



Crisis Communication Plan  
Commissioned by *Courier-Post*  
Researched and Crafted by:  
Rowan University's Student Firm –  
**PRaction**



M. Larry Litwin, APR, Advisor  
Summer – 2006

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**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Mission/Goal**

## **MISSION/GOAL**

When a crisis occurs, the Philadelphia Phillies (or any professional sports organization) will respond quickly and in a responsible manner. It is our (the Phillies) responsibility to maintain control – responding in an open, honest, thorough and valid manner so that the incident is fully explained – preventing it from unnecessarily getting “blown out of proportion” and disrupting the daily operation of the organization. By providing periodic updates to the media, the media will serve as an intermediary audience – assisting the Phillies’ organization in carrying our message(s) to our various publics (audiences).

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Brief  
Phillies' History**

## **Brief History of Philadelphia Phillies**

No one could have realized it at the time, but when the Phillies were formed in 1883, history was in the making. The Phillies are the oldest, continuous, one-name, one-city franchise in all of professional sports.

According to its Web site, the original Phillies began when the Worcester Ruby Legs were disbanded and the franchise was moved by the National League to Philadelphia. Al Reach, who in 1866 had become the first professional baseball player and was later a successful sporting goods dealer, became the Phillies first owner along with attorney John Rogers. Reach named the team the Phillies, a take-off on the team's geographic roots, "Philly."

Fast-forwarding to the more modern era, the Phillies won National League pennants in 1915 and 1950 only to lose in the World Series. Their first and only World Series win came in 1980 when they defeated the Kansas City Royals in six games. They returned to the World Series in 1983 and again in 1993 losing to the Baltimore Orioles and Toronto Blue Jays, respectfully.

During the early 1900s, the Phillies played their home games in Baker Bowl, moving to Shibe Park (Connie Mack Stadium) in 1938. In 1971, they moved into the multi-million dollar all-purpose Veterans Stadium and remained there until moving into the retro Citizens Bank Park in 2004.

Like any high profile organization, whether a sports franchise or not, the Philadelphia Phillies organization has had its share of crises. During the 2005 season, outfielder Jason Michaels in the Old City section of Philadelphia was charged with hitting a police officer who had told a crowd to move along.

Several Atlanta Braves' players and Phillies' left fielder Pat Burrell, third baseman David Bell, catcher Mike Lieberthal and pitcher Vicente Padilla attended the "party," but, according to reports, were not with Michaels at the time of the alleged incident, a source told Associated Press.

Michaels was charged with aggravated assault of a police officer, simple assault, and recklessly endangering another person. He was released on his own recognizance.

In a statement, Ed Wade, the Phillies' general manager, said: "The Phillies are aware of the charges against Jason Michaels. Pending the outcome of his case, we believe that it is inappropriate to comment. In the meantime, Jason will be in uniform and available to play baseball."

Phillies' manager Charlie Manuel was asked about the possibility of Michaels being disciplined by the team.

"We'll have to wait and see," Manuel said. "I just heard about it. I need to hear his side of the story, and we'll go from there."

Michaels was sentenced to six months of probation in December (following the season), which included performing 100 hours of community service that were part of the normal program for first-time offenders.

Michaels was traded during the off season.

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Web research carries the following information about the most recent Phillies crisis involving a player.

On June 23, Phillies' starting pitcher Brett Myers was arrested and charged with assaulting his wife Kim Myers on a downtown Boston street. His wife alleged that he struck her twice with his fist. Witnesses stated he slapped her and then pulled her off the ground by her hair. An anonymous male who witnessed the incident and placed a call to 9-1-1 described it as follows: "I got a guy smacking a girl around right in front of the Hynes Convention Center. He's right in front of the fire station that's in front of the Hynes Convention Center. She's crying. She's got no shoes on. He's a pretty big guy in a white shirt. And he's hitting her hard. I saw it. A couple of other people saw it."

Police responding to a 9-1-1 call at 12:26 a.m. found "Kim Myers crying and with a slight swelling on the left side of her face." Brett Myers was taken into custody and later released on \$200 bond, which was paid for by his wife. Myers made his scheduled start against the Boston Red Sox the following day, on June 24, where he was booed by many of the 35,564 fans at Fenway Park.

The Phillies received criticism from (some) media members and many women's organizations for not benching Myers. Myers brought additional criticism upon himself with his choice of words in apologizing for the incident when he stated: "I'm sorry it had to go public."

On June 27, the Phillies announced that Myers would take a leave of absence from the team until after the 2006 All-Star break in July, and sent him to their Class A affiliate Clearwater Threshers.

Myers returned to the Phillies roster on July 16, and was their starting pitcher in the following game. On July 23, Myers started his first baseball

game in Philadelphia since the alleged incident. He was initially booed, but eventually cheered throughout for his good performance on the mound. Myers lasted eight plus innings and allowed just three earned runs.

The Phillies faced criticism from the media, fans and casual observers for their apparent lack of preparation in dealing with what was obviously a crisis. That apparent lack of preparation and lack of a plan led to a delayed response and embarrassing statements by field manager Manuel and general manager Pat Gillick. No one from the front office or the public relations department appeared to be in control and no one followed the basic tenets of an effective crisis communication plan.

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The Myers incident and “crisis” are rarely discussed today – not because of anything the organization has done from a communication standpoint, but rather because of a major diversion – the team’s involvement in the National League Wild Card race and first baseman Ryan Howard’s home run barrage.

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Audiences  
(Overview/Segmented/  
Profiled/Ranked)**

## **Audiences**

In public relations, successfully reaching the target audiences is necessary. These, after all, are the people who keep organizations and companies in business. These are the people who need to hear your key messages – especially during a crisis.

In dealing with the Brett Myers incident, the Phillies should have directed key messages to their specific audiences. As soon as Phillies officials were made aware of the crisis, so should have been members of their internal audience, including Major League Baseball, employees and players. With today's technology, this flow of information is convenient and fast. It is important that these audiences are aware of any situation and know what to say if the situation calls for comment.

Among the most important people to reach are those in the external audience, such as Phillies' fans. These are the people attending the games and buying the merchandise (those generating the revenue). It is crucial that fans, such as season ticket holders, have faith in their team and the people running it. This is especially important when it comes time to purchase those season tickets each year. External audiences also include sponsors, vendors (outside food vendors who lease space) and advertisers. These are important to the Phillies and to any sports franchise. Without all of these key financial supporters, the team would find it most difficult to remain financially viable and competitive. In other words, most, if not all, audiences must be kept happy.

Some other audiences important to reach are non-fans and special interest groups. When someone has an existing negative image or no image at all of an organization, they tend to become powerful in their own right. These people could potentially become a fan (supporter) of another team or sport and influence others to do the same. This audience includes the potentials whom the Phillies want to be filling those stadium seats in the future.

In a crisis like the one involving Brett Myers, special interest groups become quite vocal. It is important to keep these groups happy because they could have a dramatic influence on public opinion and public behavior. If the Phillies allow an incident with domestic violence slide, they will be put in direct opposition to these groups and the individuals who support them. It is imperative that the Phillies not alienate any audience – especially large special interest groups who attract public and media attention for all the "good" they try to do.

The Phillies organization must demonstrate that it stands by them, not against them.

## **Audiences**

Identified/Segmented/Profiled/Ranked

### **Identified/Ranked**

- Owners – Those with a financial investment in team
- Front Office – Team president, general manager, etc.
- Other Staff – All other support staff
- Players
- Major League Baseball – Commissioner and National League Office
- Media
- Fans
- Special Interest Groups
- Season Ticket Holders
- Casual Ticket Buyers
- Major Sponsors – Television, radio, ball park signage, printed program, Web site, etc.
- Vendors – lease concession stands)
- Advertisers – Secondary sponsors
- Non-Fans – Considered passive audience

These audiences could be segmented into internal, external and intermediary – those who carry the message to others. After much research, it has been determined this should be the ranked order. Experience shows, this could change daily during those first criteria (golden) hours following the crisis.

It is important to rank audiences for resource purposes. Those resources are not just taking into consideration how much money is going to spent communicating with them, but how much time. Those audiences with the highest ranking get the most money and time. Those with the lowest may get neither money nor attention.

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**(Alleged)  
Incident Issues**

## Issues

(An issue is a point or matter of discussion, debate or dispute – legal and moral issues. Also, a matter of public concern.)

- Employee allegedly smacks wife
- Fan reaction negative
- Appearance that Phillies' organization had neither formal (nor informal) crisis communication nor organizational plan
- Media availability took too long
- Team didn't draft an adequate message until several days later
- Those who spoke on behalf of team appeared to be uninformed and untrained (Manuel and Gillick).
- The Phillies appeared irresponsible and, at times, uncooperative.
- Incident's effect on ticket sales [if you were to write a script]
- Incident's effect on sponsorships
- Incident's effect on product sales
- Reaction of women's groups [female spokesperson not contacted]
- Choice of too many and wrong spokespeople
- General public reaction (universally negative)
- Team's winning and Ryan Howard's offensive performance serve as a major distraction – "the best marketing plan is winning."

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Research  
Questions  
and  
Research Actions**

## General Research Questions

1. Are you aware of the incident of a Phillies Player (Brett Myers) who was accused of hitting his wife on a Boston street?
2. How did you first hear about the incident (television; radio; Internet; newspaper; word of mouth)?
3. Brett Myers pitched for the Phillies within 48 hours of the alleged incident. Should he have pitched? (Yes/No)
4. Should the Phillies have suspended Brett Myers? (Yes/No)
5. From what you know and recall about the alleged incident, were you satisfied with the manner in which the Phillies handled it? (Yes/No)
6. Who should have been the spokesperson for the Phillies organization (President; Public Relations Director; General manager; manager)?
7. Are you a season ticket holder? (Yes/No)
8. Since the Phillies moved into Citizens Bank Park, have you attended at least one game? (Yes/No)
9. Do you plan to purchase tickets to a future game or has the alleged incident soured you? (Yes/No)
10. Before the alleged incident, did you consider yourself a Phillies' fan? (Yes/No)
11. Are you a fan, today? (Yes/No)
12. Are you Male/Female?
13. Are you Caucasian/Black/Hispanic/Asian/Other
14. Which age group do you fit into (18-25; 26-34; 35-49; 50-64; older than 64)?

## Research Questions Specific to Experts

1. Does your organization have a plan?
2. What is your reaction to how the Phillies handled the alleged incident involving pitcher Brett Myers?
3. Did your organization have a plan prior to the alleged incident involving Brett Myers?

## Research Actions

1. Focus panels were conducted to help determine research questions.
2. More than 150 randomly selected members of the public were interviewed either by telephone, in person or via a paper survey.
  - Intercept surveys were conducted at Citizens Bank Park. (Intercepts are often conducted at such sites as shopping

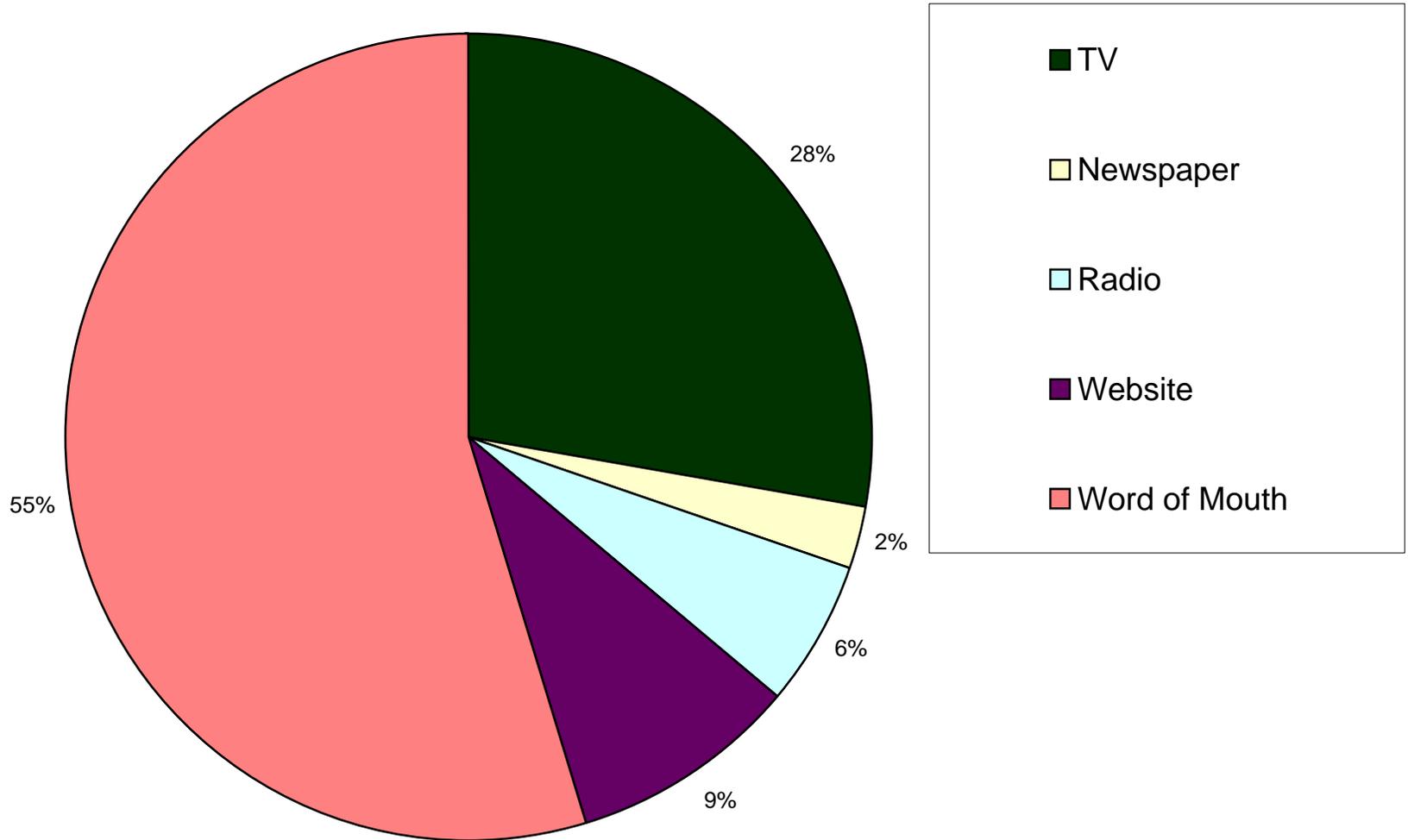
malls. It is a process whereby interviewers stop passersby and ask a few questions.)

- Paper surveys were administered in more than a dozen sites in an attempt to gather a random cross section of opinion from fans and other members of the public. All surveys were administered in the Philadelphia region.
3. Interviews with a number of public relations counselors and strategic advisors were conducted. Some of the counselors have a history of working with sports organizations; some do not.
  4. A literature (Internet research) search was conducted to determine how other organizations performed during crises.

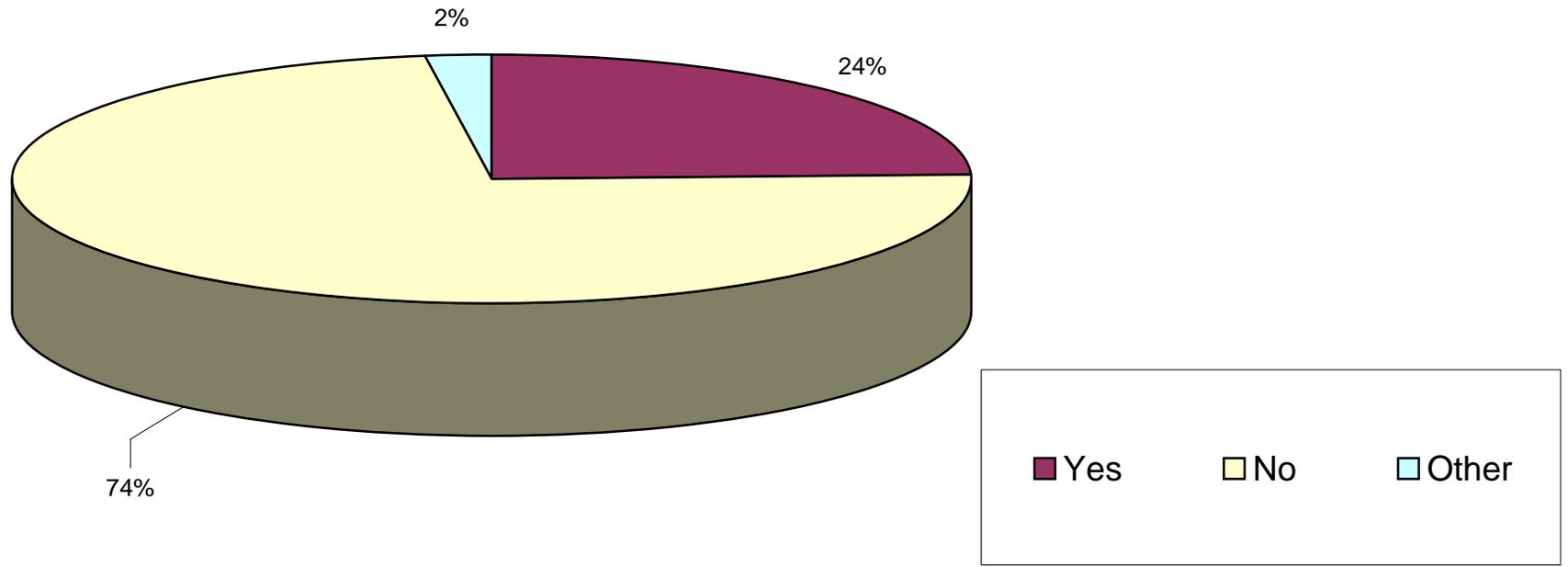
**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Research Results**

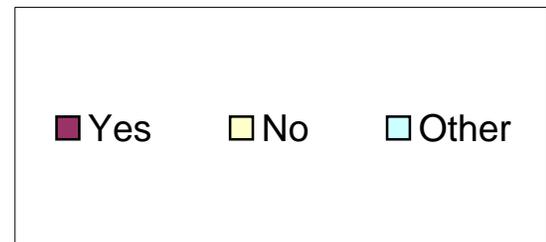
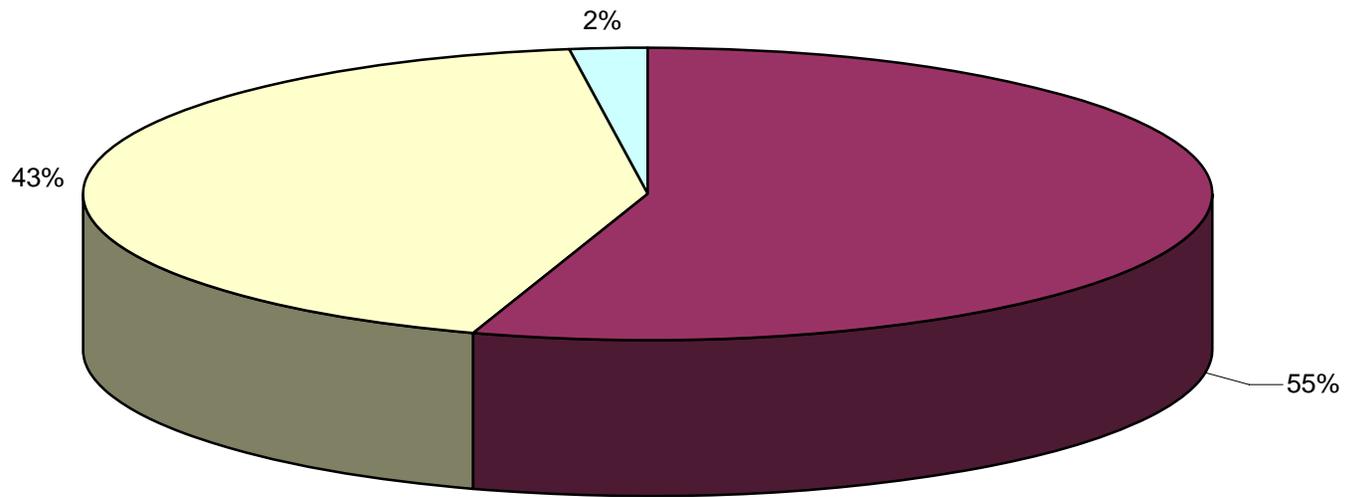
How did you first hear about the situation? [Page 1 of 13]



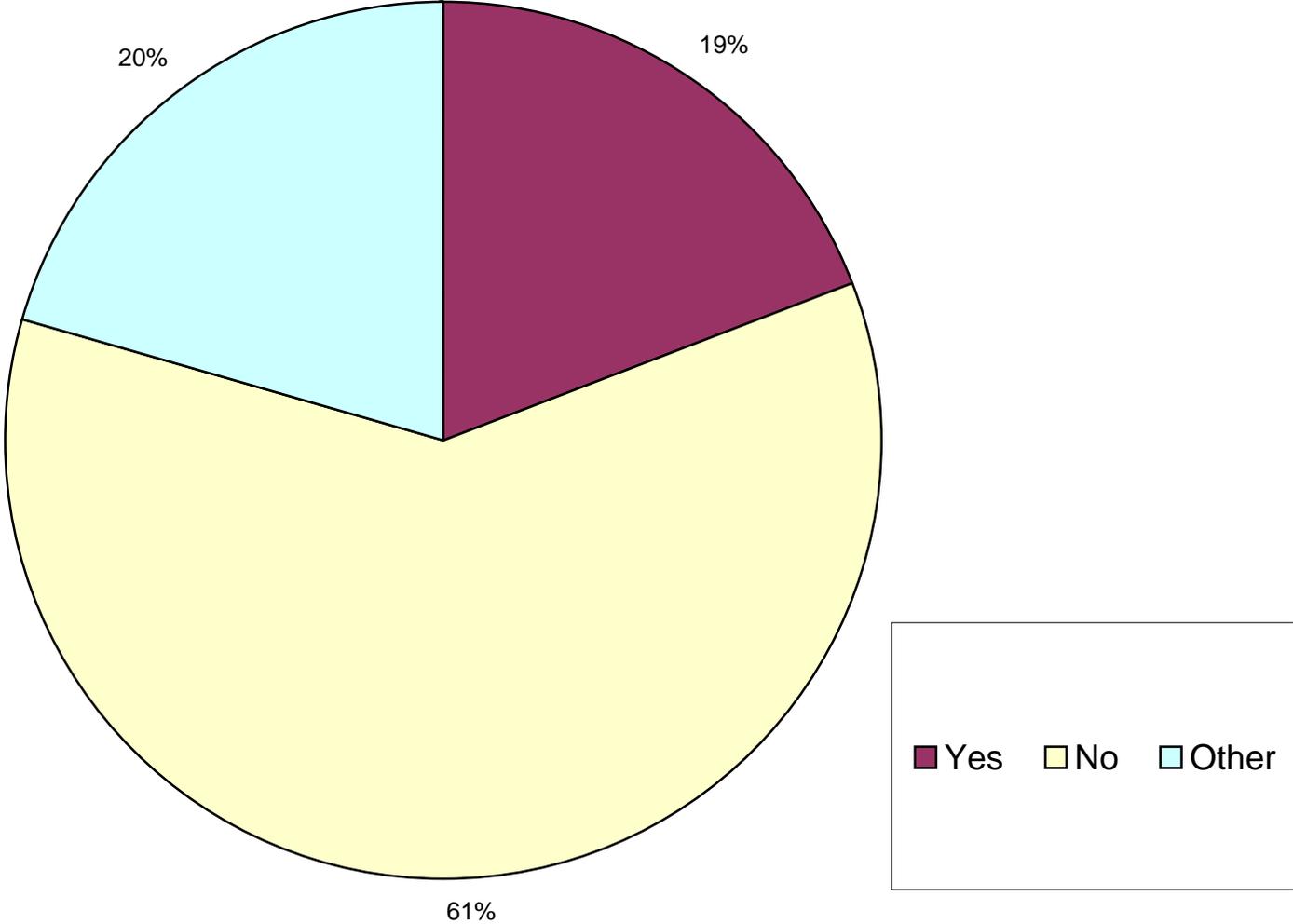
**Should Brett Myers have pitched within  
48 hours? [Page 2 of 13]**



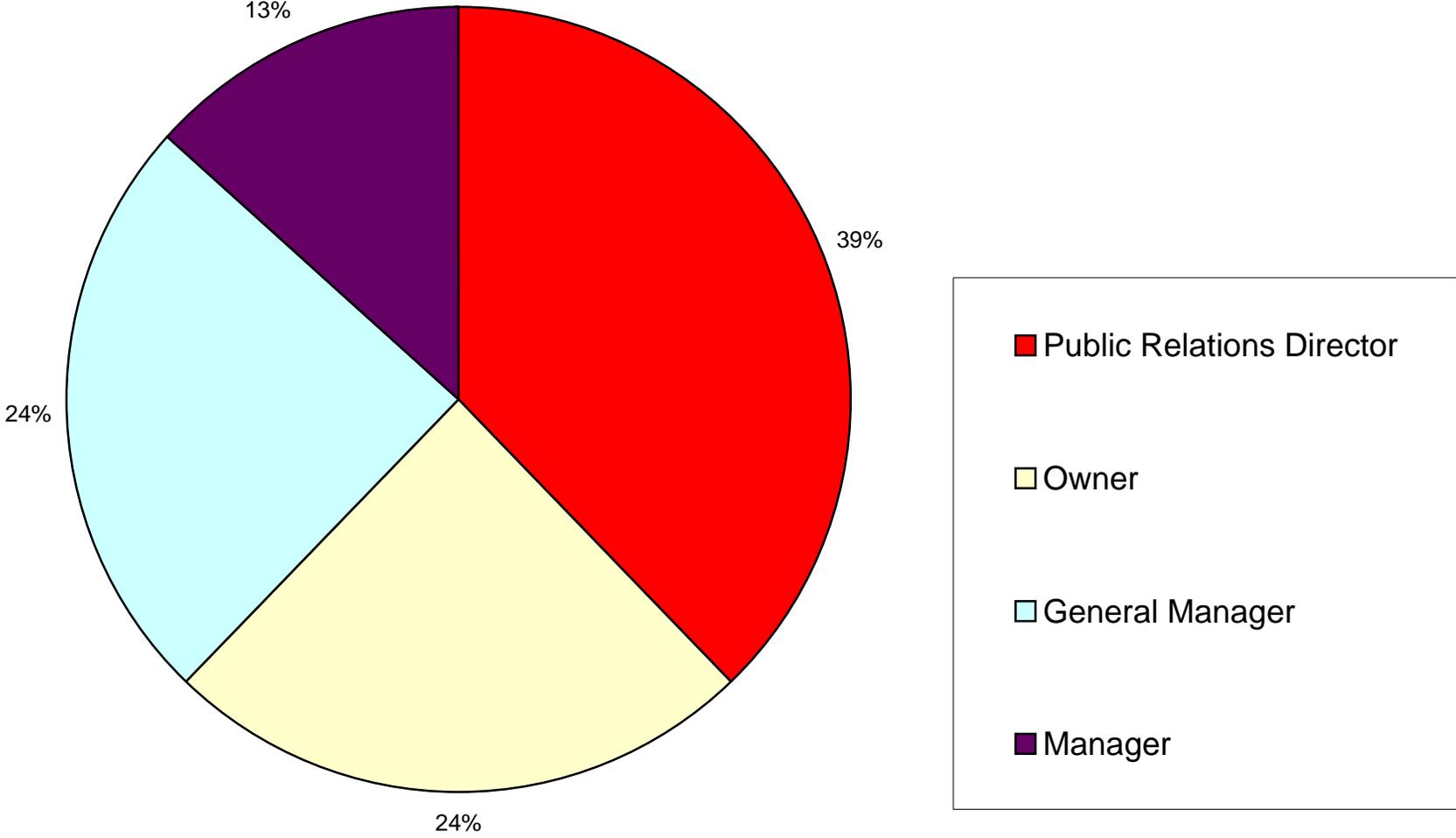
**Should the Phillies have suspended  
Brett Myers? [Page 3 of 13]**



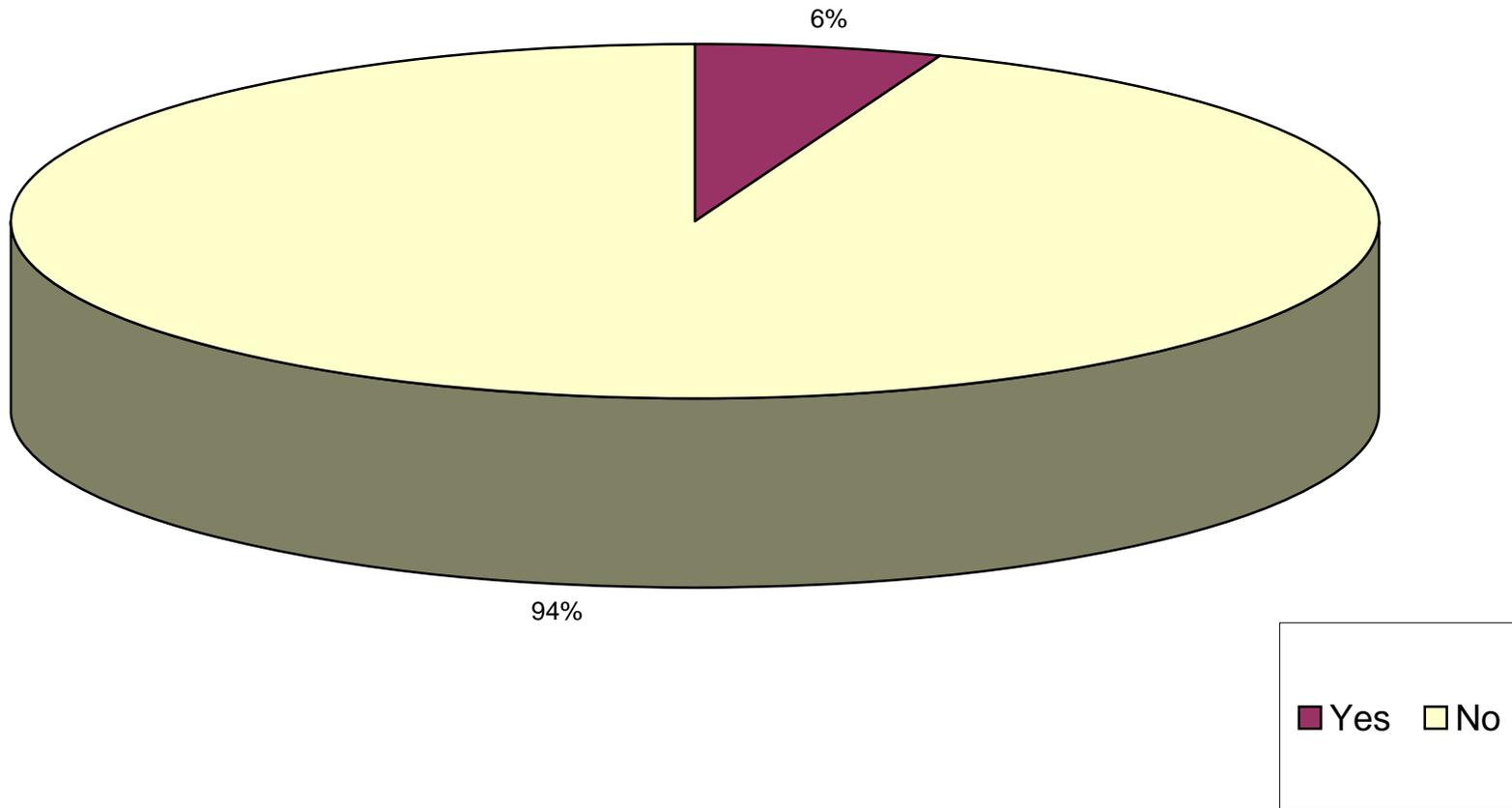
Were you satisfied with the manner in which the Phillies handled the incident? [Page 4 of 13]



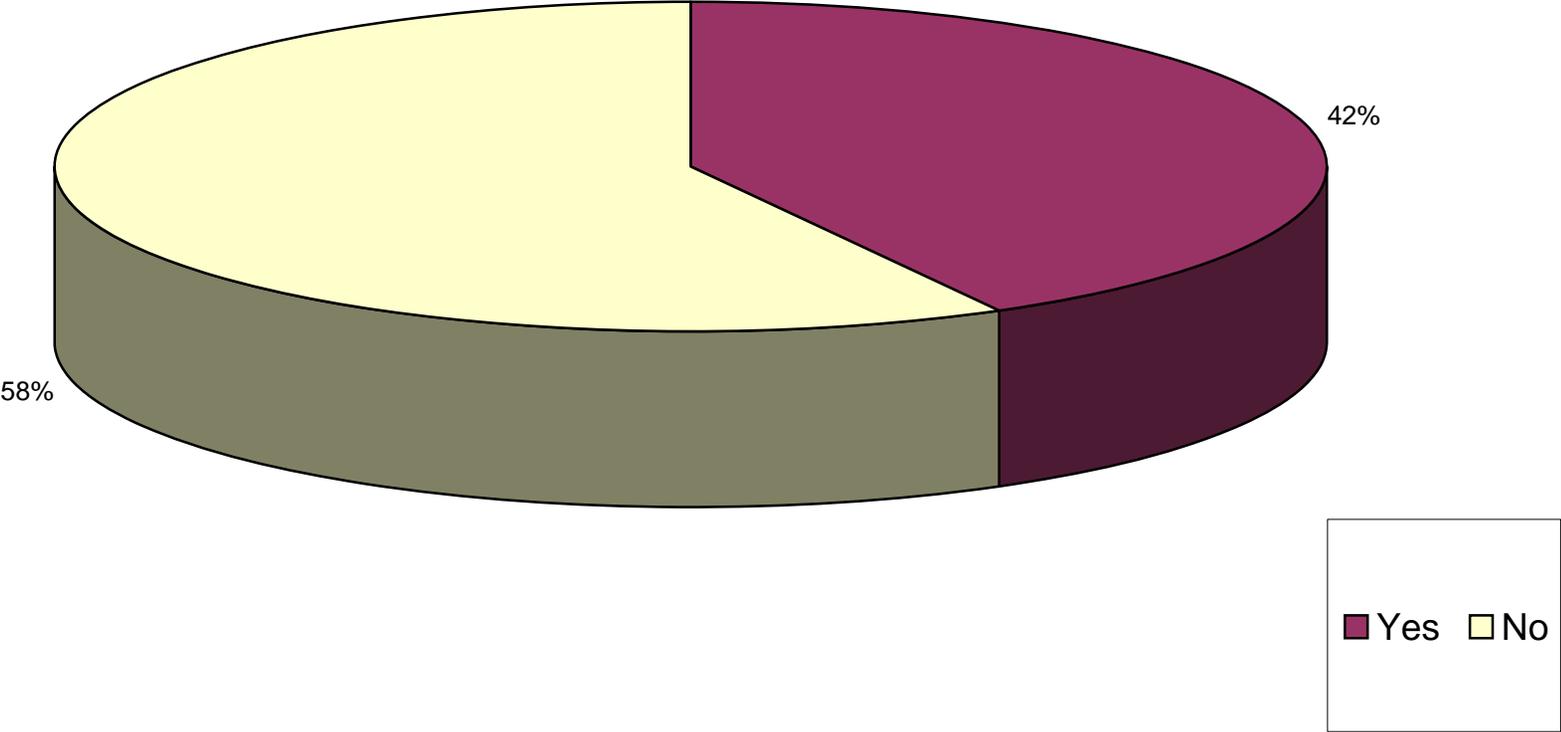
**Who should have been the spokesperson?**  
**[Page 5 of 13]**



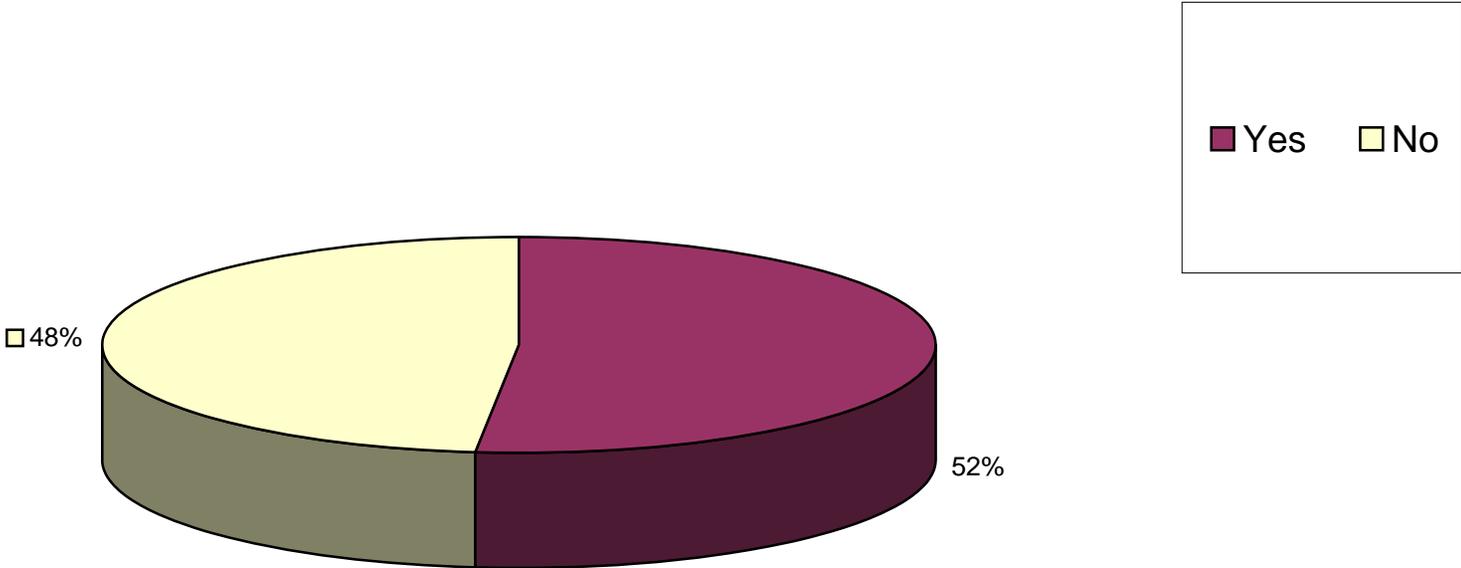
Are you a Philadelphia Phillies season ticket holder? [Page 6 of 13]



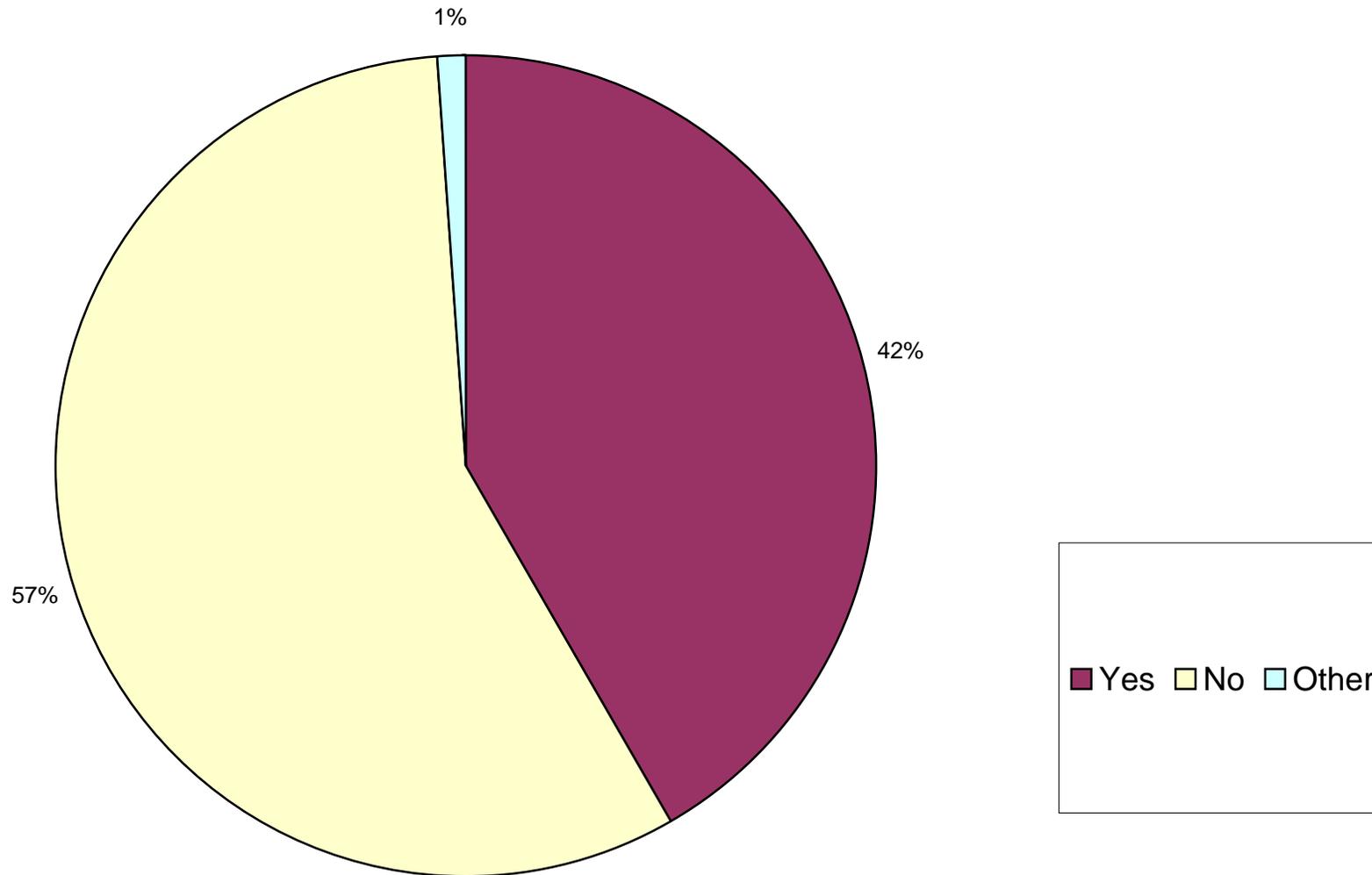
Since the Phillies have moved to the new stadium have you purchased tickets?  
[Page 7 of 13]



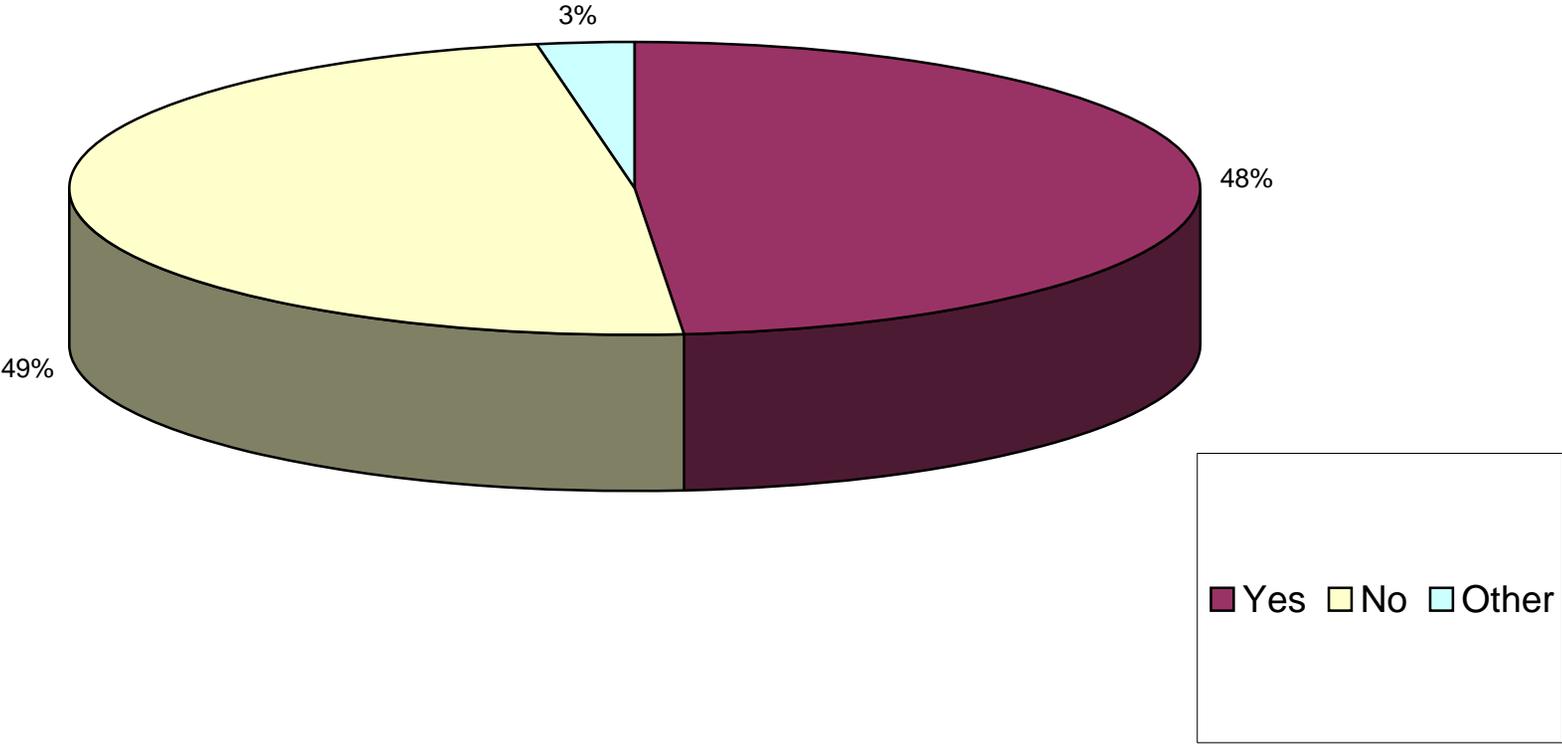
Do you plan to purchase tickets in the near future? [Page 8 of 13]



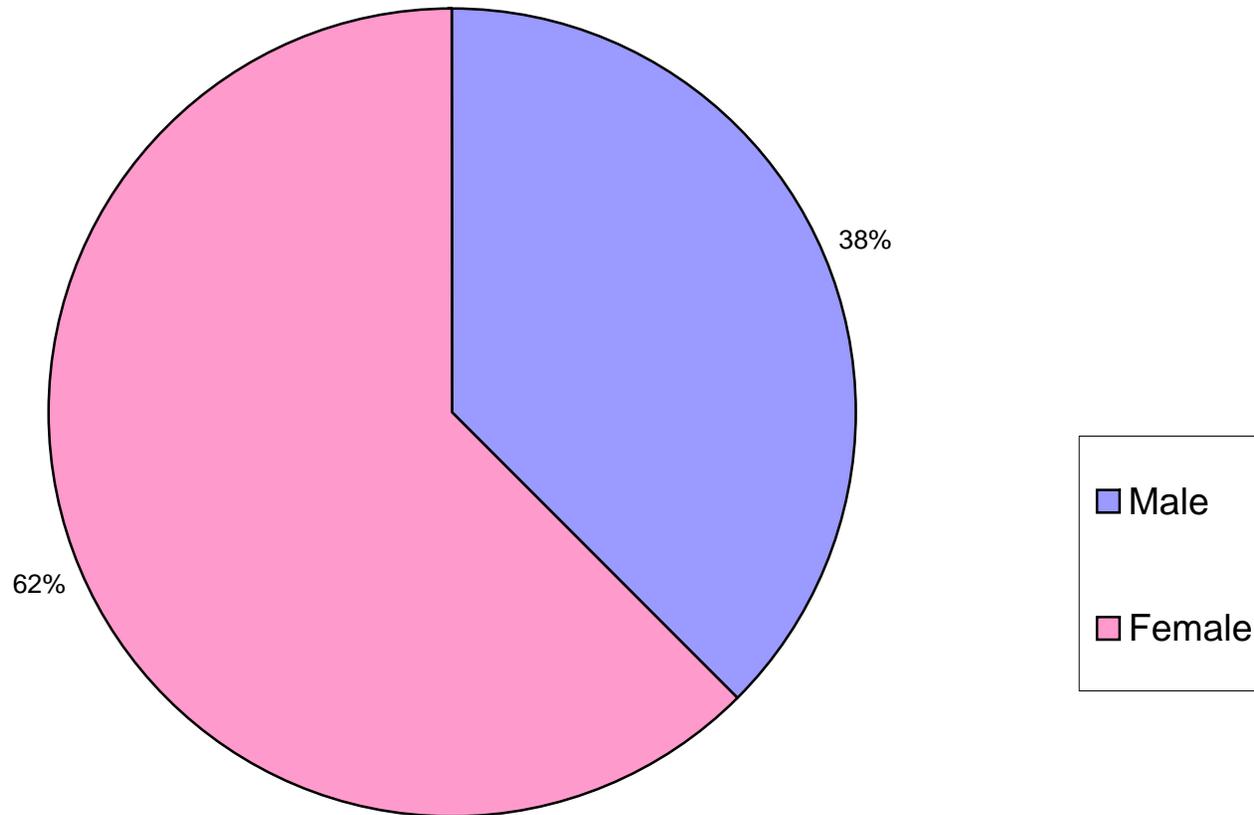
**Before the incident did you consider yourself a Phillies fan? [Page 9 of 13]**



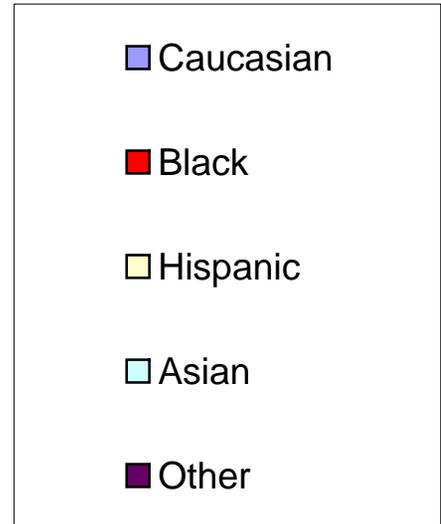
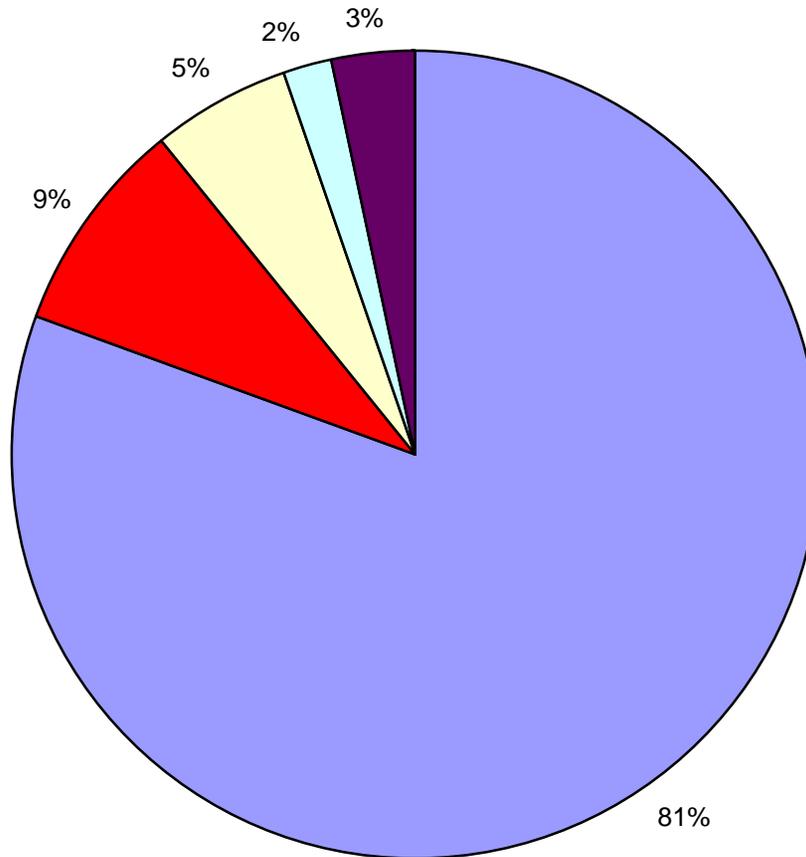
Are you still a Phillies fan? [Page 10 of 13]



Demographics (Gender) [Page 11 of 13]



Demographics (Ethnicity) [Page 12 of 13]



## **Research Results – Comments Taken from Paper Surveys**

- **Should have been removed from public eye so he could take care of personal life (many responses, across all demographics)**
- **Innocent until proven guilty (A dozen respondents, across all age groups, white and black, male and female)**
- **Phillies appeared to lack the facts**
- **Phillies owner would never face the public in this type of situation**
- **If it didn't happen on the job it shouldn't affect his work**
- **Phillies should have been more forceful in conveying they don't condone domestic abuse**
- **Phillies showed a lack of sensitivity**
- **This was an opportunity for the Phillies to step up and set an example**
- **Phillies should have taken a zero tolerance stand**
- **Myers personal business is Myers personal business**
- **Did the Phillies consider their image**
- **Should never have allowed Myers to speak**
- **Team had to be proactive rather than reactive**
- **No matter what, I am a Phillies fan (35-49 white female)**

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Interviews With  
Experts**

## Interviews With Experts

Below are the responses of public relations counselors and strategic advisors considered leaders in crisis communication. Preceding their comments are those of Heather Keafer, director of Development and Public Relations for Women Against Abuse in Philadelphia. Keafer's is the only interview in direct Q&A form:

**Q: What was your immediate reaction when you found out Brett Myers would be pitching just hours after being arrested?**

**A:** I did not find out about the domestic violence assault until the day after he pitched. My first thought then was for the safety of the victim; and then truly amazed that the Phillies let Myers pitch.

**Q: From your organization's standpoint, how do you think the Phillies should have handled the situation?**

**A:** The Phillies have a responsibility to quickly address issues of domestic violence – and other criminal acts, even when alleged. By allowing Myers to pitch, the Phillies seemed to be condoning domestic violence. This was unconscionable.

**Q: Was the eventual response from the organization adequate?**

**A:** Although I have not been involved in the discussions, it is my understanding that the Phillies will be working in the off-season to train their staff on the issues of domestic violence and how to respond appropriately to domestic violence situations in their clubhouse. Part of this work includes writing a policy for responding to domestic violence situations. Follow through on these goals is important to ensuring an adequate response.

**Q: Do you think that the fact that the Phillies have done so well since the incident has helped to distract people from the issue?**

**A:** Domestic violence continues to occur with alarming frequency in communities across the United States. (Last year in Philadelphia, there were 13,383 protection from abuse orders filed in Philadelphia alone.) Unfortunately, this is not just a Phillies issue or a just a Women Against Abuse issue. The numbers of women and children fleeing to domestic violence shelters across the nation is testament to this. The real issue is what we decide to do as a community to stop domestic violence. In the recent Myers case, the public responded

very strongly that domestic violence should not be tolerated in professional baseball. This message and action must be extended to our own communities where horrible acts of domestic violence happen every day.

**Q: Had the Phillies taken no action and Myers continued to play, would your organization have taken any further action to get your point across?**

**A:** Women Against Abuse would have continued to advocate that the Phillies should take a stand against domestic violence and address the issue of violence in their clubhouse.

**Dave Coskey** is the former executive vice president of the Philadelphia 76ers and a 25-year veteran of effective two-way public relations. His background includes working at his alma mater Villanova University, the Philadelphia 76ers, Comcast and for Donald Trump.

According to Coskey, unlike the National Hockey League, the NBA does not provide crisis communication plans to its franchise. Each team has its own and the 76ers are no exception.

He says that when an incident occurs that could lead to a crisis, the first call must be made to the people in charge of the organization.

“Top staff must know (immediately) what has happened. Everyone must be on the same page,” he says. “It must be made absolutely clear that no one says anything until you know what it is you want to say.”

Once that call is made, he and his staff begin evaluating the situation – gathering the facts – a major early step in any crisis communication plan.

He says that a basic plan dictates that only one person be chosen to speak. That is a major step toward controlling the message and the situation.

“Today, unlike 10 or 15 years ago, news travels so much faster. That means the media wants and needs information quicker. And because there is so much floating on the Internet and elsewhere, media calls have increased at least five times from what they were just a few years ago.

“Because of technology (Internet, blogs, podcasts), much of what they (the media) call about is misinformation or just isn’t true – but it is the reporters’

jobs to follow up and fact check. That," he says, "is just one more reason key personnel must be informed and together."

Specifically, on the Brett Myers incident, Coskey warns that observers may not have taken into consideration the Major League Players agreement. Because of such agreements, many times organizations' hands are tied.

"That is another reason," he points out that the Phillies should have had a key message prepared on certain constraints. It might have helped clear up why they were not more responsive, quicker.

According to Coskey, if an incident or crisis arose when he was with the 76ers, he would bring together, or at least inform, General Manager Billy King, team President Pat Croce, Coach Larry Brown and Board Chair Ed Snider.

In an incident involving Allen Iverson in Virginia, the team was methodical in crafting its key message points: "We told the media that police were investigating (finding a legally registered loaded gun under the seat of his car) and it would be inappropriate to discuss it. None-the-less," we said, "Allen used poor judgment."

Coskey's message said something, but really didn't say anything. "It was a good short sound bite and media was happy," he says.

"As an organization, we treated Allen as if he were our son. We told him 'we were disappointed in him and that he exercised poor judgment.' And we told the media that's what we told him." (Another good sound bite.)

Coskey reiterates that the bottom line is "there has to be just one spokesperson for the organization during a crisis."

He says that the reason the Phillies' organization is weathering the storm in the Brett Myers' alleged incident is because they are winning ("It's the best marketing plan") and Ryan Howard is pounding out home runs. The fans are distracted because the media is distracted – distracted by a Wild Card race and arguably the best offensive performance by a player in team history.

Coskey reinforced his philosophy about quickly informing upper management when an incident occurs so that key messages can be prepared and "everyone is on the same page." Everyone must be together.

"The worst thing the Phillies could have said is that it is in his best interest to pitch (within 48 hours of alleged incident). Yet they said it and he

pitched.” (This is where the players’ agreement may have come in – but nothing about it was ever addressed.)

By not being on the same page and not communicating early and often, it appeared as though the team was not controlling the situation.

Coskey and others agree – historically, with the Phillies organization, it is not one person or even two or three. “The Phillies image has been created by a philosophy that starts at the top.”

When asked about the Phillies’ reputation for cooperating with the media and the public (particularly during challenging times), a **leading sports entrepreneur** said, in the strongest of terms, “When a fish stinks, it stinks from the head down.”

**Anne Sceia Klein**, president of Anne Klein & Associates, Mount Laurel, N.J., among the nation’s most respected crisis communication counselors, said it was apparent from the start that the team was not prepared to respond.

“Former team President Bill Giles talked far too much, other spokespeople were out of control and the team lacked sensitivity and compassion – especially about (spousal) abuse.”

Klein describes herself as a casual fan. She says the Myers’ incident certainly wouldn’t keep her from watching should the Phillies get into the World series. She says much of what transpired could have been avoided with a plan.

“They needed a high level management type – chief executive officer – to represent the team publicly. The PR person should have gathered the facts, but someone ‘higher up’ should ‘front the team.’”

Klein is a firm believer in issue and crisis management. “With proper planning, such a scenario would have already been talked about. It’s not like it never happened before in sports. The incident happened. Even if there were no plan,” she says, “get the guy out of the spotlight – remembering that he is innocent until proven guilty.”

She says, “The team’s strategic approach could have carried a message that these are very serious charges, the team is withholding judgment and ‘we are providing support to Brett and his family.’”

According to Klein, the Phillies should have made it clear that the organization has a no tolerance policy on abuse, spousal or otherwise. However, the team and fans cannot pre-judge. That's what the courts are for."

Like Coskey, Klein says if the team would have been prepared with a rapid response through an early statement, the story would have been out of the media within a few days. And like Coskey and others in the profession, she stresses the importance of informing the internal audience (staff) quickly and using one spokesperson to issue key messages.

She says that by issuing the statements and then getting the pitcher out of the spotlight it would have reduced the embarrassment and allowed the story to play out (without being on the front pages or at least on the front sports pages). It also would have protected Myers and his family.

Klein volunteered, "The Phillies have had problems in the past with communicating with the media, so I am not surprised that this happened. Everyone was talking. They had no clear understanding who was representing the team. Things will settle down and (everyone will) move on, but the incident will be talked about for a long time. What the Phillies really want is for the fans to talk about the Phillies and not Brett Myers. Proper planning could have assured that."

**Rodger Gottlieb** is a former Philadelphia Flyers public relations director, who now handles major golf and other special events and is considered among the world's most trusted crisis communication counselors. One observer says, "He's exactly the person to stand under the klieg lights when the pressure is on."

Gottlieb says three points were immediately apparent with the Phillies and Brett Myers:

1. No one was trained in crisis communication.
2. There was no unified (clear) message.
3. No one thought about how things were going to be perceived.

He says every crisis is different.

"It is more important that a team is trained in crisis communication than there being a specific plan. When it comes to sports, you don't know what to expect with the crisis. It can be many different things. It is hard to cover

every scenario in a plan. It is important to demonstrate common sense and logic to people.”

When he first heard about the Myers’ situation, Gottlieb said he immediately recognized that there was “a violation of the fundamental elements of crisis communication – no unified message.” He said, “The message needed to be clear. There was no need to rush to judgment. A clear message would have prevented the misconception that the Phillies may have condoned what occurred.

“The team and player saying they are sorry would have gone a long way.” Gottlieb, like others interviewed, noted a show of compassion early establishes a proper tone. He said Myers should not have pitched on that Saturday in Boston on national television (less than 48 hours after the alleged incident). He would have advised the team to sit Myers “until the mess was sorted out.”

As for the single spokesperson, he said it definitely should not have been manager Charlie Manuel (He was not remotely prepared).

“The person’s title is not as important as intelligence and verbal skills.” He says in the Phillies instance, General Manager Pat Gillick would have been effective. He said it depends on the team. “If it were the Eagles, I would say Andy Reid.”

“If I were in charge, I would have rounded up the senior management at the same time I was gathering the facts. You need to know what happened to respond. If you are unsure, there is no intelligent response. You can’t rely on ‘I think,’ you need to rely on ‘I know.’ Until you know everything, you cannot intelligently comment. Once you have all the facts, that would dictate your response.”

Gottlieb says the Myers’ situation would not prevent him from watching the Phillies. He made a few concluding observations:

1. Winning solves a lot of problems.
2. If you conduct yourself well, fans and media have to stay behind you.
3. When the Islanders became No.1, its management became arrogant. “Everybody needs us more then we need them,” kind of attitude. They got away with this only while they were winning.

**Zack Hill**, senior director of communications for the Philadelphia Flyers, has a plan. In fact, the National Hockey League had the foresight to provide each of its franchises with a plan.

According to Hill, if an incident occurs with a player, he would immediately call General Manager Bob Clarke, Coach Ken Hitchcock and the player together.

As others have said, "We gather the facts, determine how it (the situation) is to be handled, craft an honest message and have our general manager serve as spokesperson."

The key for Hill and the Flyers is – "We have a plan and we know how to use it."

On Sept. 11, 2006, **Howard Rubenstein**, founder of Rubenstein Associates, New York, published an op-ed on the Internet. Among his clients are: New York Yankees, The New York Post, the Guggenheim Museum, BMW, the Mt. Sinai/NYU Health System, the Bowery Mission, Rockefeller Center, Columbia University and the Empire State Building.

Rubenstein offers this sage advice.

Organizations must have "ready at hand a list of dos and don'ts for meeting a crisis of any type.

"First off, when you see early signs of a brewing crisis, *take them seriously*. These signs might take various forms: information from an outside source, warnings from whistleblowers or disgruntled employees within a company, media calls, inquiries from government entities, etc. Whatever form they take, don't ever assume they'll go away if you avoid them. To the contrary, be as proactive as possible.

"In other words, prepare in advance. Put together a crisis team composed of management, legal personnel, communications experts and human resources professionals. Designate one or two people who will respond to media calls. Once the team is together, ask yourselves, 'What's the right thing to do?' rather than, 'What do we say?' Gather all the facts you can and identify the audiences you want to communicate with. These could include readers, public officials, stockholders, employees, the general public, etc. Respond quickly and, most important, accurately to all queries. Set the ground rules with reporters before you talk and, wherever possible, prepare written

responses rather than winging it. But get the bad news out quickly – avoid ‘water torture.’

“What you don’t want to do is lie, adopt a bunker mentality, automatically say ‘no comment’ (doing so implies guilt) or make up answers. Never fight with reporters or gossip with them. Remember: The reporter has the last word in print and gossip almost always gets out,” states Rubenstein.

“If you put together your own aggressive crisis communications plan along the above lines, you’ll have a good chance of minimizing the damage of negative news. An Oxford University study found that corporations that managed crises effectively enhanced their stock prices while those that handled the crisis poorly damaged them.”

Public relations has become a key back-up system, like an emergency generator, that more and more people realize they can’t do without.

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Real  
vs.  
Ideal  
Approach**

### Real State vs. Ideal State

**(What actually occurred vs. proper techniques to help control damage, according to public relations practitioners)**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Real</b>	<b>Ideal</b>
<b>D-</b>	The Phillies did not react quickly enough to control the situation.	The Phillies should have contacted the media before the media was tipped off either by witnesses or Boston Police.
<b>F</b>	It appeared as though the organization had no formal crisis communication plan and possibly no crisis operational plan.	Successful organizations and corporations not only have crisis plans, but conduct periodic drills to assure the plans are workable.
<b>F</b>	Those who spoke on behalf of the Phillies organization appeared to be uninformed and untrained (manager Charlie Manuel and general manager Pat Gillick). The media appeared to have much more information – although this wasn't necessarily the case.	Phillies should have selected a single spokesperson – someone high on the executive ladder – quite possibly team president David Montgomery, himself. If not Montgomery, a number of other executives come to mind – Scott Palmer, former television anchor who has joined the team's marketing department or longtime public relations director Larry Shenk. By filtering all strategic messages through a single spokesperson, the organization would have maintained control through a constant flow of information.

Grade	Real	Ideal
D+	<p>By either withholding information (even unintentionally) or being uninformed, the Phillies appeared irresponsible and, at times, uncooperative. This probably is untrue, but as the saying goes, perception is reality.</p>	<p>As former General Electric Board Chair Jack Welch has said, by taking full responsibility for its action and always telling the truth, organizations eliminate the possibility of being accused of trying to hide something. The Phillies should have taken full responsibility for the action of their player and in return the media would have not prolonged the story and the suspicion of lies would not have occurred.</p>

Grade	Real	Ideal
<p data-bbox="370 388 467 420" style="text-align: center;"><b>A or F</b></p> <p data-bbox="235 472 592 1197">The Phillies receive an "A" by default or by "wagging the dog" – the manipulation of public opinion by creating a distraction. The public has been distracted thanks to the Phillies involvement in the National League Wild Card race and first baseman Ryan Howard's offensive performance. If not for the distractions, the Phillies would receive an "F" and an overall grade of "F+," if there were such a grade.</p>	<p data-bbox="625 273 990 1239">Many related (women's) organizations have been affected by the situation. It is apparent that time, a young player setting home run records and competing for Most Valuable Player honors, and a Wild Card race may have healed many wounds (for now). In fact, it has helped distract observers from the real issues and divert attention. However, for the first few weeks following the alleged incident, many powerful organizations and fans of all ages and demographic make up disapproved of how the Phillies' organization reacted.</p>	<p data-bbox="1015 283 1380 871">Proper handling of the Brett Myers crisis will prevent a loss of fan base, loss of sponsors and a tarnished image. Thanks to "wagging the dog," there has been little if any effect on ticket sales, sponsorships or merchandise sales.</p>

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Experts'  
Recommendations**

## Recommendations from the Experts

Crisis is defined in The American Heritage Dictionary as “a crucial point or situation in the course of anything; a turning point.” It is also defined as “an unstable condition...in which an abrupt or decisive change is pending.”

The same publisher defines communication as “the exchange of thoughts, messages...speech, signals or writing.”

Successful public relations practitioners view a crisis as “a situation you plan for but hope never occurs – but if it does, you are prepared.”

Firms and organizations should develop two types of crisis plans – an *operational* plan and a *communication* plan. Operational plans are designed to keep organizations functioning. Communication plans are designed to maintain a constant flow of information – usually to help maintain an organization’s credibility during an unstable period or during a surprise situation that might have a short decision time. They also help to control the message.

A lack of crisis planning could make a bad situation worse, could have dangerous side effects or could even spell doom. How an organization responds in the first 24 hours (of a crisis) often determines whether the situation remains an incident or becomes a full-blown crisis.

Public relations counselor, Anne Klein, APR, of Anne Klein & Associates Public Relations Counselors (Mount Laurel, N.J.), has years of experience that prove the first two to four hours following a crisis to be the most crucial. “After that,” she says, “it’s a whole different ballgame.” Her advice, “Be prepared for that first news media call.”

Those first few hours are considered the communication director’s “Golden hours.” Successful public relations practitioners think about their (personal) “ABCs”

- A = Anticipate
- B = Be prepared
- C = Communicate clearly, concisely, consistently and completely

The key to a successful crisis communication plan is *anticipation*. Anticipation is not predicting, but rather being prepared before hand. Even the best communicator can boast all he or she wants about having advance knowledge or a premonition. But whether or not that innate ability is possessed isn’t the key. The key to a successful reaction is planning – being

ready for that event “just in case it happens.” However, it must be kept in mind that a plan is just that, a plan.

Klein suggests that one way for practitioners to anticipate is to answer the question, “Is there anything that keeps me awake at night?”

### **Some of Klein’s “Important Don’ts in Dealing With the Media” during a crisis:**

1. **Do not speculate about anything.**
2. **Do not give out unconfirmed facts.** Give only the facts you are sure of until further information can be obtained.
3. **Do not speculate on the potential impact of the incident** on employees, neighbors, the community-at-large, etc., unless you know, for sure.
4. **Do not estimate on dollar figures for damage that occurred.**
5. **Do not release the names of anyone** injured or killed until family members have been notified.
6. **Do not give out any medical reports on condition(s) of the injured.** This is the responsibility of the attending physician or hospital spokesperson.
7. **Do not assume liability for the incident or guess how the incident occurred.**
8. **Do not ever respond to a question with “No comment.”** It is *never* an acceptable answer. Say you don't know if you are unsure of the answer or that you will put reporters in touch with someone who can answer their questions. If a question requires an answer that you feel is proprietary to the organization or would violate confidentiality, just explain that fact.
9. **Do not speak “off the record,” “not for attribution” or “on deep background.”** This is an area of high risk, and it is best not to venture there.
10. **Do not get angry at a reporter or raise your voice.**

Klein and others who have been successful in dealing with the media during crises agree on the importance of remaining calm. Take time to compose yourself and craft your message as you formulate your answers. Remember, you are a professional doing your best to be helpful.

Practice the highest ethical standards. Succinctly, you want to be open, honest, thorough and valid in your responses and dissemination of information. Above all, never lie to a reporter, but do not answer a question if you don't have the answer and don't offer unsolicited information unless it is to your benefit. Klein recommends you notify the media before they contact you when the community is in danger; your organization's operations are affected; if having the media first learn about the situation from someone else would damage your organization's image or credibility; a good number of employees know or could possibly know about the situation; there are regulatory infractions that would embarrass your organization if the media learned about them in some other way.

**Successful Crisis PR Depends On Planning And The Practitioner's Mindset. Needed Are:**

- A strategic communication process in place.
- Support from senior management.
- Communication with the chief PR officer or someone with direct access to senior management.
- Good relations and credibility with the news media.
- Effective internal communication.
- Strong peer relations, especially with attorneys.
- Ability to "fly the plane" so to speak.

**C. Fernando Vivanco, Boeing Airline, and Kathleen L. Lewton, Fleishman-Hillard, Inc.**

**Considerations Your *Single* Spokesperson  
Must Keep In Mind (During A *Crisis*)**

- Do your homework
- Be accessible
- Be prompt and dependable
- Avoid being pushed into easy solutions
- Accept responsibility
- Be responsive, forthright and show compassion for victims and their families
- Bluffing an answer is not acceptable – wait until you have the correct information
- Speak and write your information clearly
- Be prepared to respond to incorrect information

**Get Down to Basics**

When a crisis breaks, first, before anything else, gather the facts. Once you have the facts, determine which changes must be made in the strategic plan to best manage this particular crisis. Communicate your plan, first internally, then externally.

Seek feedback.

Evaluate your plan.

M. Larry Litwin, APR – Associate Professor – Rowan University  
*The Public Relations Practitioner's Playbook* (Kendall/Hunt – 2003)

## How to Communicate During a Crisis

- Put the public first
- Take responsibility
- Be honest
- Never say *"No comment"*
- Designate a single spokesperson
- Set up a central information center (staging area)
- Provide a constant flow of information
- Be familiar with media needs and deadlines
- Be accessible
- Monitor news coverage and telephone inquiries
- Communicate with key publics

M. Larry Litwin, APR – Associate Professor – Rowan University  
*The Public Relations Practitioner's Playbook* (Kendall/Hunt – 2003)

## Lessons Learned

Hindsight is 20-20. But one thing has been proven time and again; the lesson to be learned when dealing with a crisis is to adopt a philosophy similar to that of Delahaye Medialink Worldwide headquartered in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

- **Don't duck the issue** – Every time a company tries to “stonewall” or deny the story, the media will gather information and print or air it. Companies that take a forthright approach to their crises reduce publicity almost immediately.
- **Take responsibility** – It is important to accept responsibility immediately and offer to fix the problem. Take a page from Johnson & Johnson. In the midst of tragedy, while it searched for a cause, J&J yanked all Tylenol products from store shelves worldwide, instructed consumers to flush any they had at home down the toilet and offered replacement products with or without proof. That's the kind of decisive action that must be taken.
- **Cover all bases** – In the Tylenol tragedy, J&J removed its product from store shelves and warehouses nationwide, absorbed the losses, eventually developed an improved product with several safety devices on the packages and offered consumers “gift certificates” for any product they disposed of. Simultaneously, J&J, through its corporate public relations office, cooperated fully with the news media (using a single spokesperson).
- **Offer to make good on broken promises** – During alleged “profiling” of minority drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike, Gov. Christine Todd Whitman promised to correct it. When it became apparent that wasn't happening, she called for the resignation of the state police superintendent. (He sued the state and governor for forcing him out of office. The courts found in favor of the governor.)
- **Measure results** – Monitor the news media. Press clipping services are more efficient than ever. This is also a wonderful opportunity to tap your key communicators (feel their pulse) to help determine whether your approach is on course. Kathryn Paine of Delahaye Medialink Worldwide, reminds us, “In a crisis, the goal can never be to squelch negative coverage completely. Rather, it must be to shorten the life span of the bad news, to minimize those messages you don't want to see in print and get as many of your key messages out there as possible.”

## **Bill Jones' 10 Commandments of Crisis Communication\***

(Corporate Public Affairs – PECO (now retired))

1. Perception is reality. If your audience thinks it is, it is.
2. Response is control. The community wants access to information, and no crisis is unmanageable if you give clear, cool facts.
3. Information is power.
4. Credibility is survival.
5. Body language is crucial. If you behave like you have something to hide, people will think that you do.
6. Calmness is essential. Unflappability is your best asset. Always act knowledgeable and calm.
7. Give a confession. The public and the media want a confession; so don't be afraid to admit mistakes.
8. Tell the franchise what happened. It is in the best interest of the community to keep them informed.
9. Preparation is 99% of success.
10. Out of every crisis comes the chance to "build a better mousetrap." From every crisis there are major lessons to be learned.
11. Pray like hell that you never have to handle numbers 1 through 10!

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**The Plan**  
**Goal**  
**Objectives**  
**Strategies**  
**Tactics**  
**Force Field Analysis**

## **Goal – Objectives – Strategies – Tactics**

### **Definitions**

Goal – Desired outcome of a plan of action (usually, one goal). It is more specific than the mission/goal and less global.

Objective – A specific milestone that measures progress toward achievement of a goal. An objective must address the desired communication or behavioral outcome; designate the public or publics among whom the behavioral outcome is to be recognized; specify the expected level of attainment or accomplishment; and identify the time frame in which those attainments or accomplishments are to occur.

Strategy – A general well thought out plan of action. What must be done (to change behavior) and how to accomplish it (usually carried as part of organization's public statement).

Tactic – Specific activity, action or tool conducted to carry out the strategy (memo to employees alerting them of incident or a news conference).

**Goal** – Prevent damage to team’s image and reputation, which could affect ticket sales, sponsorships and merchandise sales – eventually decreasing revenue and affecting the financial bottom line.

**Objective 1.0** To gather executives within one hour of reports of a team member allegedly assaulting his wife with the purpose of implementing its crisis communication plan.

**Strategy 1.1** Front office will decide on a spokesperson who is considered both credible and believable by the media and public.

**Tactic 1.1.1** Prepare spokesperson with correct information that will be continually updated.

**Objective 2.0** Within 2-4 hours of an incident, such as that of Brett Myers, gather enough facts to recognize that a crisis has occurred and begin planning for a news conference or news availability.

**Strategy 2.1** Release information through the media to demonstrate that the organization is in control and that it takes the situation of alleged domestic violence seriously.

**Tactic 2.1.1** Assign one staff member to visit Boston police precinct to gather initial information and get a copy of the arrest report.

**Tactic 2.1.2** Assign staff member to go to the scene to attempt to piece together what “really” happened by interviewing eyewitnesses.

**Tactic 2.1.3** Assign staff member to talk to Phillies employees who may have been at the scene.

**Tactic 2.1.4** Assign staff member to meet with Brett Myers (and his wife, Kim, and their attorneys if they are agreeable) to discuss an acceptable plan of action.

**Objective 3.0** By 7 a.m., hold a news conference/media briefing so that morning television news programs, KYW Newsradio and WIP radio in Philadelphia get the “accurate” story.

**Strategy 3.1** Express compassion and demonstrate that while the team does not condone domestic violence, Myers, for now, is only accused.

**Strategy 3.2** Be sensitive to 24/7 news outlets.

**Strategy 3.3** Establish staging area/media center to gather and disseminate information – demonstrating accessibility of team spokesperson.

**Tactic 3.1.1** Craft general strategic messages that show Phillies are doing their homework and that much more research is still to be done.

**Tactic 3.1.2** Conduct period media briefings.

**Objective 4.0** To inform internal staff of the Brett Myers incident almost simultaneously with the news briefing. (No one should hear about it first from an outside source.)

**Strategy 4.1** An informed staff should understand that while the team supports Brett Myers (for now), it in no way condones what may have occurred.

**Tactic 4.1.1** Internal messages are prepared and distributed by phone, e-mail (Blackberry®) or face-to-face communication depending on location of staff. Internal staff notification should be almost simultaneous with the news briefing.

**Objective 5.0** To constantly review communication and operation crisis plans to assure organization objectives are met; and media and public questions are receiving a satisfactory response.

**Strategy 5.1** Maintain a constant two-way flow of information that anticipates media questions and public reaction.

**Strategy 5.2** Be prepared to respond (quickly) to incorrect information – be visible, be sympathetic, be responsible and don't delay, don't deny and don't hope the incident will go away.

**Tactic 5.1.1** Assign staff members to monitor news coverage and to field (out of town) media inquiries and log and respond to telephone calls from other organizations and public.

**Tactic 5.1.2** Organize a trusted response team consisting of Phillies staff, media volunteer(s), counselors and team attorney.

<b>Force Field Analysis*</b>					
<b>Weight</b>	<b>Forces for Change</b>		<b>Forces Against Change</b>	<b>Weight</b>	
5	Rapid proactive response indicating control of situation	<b>Plan:  Develop crisis communication plan that prevents damage to team's image and reputation</b>	Wait until later in the day allowing media to run with only one side of story	1	
5	Phillies organization needs a formal crisis plan		No need to meet with reporters until they arrive at Fenway Park later in the day	1	
4	Spokesperson – One should have been designated and prepared		No single spokesperson was designated	1	
5	Preparation would help organization appear to be more cooperative		Lack of preparation made organization appear uncooperative	1	
4	Issue key messages early to satisfy media – once again demonstrating control		Don't talk and maybe story will go away	2	
2	Allow Brett Myers to pitch with full explanation		Send Brett Myers "home" until facts can be sorted out	4	
<b>25</b>	<b>Total</b>			<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>
<p>* Force Field or Conflict Analysis is a useful technique for looking at all forces for and against a decision. In effect, it is a specialized method of weighing pros and cons. Once the analysis has been carried out, it is much easier to determine whether a plan is viable. In this instance, the plan's recommendations are overwhelmingly viable as proven by the experts and the many successful examples available.</p>					

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**Examples of  
Successful  
Crisis  
Communication  
Efforts**

## **Example of Successful Effort – No. 1**

### **Media Coverage of Peco Energy's response to Fatal Gas Explosion (See exhibits following page 3)**

Not every public relations crisis has to end badly for the organization involved. In fact, there are many ways to prevent it.

One example is how, Peco Energy dealt with a major tragedy in 1995. The difference between Peco and the Philadelphia Phillies? Peco knew the right way to handle it.

In a Philadelphia suburb during the 1995 holiday season, two homes exploded after a gas leak, killing two and critically injuring one. When called about the smell of gas, Peco took more than an hour to send a technician to the scene. The Peco employee arrived 30 minutes after the gas ignited two homes.

The company immediately took responsibility for the tragedy. Despite knowing their statement could make them a target for lawsuits and public scrutiny, the company did what it felt was right. By admitting its failure to respond in a quick, efficient and safe manner, Peco was able to preserve customer loyalty by demonstrating integrity, compassion and honesty as a company – and as individuals who “fronted” for the cameras.

The incident affected Peco, but far less than if the utility company had denied its role or refused to accept blame. There was no cover up and no hesitation to be forthright. Peco handled the crisis in textbook fashion.

## **Example of Successful Effort – No. 2**

### **2002 Pennsylvania Coal Miner Incident**

“Nothing is more important during a crisis than good, quick, effective, accurate communication,” says J. William Jones, recently retired from the corporate public affairs office of Peco Energy in Philadelphia and the former director of public affairs for the School District of Philadelphia. “Effective management response is the key to credibility.”

That was evident when Pennsylvania Gov. Mark Schweiker took control of a crisis in Pennsylvania (July 2002) when nine miners were trapped underground. Schweiker, the point person, was described as responsive, forthright and compassionate. His care and concern were visible at every news briefing. When it was determined that all nine miners were alive and relatively healthy, it was Schweiker who delivered the good news enthusiastically, raising his arms in triumph. Pennsylvania had a plan.

## Example of Successful Effort – No. 3

### The Role of Public Relations in the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol Crisis

The public relations decisions related to the Tylenol crisis and the product's strong comeback came in two phases. Phase one was the crisis phase, which began on the morning of Sept. 30, 1982, with the grim news of the cyanide poisonings. Since the extent of the contamination was not immediately known, there was grave concern for the safety of the estimated 100 million Americans who were using Tylenol. The first critical public relations decision, taken immediately and with total support from company management, was to cooperate fully with the news media. The press was key to warning the public of the danger.

Later it was realized that no meeting had been called to make that critical decision. The poisonings called for immediate action to protect the consumer, and there wasn't the slightest hesitation about being completely open with the news media. For the same reasons the decision was made to recall two batches of the product, and later to withdraw it nationally. During the crisis phase of the Tylenol tragedy, virtually every public relations decision was based on sound, socially responsible business principles, which is when public relations is most effective.

Almost immediately, planning began for phase two, the comeback, and this involved a more detailed and extensive public relations effort that closely followed important marketing decisions and reached out to many audiences. The comeback began officially with a 30-city video press conference via satellite, an innovative approach suggested by Burson-Marsteller, the public relations agency responsible for Tylenol product publicity.

The video conference and all other key decisions were discussed and debated by a seven-member strategy committee formed by Chairman and CEO James E. Burke to deal with the Tylenol crisis. The committee included a public relations executive and met twice daily for six weeks. The decisions it made dealt with every aspect of the problem – from packaging to advertising to appearances on network television. Many required follow-up by the public relations staff at corporate and at McNeil Consumer Products Company – the subsidiary that manufactures Tylenol.

The Tylenol tragedy proved once again that public relations is a business of basics, and that the best public relations decisions are closely linked to sound business practices and a responsible corporate philosophy.

Lawrence G. Foster  
Corporate Vice President-Public Relations  
Johnson & Johnson  
Courtesy Lawrence G. Foster

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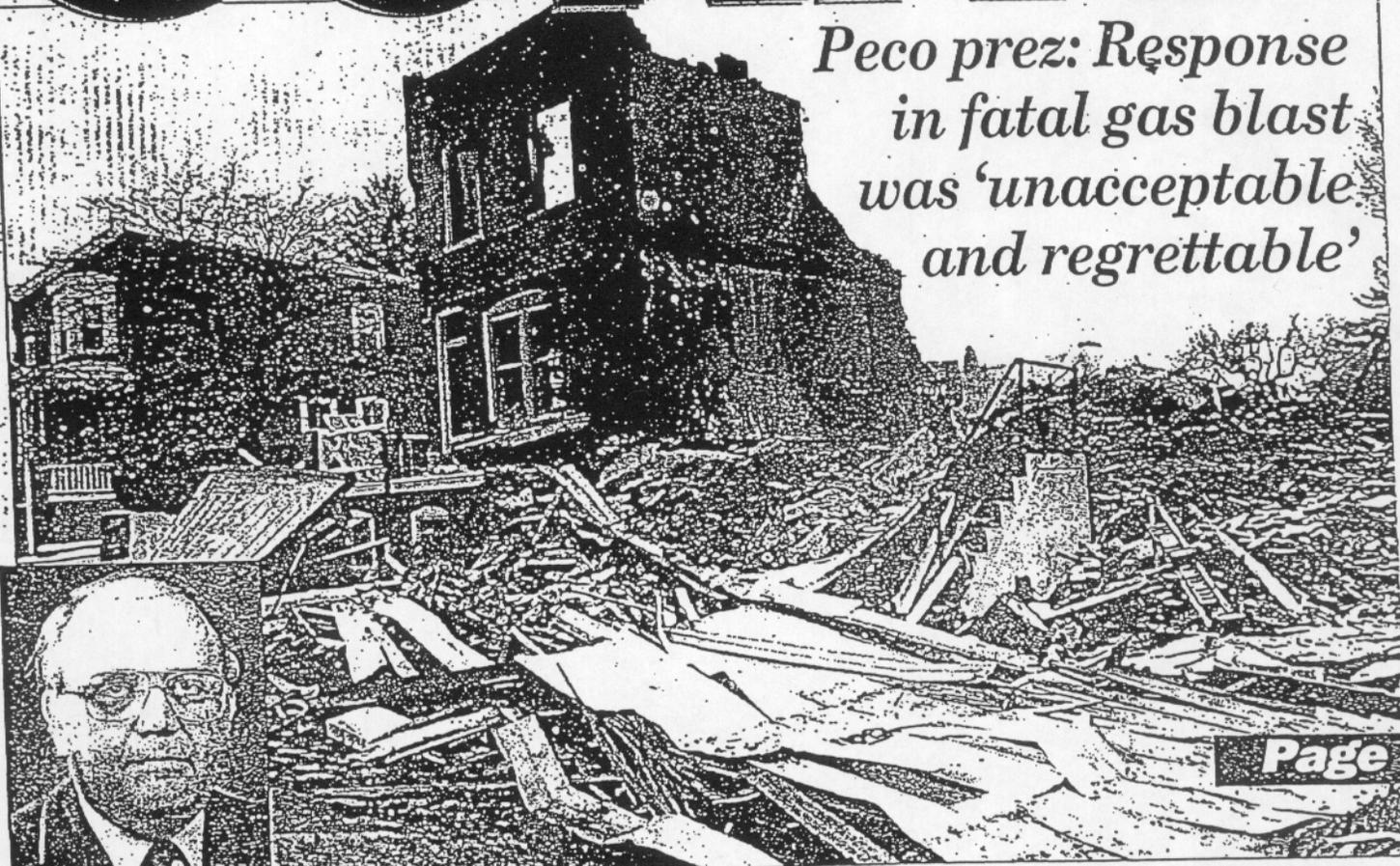
## PEETE'S FUTURE

Despite winning ways,  
the Eagle QB might  
not be back: *Sports*



# SORRY

*Peco prez: Response  
in fatal gas blast  
was 'unacceptable  
and regrettable'*



**Page 3**

Peco's Corbin McNeill: "Soul-searching"

## STORM: THIN ICE

We escaped the worst  
*Page 7*

## 'NIXON' FUROR

Movie backlash, *Page 4*  
*A review, Page 25*



# Peco's mea culpa hailed as 'brilliant'

## Savvy PR, despite firm's blast liability

by Barbara Laker

Daily News Staff Writer

At 4 a.m., Corbin McNeill Jr. got the call.

Peco Energy's president and chief executive officer was told that a thundering gas explosion had ripped apart two houses on Tremont Avenue in Norristown.

As the tragedy unfolded Tuesday, he learned to his horror that two people had died. Another was critically injured.

Later that day, McNeill told the world that Peco took full responsibility. He apologized. Everyone, even marketing experts, was shocked by such a quick, bold and honest statement from a corporate giant. Later, they had nothing but praise for McNeill.

"It was a very unusual and brilliant public relations move," said Howard Rubenstein, a New York public relations expert specializing in crisis management. "My hat goes off to them."

Raj Chandran, a marketing and international business professor at Temple University Graduate School of Business, agreed.

"Usually companies, because of the liability problems, hem and haw. But it's a lot better to be up front. I'm sure [McNeill] can sleep soundly at night. And that's worth a lot."

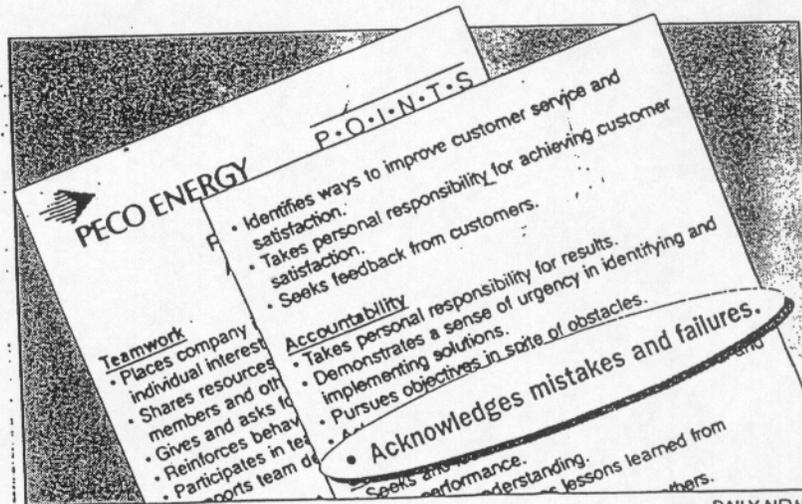
By about 6 a.m. Tuesday, McNeill and Chairman Joseph F. Paquette Jr., talking by phone,



Corbin McNeill: Peco prez



Joseph Paquette: Peco chairman



DAILY NEWS

knew things didn't look good for Peco.

Neil McDermott, director of media and public relations, told

McNeill, also by phone, "There was a question of our response to reports of gas odor leaks."

See PECO Page 35

# THE REPORTER

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER SERVING MONTGOMERY AND BUCKS COUNTIES

35 CENTS

## PECO takes blame in fatal blast

December 20, 1995

Page 1/2

By PETER LOFTUS  
Staff Writer

NORRISTOWN — PECO Energy officials were taking "full responsibility" Tuesday for an early morning natural gas explosion that killed two borough residents and critically injured another.

An apparent gas leak caused a three-story brick house at 831 Tremont Ave. to explode about 1:30 a.m. Tuesday. In addition to causing the deaths and critical injury, the blast injured two fire-

fighters who had just arrived to investigate.

Officials at the Philadelphia-based utility later apologized for the explosion, saying PECO service technicians did not immediately respond to the first report of the gas leak. A neighbor said she phoned in a report of the leak an hour before the blast, about 12:30 a.m.

"It is company policy that gas odor calls are responded to immediately," PECO president Corbin A. McNeill Jr. said in a written statement released Tuesday afternoon. "In this instance, it took more than one hour for a technician to be dispatched. This is unacceptable and regrettable."

Killed in the blast were Margaret Cognato, 75, and her brother, who was identified by Norristown Police only as Butch, age 63. They apparently were asleep at the time of the explosion, police said. The Montgomery County coroner was to perform autopsies Tues-

day evening to determine cause of death.

Benjamin Cognato, 75, Margaret's husband, was also in the house at the time, but survived the blast. He suffered second-degree burns on 20 percent of his body and was in critical condition Tuesday night at Crozer Chester Medical Center, Delaware County.

Tuesday afternoon, neighbors of the Cognatos voiced anger at PECO's delay in responding to the

leaking gas, which apparently filled the Cognato home.

"It was an emergency, but they (PECO) kept promising they'd be there within the hour," said Louise Byrd, who called the utility after being awakened by a gas odor around 12:30 a.m. "I don't feel too good about this."

Byrd, 72, who lives across the street from the Cognato house, said she and her son, Tom, phoned PECO four more times

over the next hour. Tom Byrd then called the Norristown Fire Department, which sent a fire truck "within minutes," Louise Byrd said.

A fire truck was on the street in front of the Cognato house for "no more than a minute," when the house exploded, said Norristown Police Detective George DiPetrillo. Officials did not say where the gas leak occurred, or what sparked the explosion.

Two firefighters, James Costello, 46, and Craig Keyser, 40, were thrown from the truck into the street. They were taken to Montgomery Hospital, treated for cuts and bruises and released.

The explosion instantly leveled the Cognato house, and sparked a fire in an adjacent house at 829 Tremont Ave. Charles and Charlotte Mandracchi, the elderly couple who lived there, escaped out the back door, DiPetrillo said.

Soon after firefighters arrived to douse the Mandracchi house fire, Benjamin Cognato emerged from the rubble, walking toward rescuers, DiPetrillo said. He was flown by MedEvac helicopter to Crozer Chester.

After firefighters spent several hours quenching the flames, emergency work crews were called in to demolish the Mandracchi house because it was deemed structurally unsound.

Only after the Mandracchi house was torn down were firefighters able to search the rubble of the Cognato house. They found the bodies of Margaret Cognato and her brother around 11 a.m. Both were dead at the scene.

Louise Byrd, the neighbor who lives across the street, said she was standing in her front doorway with her back to the Cognato house when it exploded. She said she felt the force of the explosion, and grabbed an iron railing to keep her balance.

Sam Rinehart, who lives five houses down from the Cognatos, said he was awakened by the blast. He and his wife, Maryann, rushed to the bathroom window to see what happened.

"I just looked out the window and saw a big blaze of fire," Rinehart said.

The Rineharts, Louise Byrd and residents of about 20 other houses in the multi-ethnic neighborhood were evacuated from their homes shortly after the blast because officials feared the gas had spread.

PHILADELPHIA DAILY  
**NEWS**  
THE PEOPLE PAPER

December 26, 1995

## Peco does right thing

There are several good reasons for Peco Energy's astonishing — and immediate — apology for the thundering gas explosion that ripped apart two houses in Norristown:

- Because of the inexcusable delay in responding to the report of a gas leak, Peco was so obviously liable that stonewalling would have been foolish.
- Saying right up front that Peco had screwed up was a major public relations triumph — “unusual and brilliant,” according to a PR expert who specializes in crisis management.
- It was the right thing to do.

Doing the right thing, of course, is justification in itself. If it also makes sense pragmatically, all the better.

This tragic error will cost Peco and its stockholders plenty, but no more or less than it would had Peco not owned up to its culpability. And whatever it costs in money is trivial to what it cost the victims of the fatal blast.

Peco president Corbin McNeill Jr. and his colleagues should be role models for those in corporate America with the disturbing tendency to try to avoid the truth and its consequences. ■

**Crisis Communication Plan  
Philadelphia Phillies**

**One More Exhibit**

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PHILLIES WIVES CHARITY EVENT

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*Kim Myers holds the electric guitar signed by pitcher Brett Myers which was part of their Pro Pack.™*

*Rosemary Rahn/Phillies*

**Phillies**

**July 29 – Phillies’ wives charity event at Citizens Bank Park – five weeks after alleged Brett Myers’ incident.**

**Kim Myers is shown holding an electric guitar signed by husband Brett, which was part of the “pro pack.”**