

Lessons In Crisis Management From Facebook And Starbucks

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Zuckerberg has been a little slow to embrace the importance [+]

Facebook has had a rough couple of weeks.

The Cambridge Analytica data-breach scandal sowed seeds of distrust across Facebook's user base, and the company's initial silence on the issue made things worse. And all that came on top of the PR problems Facebook already had linked to fake news and election meddling. Many people feel the company has not been sufficiently ahead of the unfolding crisis.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg might do well to take a page from the

playbook of Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson. When two black men were recently arrested in a Philadelphia Starbucks for asking to use the bathroom, Johnson [took immediate action](#)—and very likely succeeded in nipping in the bud what could have been a total PR fiasco.

Rather than let the press run wild with what had happened, he got out in front of the news. He denounced the actions of the Starbucks employee who called police and announced that Starbucks would be closing its 8,000 U.S. stores for one afternoon for racial bias education.

Zuckerberg has been a little slow to embrace the importance of the action component needed by a leader in a crisis—but he has stepped up as the person to be held accountable. In his recent comments, [published by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce](#), he declared:

“I started Facebook, I run it, and I’m responsible for what happens here.”

He accepted 100 percent of the blame for Facebook’s recent scandals, and that kind of accountability is rare.

Accepting total responsibility is an important mark of leadership not only because it’s true—the buck *does* stop at the top—but because operating with real accountability is something we just don’t see much of anymore. In the face of blame or mistakes, most politicians and business leaders simply duck, tiptoe and sidestep. They launch an investigation or own up to weak oversight, but rarely do they admit fault or hold themselves directly accountable.

Zuckerberg’s willingness to take it on the chin is a sign of strong leadership—the kind that can inspire confidence from the people who work for a company and in the public that depends upon its services. But, the next step will likely be harder.

Zuckerberg is going to have to back up his words with actions. After all,

way back in 2010 he wrote a [piece for the Washington Post](#) in which he made great claims of protecting the privacy of Facebook users. Somehow, it appears this value has not been infused into the culture of his company.

And culture is where the rubber meets the road, because that's what inspires employees to do the right thing even when nobody at the top is watching. Culture is about a lot more than being a fun place to work—as Facebook has been, historically.

Building an accountable culture can mean making painful decisions and even losing money in the short term—as Starbucks demonstrated. But open communication and quick action are the strategies that have proven most successful in saving a business from even the most dire public relations disaster.

True accountability has costs and rewards.

Consider the events of 1982, when cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules killed seven people in the Chicago area. Johnson & Johnson, the makers of Tylenol, didn't blame the people who tampered with the product—which would have been understandable. Instead, the company took immediate control of the situation and recalled *100 percent* of the product in the market, one of the first major recalls in history.

Throughout the crisis, Johnson & Johnson's management did everything leaders *should* do in response to this kind of crisis. They collected the facts and encouraged transparency. They communicated frequently with affected stakeholders. And they didn't split hairs about accountability. They made it clear that Johnson & Johnson was in control of the situation.

In this way, they built back trust in their brand, enabling market share to recover from almost zero in the immediate wake of the crisis to a new high within a year. While most experts initially considered the brand as good as dead, Tylenol is still going strong as a trusted name today.

Ultimately, it comes down to what sort of company you want to run.

Today's business leaders need to remember: Not only does the buck *stop* with you, your company's culture *starts* in the same place.

If you claim to foster a culture in which honesty is valued and mistakes are lessons, not defeats, you need to exemplify that culture. Take a page from Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates, author of [Principles: Life and Work](#). At his hedge fund, making a mistake is not a fire-able offense. *Failing* to report a mistake is.

During a crisis, an individual's character and a company's values are both put to the test. Only time will tell if this is a test Facebook will pass.

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