Model/Anti-Model Advocacy Responses to Hospitality Industry Sexual Harassment

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INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Tarana Burke, an African-American civil rights activist, started a nonprofit organization, Just Be Inc. to aid survivors of sexual harassment and assault. She named the movement "me too" and began a campaign to help survivors, especially young women of color from poor communities to begin to heal from their experiences (Me Too, 2018). Actor Alyssa Milano used the #MeToo hashtag to promote the effort to recognize and give a voice to sexual harassment and abuse victims as the first accusations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein were revealed across social media in 2017. That tweet quickly went viral and helped to launch the #MeToo campaign.

Since April 2017, other victims of sexual harassment and assault have spoken up around the country and the world to reveal their experiences and to expose their attackers. More than 263 people; including leaders and celebrities, in fields such as arts and entertainment, media, business, technology industries, politics, religion, education, hospitality services, and others; have been the subject to allegations of a variety of inappropriate and illegal activities including sexual harassment and assault (North, 2019).

These cases have revealed some challenges to effectively responding to these accusations. On the one hand, the individuals accused must be confronted and their specific behaviors and consequences identified and acted on. Many of those accused have been publicly shamed, their private lives and relationships damaged, others have lost their jobs, criminal and civil charges have been filed, and they have had careers and reputations ruined. At the same time, these cases have been held up as representative of larger problems in a variety of industries and institutions; including arts and entertainment, hospitality, media, business and technical organizations, politics and government, sports programs, and more. Identification and punishment of transgressors can only be a starting point for reforming the recurring and systemic conditions responsible for these actions. Transformations of organizational culture, institutions, and social expectations are necessary. Organizations have the opportunity to learn from these accusations and improve themselves and their industries.

The ongoing discourse surrounding the identities of people accused of harassment and other actions, along with efforts to address these issues within the organizations where these offenses have occurred, call for a scholarship that will extend beyond describing and categorizing accusations. Scholarship that should identify how this movement and its victims might see changes in the institutions and industries that created and allowed conditions for these behaviors to become "normalized." Advocacy that is capable of transforming these institutions is necessary and can be identified in cases where accusers and institutions have made responsible efforts to change.

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This chapter explores a case study in the hospitality industry by evaluating accusations against John Besh, a celebrity chef, and his organization, the Besh Restaurant Group (now BRG Hospitality). Applying the work of Perleman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) and their identification of model and anti-model argumentation schemes, this study reveals how organizations and industries can address accusations against members (anti-model) and also propose and advocate for changes (model) to improve both symbolic and material conditions for their industry, their employees, and their stakeholder communities. Three objectives are established for this chapter. First, provide an evaluation of the discourses by leaders and members of the hospitality industry, celebrity chefs, and the mass media for their responses to sexual harassment and assault accusations. Second, reveal how the hospitality industry can employ model and anti-model arguments to advocate for changes in their industry and practices. Finally, identify the strategic purpose for using model and anti-model argumentation as an alternative to other reputational repair strategies for any organization facing accusations of wrongdoing.

BACKGROUND

Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2019), define an organizational crisis as "a specific, *unexpected*, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of *uncertainty* and simultaneously present an organization with both *opportunities* and for threats to its *high-priority goals* (p. 7)." When individuals face accusations of harmful, inappropriate, and/or illegal behavior; their actions become the focus for judging their character, decision-making, and actions. When those same individuals are also in positions of power and influence; as celebrities, leaders, bosses, and other public roles of responsibility; the organizations and industries they lead and represent are impacted by their actions. Harmful actions by employees, leadership, and spokespersons can reflect back on the organization's goals as well as the entire industry they represent. Tieying, Sengul, and Lester (2008) refer to these as a "spillover of negative impacts" created by crises that may impact their entire industries (p. 452).

Corporate America has a history of dealing with attacks to their image and reputation due to actions within and beyond their control. Many of the strategies are for responding focus on image restoration efforts to protect reputation. Benoit (1995) identified five image restoration strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Corrective action is seen as an effective response because "unlike compensation, which seeks to pay for a problem, corrective action seeks to prevent or correct it" (p. 45). Such a strategy of action and discourse is appropriate in a situation that encompasses organizational practices and corporate values.

The issues surrounding the #MeToo movement include values and beliefs related to organizational culture and social values that impact many stakeholders and industries. Organizations often serve as value advocates in addition to their central function as profit centers. To remain socially legitimate, organizations should represent and protect larger social purposes, and act in a "socially responsible and ethical manner" (Seeger, 1997, p. 9). Corporate and industry discourses may "seek to establish public frames of reference for interpreting information concerning issues deemed important." As such, these efforts "not only reflect the society of which they are part, they also help create and recreate it" (Cheney & Dionisopoulos, 1989, p. 144).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) reveal that argumentation is capable of establishing a structure of reality by "resort to the particular case" (p. 350). By employing an argument from model and anti-model, an organization might choose to use their capacity to influence perceptions to restore credibility and support for their purposes. For example, Sellnow and Brand (2001) explored the effectiveness of

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