

Crisis in Trumpville: Can the GOP Nominee Overcome his Obstacles and Make His Campaign Great? (Op-Ed)



By Andrew Ricci, Vice President, [LEVICK](#)

One of the old maxims often quoted by [public relations](#) and crisis management professionals is the Johnnie Cochran staple, “We’ve got to be judged by how we do in times of crisis.” In the crisis management industry, we tend to define a crisis as any event or series of events that dramatically alters an organization’s ability to carry out its mission, and it’s true that how well they handle these events can often be used as a benchmark for judgment. Donald Trump’s campaign is certainly, at least today, one organization that should be acting in full-blown crisis mode after a couple bad weeks and major missteps, including this week’s suggestion that “Second Amendment people” might be able to stop Hillary Clinton or her judicial selections.

The Donald’s brand has always been that of a non-traditional candidate, and in doing so he has created a non-traditional crisis for himself. When a company is facing a crisis, it typically needs to stick to a message of transparency and openness with its consumers and stakeholders. In Trump’s case, however, the last thing he needs to do is be more transparent.

His lack of filter and diplomacy earned him his initial band of loyal followers, but his rhetoric only seems to turn off or offend many others who may be on the fence and have concerns about him. Most companies and public figures in crisis become less of a story by opening up and leaving nothing more for the media to speculate, but Donald Trump would become less of a story by becoming more closed off.

One way he might start to turn things around is to recognize and admit to himself that things haven't exactly been going his way, and he might be the culprit. In many ways, he's been his own worst enemy, driving his controversial campaign headstrong into crisis after avoidable crisis. And thus far, rather than realize that he's setting himself back, he's doubled down or passed the blame. He's dismissed polls and claimed an unfair media is the genesis of his ongoing problems. He's tried to preempt a loss by warning that the election might be rigged – despite roughly 3/5 of the states under Republican control. This is the marker not of a bad campaign strategy, but of a deeply rooted character flaw, and only by imposing some high level of self-discipline can he begin to change that narrative.

What's worse, every time a member of his staff manages to get him on the wagon and impose some sort of discipline on their candidate, it isn't long before he again goes off script and talks himself right back off. As a result, the latest [Washington Post-ABC News](#) poll had Hillary Clinton up eight points in the general election, and a recent [Fox News](#) poll showed him ten points behind. If Trump hopes to make his campaign great again, it's time for him to face the data and make some changes.

While it's true that his brash, no-holds-barred, and unfiltered style got him the nomination, he has to realize that elections are strange occurrences and the strategies needed to win a primary are radically different from those needed to win a general election. In some ways, Trump has

shown he might be starting to realize his campaign strategy needs to change to come out victorious in November. He recently began using (and mostly sticking to) teleprompters.

This is a much-needed development and straight from any crisis management playbook. Once you know you have a crisis on your hands, any public relations counselor will reinforce the importance of developing a powerful narrative and staying on message with well thought out and scripted key points, ensuring the efficacy of the story you are trying to tell and avoiding distractions. This has never been Trump's strong suit. Time and again, we have watched Trump create headlines after diverging from an average campaign speech with just one off-hand comment, which quickly becomes the headlining story in every morning newspaper and email blast.

Every time the news seems saturated with articles about Donald Trump, he says or does something ridiculous or controversial and gives the press a new story to cover. One of the easiest ways to bury headlines is to make them mundane, and because whatever Trump says or does becomes a headline he has a lot of agency over how sensational, or un-sensational, those headlines are. Unlike many companies in crisis, Trump is running for president and does not want to disappear from the news radar; he just needs to begin generating positive, or at least neutral, press. The reporters he despises can't use his own comments against him if he stops giving them their ammunition.

Donald Trump often likes to say that only he can make America great again. With the clock ticking and time running out until election day, it's time for Donald Trump to realize that only he – by becoming more of a candidate and less of a firebrand – can make his campaign great again.

About the Author: Andrew Ricci is a Vice President at [LEVICK](#), a crisis communications firm. LEVICK Fellow Kelsey

Chapekis contributed to this article.