THE IMPORTANCE OF REPUTATION

The value of a good reputation cannot be under-estimated. Whether it is your personal reputation or that of an organisation you work with, or represent, or own, a good reputation offers many benefits.

For an organisation, a good reputation can deliver improved sales, better fundraising and staff input, retention and commitment. For an individual, it can bring work opportunities and enhanced networks.

It also offers protection if things go wrong.

If you have a reputation that is known, trusted and valued then you are better able to protect yourself against the spotlight of the media or politicians. Those around you, employees, local communities etc will also be more likely to stand up and speak for you.

Once damaged, a reputation can take years of effort and resources to rebuild. But by taking some simple and straightforward steps, you can put the processes in place to protect you and your family.

• **Understand your starting position** – without a clear appreciation of what your current reputation is and where the ‘weak spots’ are, you cannot hope to make any necessary repairs. You can only design an action plan based on information. It needs an honest assessment but is well worth the effort.

  This should also include looking at any organisations you are involved with. Whether you are a school governor, charity trustee, the member of a Board or volunteer with an organisation, their reputation and the way they handle themselves can impact on you.

• **Proactive engagement** – consider whether you have a sufficiently developed network of contacts. Contacts can help provide insight and information which you can consider and allow informed decisions about you and any organisations you are involved in.

• **Be prepared** – there can always be the possibility of a crisis hitting. This can take many forms but often results in media interest. The best way to protect you and your reputation is to have a plan already in place and a team ready to support you. That team should be able to help you handle the media and protect your reputation. There may be legal issues involved as well so make sure your team includes all the experts you may need.

  Update the plan regularly with contact details and make sure the plan is easily to hand: you never know when a crisis can occur.

• **Social media** – if you or your family are active on social media then what you – and they – say and do there is as important as what is said to the media.

  Social media can also be an early warning system for potential issues. Having monitoring systems in place for all media is highly recommended and setting up a Google Alert for your name is a good starting point.
• **Control the message** – avoiding knee-jerk reactions and statements at all times is critical. That can be difficult in a personal situation but do not be tempted. The systems need to be in place to ensure that comments cannot ‘emerge’ or be made ‘off-the-cuff’ without due consideration.

This is particularly important if what you say could impact on others. They could react and respond and that will only maintain the interest of the media and make the issue even more of a story.

• **Take advice** – any decisions about reputation should not be the preserve of a tightly knit group of people, ‘the usual suspects’ all of who have a similar view of the world. Instead be prepared to bring in fresh thinking and perspective. This may mean bringing in outside help, but it is really about the ability to think through the issue and ensure some perspective is brought to it. For issues impacting on personal lives this ‘detached’ perspective can be difficult to hear but will mean you are better able to defend your reputation.

Reputation protection can be complex and challenging but if you follow these steps and put some processes in place then you will be better prepared.

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**PUBLIC AFFAIRS DECISION TREE**

- **Is there is political risk from engagement?**
  - **NO**
  - Do your messages fit with Government processes?
    - **NO**
      - Check messages and understand the decision making process.
    - **YES**
      - Are you engaging with the right audiences?
        - **NO**
          - Full stakeholder analysis and assess previous engagement.
        - **YES**
          - Are you offering a deliverable solution to your issue?
            - **NO**
              - Your engagement is flawed, start again as the proposed solution impacts on all aspects of engagement.
            - **YES**
              - There is an enhanced prospect for success.
  - **YES**
    - Stop, think again. Is it engagement for engagement’s sake?
      - **NO**
        - Stop, think again. Is it engagement for engagement’s sake?
      - **YES**
        - Are you offering a deliverable solution to your issue?
          - **NO**
            - Your engagement is flawed, start again as the proposed solution impacts on all aspects of engagement.
          - **YES**
            - There is an enhanced prospect for success.