

An Apology Tour And Other Next Steps That Could Be In Will Smith's Future



For companies and high-profile individuals, how they recover from a crisis is just as important as what they did to create or manage the situation in the first place—as are the steps they take to ensure they do not repeat the crisis.

Business leaders could learn a lot about bouncing back from a crisis by paying close attention to how Smith attempts to come back from his.

The statement that Will Smith posted Monday on Instagram could be the first in a series of steps he takes in apologizing to comedian Chris Rock for slapping him in front of a live international television audience at the Academy Awards Sunday night.

Take A Cue From Others

Smith might take a cue from companies and individuals who have had to atone for their transgressions and explain their behavior. That could include going on an apology tour.

Baruch Labunski, CEO of Rank Secure, said Smith “should take every interview, every invitation to appear on podcasts, TV and radio, and I think he should prepare himself to answer difficult questions. I believe he should face his behavior head-on, and I think he should acknowledge that he was very, very wrong.

“Smith needs to take every opportunity to apologize for his bad behavior and perhaps – after acknowledging and accepting the blame— he can do a little good by modeling an appropriate response to a mistake by bringing some attention to alopecia awareness.”

History shows that the public can forgive those who have fallen off their pedestal. Sometimes all it takes is for the ‘sinners’ to say ‘I’m sorry for what I (or we) did’, over and over again. Generally though, the worse the offense, the longer it can take to regain the public’s favor. Examples include Martha Stewart, Chipotle and Starbucks.

Next Steps?

An informal survey of marketing and PR experts, consultants and observers yielded these recommendations for what Smith should do next—and how he should do it.

Have A Plan

Marc Silverstein is the founder and CEO of On The Marc Media. He said, “...don't wing this. They should be having daily intense meetings with the PR and legal team to prepare for every contingency.

“There's already video resurfacing online of Smith making a joke about a bald member of the band years ago on Arsenio. And another of him slapping a reporter from 2012. Have a plan in case you need to respond to even more incoming.”

Openly Discuss Self-Control

Michael Toebe is the founder and practicing specialist at Reputation Quality. He noted that “Smith's behavior has become more than a conflict between two men or the Smiths and Rock. It's become a hot talking point about violence and even domestic violence. Wounds have been opened by viewers of what has happened. You will see more talk in the media and on social media about it.

“Smith would benefit greatly by realizing this and moving past the obligatory statement to talk in-depth about self-control and maybe therapy instead of violence to solve anger towards all people: men, women, children, nonbinary. That's what critics want to hear and see from him,” Toebe said.

“It will take social awareness and courage, but I like to think Smith has it in him. I do expect, eventually, Smith, either of his own volition or at the urging of his team, will do a sit-down with [the] media to talk about this to apologize and humanize himself with regret and remorse. But he should do this on his own now, the sooner the better,” he advised.

Baruch Develop A Social Media Strategy

Sherese Patton is the CEO and principal publicist of The Patton Agency. She said that “For Will, his team needs to be proactive and develop a strategy to use social media and traditional media to maintain his positive image.

“This was his first Oscar win, which many people wanted to win. He got it and it's wonderful. However, his actions last night have taken center stage and [have] taken over the story.”

Be Transparent

Patton advised that “He needs to be transparent about what he was feeling at that moment [and] be as open about his emotions as he can, and take responsibility for his actions.”

Control The Narrative

Carla Williams Johnson is the CEO of advertising and marketing agency Carli Communications. “His next steps, in my opinion is for him to take control of the narrative by addressing the incident head-on.

“I'd advise him to show up everywhere and talk about how he felt, his emotion and, quite literally that, in his mind, he was defending his family, but also acknowledging that he may have chosen the wrong way to do so.”

“I would have had him lean on the fact that he's only human and did what he thought was necessary at the time. I'm not condoning his actions but will encourage him to appeal to the emotional side of his audience to allow them to see where he was coming from,” Johnson observed.

Set An Example

James Miller, founder of Photographer Touch, said, “I think Will Smith should return his award with his apology, to give an example and show the world that there should be consequences for one's behavior, especially these days when the influencers like Smith [have] so much influence on so many people around the world.”

Donate

Stacy Rosenberg is an associate teaching professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College. She said, “holding himself accountable and communicating regret [is] most important...[and] ensure he makes no further violent acts. He could also donate to a violence prevention program to show a commitment on a broader scale.”

Counseling

Lynford Morton is a professional communicator with experience in corporate communications, a personal branding and crisis communication. He thought Smith should, “Address the real problem. That means anger management and counseling to understand and deal with how he responded and why.”

Cali Estes is a clinical psychologist who works with celebrities in the areas of behavioral management and addiction. She said that “While it may seem noble that he stood up for his wife, he thought the joke was funny until she gave him a specific nonverbal communication cue that implied action on his part. This is actually part of an abuse tactic in controlling toxic relationships and requires specific codependency counseling.”

Make Amends

“Make public amends with Chris Rock. I would have Chris and Will together at Jada's Red Table Talk. They could air out their differences with the person at the center of their controversy. It just might break the internet,” Morton thought.

Public Service

Joel Jackson, the co-founder of Lifeforce, a digital consumer-facing health products company, said Smith is “...a celebrity who is in the public eye and the entertainment media are going to follow his every move, so he should spend some time doing some self-imposed public service related to anti-violence.”