

January / February / March 2004

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA Chairman

RE: Seeking Forgiveness Precedes Rebuilding Trust

In the current business environment, to be trusted means not being feared. What's happening throughout corporate America, and in other sectors as well, is that a significant loss of trust has occurred. When this occurs, trust is replaced by fear. To rebuild credibility and move toward a state of renewed trust requires a powerful response pattern of behaviors that, taken together, provide the opportunity for public forgiveness, which then establishes a platform for restoring trust.

The restoration process involves completing the eight steps below. To achieve trust restoration in the shortest possible time, these steps must be completed in the order presented, as quickly as possible. One could call this "Lukaszewski's Law of Trust Restoration." But in truth, it is society's requirement for relationship restoration.

- Step #1 *Candor*:** Outward recognition, through promptly verbalized public acknowledgement (or outright apology), that a problem exists; that people or groups of people, the environment, or the public trust are affected; and that something will be done to remediate the situation.
- Step #2 *Explanation*:** (No matter how silly, stupid, or embarrassing the problem-causing error was): Promptly and briefly explain why the problem occurred and the known underlying reasons or behaviors that led to the situation (even if we have only partial early information).
- Step #3 *Affirmation*:** Talk about what you've learned from the situation and how it will influence your future behavior. Unconditionally commit to regularly report additional information until it is all out or until no public interest remains.
- Step #4 *Declaration*:** A public commitment and discussion of specific, positive steps to be taken to conclusively address the issues and resolve the situation.
- Step #5 *Contrition*:** The continuing verbalization of regret, empathy, sympathy, even embarrassment. Take appropriate responsibility for having allowed the situation to occur in the first place, whether by omission, commission, accident, or negligence.
- Step #6 *Consultation*:** Promptly ask for help and counsel from "victims," government, and from the community of origin ? even from your opponents. Directly involve and request the participation of those most directly affected to help develop more permanent solutions, more acceptable behaviors, and to design principles and approaches which will preclude similar problems from re-occurring.

Step #7 *Commitment*: Publicly set your goals at zero. Zero errors, zero defects, zero dumb decisions, and zero problems. Publicly promise that to the best of your ability situations like this will never occur again.

Step #8 *Restitution*: Find a way to quickly pay the price. Make or require restitution. Go beyond community and victim expectations, and what would be required under normal circumstances to remediate the problem.

Adverse situations remediated quickly cost a lot less, are controversial for much shorter periods of time, suffer less litigation, and help the victims come to closure more quickly.

Visit the author's Web site at www.e911.com for additional information on this topic.

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