SPIN:
The Weather is Here. Wish You Were Beautiful.

Several of the islands in the Florida Keys were hit by a devastating hurricane several weeks ago. The main industry for these communities is tourism, and they are headed into the height of the tourist season as winter approaches. While the beaches are still in decent condition and are certainly uncrowded for a change, 90 percent of the buildings on the islands have suffered damage, including the many hotels and restaurants. Many people are homeless and still in need of basic supplies and shelter. Residents are also wondering how they will earn a living. This recent catastrophe causes a dilemma for you as the head of the tourism department. The community is depending on you to ensure they have some much needed income from tourism, but many businesses haven’t reopened and a lot of work needs to be done to get basic survival needs met. You aren’t sure how much the town has to offer tourists this season.

QUESTIONS:
1. Is there a potential ethical issue here?
2. Explain which guidelines or codes for persuasive communication/PR could help the tourism department in knowing how they should proceed in communicating to the public.
3. What advice would Kant give and how might that differ (if at all) from what John Stuart Mill would say?
4. Explain how you think this situation could be handled most ethically by the tourism PR team.
SPIN: Weathering the Storm at the Ski Lodge

Normally you love your job and can’t believe your good fortune at getting to spend all your days promoting a fabulous ski lodge, as well as enjoying the place yourself. The majority of the time the place sells itself due to the gorgeous Colorado mountain landscaping and deluxe lodge accommodations. There are other lodges in surrounding communities who are your competition, but you feel the style of your lodge and its luxuries makes it the best choice for skiers on vacation.

However, a tragedy has struck one of these tourists and your lodge, as a young man was killed in an avalanche while skiing yesterday. While there have been other injuries and several close calls in the eight years the lodge has been open, this is the first fatality. The young man was an up and coming television actor starring on a new sit com, so in addition to local news crews, you have celebrity reporters from all over the nation descending on the town. You handled the initial flood of press in the last 12 hours by being very upfront about all the details of the accident and expressing the lodge’s deepest sympathies to this young man’s family. Several members of his family were on vacation with him and are still here at the lodge at the moment. You have provided grief counseling services, cancelled all their charges, and have been trying to be as accommodating and helpful as you can while they are dealing with the aftermath. Clearly, this accident has affected the normally cheerful mood of the lodge, and most other guests are either staying in their rooms or checking out early. Some are asking for reimbursement.

The lodge owner is devastated on both a personal and professional level. He is worried that this accident will ruin the fine reputation of the lodge, resulting in serious profit losses this year and possibly some layoffs. You are trying to raise his spirits and assure him that the lodge can survive this catastrophe and negative media blitz, but you aren’t quite sure how to proceed with publicizing the lodge and dealing with the press in the wake of this sudden disaster.

QUESTIONS:
1. In planning your PR strategy for the immediate future, what types of options do you have for communicating about the lodge in the wake of this incident? Which types of actions can you rule out for ethical reasons. Explain.
2. Explain which theory provides the best guidance for you in the situation and how so. (Virtue ethics, duty-based ethics, utilitarianism, or the ethic of care).
3. Is the most ethical option also the one that will provide the lodge with the greatest chance of remaining profitable this season…or might some financial sacrifices be necessary? Explain.
You are communications director for a city councilwoman, Marina McMannis, who is running for mayor of Bend, Oregon. She is a reference librarian at the community college, noted for her promotion of sustainable development and support of the arts. You are proud to be working for her and sincerely feel Bend would benefit from her leadership and values.

The main public relations challenge you have with Marina is that she is overwhelmingly serious, which makes her come across as dry and a bit dull. On the other hand, her Republican opponent, Lloyd Thompson, the current mayor, is quite charismatic and has been a successful businessman in Bend for many years. Marina’s platform poses significant challenges to Mayor Thompson’s business as usual stance on city management and planning.

Since the beginning of the campaign Marina has insisted on writing her own speeches and relied on you just for publicity. Her speeches, while filled with important content and good points, are not getting good results, as she cannot keep the audience’s attention because her delivery is dry. You sat her down last week and told her the hard truth about her presentation weaknesses and poll results. You suggested we hire a public speaking coach and tell her you would like to take a stab at writing her remaining speeches to improve their audience appeal. Knowing her stance on the issues like the back of your hand, you wrote her a speech to deliver to the local teacher’s union tomorrow. You, she and the public speaking coach begin working on her presentation together. Marina expresses her discomfort with some of the ideas the coach has for being more “expressive” and some of the humorous commentary you added to spice up her speech. She explains that serious issues deserve serious speeches and wants to go with her traditional speech.

You are afraid that she will not win this challenging election if she continues to deliver the serious speeches that are natural for her personality. And you know that Bend will be much better off with Marina as Mayor, and even if they find her a bit boring, they will appreciate her leadership and high ethical principles…but she has to be likeable enough to get elected first. So you are torn between letting her “be herself” and sacrificing the election. The election campaign is heating up as you have your first town hall meeting this weekend and a debate with Thompson the following week. How should you proceed in advising Marina as her Communications Director?

QUESTIONS:
1. What guidance can you get from both Kantian theory and Utilitarian theory on this case? On what points do they differ and on what points do they agree?
2. What ethical principles of ghostwriting most apply as strengths and as weaknesses in this case?
3. Most ethical issues relate to promoting truth and avoiding harm? Which of these principles most applies to this case, and how so?
4. What specific advice do you end up giving to Marina as far as how to proceed with the communications portion of the campaign, and how do you ethically justify this?
5. What problems do you see in the future as a possible weakness of this choice? And why do you still feel your decision is the best option, despite this weakness?