

The White House Media Wars

By Virgil Scudder, President, Virgil Scudder & Associates

Was it a blunder, a diversionary tactic, an effort at intimidation, or simply spite?

I'm referring, of course, to the decision of the White House last Friday to bar the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, CNN, BuzzFeed, and Politico from an informal briefing by the president's press secretary, Sean Spicer. These outlets hardly fit the description of purveyors of "fake news" as the administration has claimed. They are, however, frequent critics of the president and they often run fact-based stories that contradict the administration's statements or reveal things that the White House prefers to keep hidden.



(Photo source: twitter)

Was this shunning a foul-up or a diversionary tactic to get media attention away from the controversy over possibly improper White House contact with the FBI regarding the Russia investigation. Or was it spite? Was Spicer told by the president to "punish" news outlets that publish facts that he

doesn't like?

Regardless of the intent, the result was diversionary. The shocking ban became the day's big story. Spicer had to know the resulting storm would be the day's top story, overshadowing the Russia revelations.

In analyzing whether this was a plan or a blunder, one must keep in mind Trump's history with the media. He and his colleagues are masters of media manipulation. It's no exaggeration to say he made fools of numerous reporters and media outlets during his successful presidential campaign and long before. One example is his practice of impromptu phoning in to talk shows which readily put him on the air with no time for journalists to research his latest statements and prepare good questions and no opportunity for his opponents to get on the same program in the same news cycle and challenge his statements.

Then there was the bus incident. An audio recording revealed Trump boasting to Billy Bush about actions that can best be described as assaults on women. But, the impact of the tape was diminished through the almost-instant WikiLeaks release of material that put Hillary Clinton in a bad light. The Trump campaign team is widely suspected of pulling the trigger on the WikiLeaks barrage.

So, in light of a history of Trump's skillful media manipulation and Spicer's long experience in dealing with news media, what was the motivation for the ban: (1)diversion,(2) blunder, (3)intimidation, or(4) spite?

I'm betting on choices one, three, and four.

About the Author: Often referred to as "The Dean of Media

Trainers," Virgil is considered one of the world's foremost communication experts. In a 30-year career that has covered 26 countries on five continents, he has provided coaching and counsel to heads of some of the world's largest corporations and government leaders. Virgil is a prolific writer and speaker. His book, World Class Communication: how great CEOs win with the public, shareholders, employees, and the media, written with his son Ken, was named one of the 25 best business books of 2012. His column, In the C-Suite, appears in every quarterly issue of the Public Relations Strategist and is read by leaders of major public relations agencies and global heads of public relations of large companies. He has written or been featured in articles that have appeared in The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune, Reuters, Investors Business Daily, and numerous professional publications. Two of his speeches have been reprinted in the prestigious Vital Speeches of the Day. Prior to founding Virgil Scudder & Associates in 1990, Virgil headed the media training units of two of the world's largest public relations firms, Hill & Knowlton and Carl Byoir & Associates. Earlier, he was an award-winning news broadcaster at major radio and television networks and stations in New York City. He was a first-night Broadway drama critic for six years during that period, broadcasting reviews on NBC's all-news radio network and all-news WINS radio.