



Q: A name partner is leaving, what should we do?

A: We had a similar fire drill when after 20 years, and in the height of the Written Service Guarantee frenzy, Mike Coffield, one of Chicago's most beloved and talented attorneys (and the first name on our door), decided to leave to open a solo trial practice.

We had just three weeks to completely redesign and update the logo, overhaul the identity materials, and print everything. We designed an announcement ad campaign, cool new mousepad giveaways, fun name-change mailing, *etc.* As you know, when you have a short deadline, everything still gets done, just that much faster.

We paid enormous attention to the public relations component of our strategy. We knew his departure would be covered extensively in the media because of the firm's Guarantee-related visibility, and his prominent stature in the community and with the media. We also knew these situations inevitably cause speculation that either he was being forced out or was fleeing a sinking ship. Neither was remotely true, so we worked really hard to shape the message on both sides. That's essential.

The detailed case study is on my web site, where you can see what happens when both sides work together -- which is critical. Of course, in our situation, we DID want each other to succeed. But we made very sure that everyone who read anything about it saw that we remained friends, and that there was no taint or tarnish on either side. That comes from having a consistent message, and clear, simple answers to all the questions the media is going to ask. This has to be managed very aggressively to avoid the stench of scandal.

Over the years, I've helped other firms do the same thing -- even when both sides *hate* each other, there's no reason to engage in public mud-slinging, which is what often occurs to firms that don't have a strategy and message points. Occasionally, as part of re-branding projects, I've been forced to act as intermediary to show the other side how bad *everyone* is going to look in public unless we develop a script together and *stick to it*.

There have been really bad examples of lawyers slinging mud back and forth at each other as an apparently gleeful reporter sits in the middle and pours salt in each side's open wounds, eliciting increasingly nastier quotes. Avoiding this is a marketer's responsibility.

Re the sudden name change, it can be a great opportunity to *quickly* update your firm's visual identity. As you know, there's nothing strategic about simply reshuffling more look-alike names. Strangely, the placement of the name is important to this decision. Deleting an anonymous one from the end and replacing it doesn't matter much. At CU&H, we had no choice because his was the first of the three names.

My advice -- consider a candid conversation with your managing partner about turning this into an opportunity to change the public's conversation by creating a bold new, updated look. Show him some of the many examples of other firms that have done the same thing and benefited enormously from it. Make the discussion about your bright future, not about the guy who left. Time is of the essence, but it can be done. And, with a short deadline, things get done *fast*.

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