

# THEY SAID WHAT???

By Scott Fraser

## Why You Need Crisis Communications

For more than a year, you have been reading my column on crisis communications. Some of you have attended one of my presentations on the subject. Hopefully you have learned a few tips on what to do and what not to do when faced with a crisis. With luck you have put together a crisis communications plan for your organization or have re-examined it and made some updates.



Now, after watching the political races for President over these last few months, it appears that, at least when it comes to politics, there are no more rules. Everything I have preached for years about how to deal with a crisis and how to react when faced with a crisis has been turned upside down.

This is not a partisan commentary. At the moment, I really have no idea who I will be voting for in the fall. However, in observing the campaigns, I have been sitting back in amazement at how some of the candidates are conducting themselves, and regardless of this conduct, they still maintain, or gain support.

For instance, when faced with a crisis, it is (generally) not a good idea to lash out at anyone—your opponent, the media, or constituents of any kind. I always counsel clients to promptly take stock of the situation, admit responsibility, if necessary, outline how matters will be handled in the future, discuss remedies if any, and also outline how you will address those who may have been injured or affected by the crisis. Be prompt with

your responses and always tell the truth.

In the current Presidential race, there has been none of this. Oh, candidates have faced plenty of crises, but the reaction, for the most part, has been to lash out, deny that something was said or done (even when there is video evidence), and to blame the media or other opposing groups for twisting the facts. Blame has been placed on faulty earpieces, not understanding questions, having answers taken out of context, and on, and on, and on.

Candidates have attacked each other. They have called each other “liars”—so often in fact, that the word seems to have lost all of its impact. Candidates have attacked the heritage of some opponents. They have made fun of the looks of their opponents as well as some physical attributes. Candidates have attacked their opponents’ families which had been previously completely off limits. And at least two candidates got in to a very public dust-up criticizing each other’s wives!

And what has the reaction been when a candidate has been questioned

about his or her behavior? In many cases, the answer has been “Well he/she started it!” “He said it first.” “If he hits me, I’m going to hit him back.”

In watching the nightly news, I fully expect a candidate to come out one day and say “Nyah nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah.” My wife is a first grade teacher. On multiple occasions when watching a broadcast about the presidential race and reactions of the candidates she will observe “I have to listen to stuff like this all day in school! I certainly don’t want to hear it from presidential candidates.”

So why do these tactics seem to be working? Or at least why do they seem to NOT be hurting a candidate? That is an excellent question...for which I have no answer. In the past, when a candidate committed any one of the faults mentioned above, they would find themselves in a very deep hole from which it would be difficult to climb out. Either the candidate or their spokesperson(s) would be doing a lot of backpedaling.

This year, the actions of at least some of the candidates have been juvenile, embarrassing, underhanded (fill in any one of your choice of adjectives here) and certainly have not been flattering to a person who is striving to be the leader of the United States of America. If we were watching this go on in another country we would find it comical, the source of endless entertainment. But this is not another country, it is ours. And so far, none of this nonsense has seemed to “stick” to any particular candidate. It has certainly not inhibited the chances of any of these candidates to get elected.

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One thing I know for certain is that this presidential race will be studied for many years to come by political scientists and communications experts. The tactics used will be examined and re-examined. Will they be successful? Will they ultimately hurt one candidate more than another? Obviously that final chapter has yet to be written. Stay tuned for the end results on November 8th of this year.

So, does this mean you should change your tactics? Does this mean that if faced with a crisis you should come out swinging? Should you try to distract from the crisis by criticizing all of those around you? The answers are “no”, “no”, and “No!”

The world of festivals, events, organizations and corporations is vastly different from the world of politics. All of the “old” rules about dealing with a crisis still remain in place and should still serve as a guide should you need it. So now is *not* the time to rewrite your crisis plan and to come out and attack your detractors or enemies. Stick with the plan you have created. Follow the guidelines of the experts who helped you craft the plan.

But it is OK to sit back, observe, take in the remaining months of the 2016

election campaign, shake your head and marvel at the antics of the candidates and think to yourself “I don’t know how they can get away with saying that!” I know that’s what I will be doing.

**Scott Fraser** is a veteran communications professional with more than 30 years’ experience. As principal of Fraser Communications Group, he provides public relations, media relations and crisis communications advice for his clients who range from small non-profits, to international corporations. He has been hired to protect the reputations of companies in crisis, and gain positive public exposure for clients ranging from an emerging high tech company to established organizations in industry and healthcare. Sought after as a public speaker, Fraser also is an adjunct professor at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI, teaching courses in Crisis Communications and Public Relations. You can reach Scott at: sfraser@frasercomm.com, (401) 647-3444 and follow him @frasercomm on Twitter.