

Idle No More: Maintaining their Mission Through Crisis Management

David Twombly

Bridgewater State University

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Thesis: In times of crisis, Idle No More, entered into a situation which could potentially subvert everything that they stand for; the peaceful protest and education of social justice in our world. However, by maintaining the values found in their ideals throughout all of their actions Idle No More is able to escape scrutiny entirely.

Beginning as a grassroots campaign in the Turtle Islands of Canada, the Idle No More movement has become a national phenomenon in the country. Since late 2012 Idle No More has been focusing on an initial outrage over bills being passed that would destroy sovereign land; land that would be lost for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples for generations. Essentially, “everyone needs clean water,” and it was a group of indigenous people who initially brought a sense of passion to the cause. While it has been confused that the Idle No More movement is directed specifically for indigenous peoples, the campaign finds its success in that the all of its causes can be applied to a broad spectrum of populations; the environment, social human rights, domestic violence, etc. Idle No More takes these global problems one step further by bringing its message to the everyday citizen, not just the informed or concerned citizen. With a massive media campaign, Idle No More still chooses to not stay idle: in 2012 they took their movement to the people with flash mobs and the like in public areas; shopping malls and parks. Idle No More finds its success in its care and devotion for the everyday citizen, the one who needs the most informing. The mission statement: “Idle No More calls on all people to join in a revolution which honors and fulfills Indigenous sovereignty which protects the land and water,” is the driving force for the organization, so much so that it can be seen played out in public by Idle No More in nearly every event put on by themselves, or any appearance that is written about the organization by the public. Idle no more is a success in reaching a global base of supporters because of its ability to speak to a large demographic and to always act according to its mission.

The greatest example of Idle No More running according to its own mission would come from its ability to function appropriately in an instance of crisis management. On October 17th Native protesters rallied against Shale Gas Fracking in Rexton, N.B. The interactions between the protesters and the RCMP officers resulted in burned vehicles and over 40 people arrested.

The protesters were not able to stop the SWN Resources will not stop the process of shale gas fracking, however, First Nation representatives maintain the stance that the “war is not over,” and will continue to protest. Many Chiefs and Shawns were affected in this, several being arrested, several others were injured.

There was major potential for this one event to destroy much of Idle No More’s credibility, this “peaceful protest” resulted in injury and heated protection of values. Idle No More has been praised for raising awareness and protecting lands and ideals, however a full scale protest to this level goes against much of what Idle No More claims to be about. Idle No More was able to subvert expectations though not only after the event, but while the event was going on. By live tweeting, and releasing “to-the-moment” relevant videos demonstrating their perspective and garnering positive focus. From here they were in control of what media outlets would be sending out and could make a conscious effort that their actions would reflect the peace that they desire according to their mission juxtaposing it to the anger coming from the RCMP.

Crisis responses depend on public and political environment, culture and inner workings of the organization, and human nature. The culture and inner workings of the organization are important as the Native Protesters highlight that they search for an answer that involves peace: ‘We urge all sides not to resort to violence as history has proven these tactics are not productive.’ Chief Gabriel Atwin, Kingsclear First Nation. It is important the Idle No More sticks to its ideals and brings them to the surface for the public to understand and trust them. In this statement Idle No More maintains an ability to be “upfront” with their public and to demonstrate that they will remain focused on the mission of the organization as a whole. There has not been much diversity in the kinds of crises that Idle No More has encountered. Primarily it has been either Human Error or Mechanical Problems. Idle No More has had many violent and difficult

run-ins with Canadian officials, from legislative to local authorities. Idle No More remains active in its protests and often these can lead to difficult crises that must be managed, however violence is never their answer; but remaining tied to their mission allows for them to emerge successful consistently.

In the context of public relations, this specific study of crisis management for Idle No More exhibits how it has been able to achieve success: by sticking to its mission. Creator of TOMS footwear, Blake Mycoskie, has maintained the premise that in order to start something that matters, it is important to “keep it simple.” Idle No More has started as a simple grassroots campaign to keep legislature from destroying land, and it has easily lent itself toward becoming an organization that supports social justice and trying to educate the everyday citizen. Idle No More maintains the values of their mission; requesting and supporting action from all peoples. The linchpin to maintaining a positive image after this crisis was using the perspective of the everyday individual defending their values, and then releasing these images to the public. Activist campaigns are becoming more and more focused on calling upon people to decide to care, to decide to make a difference, Idle No More maintains this in its mission and shows it taking action, revolutionizing how people can become a part of an activist movement.

For instance, in Dawn’s “Dawn Saves Wildlife” campaign demonstrated plenty of individuals doing their part to protect hurt animals, however these were all specialist, everyone else is asked simply to buy Dawn product. Idle No More, however takes the action of its supporters and shows it through someone’s own cell phone. Becoming a part of Idle No More is more of a reality- you can not only aid change, but you can lead change. Moving forward, Idle No More will have to reevaluate how they decide to take action; if they reach about five “peaceful protests” gone awry by the end of a calendar year, the public may see them as straying

from the mission which they claim to live by. Idle No More, however, understands how it needs to operate in order to maintain order and success, keep it simple, if they can say that they are functioning according to their mission- what they stand for- then there will never be any need for to defend their actions.

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