manage it properly you will place yourself in a favorable position).

The Value Compass is an effective tool for establishing and focusing your principles, particularly when public trust is threatened. If you want to be believed and trusted it is critical that you clearly embrace this concept.

Steve Paikin interviewed me on his TVO show, The Agenda, and asked about high profile executives who made huge media blunders.
<http://tinyurl.com/23s5k96>

When the Headline Is YOU - <http://www.whentheheadlineisyou.com/>

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4.) HOW TO ADMIT BAD NEWS

This chapter focuses on the importance of being present and responsive when bad news happens. It also explains the four principles for building trust.

When bad news strikes, people have a tendency to withdraw from the media, or trivialize it. Both are huge mistakes.

As I explain in detail in my book, the four principles for building trust are:

- Show Humility
- Answer Honestly
- Acknowledge Skepticism
- Couple Concern with Commitment to Action

In order to do this you have to learn a few skills, like “be accessible, be among those most upset, and most importantly, “facts” will never win over “emotion.”

Emotion trumps fact every time. If you think all you have to do to get people on your side is to relay facts in an orderly fashion, you’ll be in for a rude surprise.

I also discuss in this chapter a process I call “The Problem Solution Formula.” It is a way of addressing a problem honestly while simultaneously ensuring the “solution” will be quoted in your favor.

Admitting bad news is much more difficult than people imagine, and if you do it improperly it is highly likely you could make the crisis seem even worse.

Not to downplay the environmental catastrophe of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, but ex-BP CEO, Tony Hayward, claims he was “demonized” and forced to resign over the spill. I beg to differ with Mr. Hayward.

Hayward wasn’t forced to resign because of the spill. He lost his job and also negatively impacted BP’s share prices even further because he mismanaged the message during the first few hours of the crisis.

Hayward actually made it worse for his company and his career.

MONEY Magazine article
<http://money.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=7936072>

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5.) CRAFTING COMPELLING MESSAGES

John Ruskin, a Victorian writer and critic wrote, “Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words, or he will certainly misunderstand them.”

It’s also great advice for anyone disseminating information about a crisis.

A study published in the Journal of “Personality and Social Study” reported that repeated exposure to one person’s perspective and viewpoint has almost as much influence as exposure to shared opinions from many people.

The study suggests that if you are a competent spokesperson you can single-handedly manage the message during a crisis situation and not only ensure consistency, but also have your company’s message resonate in your favor.

There are however “Messaging Maxims” you have to follow, but it’s harder to do than you might think because your message has to resonate with a wide variety of stakeholders including investors, retailers, customers, and critics.

Your one message has to reach and have a favorable impact with all of these people, and you have to do it immediately after the crisis strikes. So, if you are not prepared, you will be disadvantaged before you even start. There is no opportunity for a second chance, and issuing a retraction of an early blunder will surely make the crisis seem even worse.

I address a long list of strategies in my book to help you prepare for the worst.

This chapter also includes the Compelling Message Creator, which is a TEMPLATE that will not only help you craft a message that will meet the needs of journalists, but also help position your message in a proactive and positive manner.

I am delivering a presentation at IABC – International Association of Business Communicators on October 21, 2010 - <http://tinyurl.com/2ekylc3>

Bloomberg Businessweek recommends my book <http://tinyurl.com/2wojst3>

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6.) DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

Words are like toothpaste.

Once you squeeze them out you can’t get them back in the tube.

In this chapter I share well proven and documented methods that will help you pace yourself and say the right thing, which is something professional communicators plan and do not leave to chance. Politicians and executives learn the tricks of the trade and practice their skills in preparation for a crisis.

There are a number of relatively complex components required to deliver your message in a manner that serves you well. Each on its own seems relatively

simple, but the challenge is to make it all work together when you are under the stress of a crisis.

For example, you have to learn to slow your racing brain, and one way of doing it is to learn how to breathe. I cover these two important tactics in great detail in my new book. Your face and especially your eyes relay information that can either help someone trust you, or brand you as a liar. How you use your hands is important too. I refer to an involuntary function as “Body Language Leakage,” which means when you are nervous or lying, you might be doing something that indicates you’re being deceitful. Poker players refer to it as a “TELL.” If you don’t know what a “nodding head” means you need to read my book before you talk to reporters.

You also have to pay attention to your voice. The tone, speed, and inflection tell a person a lot about your message. It’s not what you say as much as how you say it that gets people on your side. You have to “Say it like you mean it!”

I’ll also show you how to repeat the same message to different reporters using different words. If you learn to do it properly it can have great impact regarding how your message is received.

All good spokespeople have one trait in common – they PRACTICE. My book describes a number of simple ways throughout the day you can practice.

I even include a 5 Step exercise you can practice anywhere and at any time.

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I’m doing the next Dealing with An Angry Public Seminar presented by the MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Program on November 2 & 3, 2010.

Please join us in Cambridge MA, and tell your friends and colleagues.

<https://www.regonline.com/builder/site/tab1.aspx?EventID=885896>

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7.) WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

“Reporters have little reluctance in asking antagonistic or intentionally misleading questions. If necessary they’ll resort to embarrassing silences, dogged questioning, and ambush tactics in order to get their story.”

Reporters love to use surprise as leverage.

Here’s a secret I share in my book.

When you are caught off guard by a reporter, be sure to breathe, genuinely listen to the questions and stop thinking about what to say – just listen. Then ask questions to make sure you understand what’s being asked of you. The full process is outlined in the book.

“Angry upset people want two things from you. The first thing they want is for you to acknowledge the problem. The second thing they want is for you to

solve the problem, which is not always possible while standing in a hallway or parking lot.”

The book also provides direction of what to say when you don't know what to say. The FLUSTER Strategy is an easily-learned four step process that can give you time to think and recover.

Sometimes you have to know how to end the barrage of reporters' questions. I call this the CLOSURE Strategy. When the same question is asked repeatedly it indicates the media is not interested in your message, and that the question itself, as well as your answer, will form a pivotal part of the story. “Often, when spokespeople are pummeled in this manner, they weaken and end up providing the one quote they were determined to avoid.” Don't do it!

I'll guide you through a well known political example that will illustrate how to recognize this type of situation, and what you can do to manage it.

Sometimes you have to pull out the big guns, so, I also describe the CLUSTER Strategy, which is a blend of Fluster and Closure Strategies.

Apologizing will usually get people back on your side, but only when you do it properly. There is however concern by some attorneys that an apology constitutes an admission of guilt. Recently though, many governments have passed what is known as the “Apology Act” in an effort to encourage more people to own up to their mistakes without fear their apology will be used against them in court. To date, three provinces and thirty-five states have already passed such legislation. The legal issues differ between jurisdictions, and as you might expect the issue in general is quite complex, but I do cover the challenge at length in my book and provide a few examples so you can easily see how important it is to apologize properly.

Jim Golden, a lawyer for the trucking industry said, “There's a difference between saying I'm sorry, and it is our fault and we're legally responsible. Saying, I'm sorry when an accident is clearly your fault helps begin the healing process.”

I spend quite a bit of time in my book describing the different ways and reasons for saying you are sorry. Apologizing is not only a delicate legal issue, but an emotional one as well that sends a message to victims during a crisis situation that the person or company responsible is genuine in their remorse and committed to making things better.

Rita Celli of CBC Radio 1 interviewed me about Managing News Media. Great stories from a number of call-in listeners!
http://www.cbc.ca/ontariotoday/story_archive.html

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8.) WHAT IF'S – EXAMPLES & SOLUTIONS

Real world and timely examples help people understand complex issues.

Consequently, I assembled a list of 20 “What If’s” to help readers more clearly understand what they should do in difficult situations when journalists are hounding them and proving to be frustrating.

Here’s a list of the What If’s I address;

What if you don’t want to answer the question, but you have something to say? I used an example of Bill Gates in China regarding issues of free speech. When asked what he thought, Gates stumbled and ended up looking deceptive instead of concerned. My book goes into considerably more detail.

What if you don’t know how an accident or mistake happened?
What if you’re asked for hard numbers and don’t know the answer?
What if you don’t know the answer, but a colleague who is with you might?
What if you need to pause?
What if there really is nothing to say?
What if the answer is confidential?
What if it’s a question about a rumor?
What if the answer is personnel-related?
What if the question pertains to lawsuits or lost sales?
What if it’s a question about a competitor?
What if it’s a general question about a specific private or privileged issue?
What if the question is offensive?
What if you are asked for your personal opinion?
What if the issue is ugly, and you’re not the appropriate spokesperson?
What if you don’t like what you’re saying?
What if it’s a YES or NO question?
What if it’s an “Is it possible” question?
What if it’s a “Can you guarantee” question?
What if you’re interrupted mid-answer?

I provide examples and answers to all these scenarios in my book

You can ORDER When the Headline Is YOU here <http://tinyurl.com/23gbmap>

I want to leave you with one last little GEM. It’s MUST SEE video of Phil Davison, GOP candidate going ballistic during his candidacy speech.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMgyi57s-A4>

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

I hope you found it informative and valuable.

Sincerely,
Jeff Ansell

Be well . . . and Thank You !!

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<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=147796085245411&ref=ts>

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