

Crisis Communications exercise
Week 7, Class #2

Today, you and your team are faced with the task of addressing, explaining, and apologizing (if necessary) for an unfortunate event facing the company.

Mission: You have two tasks:

- 1) draft a **ONE-PAGE WRITTEN PRESS RELEASE OR STATEMENT** addressing the event that caused a public crisis for Walmart and has begun to tarnish its image in the public space.
- 2) draft a **PUBLIC STATEMENT** addressing the issue, to be read as a “presser.”

You may not:

- Criticize Walmart or the party in question that has pointed out Walmart’s error
- Publicly second-guess Walmart’s decision or its motives
- Bash or denigrate the company, its executives, or anyone else
- Attack the press or the counterparty on this issue
- Spin the issue or try to “turn negatives into positives” to gain favor with the public

Team 1: News commentator goes after Walmart “greed”



MSNBC news commentator Keith Olbermann introduced the story of Debbie Shank, a 52-year-old former Walmart employee and mother of a soldier killed in Iraq who suffered severe brain damage after getting hit by a truck and was subsequently sued by Walmart to recover \$470,000 in medical expenses (paid out by group coverage). Shank had won a substantial settlement from the trucking company and, after legal fees, took home \$417,000, prompting Walmart’s suit of their ex-worker.

Olbermann declared Walmart his "Worst Person in the World" and has subsequently mentioned the issue every night since. Walmart shortly thereafter dropped their suit, but suffered a tarnished reputation.

Your task is to address the matter and cleanup Walmart’s reputation.

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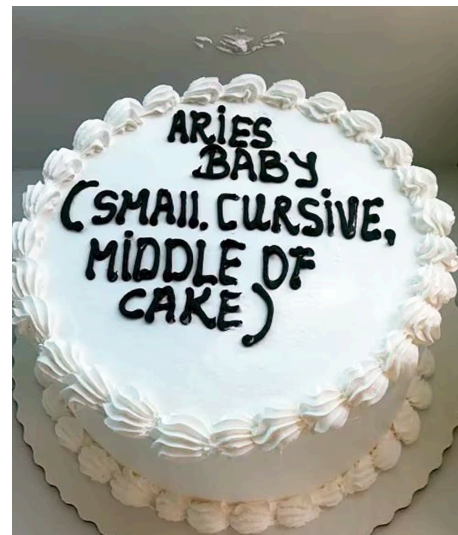
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Team 2: Walmart Cake fail goes viral—and national

A flabbergasted woman shamed Walmart's bakery department online after incorrectly decorating her cake, sharing images of the sweet snafu online.

TikToker Peyton Chimack, 22, from Illinois, ordered what should have been a simple birthday cake: white frosting with black, cursive lettering reading “Aries baby.”

She even provided a photo of a similar creation for decorators to follow.



Your task is to address the matter, reassure Walmart customers about the competence of staff, ongoing training of employees, and product quality.

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Team 3: “Union busting” Walmart's history of treating workers poorly

A U.S. labor agency has accused Walmart of using illegal tactics to deter unionizing at a California store. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) said it had issued a complaint late Wednesday alleging Walmart interrogated workers at the Eureka, California, store about their union activities, removed pro-union flyers from a break room, and threatened employees who distributed union literature in violation of U.S. labor law.

This comes after years of complaints about Walmart, including a lawsuit regarding janitors being locked in stores during their shifts (2004) and being sued by undocumented workers (2010).

Your task is to address the situation, show support for Walmart workers, and also address safety and legal concerns at Walmart stores.

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Team 4: Walmart employee found dead in oven at store

A **19-year-old Walmart employee's** body was found in a store's walk-in oven in Canada last month, police said. The young woman was identified as Gursimran Kaur by the Maritime Sikh Society in Nova Scotia, which **launched a fundraiser** on behalf of the family.

Halifax police were uncertain in their investigation “where the cause and manner of death have been confirmed,” they've said.

“We urge the public to be mindful of sharing speculative information on social media,” police said last week in a statement. “Please be aware of the impacts that speculation could have on family, colleagues and loved ones of the woman.” However, according to emergency audio from first responders, the woman was believed to have been “locked” in somehow.

Your task is to address the situation, show empathy to the family and coworkers, and also address safety concerns at Walmart stores.

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Team 5: Walmart blamed for “unsafe” restrooms, no restrooms at all

A Walmart employee warned customers not to use restrooms at some locations, stating in a TikTok video that toilet paper appear to be marked with blood spots, believing them to be needle holes left by IV drug users.

In another location, a customer blasted the retailer on social media for having low stock on regular goods, but also providing no restrooms for shoppers, only port-o-potties outside the store.

Your task is to assure customers that these isolated incidents, while addressing the afroementioned issues in a transparent and direct manner.

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Team 6: Walmart's history with disability lawsuits, judgements

A former Walmart employee down syndrome was awarded \$300,000 after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claimed she was fired after 15 years with the company because of her disability, and also that the retailer refused legally mandated accommodations.

Another former employee with a seizure disorder sued after being dismissed because of absences despite putting forth a disability leave request with her employer. This follows a string of other suits by employees, in conjunction with the EEOC.

Your task is to address Walmart's bad record on disability suits, and announce a new policy going forward of better supporting employees.