

## PRETEND OR REACT – MANAGING CRISES



Sometimes the most carefully downplayed response to particularly unsavoury actions can blow up big-time and that is what has happened after Richmond Football Club player Dustin Martin was forced to apologise for threatening a woman last Saturday night (December 5).

In a nice piece of mitigation, headlines proclaiming how “deeply embarrassed” Dustin Martin was after a “drunken night and chopstick threat” began to appear on the AFL website on Monday evening.

The use of the term “deeply embarrassed” were attempts to take the heat out of developing media accounts of an ugly act of aggression toward a member of the public by the AFL player.

Throw in the fix-all line of blaming alcohol rather than the person, and suddenly you have one of the boys being an idiot on a night out after a skinful. A nice flick-pass from the real issues at hand.

On the serious stuff scale, threatening to plunge a chopstick into the eye of anyone, but particularly a woman, is only marginally below actually doing it.

Proper issues management was what this situation called for from both the player’s club and the AFL – not clever attempts to downplay his actions.

The clever attempts soon came crashing down when past Richmond playing legend and former coach Kevin Bartlett called for “. . . *the club to throw the book at Dustin Martin, calling on the Tigers star to be banned for a year.*”

The AFL and his club have so far failed the “pub test”.

An internet poll on the Herald Sun Newspaper site shows that over 70% of their readers have called for player Martin to be suspended.

The pub test is simple; if it was your wife, sister or mother who was threatened, how would you feel about the lack of any reaction from the management of the code involved?

There is a profound lesson for businesses in this unsavoury assault. Put yourself into the mind of the victim and imagine what they and your stakeholders would wish to hear from you.

Taking the short-term option in the hope of not affecting sales or reputation nearly always leads to a greater loss of reputation.

Richmond has now belatedly launched an investigation into the incident and released a statement on Tuesday afternoon. Too late, the damage has already been done to both the club and the organisation.

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