

Hedgehogs and the pursuit of media

By Wendy Erika Werden, APR PRSA

If you haven't read Jim Collins's book, *Good to Great*, you're missing out on some informative, progressive thinking. The entire premise of *Good to Great* (and the monograph *Good to Great for the Social Sectors*) is how to make your organization the best it can be, whether you're a business, a non-profit or somewhere in between.

The main point of *Good to Great* is defining your organization's "hedgehog concept" described as "attaining piercing clarity about how to produce the best long term results/product, and then practice relentless discipline to say 'no thank you' to opportunities that fail the hedgehog test." Basically, defining what your organization can do better than anyone else, and staying focused on that one thing.



This important lesson also applies to effective public relations and working with the media.

Reporters of all types—from print to broadcast to the Web — all look for people to interview as "experts" in their fields. If you know your "hedgehog concept" and can honestly say you are the best at "X" you are a perfect candidate for the media.

But how do you get positive media attention? Several approaches to practice together will get you the best result:

- If you're the best at "X," know the reporters who cover your subject. From real estate to children's issues, when you see or hear something in the media that relates to your "hedgehog concept" make a note of the reporter and get their contact information. Keep this information current, as reporters can come and go frequently.
- Contact those reporters who cover your area of expertise, thank them for their recent coverage and let them know that you'd be happy to be a resource for them in the future. Make yourself available when the media calls, and make sure the person processing your phone calls and e-mails knows that media inquiries are a priority. Have a media procedure in place.
- Write out your "hedgehog concept" talking points about your organization in short, informative sentences that would be understood by anyone OUTSIDE your field. You may be an expert on neotropical migratory land birds, but the public needs to know you are an expert on hawks. Forget the jargon of your field when talking with the media.
- When you have news or a relevant idea for a story, make sure you send it via news release or phone call to the reporter covering your area. Be ready with how it will affect their readers/viewers/listeners and have examples to back up your idea.
- Equally as important, know when to pass on media coverage. If the story or concept that the reporter is asking about is really not a part of your "hedgehog concept" it is perfectly acceptable to let the reporter know that you are not the appropriate contact in that situation. If you can refer the reporter to someone you know that is an expert in that field, you will build an even stronger relationship.

These media lessons apply just as strongly to non-profits as for-profits. As Jim Collins summates, "The critical distinction is not between business and social, but between great and good. We need to reject the naive imposition of the "language of business" on the social sectors, and instead jointly embrace a language of greatness. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline."

So I urge you to define your "hedgehog concept" and share it with the media through conscious choice and discipline. Positive media coverage lets the world know about your great organization.

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