

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Lindsay Griffiths



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Communication Crisis - My Two Cents on the Kenneth Cole Scandal

I've been debating whether or not I wanted to jump on the bandwagon and address yesterday's social media debacle with Kenneth Cole. If you're not familiar with what happened, both [Nancy Myrland](#) and [Gini Dietrich](#) wrote great posts that also recap it [here](#) and [here](#).

I decided that I did want to add my two cents - I was certainly dismayed by Cole's tweet yesterday, though not surprised. If you've driven down the FDR in Manhattan over the last ten years, you've seen his snarky political billboards on the side of the road. Why I think non-politicians shouldn't use their power and money to push their political philosophies on the rest of us is a whole other post, but I thought Cole really stuck his foot in his mouth yesterday.

As Nancy mentioned in her post, he needs some serious crisis communications work - we had a speaker on this very topic back in 2007, so I thought I'd dig through my conference report archives and share some of his wisdom with you. Although I'm particularly disgusted by what Cole said yesterday, social media and other gaffes can happen to the best of us, and we need to know what to do if we're in the same situation.

[Harry Rhulen](#), CEO of [Firestorm](#), started out by sharing with our delegates that having an appropriate crisis management plan in place for business continuity is something that's necessary for all organizations - no matter their size. His talk focused on disaster planning - such as took place in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings, and the devastation of hurricane Katrina - but a lot of his lessons can be applied to self-created crises as well:

- Have a plan in place BEFORE the crisis - once it gets underway, it's much more difficult to respond.



- Don't put together a plan and then leave it in a binder on a shelf, waiting for disasters to occur; train your employees and do the critical analysis that's necessary to implement the plan. Otherwise, there's no chance of success.
- Depending on the crisis, you may need to bring in an outside consultancy to analyze the situation and assist the principals in responding - often in a crisis, the people at the company who are involved are too emotional to make rational, effective business decisions.
- Craft the messages that you want the media to have, and train the employees and senior members of the company so that only these messages are delivered to the media.
- Don't fail to plan because you think there's no way to predict what can happen - Rhulen emphasized that nothing today is unforeseeable.
- Follow a "predict," "plan," and "perform" methodology: predict the vulnerabilities and the exposures, then work to plan for those and mitigate them to the greatest extent possible, and then perform them if necessary.

Nancy also alluded to another key part of a crisis communication plan for the situation that Kenneth Cole finds himself in - apologizing. Sure, Cole said he was sorry on Twitter and Facebook, and took the post down (a good start), but the apology must be immediate, it must be heartfelt, and it must be sincere. Check out [Heather Morse's post](#) about what happened between Detroit Tigers' pitcher, Armando Gallaraga and Umpire Jim Joyce to see more of what I'm talking about.

But the main thing here? Learning a lesson - and not just Kenneth Cole. We all need to learn a lesson - social media is a wonderful tool. But it's also a dangerous one. So when you're getting ready to tweet, post something on Facebook, respond to someone's comments, ask yourself a few questions a wise person once told me that I try to keep in mind:

- Does this need to be said?
- Does this need to be said by me?
- Does this need to be said right now?

And if the answer to any of these is "no" it's time to take your fingers off the keyboard. Continued prayers go out to the people of Egypt.

Lindsay Griffiths of the International Lawyers Network
 179 Kinderkamack Road
 Westwood, NJ 07675
 Phone: (201) 594-9985
 Fax: (201) 740-9765