

# WORKING WITH OUTRAGED GROUPS



# BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

- OUTRAGE IS AN INCREASINGLY COMMON ELEMENT OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- CONSISTENTLY BEING ON THE RECEIVING END OF OUTRAGE CAN BE TRAUMATIZING
- PUBLIC TRUST AND CIVIL DISCOURSE ARE BEING ERODED. OUTRAGE IS BECOMING AN UNAVOIDABLE ELEMENT OF ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES
- WE MUST FIND STRATEGIES FOR DOING THIS WORK COMPETENTLY, AND IN WAYS THAT PRESERVES OUR, AND OUR STAFF'S, WELL-BEING
- I AM NOT AN EXPERT
- THIS SESSION CONTENT IS BASED PRIMARILY ON THE WORK OF PETER SANDMAN, AS WELL AS THE PRINCIPLES OF IAP2

# RISK COMMUNICATION

RISK = HAZARD + OUTRAGE

HAZARD: THE TECHNICAL, OBJECTIVE AND MEASURABLE COMPONENT OF THE ISSUE

OUTRAGE: THE EMOTIONAL, CULTURAL AND PERSONAL COMPONENT OF THE ISSUE

SANDMAN CALLS THIS WORK 'RISK COMMUNICATION'

# WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

## WHO IS THE “THEY” THAT IS OUTRAGED?

- INDUSTRY
- REGULATORS (AT ALL LEVELS)
- ELECTED OFFICIALS (AT ALL LEVELS)
- ACTIVISTS (AT ALL LEVELS)
- EMPLOYEES AND RETIREES
- NEIGHBORS (EVERYONE WHO IS ESPECIALLY IMPACTED BY THE ISSUE)
- CONCERNED CITIZENS (EVERYONE WHO ALREADY HAS INDICATED A DESIRE TO GET INVOLVED IN THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE)
- EXPERTS (EVERYONE WHO HAS SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE OF THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE)
- THE MEDIA (AND THROUGH THE MEDIA, THE WIDER PUBLIC)

STUDENTS/MEMBERS

REGULATING BODIES (UNIVERSITY, GAMING & LIQUOR, POLICE)

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

SPECIFIC STUDENT GROUPS, EXTERNAL INTEREST GROUPS

CAMPUS EMPLOYEES AND FACULTY

NEIGHBOURS

CONCERNED CITIZENS

EXPERTS

TRADITIONAL MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA



# WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?



# HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO OUTRAGE?



# IT'S NOT ABOUT FACTS

“[W]E HUMANS QUICKLY DEVELOP AN IRRATIONAL LOYALTY TO OUR BELIEFS, AND WORK HARD TO FIND EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THOSE OPINIONS AND TO DISCREDIT, DISCOUNT OR AVOID INFORMATION THAT DOES NOT.”

– CORDELIA FINE, “BIASED BUT BRILLIANT”, NEW YORK TIMES, JULY 30, 2011. AUTHOR OF *A MIND OF ITS OWN: HOW YOUR BRAIN DISTORTS AND DECEIVES*.

# OPENNESS VS SECRECY

- AS A SOCIETY WE ARE VERY INTOLERANT OF SECRETS. WE CAN TAKE BAD NEWS, BUT NOT BAD NEWS THAT HAS BEEN WITHHELD.
- SECRECY IS A MAJOR ELEMENT IN VIRTUALLY EVERY RISK CONTROVERSY
- THE FIRST COMPONENT OF A RESPONSIVE PROCESS IS THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TELLING UNPLEASANT TRUTHS PROACTIVELY AND KEEPING SECRETS, WITHHOLDING THE INFORMATION UNTIL IT IS FINALLY REVEALED BY A FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT COMPLAINT, A WHISTLE-BLOWER, AN ACTIVIST, OR AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER.



# EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION TO REDUCE OUTRAGE

- WHEN THE HAZARD IS LOW AND THE OUTRAGE IS HIGH, THE JOB OF RISK COMMUNICATION IS TO REDUCE THE OUTRAGE. STRATEGIES TO COPE EMPATHETICALLY WITH OUTRAGED STAKEHOLDERS, WHERE THE STRESS IS VERY HIGH, INCLUDE:
- **LISTEN:** DR. SANDMAN EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING AND ALLOWING PEOPLE TO VENT AS A CRUCIAL FIRST STEP. PEOPLE WANT TO TELL YOU THEIR STORY. BEFORE YOU ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING ELSE YOU MUST LISTEN TO THEM VENT.
- **ECHO WHAT YOU HEARD:** SKILLFUL ECHOING SHOWS PEOPLE THAT YOU HAVE REALLY HEARD WHAT THEY HAVE SAID. DR. SANDMAN EXPLAINS, “ALWAYS START BY REITERATING THEIR KEY POINTS. THIS DEMONSTRATES THAT NOT ONLY HAVE YOU HEARD THEM, BUT CLEARLY UNDERSTAND THEM.”
- **ASK QUESTIONS:** QUESTIONING IS A GOOD WAY TO CHECK YOUR JUDGMENTS ARE ON TARGET. THE TRICK IS TO ASK QUESTIONS THAT OPEN UP THE CONVERSATION RATHER THAN SHUTTING IT DOWN.
- **FIND THINGS TO AGREE WITH AND POINTS TO ADD:** DR. SANDMAN CALLS THIS THE ‘YES, AND...’ STRATEGY. EARLY IN THE RELATIONSHIP IT’S USEFUL TO VOICE SOME AGREEMENT AND THEN TAKE THAT POINT ANOTHER STEP IN A NEW DIRECTION.
- **FIND THINGS TO VOICE RESERVATIONS ABOUT:** ESTABLISHING YOURSELF AS AN AUTHENTIC PERSON WHOSE VIEWS ADD VALUE MEANS SHOWING YOU DON’T ALWAYS AGREE. RATHER THAN REBUTTING, USE THE ‘YES, BUT...’ STRATEGY.

# HOW DO WE AVOID GETTING TO OUTRAGE? PLANNING FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- EFFECTIVE P2 ACKNOWLEDGES THE DESIRE FOR HUMANS TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM
- EFFECTIVE P2 FACILITATES BETTER UNDERSTANDING
- EFFECTIVE P2 IS INTENTIONAL ABOUT WHY WE'RE ASKING THE PUBLIC TO PARTICIPATE

# INTENTION AND TRANSPARENCY

## INFORM

Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and/or solutions

"We will keep you informed."

## CONSULT

Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions

"We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision."

## INVOLVE

Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

"We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision."

## COLLABORATE

Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution

"We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible."

## EMPOWER

Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

"We will implement what you suggest."

# OTHER POSSIBLE BEST PRACTICES

WHEN YOU ARE PLANNING TO WORK WITH GROUPS THAT MAY BECOME OUTRAGED, YOU CAN PREPARE BY DOING THESE THINGS:

- CLARIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S OUTCOMES FOR THE WORK (TO WHAT END, FOR WHAT PURPOSE AM I ENGAGING IN THIS WORK?)
- CLARIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT, AND APPLYING THEM WITH 100% CONSISTENCY
- CLARIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S EXPECTATIONS, AND APPLYING THEM WITH 100% CONSISTENCY
- OTHERS?



# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- SANDMAN, PETER M., 2012. *RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY OUTRAGE: STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE RISK COMMUNICATION*. AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE ASSOCIATION PRESS.
- PSANDMAN.COM
- CONSULTATIONMANAGER.COM
- INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION. *FOUNDATIONS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION*.
- OTHERS?? IF YOU HAVE RESOURCES YOU WANT TO SHARE, PLEASE EMAIL THEM TO ME, AND I'LL INCLUDE THEM IN THIS LIST AND SEND TO ORGSYNC AFTER THE CONFERENCE

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