

## **Say It Isn't So Lady "O": A Sex Scandal at the Oprah Leadership Academy for Girls**

*Barbara Burgess-Wilkerson, Winthrop University*

*Barbara K. Fuller, Winthrop University*

*Nathaniel Frederick II, Winthrop University*

### **Abstract**

This critical incident represents a real situation in which a well-known billionaire television executive, Oprah Winfrey was caught in the middle of a sex scandal at her beloved Leadership Academy. In response she visited the school to ensure the safety of the girls. She then made allegations and statements to the media and immediately terminated two individuals because of the allegations. This event played out in the media who weighed in throughout the ordeal; subsequently the charges were dropped on the first individual as insufficient evidence was found to support the charges. The executive was taken to court for defamation by the second individual; the case was resolved in an out-of-court settlement. Oprah's candid communication and leadership styles in dealing with the media sends a powerful message to all those who manage and lead because of the consistency in her morality and values which translate into ethical and honest communications.

### **Learning Outcomes**

In completing this assignment students should be able to:

1. Identify the business communication strategies used for managing negative news and crisis communications.
2. Analyze the situation and determine the leadership styles used in crisis communication and determine the extent that leadership styles impacts the decision-making process.
3. Evaluate the strategies used in responding to a crisis and the impact on the media and brand; they will develop strategies for addressing the news in the public and media that positively impact the company brand.
4. Understand how decision-making of business communicators can be influenced from personal values as well as from a legal, ethical or moral standpoint.

### **Application**

The incident is appropriate for use in both introductory and advanced courses in business communications, crisis communications, leadership and communications, business ethics, mass media, and entrepreneurship.

### **Key Words**

crisis communications, ethics and communications, leadership styles, brand management, media relations

### **Contact**

Barbara Burgess-Wilkerson, CBA Department of Management, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC 29722, Email: burgessb@winthrop.edu, Phone: 803-323-2690.