

5 Critical P.R. Moves Tiger Needs to Make Now

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An Open Letter to Tiger Woods

Dear Eldrick:

First, sorry to hear about the second most famous “crash” last week. (I’m sure in retrospect, you wish you were with those other “crashers” at the White House, rather than being eased out of your Escalade at 2 in the morning.)

Second, I know you and the lovely Elin have been ducking the local fuzz in terms of elaborating on what happened and you tried to extinguish the fire with yesterday’s half-baked statement but...

Third, as much as you don’t want to hear it, your only choice now is to take the “penalty stroke” and fess up about what happened -- maybe not “*all*” of it, but at least, “*much*” of it.

Frankly, the statement you released yesterday expressing that “***This is a private matter, and I want to keep it that way,***” is a non-starter. Alas, there is nothing “*private*” about what you do. That’s the price you pay for who you are.

As any even casual viewer of cable news knows by now, when a celebrity hits the wall (in your case, literally!), there is no alternative but to get the bad news out.

Michael Phelps, Kobe Bryant and Michael Vick did, and they lived to score another day. Martha Stewart and Mel Gibson didn’t, and they never fully recovered. And it took Michael Richards three years and a Larry David “Seinfeld” comeback to begin to clear his name. And as to the late lamented Latin lothario Governor Mark Sanford from South Carolina, don’t even ask.

So, my friend, as much as you value your privacy and as distasteful as the reality of this awfulness is you really have no choice.

With apologies, here is the crisis management mantra to which you must abide:

#1. Go Public

You can’t not. Those TV trucks outside your gates, and the Cro-Magnon creeps attempting to scale the wall around your community ain’t goin’ nowhere till you come out. I know you’re used to being hounded by paparazzi, but this is another dimension. You’ve got a “secret” they want. And they get paid only if they pry that secret loose. So forget about maintaining an “allow us our privacy” stoicism. Nothing in the world of global icons is “private” -- especially when there is the whiff of sex in the air. You’ve got to go public.

#2. Do It Yourself

When companies get in trouble, crisis managers typically advise CEOs to let spokespeople handle the explanation as long as possible. Once the crisis is escalated to the CEO level, you can’t throttle it back to

a lesser light. On the other hand, some corporate crises -- deaths, kidnappings, massive layoffs, etc. -- must be handled by the top man or woman, right out of the box.

This case is of the latter variety. You can't finesse this one through a spokesman. Only one person can suitably explain what happened and why; You.

#3. Do it Tuesday

The longer you let this linger, the greater the fervor among the reportorial bottom-feeders to bring you down. And trust me, they will.

You have a previously booked press conference scheduled Tuesday at the tournament you're hosting in Thousand Oaks, CA. Use that opportunity to tell the tale and clear the air.

If you refuse to talk about the incident or, horror of horrors, cancel the press conference, you will learn first-hand the truth of the journalistic adage, "Hell hath no fury like a tabloid reporter scorned."

#4. Get It Out

This, of course, is the tricky part.

The fact is that not only do most sports fans by this time know all about the party-planning hottie with whom you've been linked, they likely spent the entire weekend downloading her surf and sun photos! So what to say?

The answer, of course, depends entirely on what you've done, who else is aware of it, and who had a cell-phone camera handy to catch you "playing the course," so to speak.

Mel Gibson and Michael Richards had beaucoup witnesses to their meltdowns. Michael Phelps was captured in full bong-inhaling mode by a cell phone camera. And Mark Sanford's billing and coo-caracha-ing was memorialized in e-mails.

So if somebody is likely to have the goods on you, it's better to divulge it all on your own terms rather than letting others capitalize and sensationalize. That's how Kobe Bryant controlled his brush with oblivion. And he triumphed.

On the other hand, if the affair allegation is exaggerated -- and there is little more to seep out -- then a more limited explanation might serve to defang the scandal dogs, i.e. "My wife and I are going through a rough patch in our marriage, and we are trying to work it out."

Ultimately, what you say depends on what you did.

The point you must recognize is that at your level, now that the cat is out of the golf bag, you can't hide.

#5. Learn From Your Mistake

Finally, if you handle this unfortunate incident expeditiously, it may not have "legs" (as opposed to your party planning friend!).

Count your blessings and learn from it.

You know now that even the great Tiger Woods is vulnerable if he slips up. So use this as a wake-up call and don't repeat the offense.

You might even think about running with a bit more responsible crowd.

Like, for example, Derek Jeter.