

The Art of the Apology

By Lisa LeMaster

When the bad news was delivered to the families, "there was no apology. There was no nothing. It was immediately out the door," said the father of one of the miners who died. (Associated Press, January 4, 2006)

Everyone seems to want one---an apology, that is. Louisiana's governor demanded an apology from the Speaker of the House when he questioned the wisdom of rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The media eagerly anticipated a possible apology from President Bush for slow disaster response. Everyone asked FEMA to say it was "sorry" for its post-hurricane efforts. In a media reversal, Watergate journalist Bob Woodward apologized to his newspaper for withholding the name of a source. In the past year, the demands were issued to Pat Robertson, basketball's Kobe Bryant, baseball's Kenny Rogers, Senator Richard Durbin, and, of course, to the owners of the West Virginia mining company that lost 12 men in this month's accident. Now, even hospitals are studying apology strategies when faced with "bad outcomes."

Clearly, the medical ethicists, insurance companies, malpractice attorneys, corporate litigators and media professionals will spend much time debating the efficacy and appropriateness of apologies from hospitals. If, however, your institution faces a public call to apologize, be sure to do it the right way.

Hardly anyone wants to apologize initially. Unfortunately, the emotional platforms in crisis communications are akin to those of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' description of the grief stages following the death of a significant other: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

With a "bad outcome," or a stupid remark, inappropriate reaction/response, lapse in judgment, usually, the perpetrator(s) tries to "explain away" what happened or didn't happen. Interestingly, it seems to take at least 7-8 days for most newsmakers to finally apologize.

For example, on June 14, 2005, Senator Durbin compared treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay to how prisoners in Nazi Germany were handled. His apology came eight days later, on June 22nd. Perhaps, he was following the example reflected by Newsweek when it erroneously reported that U.S. interrogators had flushed a copy of the Koran down a toilet to force inmates to talk. The initial report came on May 9, and it resulted in anti-American protests around the world. The retraction came one week and one day later on May 17, after the Bush administration brushed off a simple apology from the magazine.

From Major League Baseball, pitcher Kenny Rogers shoved a Fox cameraman prior to batting practice on June 29. Although his club, the Texas Rangers, apologized immediately to the fans for Rogers' behavior, the All-Star pitcher waited until July 6th to read a hand-written statement of "regret" to the media.

Each time, it took 7-8 days to apologize. Coincidence? I don't know, but we

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The Art of the Apology (Continued...)

can all learn to move our institutions quickly out of denial and into acceptance and problem-solving. In the debate over apology policies for hospitals, there is one certainty. Lack of communication will result in miscommunication.

Witness the example from West Virginia. When reports escaped from the command post that 12 miners had been found alive, every blogger, neighbor, comrade, industry expert, gossip, as well as the throng of journalists "reported" the news. The company waited three cruel hours before correcting a false report that had been distributed worldwide. I submit the executives were in denial ("This can't be happening!"), and therefore were paralyzed and unable to react the right way. As a result, the follow-up national media stories focused on the three hours when there was a communications lapse as opposed to the tragic loss of 12 men and the survival of one young miner.

Does this mean that hospitals should adopt apology policies in order to have an appearance of openness? That's probably way too simplistic an approach in a complicated, litigious world. There are differences between apologies, statements that accept responsibility, and admissions of guilt. It's all in the words, the attitude and the motive of the person who utters the words: I'm sorry.

Next time: The right way and the wrong way to apologize, especially when the camera is rolling.

Lisa LeMaster is the president of The LeMaster Group, a Dallas-based company specializing in crisis communications, perception management and media coaching. For more information, you can visit: www.lemastergroup.com.



The Second National Executive Women in Healthcare Symposium Workshop Overview: Why and How (Not) to Innovate

Presented by Dorothy E. Bellhouse, Kenagy & Associates &
Robert B. Harrington, Director, Cambridge Management Group

This workshop will provide a framework for assessing your organization's readiness to sustain change and grow.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

With so many pressing operating challenges, how do you know whether and where to invest for growth, better performance and patient safety? What is "innovation," and do the benefits match the claims? Will your organization really sustain change and grow?

Downward pressure on payments and operating margins is made worse by increasing capital requirements, consumer expectations, and unfunded mandates. Meanwhile, health care organizations are being disrupted by their key suppliers - physicians. You know that doing the same things harder, longer and faster is not the answer. In many ways, your organization's current capabilities are becoming disabilities for innovation and change.

But how do you know if you need innovation, whether your organization feels secure enough to make the necessary changes, and there are sufficient resources to be successful?

Please [click here](#) for additional information and to book online.

By attending this session, you will be able to help your organization assess

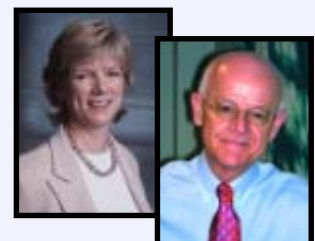
- the case for innovation,
- if the prospective benefits are worth the cost of change
- your organization's ability to make sustained changes
- how to focus on the areas of greatest potential and,
- the resources necessary for success

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

This workshop is designed for CEOs and management executives with responsibility for organizational strategy, direction and performance.

Presented by:

**Dorothy E. Bellhouse
& Robert B. Harrington**
Sunday, March 5, 2006
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Ritz-Carlton,
Lake Las Vegas



The 10 Best Practices for Advancing Women in Business: #5 - Delegating

By Lynn Shapiro Snyder

This is the fifth in a series of articles I have been authoring in which I describe the Ten Best Practices for Advancing Women in Business. These Best Practices were developed by the Women Business Leaders of the U.S. Health Care Industry Foundation. The focus of this column is on Best Practice number 5. It provides as follows:

5. Be comfortable with delegating and surround yourself with excellent talent.

Why is it so difficult for some people to delegate work to others in the workplace? Why must some people insist on doing it all by themselves or overlapping with the people who are doing the work anyway? Why do others appear to be so good at delegating the workload? And, why is delegating the workload so important to the long term success of any business organization?

A related issue is the type of talented people that someone is likely to recruit. There are some people in management who recruit candidates that have capabilities less than or equal to them. This may be because they, themselves, are not comfortable supervising employees that have superior skill sets. Others recruit the best and the brightest because they enjoy the chance to have others 'step to the plate' and take on more responsibility knowing that this helps the organization prosper. Some of these recruitment styles are obvious and deliberate. Others may be more subtle and subconscious. In any event, who and how one recruits new employees also can have an effect on whether effective delegation takes place.

Consider the following:

Jane Smith is a CEO of a large not-for-profit health care system comprised of five hospitals. Based upon an organizational chart, she currently has all five CEOs reporting directly to her. As each hospital has the same amount of beds, about 125, she initially assumed that each CEO would require about the same amount of supervision and that she would be delegating the same amount of work to each. She has discovered that this is not the case. Jane Smith is finding that she is very much involved in the details of running two of the hospitals. The remaining three hospitals appear to require very little of her time and supervision. It is ad hoc the way in which she is spending her time supervising the CEOs of these five hospitals.

Smith well knows that there are only 24 hours in one day and only seven days in a week. She also knows more about some hospitals but she may not know enough about the other hospitals. As her delegation appears to be uneven, she may know too much about some hospitals and not enough about the other hospitals. So, as the senior executive leader of this system, Jane Smith may want to consider the following questions:

Is the imbalance a function of legitimate work load or is she just more reluctant to delegate responsibility for certain decisions to these two CEOs where she is spending more of her time? If so, what is it about these CEOs that makes her more reluctant to delegate responsibilities to them? Maybe it is that these two CEOs are just unwilling to accept the same responsibility as the other CEOs? Jane Smith may want to be in control of the delegation and not necessarily have the situation control her.

What about the other hospitals with much less interaction with

Jane Smith? Is this the case of Jane Smith being more willing to delegate decision-making or is this merely a function of the time limitation and the CEO's particular leadership style that makes Jane Smith less hands on in the operations of these hospitals?

Shouldn't there be some generic list of decisions that are delegated and those that are not delegated so that there is uniformity in how the system operates? Do you need uniformity to achieve success when there may not be uniformity in the CEOs respective skill sets? Should the skill sets of the particular employee play a role - either formally or informally - in what decisions and responsibilities get delegated or kept at the higher levels of an organization?

These are just some of the key questions that are raised by this Best Practice scenario. Depending upon the answers, Jane Smith is in a position to improve the way she delegates the work and how the work actually gets done. This is key to the success of any organization.

Finally, some have said to me that men are more likely to delegate work than women in the workplace. In my experience, I have not found this issue to be driven by gender. Instead, I have found it to be driven more by the level of patience a person has and the amount of enjoyment a person gets in teaching another how to do something and then to step back and let that student 'fly solo'. I also have found even the worst delegator to be ready, willing and able to delegate if he or she has confidence (or at least the perception) that the person to whom the work is being delegated has excellent skills to do the work.

I also believe that if you want your organization to prosper, you need to satisfy your best employees. As a senior executive, to satisfy these employees, you need to demonstrate to them, through delegation, that you trust them with ever increasing responsibilities. After all, they are likely to be the next generation you and the governing board intend to rely upon for the future prosperity of your organization.

To Do:

Make an inventory of some of the major items you currently spend time on during the work day. Consider what, if any, of these major items could be delegated to others within your organization thereby giving you a more supervisory role and more time for other initiatives. Then, choose one of your best 'up and comers' and charge that person with this new responsibility. You may find that you have freed up your day to some extent and you have created an even more satisfied employee at the same time.

Lynn Shapiro Snyder is a National Health Care Practice Leader at Epstein Becker & Green, P.C. in Washington, DC (www.ebglaw.com). She has been voted one of the 100 most powerful people in health care for her leadership as a top Medicare, Medicaid, and compliance attorney. In addition, Ms. Snyder is nationally known as the Founder and President of the Women Business Leaders of the U.S. Health Care Industry Foundation, an invitation only group of about 1,200 senior executive women and women board members (see womenleadinghealthcare.org).



End Piece: Women on the Career Ladder

We recently ran across a newsletter article containing remarks by John Bittleston, a business mentor and career coach. He listed the many successful women in business and then wondered why questions remain about the qualifications of women in the CEO seat.

He pointed out that in some parts of the world women still don't have even basic rights, let alone the ability to climb the corporate ladder on the same footing as men. Even where women are afforded the same rights as men, there are often barriers to their holding senior positions. Why?

Bittleston's answer is that "historically, it was thought that the woman's place was in the home. Women were often less well educated than men. Frankly, men kept the office for themselves, somewhere they could be chaps together. Were they afraid or just die-hard reactionary?"

"The old excuses were always trotted out - women left to have a family just when you wanted them most; they failed to turn up if one of the children was sick; if their husbands were posted away from the area, they followed them; women weren't as physically strong as men.

"All perfectly valid points but then there are at least as many reasons for not appointing men to top jobs. Enlightened companies have long since abandoned these outdated attitudes and, indeed, often provided facilities for the special needs that women have, just as they have always done for men's special needs. Every problem has a solution."

Bittleston raised the question, what helps women to climb to the top, whatever the odds are? His answer: "More important than any other factor is that **they must love the job**. This applies to men as well, of course. I suspect that it is even more important for women. It is vital that someone aiming to run or build a business is totally focused on it. Such concentration comes not only from discipline. It comes from enjoying what you are doing.

"My second tip for aspiring women CEOs is to **speak up**. So conditioned are some women to playing second fiddle that they only answer when they are spoken to. To make a mark, you have to be heard. Whether you liked Margaret Thatcher's politics or not, you couldn't help but admire her ability to get listened to.

"It's important, too, to **review your career at every crossroad**. We all have times when we need to re-think where our career is headed. We should also rethink what we want out of life and how this helps to determine what we might do for the next stage.

"Women are often more academically qualified than men. Girls mature faster than boys and this can help them with their studies. But men often catch up later so it is important to keep learning. We all understand that everyone needs to retrain frequently. Doing so is an opportunity to advance beyond the original horizon.

"**Make up your mind about children and guilt**. If you want to stay home and bring up the children, and if you can afford to, do so. There is a little evidence that children are happier and more adjusted when their mother stays with them for the very early years of their lives. But it's not compelling enough to stop women having careers, especially when there is family support from the grandparents and physical (and emotional) help from caring maids and nannies. To stay at home, or not, is a matter for each family, not some golden rule that can be foisted onto everyone.

"**Can you ignore the stereotyping of centuries? Yes**. It's outdated and past. You have your say at home and make your points clear there, why not at work? You have an added advantage over men. You can be much more charming than any man. Your emotional intelligence level is likely to be higher than any man. Use your advantages. Men use theirs.

"**Can you cope with change? Yes**. Women have always been the de facto head of the family, especially in times of crisis and change. Read Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and learn how the women kept the families together in the agonizing migration from the mid-West to California in the 1930s. Don't just put up with change, embrace it, encourage it. You can be the leader of change for the better."

Finally, Bittleston wrote: "**Be professional**. Your staff, your colleagues, your customers, your suppliers will all gossip about you, whatever you do. They gossip about everyone. Ignore it. Don't descend to gossiping yourself, it's not necessary. Just be professional. You'll win. Hands down."

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