

SOP: Work POV & Catch-22 to SNAFU

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 15 November 2012 19:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 15 November 2012 19:12

Pretty much Standard Operating Procedure these days: When bad things happen, have your legal and PR staff closely question and challenge the Point of View of accusers, while working every Catch-22 connection and boondoggle in stock, trusting complaints will crash in on themselves from sheer confusion, crosswinds, and weight.

Once the status quo has been maintained and Situation Normal (All Fouled Up) has been re-instituted, one can then declare victory and divvy out promotions and bonuses, taking a year off with full pay and benefits.

This formula works right across the tragedy board, and throughout the entire spectrum of mass mayhem people usually encounter: any banking, all politics, business in general, you name it.

All areas of human endeavor eventually go south; when they do, it's important to have a standard game plan already in place to dodge blame and lay a solid foundation of Doubt and Delay -- two of the best friends any industry or enterprise has ever had.

BP has emerged a masterful maestro, working both of these with ongoing masterstrokes.

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Some tragedies tend to rewrite the textbooks on both sides of the fray -- the defensive business manuals of the offending agency, group, or business, and for those on the other, texts for those who find such industrial tactics, antics, and behaviors reprehensibly offensive.

BP's belching oil volcano, smearing and staining the Gulf of Mexico, is one such incident. Nothing much is as it once was for life under the waves, for those along its seashores, and for those whose livings once rode atop those same waves.

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You can't purchase much clean ocean with mere money. But, you can make parting with pallets and bales of it, forever, a mighty unattractive option for those who spoil it.

However, I am no longer sure a mere loss of money -- even boatloads of the stuff -- is enough to prevent bad corporate behaviors and horrific outcomes, not when a business's cash pipeline is as fat and round as an oil company's.

Such monstrously profitable, well-connected, highly-protected, and deeply subsidized companies simply factor in disaster costs in iffy situations, and go ahead regardless -- no matter what disastrous outcomes might come to pass.

As always, you can do a job right for one cost, or you can do it again, after screwing it up badly, and sometimes pay hundreds of times the cost of the original. Plus the clean-up. And the penalties. And the fees for lawyers and added workers. And the...

And so on.

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Business advisory: If you don't think you have the time and money to do things right the first time around, what makes you think you will have enough the second time -- and still have enough for pleas, penalties, fines, lawsuits, and fees?

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The clock can move slowly, but not so slowly as justice sometimes does.

Now, finally, there are to be some criminal pleas and fines and settlements, it is announced, and

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an even more rigorous defense by BP of civil lawsuits, the oil company says -- and so forth.

Scattergun and birdshot, bit by painful bit, piece by injured piece, this one is trying to work itself out, this long tragic dance of hurt.

BP is bulwarked by brigades of lawyers, and no one on that side is missing any meals throughout any of this, you can bet. On the side of the injured parties, you have the usual story: some dead, many more casualties of all kinds. Many missed meals.

And that's just the humans. There are no lifeforms from the sea familiar with American jurisprudence or its forms of practice -- there is only clean water and life or suffocation by oil and death. Things are simpler under the waves, in some ways.

Onshore, the *moneyground* continues, with scraps of paper passed out and handed around like markers in some dark game -- *a little leaves here, and moves over there, while a bigger pile shifts from this place, here, over to that spot, there...*

When everything's done, even if done as fairly as can be done, it is to set things rights again. Except we all know it will not be set right, not even close -- not for life in, on, and around these waters. *Disasters can't rewind in time, and can't go back in the can, once opened.*

Yes, the moving around of that money is supposed to make everyone feel better, and help turn the page, to help put things back together -- things that can never be fixed by human hands. Mostly, that money moving around is supposed to help some people, somewhere, sleep better.

Funny, how the decisions about any area are usually made by people who live nowhere close to the area affected. This helps business decisions be as toxic, negligent, damaging, and noxious as deemed desirable. It helps anyone doing any deciding never be inconvenienced by lost sleep.

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In the middle of the wreckage heaved into shoreline residents' lives, you might remember a poor ol' BP exec who was just so tired and stressed out, *all he wanted was his life back, to go sailing aboard his yacht...*

People had died quickly at sea in the disaster, and many more were slowly dying on shore. *And this insensitive, self-centered BP bastard wanted to run home, to go sailing on his yacht...*

Yes, and all while people on shore wondered how they'd maintain their own homes anymore, or if they'd have one to go -- or how they might make their non-yacht, fishing boat payments, since they were unable to fish in the Gulf.

And BP, basking in the publicity of making promises, stringing residents along like a school of fish strung on miles of barbed wire...

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The Supreme Court tells us corporations are people. Who will tell BP to go to jail? And, one better: Even if BP would go, how and where would we house it? *House arrest?*

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I have never been one in favor of the death penalty, as we humans are imperfect. As such, we have no right handing down punishments we are unable to later correct.

And, on the other side of it, death is too easy -- and too quick -- a way out for the guilty. A remaining lifetime spent reconciling oneself to one's actions seems more appropriate, and

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provides an opportunity for some measure of learning and self-improvement before moving on to whatever is next.

However, having said that, I will say, with a clear conscience and strong voice, *BP should be put to death*

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If life were actually up to this realist's challenge, here is how the fantasy death would go:

And, BP was boarded by swarms of legal pirates, and taken as a nationalized prize in the name of all parties on whom BP has warred and injured, and the kin of those BP has killed.

Let a new name be painted on the stern, and a new crew work the trade winds, flying the lightning-blasted flag of the People!

And let the new venture and flag serve as fair warning for any who would dare spoil the earth, sky, or seas.

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In this fantasy, there is a corresponding earthquake beneath all business foundations.

And there was a sudden, great popping and clapping sound, all round the nation and world. □ It was the sound of business sphincters reflexively, protectively, and automatically slamming and slapping shut, tight as mussels at low tide.

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It was also the sound of business leaders rethinking a host of decisions, sitting, for the first time in decades, bolt upright in their boardroom chairs.

Lightning-bolt upright, in fact.

BP, Take 1:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/11/15/165190956/bp-expected-to-plead-guilty-pay-record-fine-in-gulf-oil-spill-criminal-case>

BP, Take 2: http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/bp-to-pay-billions-in-gulf-oil-spill-settlement/2012/11/15/ba0b783a-2f2e-11e2-9f50-0308e1e75445_story.html?hpid=z2