

Pistorius and the art of PR

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

20 Mar 2014

When it comes to sentencing time in major court cases, juries and judges always look for remorse from the accused. It's a really big thing when it comes to mitigation of sentence. And it seems to me that Oscar Pistorius and his legal team are taking no chances.

Just looking at the trial from an unbiased PR point of view, there are any number of clues suggesting that not only is advocate Barry Roux and his defence team on the ball when it comes to uber-nitpicking by boring into the very souls of prosecution witnesses, but they are also masters of the art of public relations, body language and the power of perception.

A powerful tool

For a start there is Oscar's immaculate pin-striped suit. It must be dreadfully uncomfortable but vitally important to demonstrate respect for the law, the justice system and the judge.

Oscar's demeanour throughout the trial has been one of tearful and silent humility - a powerful tool these days. Humility has become a trait that no longer portrays weaknesses but rather strength and admiration.

Pope Francis is a living, breathing example of this - as is any PR savvy corporate CEO trying to defend an indefensible cockup in his company. Only politicians seem to not have embraced it.

When Oscar started throwing up into a bucket in the court room, everyone from the judge to the media and public were taken aback. Most were unquestioning and viewed this as stress-related. A few however, questioned whether it was a put-on. Just another bit of PR. Frankly, I was surprised that the prosecution didn't ask for a medical examination of the accused to ensure that nothing was used to induce vomiting.

The big PR giveaway

But, whether or not the vomiting was put up or not is beside the point because the big PR giveaway in my opinion, was the fact that Oscar and his defence team insisted that he would prefer to stick it out and stay in court instead of being allowed to remove himself as the judge offered. That is called leveraging a situation for maximum PR point-scoring...

I have to say that I also wondered how the bucket got to be put next to Oscar before he started throwing up. Maybe he complained of feeling nauseous or perhaps he knew what was going to happen when the pathologist took the stand.

I remember from my early days as a court reporter, being regaled by attorneys and advocates with stories of the extent to which they leveraged all manner of emotions to help win their cases. And after that years in the marketing and particularly the PR business I tend to look beyond the obvious to read between the lines. Or, as my friend Malcolm Russell put it in his book "reading between the lies".

The Pistorius case is full of spin, PR and body language. Not that there is anything wrong with that. It's perfectly legitimate. Roux himself is clearly giving it his all. He has obviously done his homework and one has to applaud him for his attention to detail.

He is also not shy of publicity, with newspaper photographs of him outside the court surrounded by an adoring public wanting to take selfies with him. In fairly crass terms, the purpose of marketing and particular elements of marketing such as advertising and PR, is to positively manipulate emotions in an effort to win hearts and minds.

It is fascinating to watch just how much PR, spin and emotional manipulation is being presented in this case.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

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