ETHICS AND DILEMMAS IN PR

Silvia Dykstra, Mariah Nelson, Thomas Reese, Achsah Henry, Kristina Vorndran, Enriqueta Balandra
PRSA CODE OF ETHICS

• Why does ethics in PR matter?
• The Public Relations reputation.
• What is the PR responsibility
• Why do we have a code of ethics?
WALMART V. NEW YORK TIMES

- Prnewsonline.com article published in June 2014
- New York Times Columnist Timothy Egan
  - “The Corporate Daddy”
- Walmart VP of Corporate Communication, David Tovar
  - Harsh Sarcastic Blog Post in return
- Columnist responded back in an interview with Business Insider.
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

If you were Walmart, how would you have handled the response to the New York Times?

Pros

• Exposure: the blog post attracted attention
• Creativity: the method of response was unique and grabbed people’s attention

Cons

• Choose Your Battles
• NOT a good idea to fight with the media.
• Professionalism: sarcasm is immature
• Belittling of another professional
• Don’t let emotion control you
TARGET CLOSES ALL 133 CANADIAN STORES

- Article on Mashable Jan. 15, 2015
- Opened in Canada in 2013; closing all stores in less than two years
- Announcement via impersonal audio clip
- 17,600 employees to lose jobs

"After a thorough review of our Canadian performance and careful consideration of the implications of all options, we were unable to find a realistic scenario that would get Target Canada to profitability until at least 2021."

-Brian Cornell, Target chairman and CEO
IN REALITY…

• Quick and quiet removal from Canada
• Employee Trust: $59 million
• Covers a minimum of 16 weeks wages and benefits

"This particular approach is unprecedented. It's never happened before." - Susan Philpott, Labor Relations Manager
“The Perfect Body” Public Relations Campaign...

1. Plays on typical stereotypes
   - 5’ 11” and less than 120 lbs. models vs. 5’4” 140+ lb. average woman 80% white

2. Makes false promises
   - If you buy from Victoria’s Secret, you will look like our models

3. Portrays women in a sensuous way
   - Provocative PR campaign targeting women and girls anywhere from ages 15 – 40+
IN REALITY

• Victoria’s Secret altered the campaign within a matter of hours after a backlash from various activist groups
• Did not apologize
• From “The Perfect Body” PR campaign to “A Body For Every Body”
TIPS FOR FOLLOWING PR CODE OF ETHICS

• Provide accurate and truthful information.
• Enhance informed decision making through open communication.
• Protect confidential and private information.
• Promote healthy and fair competition among professionals.
• Avoid conflicts of interest.
• Work to strengthen the public’s trust as a PR professional.
FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN MAKING AN ETHICAL DECISION

1. Do we have enough information as we possibly can get before taking a critical decision?
2. Are we being emotional rather than rational?
3. Have we explored other options or alternatives?
4. Have we considered the consequences on the life and well-being of others?
5. Can we, ethically, justify our decision?
FINAL THOUGHTS

“Success is final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to the courage to continue that counts.”

-Winston Churchill
Ethics. Retrieved January 18, 2015, from http://www/prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/#.VLv94zd0xMs


