

**UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI**  
**FACULTY OF COMMERCE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**  
**MAIN EXAMINATION PAPER**  
**DECEMBER 2018**  
**IDE STUDENTS**

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- TITLE OF PAPER :** PUBLIC RELATIONS 1
- COURSE CODE :** BA 518 / IDE
- TIME ALLOWED :** THREE (3) HOURS
- INSTRUCTIONS :**
- (1) TOTAL NUMBER OF QUESTIONS IN THIS PAPER IS SIX (6)
  - (2) THE PAPER CONSISTS OF SECTIONS A AND B.
  - (3) ANSWER THE QUESTION IN SECTION A WHICH IS COMPULSORY AND ANY THREE (3) QUESTIONS IN SECTION B.
  - (4) THE MARKS ALLOTTED FOR A QUESTION /PART OF A QUESTION ARE INDICATED AT THE END OF EACH QUESTION / PART OF QUESTION.
  - (5) WHERE APPLICABLE, ALL WORKINGS / CALCULATIONS MUST BE CLEARLY SHOWN.

**NOTE: MAXIMUM MARKS WILL BE AWARDED FOR GOOD QUALITY LAYOUT, ACCURACY, AND PRESENTATION OF WORK.**

**THIS PAPER MUST NOT BE OPENED UNTIL PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY THE INVIGILATOR.**

## SECTION A: COMPULSORY

QUESTION 1 Read the case and answer the questions that follow:

### Case: Wendy's Fingers a Hoaxer

Just as airlines must be prepared for the dreaded day when **crisis arrives** in the form of a crash or hijacking, so, too, the public relations professionals at fast-food restaurants must be prepared for crises involving robberies or **tainted food**. Little, however, could have prepared the executives at Wendy's restaurants, one of the nation's leading fast-food purveyors, for the shocking report they received in March 2005.

A woman named Anna Ayala, dining at a Wendy's in San Jose, California, reportedly discovered a portion of a human finger in a bowl of beef chili. Ayala went **public immediately**, threatening suit, and Wendy's became embroiled in a **five-alarm crisis**, face-to-face with the nation's and the world's media

#### **No Public Relations Finger-Pointing**

After the San Jose franchise owner notified management, Wendy's corporate executives leapt into action with a multipronged public relations initiative.

- Wendy's President Tom Mueller quickly stepped into the public spotlight, responding initially to the media.
- The company offered a \$50,000 reward to the first person providing verifiable information leading to the identification or origin of the finger.
- A toll-free number was established to receive leads.
- A comprehensive internal investigation was undertaken to ensure that the finger didn't come from an employee.
- The company and its president made themselves available to the media to reaffirm that "Nothing is more important to us than the quality of food we serve."

The results of the internal investigation indicated that no Wendy's personnel seemed to be involved. No restaurant employees or chili suppliers had suffered hand injuries. The employee who prepared the chili was a 10-year veteran of the San Jose restaurant. Wendy's personnel appeared clean.

Nonetheless, the company was careful not to blame anyone, most of all Ayala. The company was circumspect in its public statements about the alleged victim. It never even suggested the possibility that Ayala might be involved in the crime. Even after Ayala's lawyer quit and she mysteriously dropped her threat to sue, Wendy's kept its distance from pointing fingers

#### **The Finger Lingers**

Over the next month, the police investigation proceeded and Wendy's continued to make itself available to the media. A month to the day after the finger fracas began, Wendy's public relations director allowed the *New York Times* to follow him through damage control duties, meeting with the reporter at the restaurant scene of the crisis.

A nearly full-page, generally sympathetic story resulted, analyzing all aspects of Wendy's

public relations dilemma. The story even speculated as to where the found finger may have originated, including a woman who recently lost a finger in a leopard attack. Among other things, the public relations chief acknowledged that the picture of the finger in the chili "was a gruesome image ... and it spread across the country in no time."

Meanwhile, late-night comedians were having a field day. Jay Leno on the *Tonight Show* admitted he hadn't been aware that "Wendy's sold finger food." Leno then referred to the company's late founder: "I guess we know what Wendy's did with their founder, Dave Thomas."

Also busy on the airwaves was Ayala, who willingly told *ABC's Good Morning America*, "Suddenly I chew something that's kind of hard; crunchy ... **I spit it out**".

As the month wore on, the Wendy's finger incident refused to go away. Sadly summarized, the company's public relations director to the *New York Times*, "We can't put this behind us until we get a third party to exonerate us, if that's possible. And it may never be possible."

### **Fingering the Finagler**

A little more than a month after Wendy's nightmare began, it ended. Just like that.

Police in Las Vegas arrested Anna Ayala at her home and charged her with attempted larceny in perpetrating a hoax against Wendy's. According to police, Ayala had been involved in other legal disputes, lots of them. She filed at least 13 civil actions in California and Nevada involving her and her children, most of the time settling for cash rather than going to trial.

When asked if police had suspected Ayala of committing a hoax, the head San Jose's police department's investigations unit answered yes.

In January 2006, Ayala and her husband pleaded guilty to the scheme to extort money from Wendy's. Ayala's husband had purchased the mysterious finger from a coworker, who lost it in an industrial accident. Ayala was sentenced to nine years in jail and her husband to 12 years. They were ordered to pay \$21 million.

As for Wendy's, President Mueller said, "We're thrilled the arrest has been made." Less thrilling was the fact that the hoax forced Wendy's to lay off dozens of workers and cost the company \$2.5 million in lost sales.

### **Questions:**

- a) How would you assess Wendy's treatment of Ayala in a public relations sense? [10marks]
- b) Was the public relations director's interview with the *New York Times* helpful or harmful to Wendy's? [10 marks]
- c) Discuss the general instant warning signs that invariably appear when crises strike and what would be the best thing to do in a crisis.

[TOTAL MARKS 40]

## **SECTION B**

Answer any **three (3)** questions from this section.

### **QUESTION 2**

Explain with examples, the following trends that have contributed greatly to the increased use of public relations today:-

- a. The heightened awareness and sophistication of people everywhere as a result of technological innovations in communications. [5 marks]
- b. The increased importance of public opinion for positive democratic practice. [5 marks]
- c. The extraordinary growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web. [5 marks]
- d. The increased importance of public opinion for positive democratic practice. [5 marks]

[Total marks 20]

### QUESTION 3

Persuasion is perhaps the most essential element in influencing public opinion. Explain the factors you need to consider or use in order to persuade people. [20 marks]

### QUESTION 4

Discuss with examples, the management functions of public relations practitioners within the organization. [20 marks]

### QUESTION 5

Many public relations practitioners think that once they win public opinion their assignment is complete yet public opinion changes with time. Explain with examples, the traps of public opinion [20 marks]

### QUESTION 6

However good a company's products are or customer service is, there will be times when someone will complain. Explain the guidelines you will follow in order to successfully handle customers' complaints

[20 marks]