

Idle No More: An Effective Model for Crisis Management
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Summary: In today's society, every business or organization should have a solid understanding of effective crisis management techniques. The Idle No More Movement is a strong example of how these techniques can be beneficial in preserving a favorable public image during times of crisis. The Idle No More Campaign was successful in their attempt to address a violent incident and portray it in a way that strengthened the movement.

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The Idle No More campaign is defined as a network of native communities who have come together to push for coexistence. The group spends their time and effort taking part in what they consider to be a peaceful revolution for change. They focus on a variety of issues that impact their own communities such as violence against women, and environmental protection. The Idle No More mission statement reads: “Idle No More calls on all people to join in a revolution which honors and fulfills Indigenous sovereignty which protects the land and water.” The group achieves this by continuing to work to restore and protect the rights of their people, but like any type of revolution, conflict and confrontation is simply part of the process.

Although it is easy to mistake the Idle No More campaign for a movement that is simply based on environmental issues, there is an even larger issue at the center of the movement. The Idle No More Movement focuses on the concept of indigenous sovereignty. Sovereignty can simply be defined as holding supreme power or authority over a group. The government's failure to consult with indigenous peoples over changes in legislation has been an issue that has created this strong movement. Many native groups have felt as though the government has gotten away with stripping them of their own basic human rights. They still feel as though they have been denied access to land that had once been peacefully occupied by their ancestors. They have grown to resent the government for depriving them of the land's rich resources and view self-government as a way to correct the feelings of wrongful oppression. Many indigenous people believe that self-government will grant them the ability to practice their own culture and customs without regulation or unnecessary government interference. Since its establishment in December 2012, Idle No More movement has gained thousands of followers that are now demanding the security of the rights of Indigenous people that they consider long overdue.

The Idle No More campaign has teamed up with Defenders of the Land, another group dedicated to the advancement of indigenous communities across Canada to combat this issue of sovereignty. The Defenders of the Land explain their mission in the following statement found on

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the organization's website: "We, Indigenous Peoples of the territory known as Canada who are defending our lands and waters, our ways of life, and our rights, are of one mind that: We are sovereign nations. We will determine our own destinies in accordance with our own customs, laws, and traditions - not in a way dictated to us by Canadian and provincial governments, and without interference by these governments".

The Idle No More Campaign plans to accomplish national sovereignty by developing leadership structure and councils, coordinating rallies, and gaining additional support through the use of social media sites. They also plan on hiring experienced experts so that they may become well versed in topics like treaty research and indigenous rights. They are looking to request meetings with First Nations leadership to have discussions with the government and present their wishes as well as their concerns. These efforts to combat unfair government practices are not something that can be achieved over night. Like any revolution, their efforts have triggered a great deal of conflict and have even resulted in violence.

On October 17th, an anti-fracking protest turned violent in New Brunswick, Canada. Members of the first nation came out to express their dissatisfaction with natural resources company SWN Canada. SWN began exploring the region looking for natural gas deposits within the land. Protestors grew increasingly unhappy and worried that the company would eventually choose to begin a process known as fracking. Fracking is defined as "the process of extracting natural gas from shale rock layers deep within the earth". It allows companies like SWN Canada, to access natural gas that is located deep beneath the earth's surface. These natural gas deposits were once considered to be unreachable by mankind until the process of fracking had been developed. The process involves injecting chemicals into the earth to break out the resource deposits. Many opponents consider these chemicals to be extremely harmful to the environment. According to Earth Justice, an organization that is against fracking, the process is "poisoning our air and water and on its way to jeopardizing the health of millions". They also claim that one

should seek other alternatives and “find a better way, one that protects our health and gives us clean, and safe energy sources that never run out”.

The riot in New Brunswick is just one of many protests that have been organized to combat the efforts of energy companies in Canada. The Idle No More Campaign is a product of ongoing tension between companies like SWN and the indigenous peoples throughout the country. This particular incident turned violent when police arrived to shut down the protest. Officers arrived armed with attack dogs, pepper spray, fire hoses, tear gas, rubber bullets, and even snipers. It resulted in the arrest of nearly 40 protestors, including Elsipogtog Chief Arren and several other council members. Rioters reacted to these arrests by setting a number of police vehicles on fire. There has been much dispute over the method that the police chose to deal with the protest. The RCMP or Royal Canadian Mounted Police said the protestors were arrested for numerous charges including violating firearms policies and violating the injunction. Protestors combated those allegations and claimed that the RCMP acted erratically, aggressively and unethically against unarmed citizens.

Violent events are crisis that have the power to destroy the reputation of any credible business or organization. The Idle No More Movement was caught in a social media firestorm that made headlines across the globe. This leads us to an important research question centered on effective crisis management. How can organizations like Idle No More deal with periods of crisis? What steps should be taken to insure that the violent incident does not threaten their otherwise credible and positive public image?

Before one can respond to a crisis similar to the one in New Brunswick, it is crucial that they know what elements make a situation a crisis. A crisis is “a non-routine event that risks undesired visibility that in turn threatens significant reputational damage”. There are four types of crises: meteor, predator, breakdown, and morphing. A meteor crisis is an unexpected crisis that is not anticipated. An example of a meteor crisis is the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis. During

this crisis, individuals took bottles of Tylenol off the shelf, and tampered with the pills inside the bottle. This event caused the death of five individuals who unknowingly purchased and ingested the tampered drug. A predator crisis occurs when a company or organization knowingly carries out an act that they consider to be wrong or immoral. These types of crisis occur when a company attempts to pull a fast one in attempt to get ahead. These types of crisis often result in law suits and the loss of a company's credibility. A breakdown crisis occurs when an employee of a company breaks the law. It is called a breakdown crisis because it generally involves a breakdown in company policy or procedure which in turn causes the crisis. The Exxon oil spill of 1989 is a good example of a breakdown crisis. Captain Joseph Hazelwood, who was in charge of controlling the ship, was asleep in his bunk. The captain was reportedly drunk at the time that the vessel crashed into a reef. His neglect caused thousands of barrels of crude oil to be dumped into Alaska's Prince William Sound. It is an example of a breakdown crisis, because an employee of Exxon failed to follow company procedure, which then in turn caused the crisis. The last type of crisis is known as a morphing crisis. Lastly, a morphing crisis is an event that starts out as one type of crisis and morphs into another. The Exxon oil spill could also be an example of a morphing crisis. At first it appeared that the crashing of a ship was an unexpected event that was difficult to avoid. This factor would lead people to believe that it was a meteor crisis. Once the public learned that the crash was caused by the captain's own intoxication, it then morphed into a breakdown crisis.

Many consider the riot that took place on October 17th to be a predator crisis. It appears that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had to have known that they were using aggressive force against unarmed protestors. Many felt that it was necessary to use violence against men and women that showed little to no signs of threatening behavior. Snipers, fire hoses, attack dogs, and rubber bullets were just a few of the unethical tactics that the RCMP used to put an end to what

many consider a peaceful protest. The police lost a great deal of credibility when the photos and videos of the incident reached viewers.

An organization's responses to an event like this must be planned extremely carefully. Acting erratically can have a negative, long lasting effect on the company or organization's reputation. Crisis response techniques still remain in an early stage of development. Today's crisis response strategies are the result of compiled research from case studies. An effective crisis response is made up of three distinct components. Responses to crisis should be quick, consistent, and open. These three components have proven to be consistently effective for several reasons. Being quick stresses the importance of getting the word out about the event quickly and efficiently. Many organizations depend on the use of social media to spread the word as quickly as possible. In an article titled, *Crisis Management: A Communicative Approach*, author Timothy Coombs claims that "crisis experts preach the need to get the word out within the first hour of the crisis". A quick response allows the organization in crisis to get their facts out first without allowing others to relay false information that could potentially portray the company in a negative light. The Idle No More movement understands the importance of getting the word out. Photos were immediately posted on social media sites by protesters who captured the brutality of the riot on their smart phones. Social media sites were flooded by coverage of the incident within minutes and hundreds of supporters took to the sites expressing their outrage towards the RCMP behavior. That majority of the photos and videos released were in posted in support of the protesters. According to the article, "The New Manifest Destiny: A Brief Political History of the Idle No More Movement", a quick search on Google trends for Canada revealed a 100 percent spike in search information for Rexton, New Brunswick. This statement shows the importance of a quick response. The protestors wasted no time uploading photos, videos and other reports about the brutality that occurred during the riot. This ensured that their accurate information was the first

accounts that surfaced which created a positive public perception of the movement. By responding first, the campaign was given the chance to control or regulate its own reputation.

Being consistent is the next response that leads to effective crisis response. Consistency means that there are no contradictions found within the information released by the company or organization. The message must remain consistent throughout the crisis response because it builds credibility among the organization. It is also important that the organization has a designated spokesperson. This ensures that the message stays constant. If there is more than one spokesperson appointed, it is important to keep each one informed of the current state of the crisis. This ensures that the information released stays the same throughout each stage of the response. The Idle No More Movement has released several statements that have remained consistent. They have managed to produce proof that collaborates with their statements to act as further evidence to their claims. This evidence includes photos and videos taken at the protest in New Brunswick which clearly reveal the unprovoked brutality. Members of the RCMP claimed that they grew aggressive only when threatened, but the video evidence reveals that this statement was not entirely true. This immediately tarnished the credibility of the police officials since they failed to remain consistent.

Being open is the last component of an effective crisis response plan. Being open is defined as remaining available to comment on the situation at hand. Being open is extremely important for several reasons. If a company or organization refuses to openly comment on an event, it appears to the public as though they have something to hide. It adds a shadow of doubt to the conversation and negatively affects the organization's credibility. The Idle No More Campaign understands the importance of an open relationship between the organization and its public. It is constantly looking to the media and providing the public with accurate information pertaining to the event. They are constantly providing statements in newspaper articles and even created an active blog on their website to promote a truthful conversation about the issue. These

blogs ask the public to share ideas, solutions and recommendations to ensure that the future of the campaign is positive. It is clear that they are making efforts to keep communication open, rather than hiding or covering up any important details.

Keeping your publics informed through social media is yet another way to remain open and willing to encourage an open dialogue. The Idle No More campaign currently depends on social media now more than ever. On Friday, July 28th, the Idle No More Campaign launched a brand new website and communication platform centered on the use of social media sites. The purpose of the new campaign was to engage people on the issue through web, social media, email and text. Idle No More organizer, Crystle Lightning, stated “We know that this is a global movement with this new website grassroots organizers everywhere will be able to connect, share resources, and see all of their events and actions-literally all on one map”(Lightning).

Their use of social media is one of the main reasons why the movement has been considered successful on a global scale. As of 2013, Facebook, a popular social media site, has nearly one billion users. Approximately 200 million of those users only access the site on mobile devices. In a matter of seconds, society has access to thousands of sites and databases and can search even the newest of stories. In the case of the Idle No More Campaign, protestors were able to upload videos and photos of the incident in a matter of minutes. This allowed individuals around the world to see the events that occurred first hand. The power of photos and videos is extremely compelling and leaves no piece of information to the imagination. This allowed society to see the police brutality with their own eyes which in turn did wonders for the campaign. Members of society immediately came to the defense of the protestors and the campaign gained even more national news coverage. With the growing number of active supporters, the Idle No More Campaign is only gaining momentum. Business and other organizations should use the Idle No More Campaign as an example for effective crisis management.

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These three components of effective crisis response strategies have helped the Idle No More Movement to manage a situation that could have ruined their reputation if not handled properly. My research suggests that many people are in support of the movement. In my opinion, society values a company's ability to remain quick, consistent and open. That is not something that is easy to do in the wake of crisis. The fact that the Idle No More Campaign has achieved all three of these components is something that is greatly valued by the public. The organization is continuing to grow in supporters, which leads one to believe that the campaign is only getting stronger. This case study is extremely significant in the field of activist campaigns because it demonstrates how an organization should properly approach a crisis. The movement managed to take an extremely difficult situation and turn it into one that is positive and beneficial for the cause.

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