

**The National Press Club
presents “Candid
Conversations: Addressing
Racism as Communicators”**

Free On-Demand Video

THE NATIONAL

PRESS CLUB

The National Press Club’s Communicator Team held a Candid Conversation via Zoom on Aug. 4 on how communications professionals are helping organizations navigate conversations about race and racism.

Three experienced practitioners shared best practices as well as personal experiences. While this event was for National Press Club members, we felt the topic and the conversation was too important not to share out beyond the immediate audience.

Please listen in – here’s a link to the event: <https://www.youtube.->

[com/watch?v=gt-RsPa_Leg&feature=youtu.be](http://www.press.org)

ALSO: We encourage everyone to check out the National Press Club at <http://www.press.org> for breaking news events that are open to the public.

Panelists:

- **Crystal Borde**, Vice President and Diversity & Inclusion Practice Lead at Vanguard Communications who applies a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to her PR counsel for nonprofit and government agencies;
- **Priscilla Clarke**, President & CEO of Clarke & Associates, who has worked with clients for the 50th Anniversary of The March on Washington and the spiritual advisor to Trayvon Martin's family; and
- **Sean Greenwood**, Grand Poobah of Public Relations at Ben & Jerry's, who has seen the triumphs and tribulations of leading with your values during his three decades with the company.
- **Lisa Matthews**, Club vice president and assignment manager, U.S. video at The Associated Press, served as moderator.

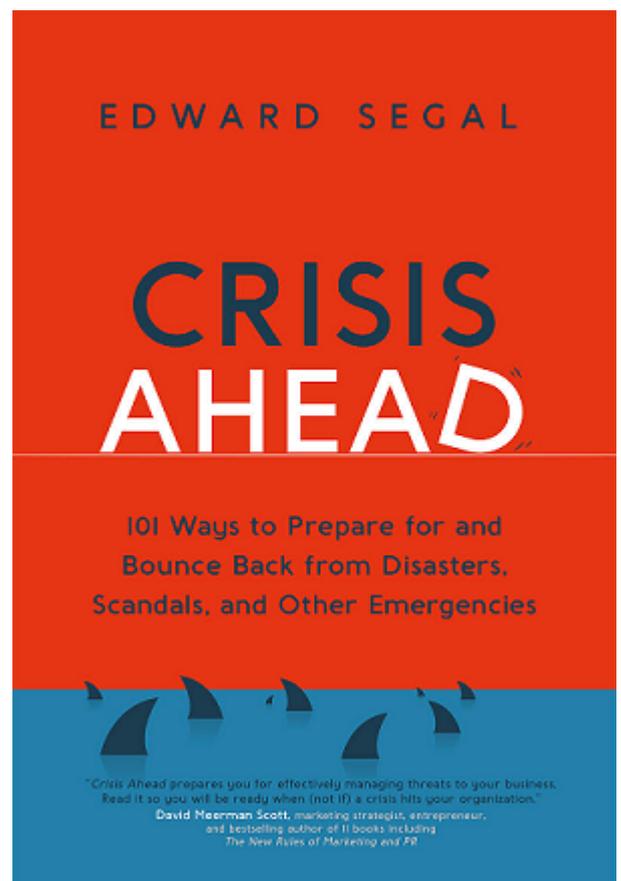
A special note of thanks to NPC Communicator Team Members Karen Addis, Maria Rodriguez and Edward Segal for making this session a reality and to Zeev Wexler who also helped with the video!

Right and Wrong Ways to Recover from the Coronavirus Crisis

Edward Segal, Crisis Management Expert

The decision by some states to begin reopening their economies appears to be based more on hope than science – and could lead to the further spread of COVID-19. Adding to the pressure to return to normal, some workers have staged protests, insisting their governments restart their economies or rescind social distancing mandates. That's like hospital patients demanding to go home after a major operation before doctors say it is prudent and safe for them to be released.

Decisions by state governments on when and how the recovery will begin – and how it will be managed – provide important early lessons on the best or worst ways for corporations and organizations to bounce back from this or any crisis.



Know the full scope of the crisis. With only one percent of the US population tested for COVID-19, it is simply impossible

for anyone to know how many people have been exposed to the virus, are infected, or where they are located. Facing continued shortages of tests and personnel to administer and process them, there is no telling when scientists will be able to have a true and accurate picture of the nature of the disease.

Confirm the crisis is over. The number of confirmed cases of the coronavirus continue to rise – as do the deaths associated with the disease. According to health officials, it could be a year or more until an effective vaccine is available.

Ensure the crisis does not return. Given what we don't know about the disease or when, how or if it will reoccur makes it difficult to reopen the economy with any level of confidence. Hoping a crisis will not repeat itself is never a good or effective strategy.

Follow the advice of the right experts. Business executives and political leaders may be experts in many things, but they are not scientists or hold medical degrees. It's always best to solicit and follow the advice of the people who know what they are talking about.

Set the right tone and direction. Those at the top of any organization chart should go the extra distance to ensure that everything they say and do helps resolve the crisis as soon as possible. They should not make matters worse or prolong the crisis.

Be careful in making forecasts or projections. Although forecasting the future is an important part of running a business or organization, any projections about the future of the pandemic should be tempered with the fact that the health and lives of people may be at stake.

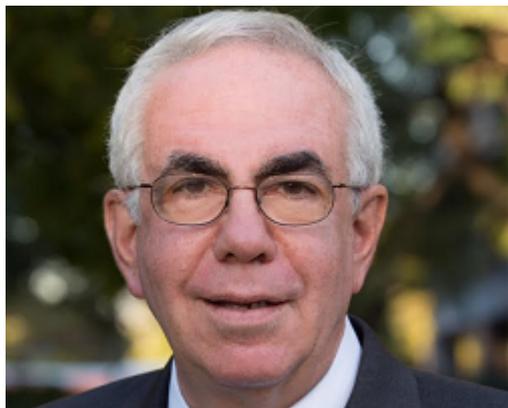
Have the right priorities. The driving force to reopen state economies is the desire to re-open businesses and put people back to work. As important as that is, it is even more

important that it is absolutely safe do so. Although COVID-19 led to a massive economic crisis it was caused by a disease and should be managed as such. Administering the wrong treatment to a patient or giving them the wrong medicine will not make the patient better – it could only make matters worse.

Learn from the experiences of others. Officials in San Francisco, New York, and Washington DC have been more aggressive in their handling of the crisis. In addition to requiring people to stay home, New York now requires anyone who must go outside for groceries, etc. to wear a mask, and Washington DC has extended their stay at home mandate.

Don't engage in magical thinking. Just as there is a cause for every crisis, there are logical reasons why and how it will come to an end or it may come back. The reality is that no crisis ever goes away on its own, and bouncing back successfully requires an efficient, effective, and strategic plan.

The bottom line is this: In any crisis, it is important to get back to normal as soon as it is appropriate to do so. In this national public health emergency, people must truly believe it is safe again to leave their homes before they will be confident about going back to work or to their favorite restaurants and stores – no matter how many “we’re open for business” signs they might see.



About the Author: Edward Segal is a crisis management expert, consultant, and author. His new book on crisis management – *Crisis Ahead: 101 Ways to Prepare for and Bounce Back from Disasters, Scandals and Other Emergencies* ((Nicholas Brealey) will be released as an ebook April 21 and as a paperback on June 16. They can

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How the Coronavirus is Infecting the Trillion Dollar Meeting Industry

Edward Segal, Crisis Management Expert

The coronavirus crisis is unfolding before our eyes as the media continuously reports the latest news and developments about the disease. Also unfolding is how the disease is infecting the economy and various industries, including the trillion-dollar global exhibitions and events sectors.

Last Friday afternoon, just days before it was scheduled to open, the mayor of Austin, Texas announced the city's world-famous SXSW – the Southwest festival of music, film, and technology – was cancelled because of the virus. “We are

devastated to share this news with you,” SXSW organizers wrote in a statement. “‘The show must go on’ is in our DNA, and this is the first time in 34 years that the March event will not take place.”

The surprise decision will create important regional ripple effects. In 2019 the event pumped more than \$350 million into the local economy, and attracted more than 200,000 people from 106 countries, with 55,000 of them reserving hotel rooms.

The sudden cancellation – which was reported by CBS, NBC, and other major news organizations – was not the first event to be scrapped because of the COVID-19 virus, and it is not likely to be the last. The loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in Austin will be drops in an international bucket of lost revenue, red ink, and budget shortfalls. The bucket will only get deeper with each new announcement about another cancelled event.

“This disease is presenting the exhibitions and events industry with an unprecedented global challenge,” Cathy Breden, executive vice-president of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events, told the *Financial Times*.

Cautious, Realistic, and Optimistic

The mood and tone of the industry appeared to shift with the progression of the disease around the world.

Last month, just as the coronavirus crisis was unfolding, the Center for Exhibition Industry Research cautioned that, “It is too early to give a precise estimate on the impact of coronavirus...” They noted that Federal Reserve Chairman Powell indicated that “the situation is really in its early stages, and it’s very uncertain about how far it will spread and what the macroeconomic effects will be in China and its immediate trading partners and neighbors and around the world.”

On March 5, the Events Industry Council took a more defiant tone, saying in a news release that, “We are adaptive. Events will continue despite COVID-19. The majority of events around the world are still happening, despite what the media reports. Some will be – or have already been – cancelled or postponed. Most of them will come back just as they did after other major world events.”

But this may be easier said than done, given the level of fear – bordering on panic – that is spreading faster than the disease and how effectively the public’s anxiety about catching the virus can be addressed – or how serious the crisis becomes.

Perhaps that’s why the council advised their members to “...make informed decisions about our meetings based on sound information and guidance provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As always, health, safety and security are the top priorities.”

Rather than preemptively canceling their meetings outright, the American Society of Association Executives posted this announcement on its website: “Absent federal travel restrictions and/or local, state, or regional decisions to close venues, ASAE has not canceled any of its meetings. At these events, we commit to maintaining all appropriate sanitary, health, and safety measures and encourage attendees to follow guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization. If there are any changes to event schedules, we will provide information to registrants about virtual options that may be available and/or other specific details.”

What’s Old May be New Again

If necessity is the mother of invention, then every passing day of this virus crisis is forcing a growing number of

companies and organizations to invent – or re-discover – alternative ways for people to “attend” and participate in meetings and conventions.

Live-streaming of events, for example, is nothing new. This older technology could become even more widely used as the coronavirus crisis drags on. Virtual meetings may become the new virtual reality, spawning a growth industry among companies who can quickly scale up their ability to meet what may become an insatiable demand.

Corporations who now spend large sums of money to stage, sponsor or exhibit at meetings and conventions may have to reallocate those funds to different line items in their annual budgets. Trade shows and other events that rely on sponsorship dollars and the spending by attendees may be forced to find new and creative ways to make up for lost income.

For those who continue to hold in-person events, when and how they interact with attendees will change, according to trade show and branding expert Francis J. Friedman of Time & Place Strategies, Inc.

In the short term, he advises exhibitors to “pay attention to the fact that people are scared” because of the virus and to set up their booths “as a health center, as well as an information exchange center.” That could include converting into video formats more of what companies want to talk about “so that people can quickly understand what your value is and why they should possibly communicate with you. [Promote] your web address and that you are available to interact with anybody who wants to interact with you by smartphone or email.”

Although the multi-billion events industry will not disappear overnight because of this public health emergency, Friedman said it will continue to evolve. He predicts the meetings industry will realize that it is in the information industry

and will offer more ways to present the intellectual propriety of exhibitors to attendees.

Reality Check

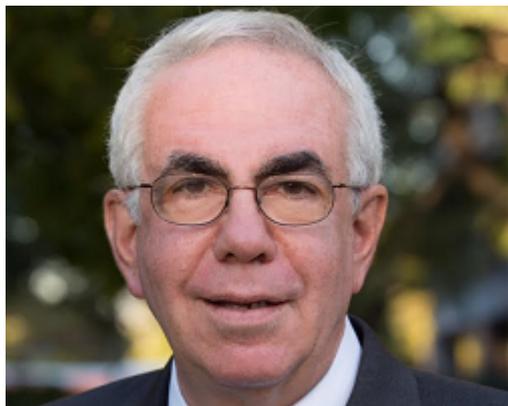
Convention and exhibition expert Sam Lippman, president of Lippman Connects, put the current crisis in perspective. “The number of events being cancelled is minuscule compared to the thousands of events – large and small – that are occurring throughout the United States.

“Now, more than ever, we must continue to meet face-to-face and celebrate our humanity; spread information and conduct business. Since gathering at the intersection of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers thousands of years ago, humans have gathered to trade; network and celebrate, and we will continue to do so now and in the future,” he predicted.

When it comes to addressing and resolving the still developing coronavirus crisis, it’s best not to hold your breath – literally or figuratively. According to health experts, it could be a year or more until an effective vaccine is available. And the reality is that there may be no guarantee that once the disease fades away, that it will not come back year, after year, after year, bigger and more lethal. Just like the flu.

Unlike most crisis situations, this developing disaster for the meetings and events industries may not be easily or quickly managed, addressed, or resolved. Much like the coronavirus itself.

As a doctor might tell a patient about an uncertain prognosis, “We will just have to wait and see.”



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Panic about the Coronavirus: Steps Companies Need to Take to Address Investor Fallout

Edward Segal, Crisis Management Expert

Panic about the COVID-19 coronavirus among investors is spreading faster than the disease itself. Businesses and organizations that have been affected by the virus – or soon will be – should heed the words of former British prime minister Winston Churchill: “When you are going through hell, keep going.”

I dealt with a series of crises as the CEO of two trade associations and, as a public relations consultant, have counseled scores of clients about what to do and how when a

crisis strikes. Here's my advice about the steps publicly-traded companies impacted by the crisis should take as the virus and the panic continues to spread.

First, don't add to the panic of your investors. Everything you say and do should help provide as much confidence and accurate information as you can.

Get the facts. Follow the latest news and developments about the virus. Keep a close eye on how COVID-19 is affecting any and all aspects of your business, including sales, inventory, customers, and employees.

Communicate. Tell investors, analysts, and influencers in your industry exactly how the virus is affecting your company and what you are doing or will be doing. You should be the reliable source of credible information about how the disease is impacting your business. Don't minimize or sugar-coat the bad news. Remember that stockholders and others can get their information about your company – or the wrong information – from a variety of sources. And always tell the truth – no matter how much it may hurt. Otherwise your credibility, and the trust investors have placed in your company – will suffer.

Be transparent. Post information, updates and key messages about the affect of the virus and your company and steps to address it on your website and social media platforms. Prepare, post, update, and share with investors, employees, and the media a list of frequently asked questions about the virus and how it is affecting your company. If appropriate, establish a 24/7 hotline as another way to help answer questions or concerns from worried stockholders or other investors.

If you have a crisis management plan, follow it, and test and update it on a regular basis to address the current situation. If you don't have a plan, get one now. Letting people know that you have a plan for dealing with this or any other crisis

can help provide a level of confidence that you know what you are doing and are doing it in a logical, comprehensive, and coordinated fashion. Put yourself in the shoes of your investors: if you were them, what would you want to know about how you are dealing with the impact of the coronavirus?

Get the help you need. This is not the time to wing it. If there is any aspect of your crisis management plan for which you need help in implementing, don't hesitate to bring in the expertise you need to get the job done, and get it done right.

Stay ahead of the curve. As the crisis continues, work up your own confidential and worst-case projections about how the virus may impact your company, and plan your next steps accordingly – including how you will bounce back after the crisis is over.

But don't assume the coronavirus crisis will end soon. You and your investors may be in for a long and bumpy ride.



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Selling Social Issues



Dr. David Hagenbuch, Ethicist and Professor of Marketing, Messiah University, Author of Honorable Influence, Founder of MindfulMarketing.org

Besides being a tasty treat that almost everyone enjoys, ice cream is a 'celebration food' served at birthday parties and used to reward kids' sports team success. So, why did Walmart's new frozen dairy flavor created to celebrate Black Americans' emancipation leave a bad taste in so many people's

mouths? Moreover, what can the failure teach organizations about commercializing social issues?

In its ongoing search for profitable new products, the world's largest retailer recently cooked up a novel plan—tap into Black Americans' and others' celebrations of Juneteenth, the federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States.

Walmart's strategy to support the celebration involved a line of party products, including napkins, plates, and drink koozies branded "Juneteenth" using the black, red, and green colors often associated with Black liberation, and carrying the tagline, "It's the freedom for me."

Walmart also created a special food worthy of the branded partyware—Juneteenth Ice Cream, a frozen concoction resembling swirled red velvet cheesecake. However, it wasn't long after the company launched its Juneteenth line that social media began to skewer it, as shown in these sample tweets:

"Walmart needs to do better. It shows the lack of understanding of the pain and suffering that made Juneteenth come about. It is absolutely insulting to have this special holiday turned into some commercial product." (@The Next Ceiling)

"This isn't "wokeness", it's corporations trying to profit off of minorities by acting like they care about us." (@DeadpoolLIFE69)

"So let me get this straight □, y'all made more money keeping us enslaved after the Emancipation Proclamation, and NOW that it's a recognized Federal Holiday y'all want to make MORE money off the same culture you enslaved??" (@MoodaSchmooda)

"White America: Mmmm...best thing we can do is some Walmart

Juneteenth ice cream that we'll profit off of." (@RedeemRobinson)

In the face of the backlash, Walmart made a quick pivot and pulled its Juneteenth-themed ice cream. It also apologized:

"We received feedback that a few items caused concern for some of our customers and we sincerely apologize. We are reviewing our assortment and will remove items as appropriate."

Companies are increasingly 'hitching their wagons' to social causes—an alignment that many people prefer including 83% of millennials. Consequently, the approach often proves profitable. Furthermore, during recent years filled with race-related violence, many consumers expect companies to show their support for racial justice.

So, wasn't Walmart right to support Black Americans by launching a line of Juneteenth products?

Although the Twitter feedback above is enlightening, social media responses often prioritize 'quick and pithy' over 'thoughtful and measured.' For that reason and to help me better understand how Black Americans might perceive Walmart's tactics, I reached out to a colleague at my university who's well-qualified to offer an informed perspective.

Dr. Todd Allen is Vice President for Diversity Affairs and Professor of Communication at Messiah University. He's also the founder of The Common Ground Project, "a community-based non-profit dedicated to teaching the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States."

When I asked Allen about Walmart's Juneteenth product line, he shared these insights:

"I think the timing (a new holiday) and some people still feeling burned by the promises of 2020 (which haven't necessarily resulted in the hoped-for transformative change) just made this too soon. The fact that they pulled [the ice cream] so quickly also makes me wonder who was in on the decision making in the first place. It seems like if the TV show Blackish were still on the air, this would be an episode."

Allen also offered one word that captured much of what he shared, "context." For instance, he mentioned that Walmart is not known for being progressive on racial issues. He also said that the company's approach "felt just a bit too commercial and too opportunistic."

So, what if the *context* were different? **For another company with a more positive race-related track record, offering different products with better messaging, public perceptions may have been more positive.**

Allen's response and the idea of *context* got me thinking: Beyond just Walmart and Juneteenth, are there principles that all organizations should follow when connecting with social causes? There undoubtedly are many, but here are perhaps three of the most important questions to ask:

1. What's the company's track record on the issue? Whether it's an individual or an organization, we're more likely to trust the motives of someone who has already demonstrated genuine concern about the social issue at hand. In the case of Walmart and race, results have been mixed.

On one hand, in June 2020, the company pledged \$100 million over five years to address racial disparities in the U.S. However, in January of 2022 a black correction officer sued Walmart for racial profiling when he was wrongfully accused of shoplifting, then in February, the U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission (EEOC) sued Walmart because “Walmart violated federal law when it gave a Black female employee an unsanitary lactation space based upon her race.”

In contrast, Fundraising for a Cause, the world’s largest manufacturer of awareness products, enjoys strong credibility when it comes to earning income through social causes, partly because it’s owner and CEO, Karen Conroy, founded the company after her sister was diagnosed with breast cancer and also because her company passes significant profits onto her customers, e.g., they can buy 50 silicone bracelets for \$40, sell them for \$5 each, and net \$210 for their cause.

2. *What’s the nature of the product?* There’s a place and time for most products; the key is to ensure that the product personality aligns with sentiments surrounding the social issue.

Juneteenth is certainly a cause for celebration but that’s because it marks the end to several centuries of enslavement. As such, the holiday understandably evokes mixed emotions that aren’t necessarily in keeping with an all-out party atmosphere, or at least not one worthy of a namesake flavor of ice cream. Would it be right to have a dairy treat marking the end of the Holocaust?

For comparison, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a nonprofit organization that works in over 50 countries around the world to provide disaster relief, foster economic development, and promote peace. Among its biggest fundraisers are quilt auctions, which raise hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Quilts are items of beauty and comfort that complement MCC’s three-fold mission.

3. *Is the company adding value?* Whether it’s a single salesperson or an entire organization, the measuring stick for any marketer is the value they add in an exchange. No company

should extract more value than it gives.

It's hard to know how much money Walmart would have made on the Juneteenth ice cream and other products. Knowing Walmart's typical pricing approach, the profit margins on the items were likely low; however, selling them across more than 5,300 U.S. retail stores, even modest margins would have added up quickly.

Walmart also likely hoped to pocket goodwill from the products; however, the biggest grab by Walmart was its attempt to trademark (TM) Juneteenth, as if it had created the name, so that only it could sell Juneteenth branded products.

On a positive side, Walmart consumers could purchase the branded products at reasonable prices. However, it's unlikely that Juneteenth-imprinted paper products and ice cream would deepen anyone's understanding of and appreciation for the momentous historic event. If anything, Walmart's products may have trivialized it.

Other companies have made money, in some cases very large amounts, from marketing race-related products; however, many times they've added extra value through education.

A good example of such value-added is the feature film *Selma*, "a chronicle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965." An Academy Award nominee for best picture, the movie grossed over \$66.7 million worldwide on an estimated budget of \$20 million.

Selma was very profitable for Harpo Films and the other production companies that made the movie. However, those who watched the film also 'profited,' not just from two hours of entertainment but from a better understanding of a very important historic event.

As Allen suggested, context matters. Like others, he wondered why Walmart didn't instead promote a Black-owned ice cream brand, Creamalicious, which it was already selling in its stores. Such an approach would have been a better context in at least two of the three ways described above.

Unfortunately, however, Walmart tried a more self-serving strategy that quickly melted. So instead of celebrating, the company is doing damage-control because of its "Single-Minded Marketing."



About the Author: *Dr. David Hagenbuch is a Professor of Marketing at Messiah University, the author of Honorable Influence, and the founder MindfulMarketing.org, which aims to encourage ethical marketing.*