How to Handle “Negative Press”
(from a School Bus Driver POV)

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What’s MY Role as District PR Officer?

- Handle media calls
- Use a hotline to admin & transportation heads
- Conduct media interviews
- Share insight with media
- Educate the public
- Follow-up & hold media accountable
- Spotlight when appropriate
Experience / Background

• Former TV news anchor & reporter
• Master’s degree in broadcast journalism
• MCPS = 14 years
• 42,000 students, 6,000 employees, 300 buses on roads daily

• Covered everything from:
  • Minor fender benders
  • Rear-end multiple-vehicle accidents
  • Bus fires
  • Deadly crash with 23 students on board, 1 killed
School Bus FACTS

• 2014 Illegal passers in FL: 9,377 daily from 11,000 bus drivers (FL DOE)

• Nationwide:
  • 144 school bus crashes daily
  • 26,000 annually
  • 17,000 students to the hospital

• Takes 8-12 months to receive a new school bus

• Average cost: $100k+

• Basic tips for students & parents (FL DOE)

• FL Dept. of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles (Stop on Red, Kids Ahead!)

• National Statistics (Nat’l Hwy Traffic Safety Admin)
What YOU Do as the Driver

• Handle our most precious cargo
• Usually favored by the public for the job you do
• Held to a higher standard because of this
• Can be crucified in the media for blatant mistakes
What You SHOULD Do as the Driver

• Drive carefully
• Drive cautiously
• Drive courteously
• Cameras, cameras, cameras!
  • surveillance
  • news
  • cell phone
• Depend on your supervisor
• Depend on your district PIO / Communications contact
• Don’t make statements (public, private or social media) that jeopardize your position
What You SHOULD NOT Do as the Driver

• Don’t ignore your responsibilities as a bus driver
• Don’t be abrasive in public
• Don’t get caught on camera doing something wrong
• Don’t lie
• Don’t be tempted by media
• Don’t think you have to handle media on your own
• Don’t forget you’re the one in charge of the bus
What is “Bad Press?”

- What does this picture tell you?

- Bad press is:
  - one-sided
  - unfair
  - unfounded
  - not accurate

- If the story is true, accurate and fairly presented, it is not “bad.”

- Unflattering, perhaps, but not false.
3 Opportunities Every School Bus Driver Has

• **Opportunity #1: To PROTECT**
  • children – get them to school and home safely and without issue
  • other drivers - bad, stupid, or otherwise ignorant ones

• The Profession – this is no easy job! Many districts struggle to find enough bus drivers.

• The District
  • Normally among the largest employers in any county
  • recipient of millions of community tax dollars
  • can be judged on just one person’s actions
3 Opportunities Every School Bus Driver Has

• **Opportunity #2: To ENGAGE**

  • Parents – help them better understand the challenges you face every day with students
  
  • Community – help them better understand the challenges you face every day with other drivers on the road
3 Opportunities Every School Bus Driver Has

**Opportunity #3: To SERVE**

• Schools – by getting students to and from school safely and on-time

• Students – because you’re the first and last school-connected person they see every day
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