Risk Comes With the Territory! What Big Business Execs Can Learn from Values-Based Nonprofit Leaders

By Chris Croll

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These days we live in a hyper-networked world of “real time” and “always on” media coverage. Few provocative quotes escape notice. From the blogosphere to the business section of your local paper, it seems as if each day brings new stories about corporate executives who could benefit from spending more time discussing risk management with their nonprofit counterparts.

Chick-fil-A President Dan Cathy kicked up a feed-storm of controversy last week when he commented to the *Baptist Press* that his company is “guilty as charged” for supporting Christian values, including the belief that same sex marriage conflicts with “the Biblical definition of the family.” Time for Chick-fil-A to roll out the risk management and crisis communications plans!

Much of the controversy that erupted after Cathy’s comments had, at its core, a debate about whether a successful American business could, and should, have a values-based corporate mission; especially a business that caters to such a broad spectrum of consumers. When Mr. Cathy waged this ideological food-fight, many of you reading this *eNews* must have been thinking, “Welcome to our world, Mr. Cathy!”

Leaders of values-based nonprofits have no choice but to be well-versed in risk management *and* crisis management. Yet we know that many readers of this *eNews* have insights on navigating a storm with a values-based mission as the rudder and a broad base of constituents on board. The leaders of the nation’s largest and most revered nonprofits, from Boy Scouts of America to Habitat for Humanity know full well that risk management is core to keeping a values-based organization safely afloat and mission-focused.

Regardless of whether you’ll be eating or avoiding chicken today, it’s probably a good day to remind yourself that, “If you’re going to take a stand, you’d better have a plan!” Is your risk management plan ready for the day it’s your turn to face the cameras?

On a sad note, the company’s head of corporate communications, a 29 year veteran of Chick-fil-A, passed away last weekend from a heart attack amidst all of the controversy. This is the kind of tragedy that even the best laid plans could not have anticipated.

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