

Play Golf

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From HBC's Sound Bites Blog (www.hellermanbaretz.com/soundbites)

As you know, Tiger Woods has been scoring a lot of birdies lately, and not in a good way. Just after US Weekly went out with a cover story on Tiger's alleged two-year relationship with a LA cocktail waitress (if you're scoring at home, this is distinct from his alleged relationship with NY woman that was the subject of a National Enquirer article), Tiger released his first statement to the press.

Tiger is notorious for maintaining tight control over his image, and to us, the press statement has the feel of a document that was actually written by Tiger Woods. That's a good thing (documents like this shouldn't feel overly polished), but also a bad thing (Tiger could have used an editor with a cooler head when drafting this up).

The public loves Tiger because of his excellence on the golf course, not because of his perfect family life—though, yes, the idyllic image of his marital union did enhance his fairy tale story on the golf course. In any case, the messages here should have been: (1) I've failed my wife and family, and we're addressing our issues as a family, privately; and (2) I remain committed to the game of golf and my fans. The public can certainly understand his need for privacy in this matter, and would take solace in the fact that they would soon be seeing Tiger, the golfer, back at his game in the spring.

Let's analyze the statement:

"I have let my family down and I regret those transgressions with all of my heart. I have not been true to my values and the behavior my family deserves. I am not without faults and I am far short of perfect. I am dealing with my behavior and personal failings behind closed doors with my family. Those feelings should be shared by us alone."

The fact that the first three sentences all start with "I" is your first indication that this was not the work of a professional writer. Beyond that, this paragraph is a perfectly contrite, if veiled, admission of infidelity, along with a call for privacy. So far so good.

"Although I am a well-known person and have made my career as a professional athlete, I have been dismayed to realize the full extent of what tabloid scrutiny really means. For the last week, my family and I have been hounded to expose intimate details of our personal lives. The stories in particular that physical violence played any role in the car accident were utterly false and malicious. Elin has always done more to support our family and shown more grace than anyone could possibly expect."

Uh-oh. Not good. The contrition expressed in the first paragraph just went out the window. In this paragraph, Tiger is casting himself as the victim of an overly aggressive press spreading "false and

malicious” reports about his personal life. This is not going to work—for one thing, a number of those reports appear to be true—and, worse, it makes Tiger look unrepentant.

"But no matter how intense curiosity about public figures can be, there is an important and deep principle at stake which is the right to some simple, human measure of privacy. I realize there are some who don't share my view on that. But for me, the virtue of privacy is one that must be protected in matters that are intimate and within one's own family. Personal sins should not require press releases and problems within a family shouldn't have to mean public confessions."

Now we're waaay off point. This is not the time for a philosophical discussion about the virtue of privacy. Everyone understands that Tiger wants to keep his marital affairs (so to speak) private, and the general public certainly respects the fact that Tiger and Elin have some serious work to do on their relationship. Going on about this is not helping, and by playing the victim again here, Tiger is putting himself in a bad light.

"Whatever regrets I have about letting my family down have been shared with and felt by us alone. I have given this a lot of reflection and thought and I believe that there is a point at which I must stick to that principle even though it's difficult.

We get it. See above.

"I will strive to be a better person and the husband and father that my family deserves. For all of those who have supported me over the years, I offer my profound apology."

A nice apology at the end, but taken as a whole, this document doesn't feel like an apology at all. It feels like a rant against US Weekly.

This message should have been much shorter, more contrite, and more assuring to Tiger's golf fans. From a PR perspective, Tiger should do two things going forward. In private, he should work on his marriage. In public, he should play golf.