

Scenario 1 – “Pool Party”

The wildfire had burned for seven days, fueled by high temperatures, windy conditions and dry terrain. Hundreds of fire fighters had responded and hundreds of acres had gone up in flames, including at least one neighborhood of high-priced homes. Roadblocks have kept reporters away from the devastation and the active firefight, although they’ve had access to a staging area and been able to interview firefighters. The fire is now 90 percent contained and you are willing to take a pool into the devastated neighborhood. You’ve selected one network-affiliated TV reporter, one AP photographer and a reporter from the large daily paper in your state. However, the other reporters are very vocal about their displeasure with the size of the pool and the press members you’ve selected. Most want a larger pool, or a second pool, but a few are demanding complete access to the site.

Discussion questions: How do you respond? What do you do to prevent such a situation from happening again? What is the best way to “pick” pool members?

Scenario 2 – Loaded Question

Your agency director is taking questions at a news conference. It is the first anniversary of a particularly high-profile issue (lack of adequate and geographically accessible shelters) that affected primarily an economically depressed neighborhood. Your agency has done a good job putting in place new policies and protocols to address the issue, and you have fully briefed your agency director on the accomplishments to date. A reporter stands up to ask a question. He begins by recapping the issue and citing a number of “facts.” He states that your agency continues to ignore the needs of the community, as there are no designated shelters to date. Then the reporter asks: Don’t you think this is clear evidence of extremely discriminatory practices?

Discussion questions: How do you handle this situation while it is happening? What could you have done to reduce the consequences?

Scenario 3 – News Conference Gone Wrong

You are holding a news conference updating reporters on the status of a school shooting. The shooter – a student armed with his father’s hunting rifle -- has been killed; seven other students and two teachers have been wounded and taken to local hospitals. They are expected to survive. You start by reading a statement recounting the facts and then open the floor for questions. The first questions are appropriate – how many officers responded, where did the shootings occur, what was the motive. Then a reporter begins to ask questions about the shooter’s parents, their gun history and the state’s gun control laws. Other reporters jump on the gun control angle and begin asking for your opinion on the National Rifle Association, the Second Amendment and the ability of people to buy unregistered guns at gun shows.



Note

Discussion questions: How do you handle the situation while it is happening or right after? What would you do next time to reduce the chance of this happening again?

Scenario 4 – Social Media Bites Back

Your agency had been slow to accept social media and has just started a Twitter feed. Although you already have 2,500 followers, you'd like to see that number grow 10-fold. To create some excitement and energy, you send out a tweet: We're here to support you. Tweet photos of your interactions with our officers and use the hashtag #goodnewsaboutus. Unfortunately, the photos coming thick and fast are not images of happy interactions. They show a variety of negative encounters – including one that appears to show an officer shooting a dog.

Discussion questions: How do you handle this onslaught of negative images on social media? How do you handle the resulting news story about the campaign? What social media policy do you put in place to help prevent this from happening again?



Note

Scenario 5 – The Misquote

Your agency director has granted an interview to a newspaper reporter from your city. You have developed a good rapport with the reporter and feel it is a good time to go “on the record” about the issue. The issue at hand is fairly complicated – and controversial – but your director does a good job fully explaining the situation, and why your agency has taken the action it did. You feel the interview went well and are optimistic about the upcoming story. However, when the story runs a week later, above the fold on the front page, you're not sure you were sitting in the same interview as the reporter. The facts are incomplete, the quotes are taken out of context and there are places where it's clear the reporter failed to understand the intricacies of the situation. The headline, particularly, is a nightmare.

Discussion questions: What options do you have to push back against the story? What could you have done differently? What will you do differently in the future?