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U-turns in spin lane exceed all credibility

By Andrea Obston

The recent spate of U-turns in crisis response makes me wonder just how dumb some folks think we are.

Most recently, it came to mind when I read of the purported accidental leak of the PR plans for "Pottermore," the super-secret Harry Potter-themed internet treasure hunt. It seems the agency handling the PR for Pottermore inadvertently sent the timeline to The Times UK, The Guardian, The Independent and other media. When confronted with the mistake their initial comeback was that those were "old plans." Maybe, but I had a lot of trouble buying into that and it turned out to be as much a fantasy as Hogwarts.

Interestingly, there has been some speculation that the leak was part of some elaborate marketing ploy to raise anticipation for the release of Pottermore. My Google search had the phrase "Pottermore" and "leak" taking up the first page on Google. You can't buy that. Unfortunately, J. K. Rowling's PR representative confirmed that the leak was nothing more than a mistake. "Much as we would like to say this is an elaborate stunt to create excitement, I'm afraid it was a simple error," Hutchinson said. So first it was an "accident," then it was a clever ruse and now we're back to "accidental but still old."

I suppose it fits with the playfulness of the whole venture, but frankly I'm inclined to distrust the whole thing and wonder at their need to continually U-turn.

And, of course, you're going to have to go a long way to beat the newly crowned King of U-Turn Crisis Management: former U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner. This guy thought we were dim-witted enough to buy

his "My-Twitter-account-was-hacked" story for five days. The more this guy U-turned, the more pathetic he seemed.

The approach isn't new. Who could forget the version played by the John Edwards' campaign? It was a variation on Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean" line: "The Kid is Not My Son (daughter)"? What started as a 2007 National Enquirer story about his affair with a former campaign staffer escalated to an August 2008 on-air interview with ABC News' in which he confessed to having the affair but maintained that he was not the father of Rielle Hunter's baby. That was followed by a 2010 U-turn in which he admitted his paternity, saying "I will do everything in my power to provide her with the love and support she deserves." Earlier this month, the whole thing came home to roost. This former presidential hopeful was indicted by federal prosecutors for violating campaign finance law by soliciting nearly \$1 million to cover the cost of keeping Rielle Hunter and her baby out of sight. Edwards response (and here the U-turns are definitely giving me whiplash) was to essentially say "I may be a lying creep, but that doesn't mean I'm a felon."

The lesson here is quite clear: U-turns don't fly. When you mess up, fess up. Don't bob and weave hoping people will buy your story and forget it when the truth comes out. It always comes out. So why put yourself in the embarrassing situation of explaining two mistakes?

My mother had a refrain that was the bane of my existence growing up.

When I'd weave a yarn to cover up a screw-up, my mother's response was, "What makes me really mad isn't what you did, it's that you think I'm stupid enough to buy that story." I hated that then. Now, it seems pretty wise. ■

Andrea Obston is president of Andrea Obston Marketing Communications LLC in Bloomfield.



Andrea Obston