

September / October / November 2008

FILE: Community Relations & Grass Roots Campaigns

TO: Executive Addressed

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

RE: Lukaszewski's Contention Survival Manifesto:
Keeping Yourself and the Things That Matter Under Control

This manifesto is a personal and often publicly declared set of principles, policies, or intentions for addressing contentious public circumstances and situations, and behaving with integrity, honesty, and even good humor. If your mother could teach you the rules for winning in the irritating, aggravating, agitating environment of being under attack in the news media— personally, politically, or professionally, these are the 27 techniques and practices she (or most moms) would share. You can succeed even in the face of contentious people, angry neighbors, negative media coverage, and irritated public officials.

1. **Speak only for yourself.** Say less, write less, but make these communications truly important.
2. **Answer every question.** Aim for 75-150 word responses; this is 30-60 seconds reading or speaking time. Honorable organizations, people, programs, and initiatives can answer any question.
3. **Always let others speak for themselves.** When you try to speak for others, you will always be wrong, and attacked or humiliated for being wrong.
4. **Avoid claiming that you agree with your opponents** on anything, unless they say so first. Once opponents say it, you may quote them saying it, but always say what you believe to be true and back that up.
5. **Avoid saying that you work closely with public agencies,** other organizations, or even individuals related to your situation (even if you believe you do), unless they say so first and you then quote them. Otherwise, they can deny it (especially if controversy arises) or point out, as some may quite quickly, that whatever links exist are rather weak. They will then describe those weaknesses or deny that you have any real influence.

Those who can and may support you in the future (public or private) must have their status preserved for the long run. Drawing them into your discussion could needlessly make them targets of attack. They will have to abandon or, perhaps, denounce or distance themselves from you.

6. **Assume that everyone in the discussion has more credibility than you do.** Your job is to validate your credibility, every time, rather than to discredit others.
7. **Be relentlessly positive** (avoid all negative words) and constructive (avoid criticizing and criticism). Both provide the fuel opponents thrive on.

8. **Focus on the truly important 5%;** forget the rest. Respond to and develop what truly matters.
9. **Let attackers discredit themselves.** Their emotional words and negative, destructive language equals less truth and trustworthiness. Avoid “friends” who suggest this approach. It will always backfire.
10. **Practice laggship.** Speak second but always have the last word.
11. **Remain calm.** Critics, agitators, and bullies are energized by anger, emotionalism, whininess, and negative counter attacks.
12. **Silence is always toxic to the accused.** After a while, even your friends will sacrifice or question you.
13. **Apologies are always in order,** provided they contain all of the crucial ingredients of an effective apology. The most constructive structures for apology are in *The Five Languages of Apology*, a book by Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas (*The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships*, Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas; Northfield Publishing, September 1, 2006; ISBN 1881273571.). Here, with some paraphrasing and modification based on my experiences, are the ingredients of the perfect apology.
 - **Regret (acknowledgment):** A verbal acknowledgement by the perpetrator that their wrongful behavior caused unnecessary pain, suffering, and hurt that identifies, specifically, what action or behavior is responsible for the pain.
 - **Accepting Responsibility (declaration):** An unconditional declarative statement by the perpetrator recognizing their wrongful behavior and acknowledging that there is no excuse for the behavior.
 - **Restitution (penance):** An offer of help or assistance to victims, by the perpetrator; action beyond the words “I’m sorry”; and conduct that assumes the responsibility to make the situation right.
 - **Repentance (humility):** Language by the perpetrator acknowledging that this behavior caused pain and suffering for which he/she is genuinely sorry; language by the perpetrator recognizing that serious, unnecessary harm and emotional damage was caused.
 - **Direct Forgiveness Request :** “I was wrong, I hurt you, and I ask you to forgive me.”

The most difficult and challenging aspects of apologizing are the admission of having done something hurtful, damaging, or wrong, and to request forgiveness. Skip even one step and you fail.
14. **Have courage, and refuse to be distracted** by negativity, friendly pressure, or the agendas of others. You are in the spotlight. They are in the shadows. Be especially wary of those who feel that responding empowers others, or that you might look like a sissy for having done it. Either of these outcomes is better than being considered boorish, bullyish, arrogant, or callous.
15. **Discourage others from explaining your situation.** They will get it wrong. You will be blamed, and they will be attacked. They will then have to abandon you altogether, keep some distance, or attack you to preserve their own credibility.
16. **Everything that goes around comes back around.** Avoid verbal vegetables, the words phrases, arguments, assertions, and statements you write or say that you know you will have to eat some time in the future.
17. **Remember the math of truth:** Truth is 15% facts and data and 85% emotion and perception; 65% of truth is point of reference (my backyard or neighborhood). Facts do matter, but addressing the emotional component of issues and questions immediately, continuously, and constructively is essential for success.
18. **Be strategic.** Say, act, plan, and write with future impact in mind.

19. **Prepare to work alone** and to be abandoned by just about everyone.
20. **Stay at altitude**, keep a distance, avoid taking events or actions personally, and be reasoned, appropriate, and direct. Positive and constructive responses tend to disempower those making the attacks.
21. **Keep the testosterone under control**. Every bit of negative energy you throw in their direction will multiply by a factor of five to 10, and they will throw it right back at you.
22. **Be preemptive**. Work in real time. Do it now, fix it now, ask it now, correct it now, challenge it now, and answer it now.
23. **Write and speak, simply, sensibly, positively empathetically and constructively**.
24. **Avoid trying to discredit anyone, any argument, any evidence, or any movement**. Such actions stimulate the creation of critics and adversaries; who accumulate, hang around, live forever, and search relentlessly to exploit your weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and susceptibilities. Prove your position with positive, declarative language.
25. **Get accustomed to accommodating the long term, relentlessly negative nature of contentious situations**.
26. **Correct and clarify what matters promptly**, but do it all on your own Web site. Avoid joining blogs or conversations outside your site. The latter strategy will suck all of your energy into responding to the agendas of others who are having fun and sleeping well, while you are doing neither.
27. **It is your destiny**. Fail to manage it, and someone else is waiting in the wings to do it for you.

If you'd like more information or equally interesting views, ideas, and concepts, contact the author's Web site at www.e911.com.