OHIO
GFOA
38th Annual Conference &
Membership Meeting
September 17-19, 2025 - Columbus, OH
COMMUNICATIONS
COUNSEL
"Dealing with a Crisis: Case Studies
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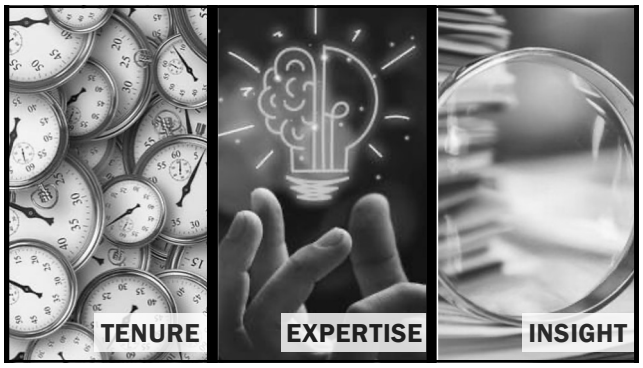
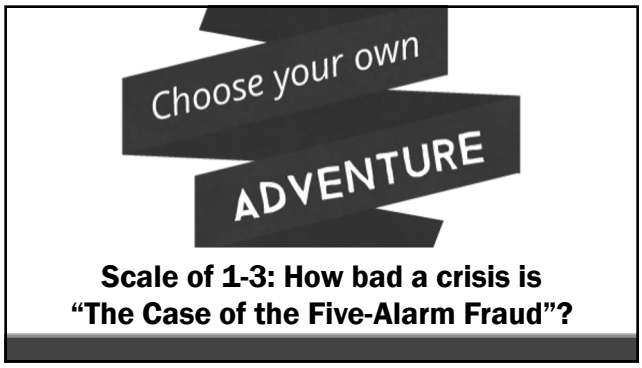

TENURE
EXPERTISE
INSIGHT

2

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE
The Case of the
Five-Alarm Fraud
SCENARIO

3



Scale of 1-3: How bad a crisis is "The Case of the Five-Alarm Fraud"?

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Level 1 - Minor

Level 2 – Major

6

Level 1 - Minor

A situation with little to no impact on company's overall operation and reputation

7

Level 1 - Minor

A situation with little to no impact on company's overall operation and reputation

Examples: water main break, HVAC problem, power outage, vehicle accident, minor property damage, weather-related emergencies, or an isolated workplace injury.

8

Level 2 – Major

A serious but inactive emergency that could impact part or all of company's operation and reputation but does not pose an immediate threat

9

Level 2 – Major

A serious but inactive emergency that could impact part or all of company's operation and reputation but does not pose an immediate threat

Has the potential to become an evolving or escalating situation, depending on the circumstances. Could be a controversial HR incident, social media scandal, stolen money, recall on a product.

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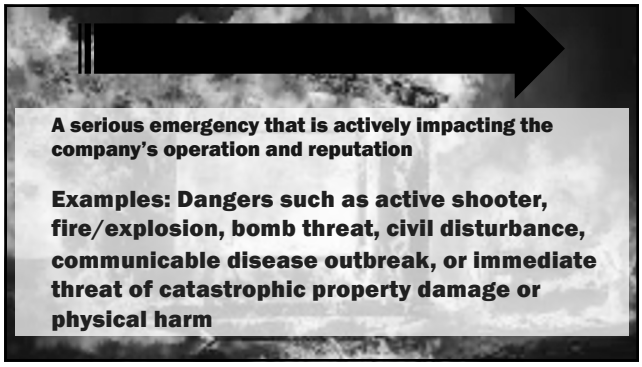

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Who's at your crisis response table?
Communications=messaging

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Who's at your crisis response table?
CFO=Subject matter expert

14

Who's at your crisis response table?
HR=Subject matter expert

15

Who's at your crisis response table?
Director/CEO =Spokesperson

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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE
No Good Deed
Goes Un-punished
SCENARIO

17

Choose your own
ADVENTURE
Your lawyer says anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.
Your comms team says you better say something…

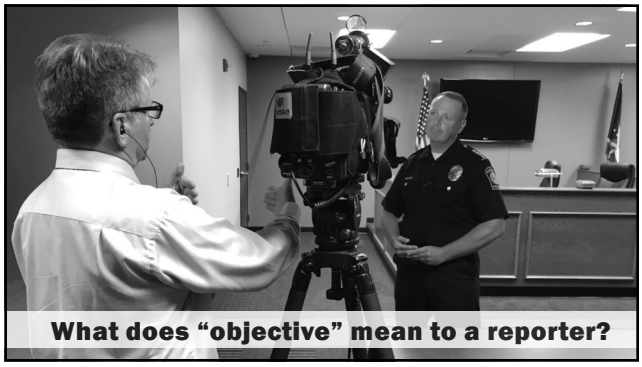
18

Defining “objective”

19

What does “objective” mean to you?

20


What does “objective” mean to a reporter?

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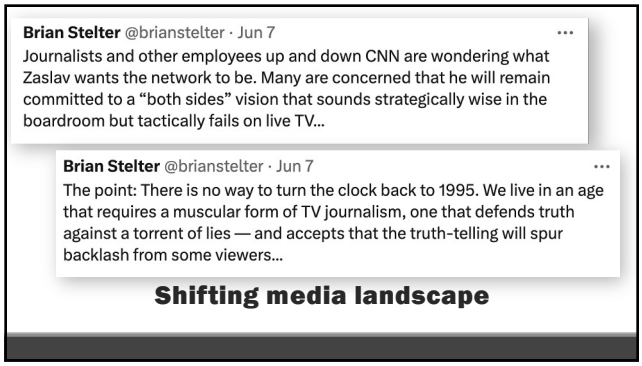
Side A
+ Side B
= Objective

22

Shifting media landscape

23


Brian Stelter @brianstelter · Jun 7
Journalists and other employees up and down CNN are wondering what Zaslav wants the network to be. Many are concerned that he will remain committed to a "both sides" vision that sounds strategically wise in the boardroom but tactically fails on live TV...
Brian Stelter @brianstelter · Jun 7
The point: There is no way to turn the clock back to 1995. We live in an age that requires a muscular form of TV journalism, one that defends truth against a torrent of lies — and accepts that the truth-telling will spur backlash from some viewers...
Shifting media landscape

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What does no comment mean?

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WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM
Side A
+ No Comment
= No story?

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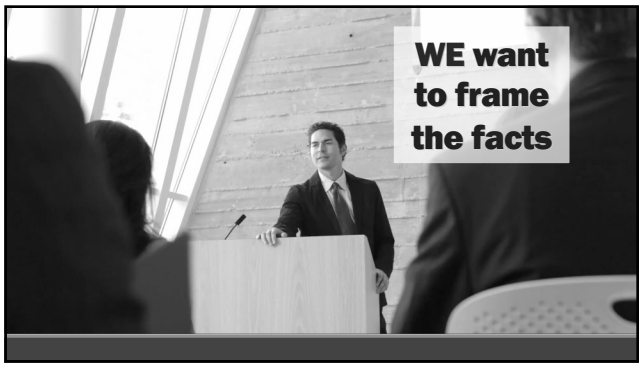
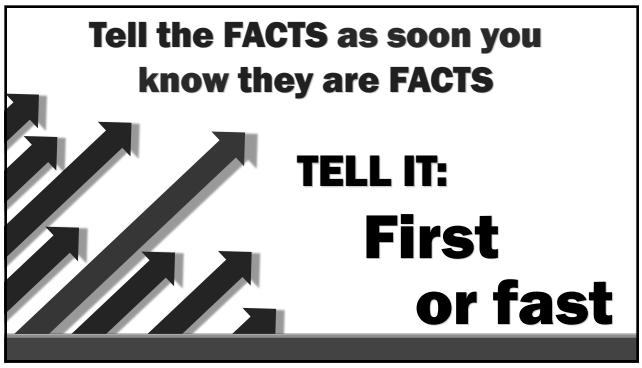

WE want to frame the facts

27


Tell the FACTS as soon you know they are FACTS
TELL IT:
First or fast

28

PUBLIC OPINION

29

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE
Show Me the Money
SCENARIO

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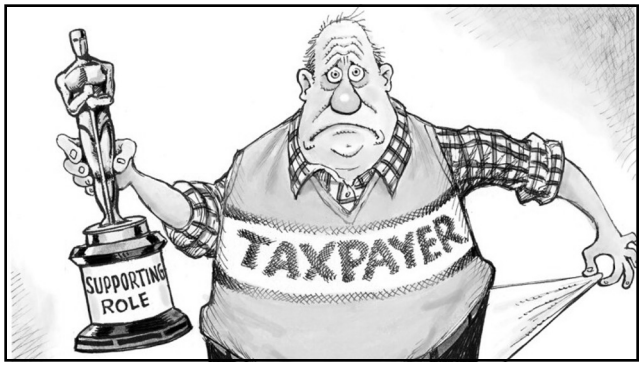
Who are your stakeholder groups that will be interested in, or need, information about this issue?

31

Identifying stakeholders

32



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Employees

34

DOUGLAS COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Other Elected Officials

35

Policy makers

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What communication channels should we use to share information with the public?

38

39

ON THE AIR
News Media

40

Social media channels

41

Telephone Town Halls

42

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE
The Case of the Spurned Employee
SCENARIO

43

Choose your own
ADVENTURE
What are the points that you believe it's important for donors to know?

44

Message Discipline

45

Traffic Light

- **Red Light**
  Information you MUST NOT talk about – illegal, unethical, unprofessional
- **Yellow Light**
  Information you'd RATHER NOT talk about – not important or distracting from message
- **Green Light**
  Information you WANT to talk about – your message

46

MESSAGE DISCIPLINE =

STICK TO THE GREEN LIGHT

47

Green Light

- **Your three most important messages, such as:**
- **Examples of hard work or good effort**
- **Aspirational or missional statements**
- **Why this matter is important**

48

Yellow Light

- Answers to hypothetical questions
- Facts that place you in bad light (unless inoculating)
- Your personal opinion
- Rumors
- Information about process and procedure

49

Red Light

- Comments critical of sympathetic victims
- Privileged or confidential information
- Investigative materials
- Defamatory comments
- Lies

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