



## 104 What Will You Say When the Cameras Are Rolling? Media Awareness Training

**Lorne M. Honickman**  
*Litigation Partner, Goodman & Carr LLP*  
President, Media Train

**Pierre Nollet**  
*Vice-President, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary*  
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

# **Communications in Crisis Management: Role of the Legal Counsel**

Pierre Nollet

Vice-President & General Counsel

## **Hollinger**

- From a communications point of view, the Black/Hollinger case is interesting because of the lessons we can learn as far as media relations management and public relations in times of crisis are concerned.

## **Reputation**

- In the space of mere months, Conrad Black went from one communications/PR extreme to the other. He shifted from a candid, self-defensive approach to a much more reserved attitude. The question now is, What impact will this shift have on the reputation of Hollinger?

## **Role of the media:**

- Key to the process whereby the public forms opinions about events and major issues, not to mention about your company.

## **The Initial Interaction**

- Most of the time, unfortunately, organizations only start to pay attention to such crisis situations after the events that trigger them have happened.

## **The Issues and the Parties**

- While there are no magic formulas, a well-managed business can and should adopt recognized, exemplary practices for managing crises..

## **React Quickly, with Accountability**

- Handling issues transparently and in compliance with the law lowers the odds that a crisis will result. The corollary to this maxim is that poorly handled issues will often lead to the emergence of a crisis situation.



## **Planning & Coordination**

- To be in a position to safeguard its assets, its brand image and its reputation, a company must possess the ability to intervene in a crisis situation.

## **Build Scenarios**

- Build hypothetical scenarios into your crisis management plan. Locate outside specialists who can work with you and your employees to ensure the situation does not get beyond your control.

## **Have a Comment to Make...**

- If you don't tell your own story, somebody else will do it for you. This is one of the key principles of managing relations with the media.

## **...but Be Sure You Can**

- Your industry segment may be governed by highly specific legislation that dictates what information your company is authorized to disclose publicly.

## **Perception = Reality**

- Get the facts.
- Set the objectives.
- Define the attitude.

## **Keep the Door Open**

- If you have no comment to make or do not have an adequate grasp of the facts, simply state that your company is still studying the situation and making all efforts to gather information.

## **Managing the Crisis**

- Respond to all requests.
- Monitor coverage.
- Analyze.
- Make corrections immediately.

## **Tips**

- Know what you are going to say before going in.
- If you don't have an answer: Never try to place blame on another party.



## **More Tips**

- Respond only to the question asked.
- Never speak on behalf of a third party.
- There is no such thing as “off the record.”

## **Legitimate Answers**

- 1) “Yes, I know the answer, and here it is.”
- 2) “No, I don’t know the answer, but I’ll try to find out.”
- 3) “Yes, I do I know the answer, but I can’t tell you.”.

## **Conclusion**

- To err has serious consequences.
- A well-managed crisis is much more acceptable than a poorly managed one.
- The strength (or weakness) of your knowledge and how you prepare for crisis management can make the difference.