

The First Responders

November 28, 2011

Erik Cummins, Public Relations Professional

The longer I'm in this business, the more I think that PR professionals are like [project managers](#). Just like those who direct traffic on a big software or construction project, it's our job to identify the best people to do the work and make sure they are available to do so. We arrange work schedules. We beg, plead, cajole, berate and sometimes bludgeon our workers to execute our requests and meet their deadlines. In the world of PR, all of this is usually set in a very tight timeframe, often with just hours or a day to spare, and it's typically all done amid a landscape of complex conflict checks and confidentiality. Of course, if the work isn't done by deadline, we can only go back to the drawing board and figure out how to persuade our workers to do a better job in handling our requests next time. If you've ever worked with a project manager, you know what I mean.

Another similarity with project managers is that we can't actually do the work. We can and do identify story ideas, respond to inquiries, write pitches, craft quotes for press releases, prepare statements in crisis situations and offer advice on how to work with reporters. But we can't actually do law-related interviews. Nor can we write attorney-authored columns or give legal advice or opinions.

All of this reinforces the point that our sources need to play their part in the process and respond to the deadlines that we, as project managers and PR professionals, set.

In the last several weeks, we came across several great success stories that had everything to do with responsiveness and everyone doing their part. As with anyone who regularly does PR, we also endured a number of missed opportunities.

But let's talk about the success stories instead, as everyone in PR has their own examples of frustrating missed opportunities.

In the first instance, we responded to a reporter's inquiry within about 10 minutes of the request and presented that opportunity to an attorney who specialized in that practice. The attorney wrote back right away and called the reporter. As a result, not only was she quoted in the very top of the article – above one of the firm's biggest and best-known competitors – but the reporter even sent a thank you note. "What great service! Thanks so much." My guess is that this positive interaction will lead to the reporter calling that

attorney again and again – which will raise her profile and her firm’s in California and beyond.

The second story was equally thrilling. One of our attorneys was tracking a court decision and was able to respond within moments of the conclusion of the arguments in the case. We sent his written analysis of the arguments to a number of reporters covering the courts and he was quoted several times in a variety of outlets. His speedy and knowledgeable response garnered this reply from a reporter at a national Top Tier publication, “I love the quotes in the email. It’s all about speed these days.”

Wouldn’t you like to be a project manager for those attorneys?