



Fast times as a Dallas Cowboys public relations specialist

The summer of 2022 is one that will not be forgotten by Megan O'Neal, Dallas Cowboys public relations executive. The importance of timeliness was learned hard way for O'Neal while she worked at the Cowboys summer training camp in Oxnard, California. After Jerry Jones used a derogatory term for the little people community, O'Neal shares the surprising tasks she and her team of public relations specialists embarked on as they quickly composed a press release on Jones' behalf.

Source: Megan O'Neal

O'Neal, who majored in public relations at the University of Texas at Austin, is no stranger to the works of public relations and finds the work to be very special.

"I love client relations and I love the bond between sponsors, the public and the organization," said O'Neal.

In college, O'Neal started her public relations career by working for nonprofits, such as MJ&M and FORE Kids. She eventually landed a career as a Dallas Cowboys public relations executive. O'Neal quickly learned the importance of fan engagement and was tasked to finalize weekly press releases for the Cowboy's Twitter. O'Neal says that she quickly learned the importance of timeliness and conciseness as she composed the weekly releases.

"Creating accurate and engaging press releases to keep fans informed and aware of the prior or upcoming events was definitely a task that took attention and care," said O'Neal.

For O'Neal, the skills she gathered from her contribution to the weekly press releases would become very important. On July 27, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones used a derogatory term in an attempt to commemorate the late Director of College and Pro Scouting, Larry Lacewell. The public and the little people community immediately called out Jones for his reference, leaving O'Neal and her public relations team in "a scramble to release an appropriate apology on Jerry Jones' behalf," said O'Neal.

"My team and I had to handle it and release a statement in a timely manner because I think timeliness is the most important thing to have the most sincere apology," O'Neal said.

For O'Neal, sending out a corrected release statement as soon as possible is incredibly important to maintain a positive reputation for the Dallas Cowboys and to show respect to the offended community. O'Neal had to get to work to send out the corrected statement on Jones' behalf.

According to O'Neal, there is also a protocol that should be efficiently followed in order to properly address the issue.

"Firstly, a corrected press release should be released by Jerry Jones himself on behalf of the organization. Secondly, the public relations team will hold a meeting to discuss the issue and have an educational moment and learn the inappropriateness of the issue going forward," said O'Neal.

Progression and ownership are two of the most important aspects for a large organization like the Cowboys to master, according to O'Neal.

"Being socially aware and willing to accept and address their faults is what separates good and bad organizations," said O'Neal.

O'Neal successfully issued the press release with Jones' formal apology, including acknowledgment and sorrow for his usage of the derogatory slur. Though O'Neal never recalls running into such a situation while working for the nonprofits in college, she believes that college can teach the skills that were necessary for the quick publication of the apology statement.

For future public relations interns and specialists who plan to work for large sports organizations, understanding crisis communication is important, according to O'Neal, and one must be prepared to respond to many situations. For O'Neal, this situation has shown her the craziness of the sports world and the importance of timelessness when the reputation of the organization is at stake.

"For all aspiring public relations specialists or anyone who dreams of a career under the Dallas Cowboys organization, I urge you to intern for a sports organization and to take your public relations and journalism coursework seriously, because you never know when it will be applicable to a real job," said O'Neal.