

# Sharpen Your Tools

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## Share Your Stories

### How to make PR moments last

It was Thursday, September 7, 2017, and Floridians were bracing for Hurricane Irma. A local news station was on site at an Orlando big-brand retail store as people rushed to purchase essential supplies.

There, luck was on the side of Ramon Santiago, who snagged one of the cherished few generators left in the store. As he made his way to the cashier, Mr. Santiago saw a woman crying. The woman, Pam Brekke, had been hoping to purchase a generator for her father, in order to power his oxygen. She was next in line, but it was too late. The store was out of generators, and Ms. Brekke was out of options. Seeing her tears, Mr. Santiago insisted she take the one he was about to purchase. Ms. Brekke was overwhelmed with gratitude.

Later that afternoon, when another generator became available, a store manager thought of Mr. Santiago's kindness and provided him with a generator free of charge.

The picture of Ms. Brekke and Mr. Santiago embracing in the middle of the store quickly went viral, illustrating the power of kindness in the middle of a disaster. For a few moments, it was a bright spot in an otherwise stormy week.

Stories like these are happening every day in your establishments. They are stories about good people doing good things for other people, employees going out of their way to help a customer or a coworker, or a random act of kindness between two customers. Companies don't have to wait for a hurricane or a news camera crew to put these stories to use. Even small stories can be big, lasting moments for a company if cultivated and used correctly.

### Capturing Unforgettable Moments

To make great moments last at your company, consider the following tips:

Find the stories. Had a news crew not been there that day, we likely would never have heard about Mr. Santiago and the store manager's decision to give him a free generator. The company would have missed out on a huge PR opportunity. Subsequently, thousands of employees across the country would have missed that feeling of pride in working for a company that does the right thing.

Gathering frontline, human-interest stories in a timely fashion can be challenging, but it is key. Companies of all sizes should set up a system that allows frontline teams to tell these stories when they see them in action. Start weekly meetings with frontline stories. Create an email address for supervisors to submit these stories. In addition, identify a place to hold these stories, such as a system-wide file, so they can be accessed again. Whatever system works best for your business, it should make it convenient for employees to share stories quickly and efficiently.

Work from the inside, out. Whether you're putting it out on social media or telling it in employee trainings, the clear message of the story should be, "This is who we are, and this is what we do." This starts by telling stories within the walls of your company. Tell everyone from your top executives, all the way down to the 17-year-old cashier. Let your values radiate from the core of the company. Word of mouth is a powerful tool. When your employees are talking about the great things their coworkers are doing, consumers will hear it, too.

Tell stories without any hope of return. Your first inclination might be to use a human-interest story to sell products or boost your company's image. Though a story certainly has the ability to do that, it should not be your first objective. Tell these stories with the primary goal of authentically sharing and illustrating what matters to the company and connecting on a human level with customers, employees and other stakeholders.

### Sharing with Care

You can leverage the power of these human-interest stories by coming from a humble place. The company isn't the hero; the people are. For example, if you decide to tell the story in a video, the video should not be about the company. The company shouldn't even be mentioned until the end. Don't show flashy company signs or corporate talking heads, and employees shouldn't wear clothing with the company logo. Instead, the video should focus on the unfolding events, the people involved and their emotions. The company is simply a fortunate bystander, happy to have good people working for and doing business with them.

So what was the power of the generator story? Am I more likely to shop there than other supply stores? Maybe. Maybe not. What I will remember is that bright spot in the midst of a sad and scary news cycle.

Today's newsfeeds line tomorrow's hamster cages—but they don't have to. Companies that seek out frontline stories and relentlessly tell them can create a lasting legacy to weather any storm.

Kindra Hall is an award-winning columnist, author and national champion storyteller. As a former director of marketing and vice president of sales, Hall discovered the most effective method for capturing attention and increasing revenue is through great storytelling. Hall's work can be seen in a weekly column at Inc.com, SUCCESS Magazine and Entrepreneur.com. She will be a speaker at RFMA's 2018 Annual Conference.