

2016 Public Relations Blunders and Wins



*By D. Nikki Wheeler, Senior Director,
Media Relations, Level 3 Communications*

Oh, 2016 you gave us much from which we can learn. While the list of public relations fails is long, the crown has to go to Unite for America and it's Anti-Trump PSA series.

What makes this campaign a fail? A couple of things:

1. Multimillionaire movie stars pandering to the public on issues outside of their scope. Playing a president on TV doesn't make you a sound provider of counsel.
2. Calling into question the intelligence of the American people to the point where each actor takes the time to explain key points to members of the electoral college. Nothing can upset an audience more or turn them off to a message faster than making them feel like you think they're stupid.
3. Attempting to shame electoral college voters by suggesting they soul search and vote their consciences as representatives of the people of the United States.

At a little over three minutes, these PSAs, are creating the opposite effect of what this powerful group of voices is trying to accomplish and alienating people in the process. The latest video is trending at a rate of 90 percent dislike.

On the opposite side, there was much to celebrate in the doing

it right category. The one that stands out for me, the National Football League. That's right the often maligned NFL; I think had a good year. The NFL stayed on message through deflate-gate, player misconduct and communicated with consistency about its initiatives to prevent traumatic brain injuries.

Not too long ago, commissioner Roger Goodell announced the NFL's plans to invest in traumatic brain injury research. While met with criticism, Goodell stayed on message saying, "I think it'll change the game immediately," and "We have invested significantly in the past to further research, but we've also not waited on research. We've made rule changes. We've made changes in our equipment. We've done things to improve the way the game is played."

What makes this an example of doing it right, sticking to the fundamentals:

1. Stay on message even after it's old to you. Many of us are challenged with this when working with clients. They get bored and want to infuse a different storyline. As annoying as it may be we all know, if you're bored, there's a good chance the public is just starting to get it.
2. Following up words with action. While the traumatic brain injury issue has come to light, so have efforts undertaken by the NFL to increase player safety, from the holding statement to changing how the game is played, the organization is demonstrating its commitment to the issue.
3. Spokesperson engagement throughout has been essential. Commissioner Goodell, love him or hate him, has been a constant, calm, credible carrier of the message. When he speaks, he's believable. People may not like what he's saying, but his integrity seems beyond reproach.

There you have it, the bad and good of 2016. Here's to 2017

and many more wonderful news cycles.

About the Author: D. Nikki Wheeler, Senior Director, Media Relations, Level 3 Communications is a dynamic integrated marketing communications professional with a passion for travel, a penchant for adventure and a never-ending sense of wonder.