

[When It Hits the Fan](#) | BBC Radio 4, featuring David Yelland and Simon Lewis



- *Exploring the behind-the-scenes workings of crises, especially in high-stakes environments like boardrooms, palaces, and government offices, can indeed provide valuable insights.*
- *Between the hosts, they have extensive experience advising companies and individuals, from The Sun and The New York Post, to the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Royal Family.*

Valuable Themes, Insights, and Examples Related to Public Relations (PR):

- Media Influence and Perception Management:

Theme: Media's significant role in shaping public opinion and the challenges of maintaining credibility and fairness in media criticism.

Insight: Accurate information and fair criticism are essential for public figures to maintain credibility and reputation.

Example: Prince Harry's criticism of the British press and the consequences of misleading statements about media coverage are discussed.

- Corporate Leadership and Crisis Response:

Theme: Differences in decision-making processes between corporate CEOs and political leaders during crises.

Insight: Corporate leaders often seek external advice and maintain checks and balances, which can serve as examples for effective crisis management.

Example: Comparison between corporate CEOs and the head of the Spanish football federation highlights these differences.

- Media Landscape and Public Perception:

Theme: Varied media environments impact public figures' perspectives and actions.

Insight: Public figures operate in diverse media landscapes, influencing their exposure to mainstream narratives.

Example: Differences in media consumption habits between the UK and the US, especially notable in the case of influential figures like Elon Musk.

- Redemption Attempts and Unpredictable Public Reaction:

Theme: Public figures face unpredictable reactions during redemption attempts, requiring careful timing and sincerity.

Insight: Unfiltered interactions with the public can lead to unexpected outcomes, necessitating effective management of public appearances.

Example: High-profile interviews with individuals like Luis Suarez and David Frost highlight the risks and rewards of redemption attempts.

- Legacy Building and Reputation Management:

Theme: CEOs focus on legacy-building, emphasizing the importance of strategic communication in shaping public perception.

Insight: Strategic communication, including interviews and media appearances, plays a role in maintaining a favorable reputation.

Example: CEOs' efforts to leave a positive legacy and shape public image in their final years of tenure.

- Personal Narratives and Emotional Connection:

Theme: Personal narratives, authenticity, and emotional connection influence public perception and sales.

Insight: Emotional connection drives engagement, especially in memoirs, fostering a unique bond with the audience.

Example: Taylor Swift's authenticity and emotional influence on her audience are highlighted, showcasing the power of personal narratives.

- Rebranding Challenges and Brand Equity:

Theme: Rebranding challenges and the importance of preserving brand equity and reputation.

Insight: Careful planning and execution are crucial during rebranding initiatives to maintain public trust.

Example: BT's rebranding to E underscores the complexities of changing established brand names.

- Ethical Considerations and Social Responsibility:

Theme: Balance between profit-making and social responsibility in corporations.

Insight: Ethical considerations are essential, and shifts in corporate values impact public perception.

Example: Unilever's reconsideration of social responsibility initiatives reflects changing corporate values and strategic priorities.

- Media Engagement and Privacy Concerns:

Theme: Strategic decision-making in media engagement and the delicate balance between public and private life.

Insight: Public figures must consider privacy concerns while engaging with the media to maintain personal and professional integrity.

Example: Public figures' participation in reality TV shows and the impact on personal branding and public image.

Episodes

Crumbling concrete, Harry returns and the Spanish FA

SUMMARY

Crisis Management:

- Example: The episode discusses the crumbling concrete crisis in government and the challenges faced by the Education Secretary. Her handling of the situation, including a poorly received YouTube video, is analyzed, highlighting the importance of effective crisis communication strategies. It mentions the need for leaders to understand the media's role and public expectations, especially during times of uncertainty.
- Insight: The government's response to a crisis, especially in the realm of education, demonstrates the complexities of managing public perception and providing accurate information during challenging situations. Effective crisis management requires leadership qualities such as active listening, understanding public sentiment, and making decisions that prioritize the well-being of the people involved.

Media and Perception:

- Example: Prince Harry's Netflix series and criticism of the British press, particularly regarding their coverage of injured service people, is discussed. The hosts emphasize the importance of accurate information and the consequences of public figures making misleading statements about media coverage.
- Insight: The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. Public figures, even members of the royal family and especially royals like Prince Harry, need to be accurate and fair in their criticism to maintain credibility and avoid damaging their own reputation.

Corporate World:

- Example: The comparison between corporate CEOs and political leaders, such as the Spanish football federation head, is made. The podcast emphasizes the difference in

how corporate leaders often listen to advisors and external opinions, which might not always be the case in political or governmental contexts.

- Insight: Corporate leaders can serve as examples of effective crisis management, as they often seek external advice and have checks and balances in place to make informed decisions during crises.

Elon Musk, 'sorry not sorry' and being booed

SUMMARY

Media Consumption Discrepancies:

- Example: The hosts highlight the differences in media consumption habits between countries. In the UK, people have common sources like the BBC and major newspapers, fostering a shared agenda. In contrast, the hosts note that in some parts of the US, there's no unified media source, and influential figures like Elon Musk operate in a different media landscape
 - i.e. his biography by Walter Isaacson, who used to edit in Time Magazine, run CNN, and has written books about Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, and Steve Jobs
- Insight: Public figures operate in varied media environments, and understanding these differences is crucial. It's essential to recognize that figures like Elon Musk might not have the same exposure to mainstream media narratives, impacting their perspectives and actions.

Challenges in Public Perception:

- Example: The hosts discuss the challenges faced by public figures when seeking redemption. They mention high-profile interviews with individuals like Luis Suarez and David Frost and how these interviews can be a double-edged sword, either helping or harming their reputations.
- Insight: Public figures face a significant risk when attempting to repair their image. The audience's reaction, especially in live situations, can be unpredictable and influence their public standing. Timing, sincerity, and contrition are critical factors in these redemption attempts.

Legacy Building for CEOs:

- Example: CEOs often focus on legacy-building in the final years of their tenure. They may engage in interviews and publications to shape their public image and set the tone for their post-career ventures.
- Insight: CEOs, like politicians, aim to leave a positive legacy. Strategic communication, including interviews and media appearances, plays a role in shaping public perception and maintaining a favorable reputation.

Risk of Public Backlash:

- Example: The hosts discuss instances where public figures faced unexpected reactions, such as Macron being booed during a public event. They compare it to other notable instances like Tony Blair's speech at the Women's Institute.

- Insight: Public figures, regardless of their status, are vulnerable to public sentiment. Unfiltered interactions with the public can lead to unexpected outcomes, underscoring the importance of managing public appearances and communication effectively.

Fashion Week and Public Relations (PR):

- Example: The hosts briefly mention Fashion Week as a significant PR event. They humorously describe the overwhelming presence of PR professionals during the event.
- Insight: Fashion Week serves as a hub for PR activities, showcasing the industry's influence on public perception and brand image. PR professionals play a pivotal role in shaping narratives and managing reputations during such events.

Russell Brand, BP and Britain's 'golden triangle'

SUMMARY

Power Imbalance in #MeToo Era:

The podcast discusses the power imbalance between individuals making allegations of misconduct and the powerful figures they are accusing. In the case of Russell Brand, the power dynamic is amplified by influential figures like Elon Musk supporting him publicly. The discussion highlights the bravery of women who come forward, risking their reputations, and emphasizes the significance of their role in holding powerful individuals accountable.

Social Media Influence and Responsibility:

The transcript illustrates the immense influence social media platforms have in shaping public opinion. YouTube's decision to demonetize Russell Brand's channel reflects the platforms' power to take a stance against controversial figures. However, the podcast also raises concerns about the effectiveness of such actions when other platforms still allow monetization, showing the challenges in regulating digital spaces.

Corporate Crisis Management:

The discussion around BP's CEO Bernard Looney's resignation sheds light on corporate crisis management. It emphasizes the importance of transparency and honesty within organizations. The revelation that Looney wasn't fully transparent about past relationships led to his departure. This example underscores the critical role corporate communication plays in maintaining trust and managing reputational risks, especially in the context of high-profile leadership changes.

Constitutional Crisis and Governance:

The podcast delves into the relationship between the UK government and Buckingham Palace, showcasing a rare glimpse into the behind-the-scenes workings. The revelations about senior civil servants considering raising concerns with the Queen about Boris Johnson's conduct highlight the delicate balance in the UK's constitutional monarchy. It underlines the importance of trust, discretion, and respect for traditional protocols in maintaining a stable relationship between government institutions and the monarchy.

Leadership Traits and Crisis Response:

The example of the job opening for the Chief Executive Officer position for the Prince and Princess of Wales emphasizes the desirable leadership traits such as being a servant leader, low ego, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence. These qualities reflect the evolving expectations from leaders, emphasizing humility, empathy, and a focus on serving others, which are crucial during times of crisis and change.

Murdoch, HS2 and British Gas

SUMMARY

Leadership Succession and Corporate Challenges:

The discussion begins with the announcement of Rupert Murdoch stepping down as chairman of Fox and News Corp, passing the reins to his son, Lachlan Murdoch. The conversation explores the challenges faced by Lachlan in handling the legacy of Fox News, specifically addressing legal issues and controversies related to the network. This example highlights the complexities of leadership succession and the need for strong leadership to navigate corporate challenges.

Infrastructure Projects and National Reputation:

The conversation shifts to the HS2 project, a high-speed railway in the UK. The speakers express concern about the escalating costs and delays in the project, emphasizing the potential impact on the country's reputation. They discuss the importance of completing such infrastructure projects for economic development and global competitiveness, pointing out the negative perception that arises when a nation struggles to complete significant initiatives.

Corporate Communication Challenges:

The discussion moves on to British Gas's communication strategy regarding the replacement of old meters with smart meters. The speakers highlight the challenges faced by large companies in effectively communicating changes to their customers. They discuss the delicate balance between conveying necessary information and avoiding alarmist messaging, emphasizing the importance of managing customer perceptions to maintain trust and loyalty.

Quirky Moments and Media Coverage at Party Conferences:

The speakers briefly touch upon quirky incidents that occur during political party conferences, such as Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, being photographed in a kayak. They discuss how such moments can shape public perceptions and media coverage, showcasing the unpredictable nature of political events and the need for politicians to carefully manage their public image.

The Taylor Swift effect, GB News and following Fergal

SUMMARY

Taylor Swift's Influence and Soft Power:

The hosts emphasize Taylor Swift's unprecedented influence as a public figure. They discuss her massive social media following, her ability to connect with people, and her authenticity, bravery, and trustworthiness. They highlight how Swift's power comes from her positivity, genuine beliefs, and ability to move people emotionally. The hosts also talk about Swift's political involvement, including her impact on voter registration and her influence on young voters.

GB News Crisis and Paul Marshall's Involvement:

The podcast delves into the crisis faced by GB News, a television news channel, and its co-owner Paul Marshall. They discuss the misogynistic comments made by one of the hosts, Lawrence Fox, and the subsequent suspension of both Fox and another individual. Paul Marshall, a major investor in GB News, is mentioned as a key figure, and his potential bid for The Telegraph and The Spectator is discussed.

Challenges Faced by the Water Industry Spokesperson:

The hosts talk about the challenges faced by David Henderson, the spokesperson for the water industry, during his appearance on the Today programme. They highlight the difficulties of representing an industry that is often criticized and unloved. The conversation revolves around the contrasting communication styles of Henderson and Fergal Sharkey, a passionate and spontaneous advocate for water-related issues.

Authenticity and Trust in Communication:

Throughout the discussion, the importance of authenticity and trust in communication is emphasized. The hosts compare effective communicators like Fergal Sharkey, who is genuine and relatable, with industry spokespersons who struggle to convey authenticity. They stress the significance of trust and believability when communicating with the public.

Media Landscape and Industry Representation:

The hosts touch upon the media landscape and the role of industry representatives in shaping public opinion. They discuss the need for industries to have advocates but also highlight the challenges faced by spokespersons, especially when the industry lacks public trust. The discussion touches on the balance between being behind the scenes and being a public-facing advocate.

Individual Journeys and Transformations:

The hosts reflect on the personal journeys of individuals like Fergal Sharkey, who transitioned from a punk rock musician to an advocate for water-related issues. They discuss how people evolve and take on different roles in public life.

Tobacco, Beckham Inc and an Eton mess

SUMMARY

Tobacco Industry and PR Challenges:

The tobacco industry faces an existential threat due to increasing regulations and public awareness about the health risks associated with smoking. The PR challenge for tobacco companies lies in rebranding themselves, shifting away from traditional cigarettes, and creating doubt about the scientific evidence linking smoking to health issues. The industry's use of PR tactics, like finding dissenting scientists to create doubt, illustrates how doubt can be a powerful tool in public perception, even in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence. The changing media landscape, social media, and politicization of news further complicate the industry's efforts to manage its image.

David and Victoria Beckham's Netflix Documentary:

The Beckham documentary reflects their journey from young celebrities facing intense public scrutiny to empowered individuals controlling their narrative. By producing their own documentary, they can present a multidimensional view of their lives, overcoming the limitations of traditional media interviews. This approach allows them to share their story, including the challenges they faced, their vulnerabilities, and their growth as public figures. It highlights the evolving nature of celebrity PR in the digital age, where controlling the narrative becomes essential for managing public perception.

Nicholas Coleridge's Past Comments and Eton College Appointment:

Nicholas Coleridge's past comments, made in 1988, resurfaced and sparked controversy after his appointment as the Provost of Eton College. His remarks, which reflected elitism and exclusionary attitudes, raise questions about accountability and transparency in leadership roles. The incident underscores the importance of vetting candidates thoroughly, considering their past statements and actions, and addressing any potential controversies proactively. It also emphasizes the changing societal norms and the need for institutions to align with more inclusive values.

Captain Tom's family, Barclays and the Grand National

SUMMARY

Crisis Management and Decision-Making:

The text discusses the decision of Captain Tom Moore's family to give an interview to Piers Morgan, which backfired and negatively impacted their reputation. The family's decision-making process lacked careful consideration of the potential consequences, highlighting the importance of crisis management and strategic decision-making in the public eye.

Media Strategy and Media Relations:

The discussion emphasizes the significance of choosing the right platform and interviewer when engaging with the media. Media strategy is crucial, and selecting the appropriate journalist and platform can significantly influence how the story is portrayed and received by the public.

Reputation Management:

The interview with Piers Morgan had a detrimental effect on the reputation of Captain Tom Moore's family, highlighting the risks associated with media appearances. Reputation management requires a thorough understanding of media dynamics and the ability to anticipate the potential outcomes of public interactions.

The Role of PR in Crisis Situations:

The text discusses the failure of Barclays in handling the crisis related to its association with Jeffrey Epstein. Public relations professionals play a vital role in conducting due diligence, assessing potential risks, and advising organizations on crisis communication strategies to protect their reputation.

Effective Communication through Press Releases:

The text praises the Jockey Club's well-structured press release regarding reforms to the Grand National, emphasizing the importance of clear and strategic communication. Crafting effective press releases with well-thought-out messages is a fundamental aspect of public relations, allowing organizations to control the narrative and present their messages accurately.

Evolution of the PR Industry:

The discussion touches upon the changing perceptions of the public relations industry and the reluctance to use the term "public relations." Despite the industry's evolution, acknowledging and embracing the term "public relations" can enhance transparency and clarity in communication, both internally and externally.

Britney's memoir, BT's rebrand and Meryl Streep

SUMMARY

The Power of Personal Narratives:

The text highlights the significance of personal narratives, especially in the form of memoirs, in the realm of public relations. Celebrities like Britney Spears and Prince Harry leverage their personal stories to regain control of their own narratives. Writing a memoir becomes a therapeutic and cathartic process for individuals, allowing them to express their emotions and experiences. The act of putting one's story into words is emphasized as a means of taking back control and finding emotional healing.

Example: Britney Spears' decision to write her memoir and reveal untold aspects of her life demonstrates the power of personal narratives in shaping public perception and reclaiming control over her story.

Emotion as a Selling Point:

The discussion emphasizes the role of emotion in marketing and how it significantly influences consumer choices. Unlike business books, memoirs often delve into emotional experiences, making readers connect with the story on a deeper level. Emotion is portrayed as a key factor that drives people to engage with various forms of media and products.

Example: The text suggests that emotional connection is a crucial factor in driving sales of books like Prince Harry's memoir. His narration, combined with the intimate format of an audiobook, fosters a unique connection with millions of listeners.

Ghostwriting and Authenticity:

The text explores the concept of ghostwriters, individuals who capture the voice and essence of the person they are writing for. It delves into the balance between authenticity and marketability, emphasizing the importance of genuine storytelling even when a ghostwriter is involved. The discussion also touches upon the necessity of baring one's soul in a memoir for readers to feel the authenticity of the narrative.

Example: The mention of Lewis Hamilton's autobiography illustrates the desire for authenticity. Even though he collaborated with a ghostwriter, the purpose was to share his genuine story, making readers connect with his journey from an impoverished background to a successful racing driver.

Rebranding and Brand Equity:

The text shifts to the corporate world, discussing the rebranding efforts of BT to E. It raises questions about the potential risks and challenges associated with rebranding, especially when dealing with established and widely recognized brands. The importance of preserving brand equity and reputation is emphasized, highlighting the need for careful planning and execution in rebranding initiatives.

Example: The discussion around BT's rebranding to E demonstrates the complexities involved in changing well-established brand names. It underscores the challenges of communicating such changes to the public and ensuring a smooth transition without alienating customers.

Timing and Public Perception:

The text explores the concept of timing in the context of public relations. It highlights how celebrities and companies strategically control the timing of announcements to manage public perception. Delaying the release of information can sometimes reduce the impact of a story, allowing individuals and organizations to navigate public reactions more effectively.

Example: The discussion about Meryl Streep's and Will Smith's delayed announcements of their separations illustrates the strategic control over timing in managing personal news. By keeping such information private for years, they effectively controlled the narrative and public reactions.

NatWest's Alison Rose, Unilever and I'm a Celebrity...

SUMMARY

PR Disasters and Crisis Management:

The text discusses the PR disaster faced by NatWest due to the closure of Nigel Farage's account, which became a significant crisis moment. The conversation between Alison Rose, the CEO of NatWest, and Simon Jack, the BBC business editor, at a charity dinner led to a series of events that became a PR nightmare for the bank. The discussion highlights the importance of crisis management and how a single incident can snowball into a major public relations crisis.

Media Relations and Reputation Management:

The text emphasizes the critical role of media relations in managing a crisis. It points out how NatWest's PR team should have briefed the CEO thoroughly before the charity dinner, considering the presence of influential journalists. The CEO's conversation with Simon Jack, a prominent journalist, led to reputational damage. The text also discusses the invasion of privacy and media scrutiny faced by Alison Rose after the incident, highlighting the challenges of managing reputation in the digital age.

Corporate Values and Social Responsibility:

The text mentions Unilever's shift in strategy under its new CEO, Heinz Schumacher. Unilever, known for its social purpose initiatives and corporate social responsibility, is reconsidering its approach. The discussion raises questions about the balance between profit-making and social responsibility in large corporations. Unilever's previous commitment to environmental sustainability, fair wages, and ethical practices contrasts with the new CEO's focus on financial performance, indicating a potential shift in corporate values.

Celebrity Culture and Public Image:

The text touches on the trend of public figures, including CEOs, participating in reality TV shows like "I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here." It explores the potential impact of such appearances on public image and personal branding. The examples of previous contestants, such as Ed Balls, illustrate how participation in these shows can either revive or damage a public figure's career.

Strategic Decision-Making in Media Engagement:

The text underscores the strategic decisions that public figures, including CEOs, must make regarding media engagement. It discusses the risks and rewards associated with participating in reality TV shows, emphasizing the loss of control over public image. The discussion around Peter Mandelson's regret about not participating in "Strictly Come Dancing" highlights how these decisions can influence personal and professional trajectories.