

**EXECUTIVE REPORT FOR
STRATEGIC CRISIS
COMMUNICATION AND RENEWAL**

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INTRODUCTION

Sunshine Cleaning Ltd faced a reputational crisis following its involvement in an employee-related issue outside of work. Although the incident occurred outside the workplace, it involved our employee, received extensive media coverage, and is presently leading to widespread consumer cancellations. Moreover, the event has diminished the confidence of prospective clients in the local community.

This document delineates the event as it occurs and functions as an action plan for both the supply chain and the board of directors. Within this document, you will find foundational information on the theories of crisis communication employed in the development and implementation of our response and recovery plan for this issue, as well as an analysis of how our stakeholders are reacting to the crisis.

This document is exclusively for the CEO and board of directors, and it provides the strategies for recovering from the current crisis and protecting the long-term future of Sunshine Cleaning Limited.

DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF BEDFORDSHIRE

The current crisis has escalated the reputational pressure on the company to address Bedfordshire's community, with an approximate population of 750,000. With an average age of approximately 39 years, it is slightly younger than England's average. The sheer number of people using social media makes reputational issues spread quickly, exposing Sunshine Cleaning Ltd. to increased scrutiny and criticism. If the company is silent about the issue or engages in poorly sequenced Corporate Social Responsibility measures, it is likely that these issues will be magnified through social media conversations with younger stakeholders. At least 28% of Bedfordshire's population identify as Asian, Black, Mixed, or Other. While Bedfordshire is primarily composed of traditional English communities, there are several vibrant multicultural communities in the area. The allegations of misconduct the company faces will likely be viewed differently in each of these communities. Transparent communication and well-sequenced CSR are vital to unite and prevent deepening the divide across these communities. There are slightly more females than males in Bedfordshire. Therefore, communicating gender-sensitive messages is also important.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

First, I want to classify the crisis's nature. Coombs (2007) stated that a crisis may be classified as a victim, accidental, preventable or a transgression. The allegations made against one of our employees are a clear example of a transgression crisis according to these classifications. Stakeholders will likely perceive that a great deal of responsibility rests with our organisation for the employee's actions based on their association with our brand and the extent to which our leadership has linked our company to this issue. SCCT recommends that companies utilise a rebuild strategy for a crisis where stakeholders hold them highly responsible for the events that occurred, and this involves acknowledging and accepting responsibility for the situation, issuing apologies where appropriate and performing corrective actions to rectify issues caused. This classification of the crisis aids in determining stakeholder expectations and assists in developing strategies to employ.

Utilising the rebuild strategy entails making visible, empathetic and corrective actions as well as reaffirming the organisational values. A key part of demonstrating our organisation is utilising a rebuild strategy, which would involve removing the employee from client-facing positions. Removing this individual demonstrates that we place the safety of the clients above all other considerations, and we are concerned about the integrity of the services we are providing. Though, as we are removing this individual, we also clearly communicate that we do not consider the employee to be guilty, but rather we are temporarily taking this action as a precautionary step in the best interests of all concerned. This balance allows us to demonstrate accountability and empathy to stakeholders while not prejudging the outcome of the legal system.

This position is further supported by Image Repair Theory. Benoit (1995) identifies several strategies that corporations may employ to repair their image and reputation after being accused of wrongdoing. In our case of this event, we must show mortification by recognising how serious the situation is and how our employee should be shown empathy. It is important to us to let everyone know that we do not condone violence and that we also realise how serious the allegations are against our employee. By taking corrective actions of departmental transfer, we further demonstrate that we are committed to changing how we do things regarding violence. Differentiation is also essential in this case, as we need to emphasise that posting bail was only a legal way to ensure our employee would be able to fully participate in the judicial process and was in no way an endorsement of their alleged activity. Clarifying that we are

differentiating the company's values from the alleged misconduct will, hopefully, allow us to protect the reputation of the company.

Apologia theory provides us with a framework for how organisations defend themselves against allegations. According to Ware and Linkugel (1973), organisations often clarify their intention when defending themselves, differentiate between the organisation's values and the actions taken by their employees, and/or view the alleged misconduct in a broader context. Clarifying that posting bail was procedural and not an endorsement of any wrongdoing is an important strategy in Apologia Theory and supports our defence of our actions while not minimising the seriousness of the situation at hand. Adding to it, clarifying that we believe that posting bail is an acceptable procedural action for our employees to take, we also have the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to professionalism and fair and equitable treatment of all our employees. By finding this balance, we will not be perceived as condoning the alleged misconduct but rather as upholding the principles of justice and humanity in our organisation.

Finally, Renewal Theory provides the final piece of our overall framework. According to Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2009), crises are seen not only as a threat to organisations but also as an opportunity for organisations to reaffirm their values and to strengthen their relationships with stakeholders. Despite this challenging time, this is an opportunity for Sunshine Cleaning Ltd to define our identity and values as an organisation. Through our Values Pledge campaign, as well as our CSR partnerships and by embedding ethics into our day-to-day operations, we can take this current situation and turn it into a turning point for us. According to Renewal Theory, the goal of a reputational recovery is not to limit the damage caused by the crisis but to build a stronger, values-based organisation going forward.

WHY COMMUNICATION MATTERS AND WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT IT

It is critical to respond to the media; it is important to do so in a careful & controlled manner. Silence can be interpreted as evidence of guilt or of an inability to care, which contributes to the reputational damage sustained by the organisation (Coombs, 2007). A written response provides an organisation with the opportunity to frame the media's narrative in a responsible and consistent manner. If we respond, positive results can include demonstrating empathy to the victim, taking responsibility for and showing corrective action, providing clients and employees with assurance, and positioning the organisation as a values-driven organisation. There are many potential drawbacks that could emerge from this situation: the media may

interpret our message incorrectly; the media attention may not go away for long periods of time; and if we do not carefully prepare our public statements, others are likely to misinterpret them for different purposes. To reduce these problems, companies should opt for written public statements instead of an on-camera interview based on a company's current crisis and provide the same type of consistent content across all of the different types of media used to reach a company's audience.

If we choose to avoid a direct response to the media, we will still need to communicate the same message through alternative methods, including posting a written statement on our website, using our website and social media to control the messages we release to the public, and communicating internally with our employees so that they feel positive about our response to the media's request for information. Also, we must communicate directly with our clients, when appropriate, to fulfil our ethical obligations. Failure to respond to the media puts us at risk of being perceived by the public as not being transparent, feeling apathetic toward and/or engaging in conspiratorial actions, and losing control over the message (Benoit, 1995). By utilising controlled channels of communication, we can reduce our risks while still being able to demonstrate to our stakeholders that we are committed to our core values through our corporate actions.

THE LEGALITY OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS RELATED TO DURING CRISIS RESPONSE

In the UK, an employee who has been charged with a criminal offence is entitled to continue to work until they have been found guilty by a court of law; therefore, an employer is not permitted to terminate the employee based solely upon being charged with wrongdoing. Termination of an employee solely for having been charged with an offence would normally be classified as Unfair Dismissal under the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Employers can only terminate employment based upon grounds defined by Section 98 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 to allow for Fair Grounds. Unjustified dismissal is a flexible ground for termination based upon other substantial reasons (hereinafter referred to as SOSR) and is typically invoked for experiential reputational damage or client pressure or a breakdown in trust, or other reasons which may result in an employee being discharged for no reason other than dissatisfaction with the employee. In the case of Sunshine Cleaners Ltd, SOSR provides an option for a legally justified reason should the current crisis escalate, causing Sunshine Cleaners Ltd client relationships to be damaged.

In order for an employee to be dismissed, the procedures established under the ACAS Code of Practice for Fair Grounds must be adhered to, including:

- Before an employee is terminated, the employer shall review all relevant facts.
- The employer will hold an appropriate hearing for the employee before making a final decision.
- The employee possesses the right to appeal the decision made by the employer.

If these steps are not followed, Sunshine Cleaners Ltd, as an employer, is open to being held liable for unfair dismissal, thereby compounding its reputational harm and its risk of facing legal actions against it.

IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CRISIS **RENEWAL**

Through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), companies can rebuild trust and demonstrate the values of their organisation. During a crisis, CSR gives stakeholders an indication of the organisation's commitment to their community beyond just complying with legal obligations. For us, CSR provides a means for them to reposition themselves as a values-driven organisation that prioritises accountability, inclusivity and renewal.

CSR initiatives will provide stakeholders with peace of mind in that they will know that Sunshine Cleaning Ltd. is committed to operating at an ethical level and strengthening community relationships, especially as the Bedfordshire community is very diverse. CSR initiatives will also provide a narrative of renewal in which Sunshine Cleaning Ltd. can transition from being viewed through the lens of the crisis to being viewed as an organisation that is taking constructive action.

To enhance the credibility of their CSR initiatives, we should explore pro bono CSR initiatives that will provide direct support to the local community:

- Offer no-cost cleaning services to schools, care homes and community centres.
- Eco-friendly cleaning campaigns to position the company as environmentally responsible.
- Encouraging employees to participate in community projects to enhance collective accountability.

According to Chaos Theory of Crisis Management (Lorenz), small missteps can lead to disproportionate consequences. In crisis communication, a poorly timed CSR initiative will likely elongate the perception of the organisation instead of helping to repair it. If an organisation introduces CSR initiatives before accountability has been established, stakeholders will perceive the CSR initiative as a diversion or a form of “damage control”.

We must sequence their efforts by establishing accountability by issuing transparent holding statements, clarifying their position and taking responsibility for the crisis. Stabilise the organisation by addressing client concerns directly and demonstrating that their operational integrity has been preserved and introduce CSR initiatives as part of a narrative of renewal once accountability has been accepted by stakeholders.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Suggestions Regarding How the Company Should Respond

- Avoid any comments that could be misinterpreted or twisted by the media.
- Do not allow them to take the lead in establishing the framework for the story; you should carefully balance the messages.
- Customers and employees need to be assured that their concerns are being listened to and addressed, and this helps build or maintain trust.
- Respond to the media and audience with empathy and understanding. "The case is still under investigation, so we will not make any comments until the legal process has been completed."
- Frame the message in a way that acknowledges the human side of the story and conveys a sense of accountability. "We understand that emotions are running high. We are focused on supporting our clients, employees, and community, while respecting the legal system."

Providing Media Response

- With Recognises the Concern "We recognise the serious issues raised regarding the victim, and we are aware of the emotional issues surrounding this situation."
- Express Support for the Victim "We affirm our support for the victim’s feelings and suffering and share the experience of dealing with the victim."

- Humanitarian View of Bail "As we stated before, we treat our employees like family, and, in the spirit of humanitarianism, we believe in providing the opportunity to hear the employee's side of the story, and for that reason, we supported the bail."
- Legal Commitment to the Process "We regard this legal issue seriously. We are monitoring the proceedings, and, as responsible employers, we believe it is improper to ignore either party, and we respect the judicial process."
- Future Action "If the individual is found guilty of any criminal wrongdoing, we will take whatever action is required. Until then, we will not reach any conclusion, as that will be determined by the court."

CONCLUSION

Sunshine Cleaning Ltd faces a transgression crisis that demands transparent, values-driven action. By applying rebuild strategies, reaffirming organisational values, and sequencing CSR initiatives carefully, the company can stabilise operations, reassure stakeholders, and transform this challenge into an opportunity for renewal. We will take this event as an opportunity to build a relationship of trust and respect that will be stronger, more meaningful, and value-driven than ever before.

ANNEXURE**Executive Summary Memo**

Subject: Addressing Reputational Crisis at Sunshine Cleaning Ltd.

To: Sunshine Cleaning Ltd CEO

As you are aware, Sunshine Cleaning Ltd. has recently been facing a reputational crisis due to allegations made against one of our employees while he was not working. The public's perception of us as a company has increased since they believe we have helped bail him out of jail. With this situation, a lot of clients have stopped using our services. Many members of the community are now questioning whether we are a company that really cares about our community or if we are only about making money for ourselves.

As the CEO, I believe you should respond to the media, but you should do so in a very careful manner. If you fail to respond, many will interpret this as being guilty, and it could also cause the public to think we are indifferent towards the situation. At this stage, the best method for you to respond is to issue a written holding statement. By doing this, you will be able to create the narrative that you want while avoiding the potential difficulties associated with conducting live interviews.

The positive aspects of responding include demonstrating that we care, taking responsibility for the problems within the company and reassuring our stakeholders. There are also potential negative aspects of misinterpretation/misinformation or the possibility of prolonged coverage of the situation; these negatives can be mitigated by using consistent written messaging. If you decide not to respond, you will have to provide transparency through other methods, such as using the Sunshine Cleaning Ltd website, utilising social media and communicating directly with clients.

In conclusion, my recommendation is to issue a holding statement that acknowledges the seriousness of this incident and shows that we care about the situation and that we respect the due process of law to determine the truth of the allegations against the employee. I also recommend that you suspend the employee from all duties that involve direct contact with our clients until the case against him has been resolved. Please communicate with our stakeholders using controlled means to ensure that they receive the most accurate information. You also have an opportunity to enhance Sunshine Cleaning Ltd.'s CSR reputation through the establishment of pro bono service activities. This approach not only helps to right the situation at hand but also provides an opportunity to strengthen Sunshine Cleaning Ltd and make it a company driven by values.

Sincerely,

Public Relations Consultant

Media Statement

Sunshine Cleaning Ltd wishes to make it clear to all clients, employees, and members of the community that we take allegations made against one of our employees very seriously. The circumstances surrounding the allegations are affecting a great number of people, most notably the young woman who has come forward. We believe it is part of our responsibility as a community-orientated business to publicly state our strong opposition to any type of violence.

We understand how serious these allegations are and how they affect everyone involved, but until the matter goes through the courts, we will wait before jumping to any conclusions. We will always adhere to due process and protect the rights of all individuals involved, including the employee. Posting bail does not condone the actions for which the individual is accused; it is merely a mechanism that permits the employee to participate fully in the judicial process.

We are first and foremost responsible for the safety and trust of our clients, the health and well-being of our employees and the reputation of our community. As a result of this, we have suspended the employee from any client-facing duties until a resolution is reached through the court system. We have made this decision in the interest of protecting our stakeholders while also ensuring that all parties have a fair process through the court system.

We acknowledge that this incident has opened many conversations within our community regarding safety, respect, and values. At Sunshine Cleaning Ltd, we are committed to listening to these concerns and commit to upholding our values of professionalism, fairness, empathy and respect. As a company, we will continue to provide our clients with services with integrity, continue to employ and support our employees with compassion, and continue to educate and connect with our community in responsible ways.

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