

Tragedy of Tragedies

SNAPSHOT

Institutions:

Eastover Medical Center, a 290-bed, for-profit establishment providing general medical and surgical services

Eastover Wellness, a comprehensive wellness center owned and operated by Eastover Medical Center

Location:

Pinehurst (population 229,121), located in the Pacific region of the United States

Characters:

Ms. Rachel McIntyre, Director of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitative Services

Ms. Susan Norton, President and Chief Executive Officer

Ms. Theresa O'Connor, Physical Therapist and Part-Time Aerobics Instructor

(all of Eastover Medical Center)

Mr. Brian Rollins, former boyfriend of Theresa O'Connor

Context:

In this case, a medical center encounters tragedy, leaving its top executive wondering how confidence can ever be restored.

Theresa O'Connor is rushing to get to work. She is running late, delayed by a lengthy breakup with her now-former boyfriend of 10 months, Brian Rollins. Breakups are always difficult, so Theresa planned things as best as possible, meeting with him face-to-face to deliver the bad news, and ensuring that she had time to address Brian's questions and concerns. Theresa was interested in maintaining a friendship with Brian, but she had lost her romantic interest in him, as he was much too possessive, something that very much offended her because she was a fiercely independent person.

Theresa believed that the breakup session would go better rather than worse, but she was very wrong. Brian was crushed, begging her to change her mind and give the relationship another chance, and even shedding what appeared to be a tear or two. But Theresa's mind was made up. Realizing that nothing she could say would make things any better, she departed Brian's residence and made her way to work, albeit very late.

Theresa serves as a physical therapist for Eastover Medical Center and, being a fitness buff, she also works part-time as an aerobics instructor at Eastover Wellness, a comprehensive wellness center owned and operated by Eastover Medical Center. Eastover Wellness is physically attached to Eastover Medical Center, a 290-bed, for-profit provider of general medical and surgical services based in Pinehurst, a city with a population of 229,121, located in the Pacific region of the United States. Eastover Medical Center has a 50-year history in Pinehurst, with its wellness center being established just 2 years ago.

Theresa's full-time position as a physical therapist is based in the establishment's physical therapy and rehabilitative services division. Because this particular division extensively uses Eastover Wellness for various therapies, the wellness center was constructed in close proximity to the division, making it quick and easy for Theresa to walk over after the day's physical therapy work to teach her aerobics classes in the evenings. Eastover Wellness features state-of-the-art fitness equipment, including treadmills, stationary bicycles, elliptical machines, and more, along with an indoor swimming pool, racquetball court, and track. Theresa deeply enjoys both her physical therapy and aerobics instruction opportunities and she works very hard to serve her customers well.

Immediately on her arrival at Eastover Medical Center to begin the day's work, Theresa apologized to staff members for being late. Entering her workstation, the telephone calls from Brian began, with calls being

directed to both her work and cellular telephone numbers. Brian initially was very sincere on the calls, but then initiated a very aggressive and mean tone, demanding that Theresa reconsider her decision to end their relationship. Theresa at first tried to handle the matter professionally by politely communicating with him, but her efforts were in vain and she was forced to simply forward the calls to her voice mailbox. She continued with the morning's work. On her lunch break, she was about to leave the building but noticed Brian in the parking lot, blocking her car in with his. Fortunately, she noticed this before leaving the building, called Eastover Medical Center's security, and had the security guards escort Brian off campus. Brian clearly was exhibiting signs of anger and distress and this struck fear in Theresa's heart.

The commotion at lunch was so pronounced that it got the attention of Rachel McIntyre, Director of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitative Services, who asked Theresa for details, after which she ensured that Eastover Medical Center's security was heightened. Being a good friend of Theresa's, in addition to a work colleague, Rachel invited Theresa to stay at her house over the coming days to decrease the chances that she would encounter Brian, who very much had become feared, given his increasingly erratic behavior. Over subsequent days, the telephone calls from Brian kept coming, but Theresa just ignored them, hoping for the best.

But things quickly seemed to be getting better. Surprisingly, about 10 days after giving Brian the bad news, Theresa received a handwritten letter in the mail from him indicating that he had made peace with the breakup. The telephone calls ceased and Theresa believed that her life would get back to normal, without the constant fear in the back of her mind that Brian would suddenly appear. Although she initially believed that she could be friends with Brian, his inappropriate handling of the breakup ruled that out completely. Relieved, Theresa moved on.

Seven days later, Theresa reported on a Thursday evening for her part-time job as an aerobics instructor at Eastover Wellness. She was very excited because this was the first time that she was scheduled to teach a water aerobics class. On her arrival, she greeted her students and after a brief introduction, the class of 20 took to the water in the wellness center's indoor swimming pool. About 15 minutes into the session, Theresa heard a loud bang at the front desk area of the wellness center, followed by the sounds of shattering glass. Brian suddenly appeared in the swimming pool area, dressed in black, carrying a cache of weapons, firing bullets at

anyone and everyone. The sound of gunshots rung out across campus. Telephone calls to emergency services immediately were placed by anyone who was not in the line of fire. Eastover Medical Center's security department immediately responded, as did the Pinehurst Police Department. But by the time law enforcement arrived, the massacre was over. After killing seven people, including Theresa, and injuring ten others, Brian turned one of his guns on himself. The water aerobics students had literally been sitting ducks, unable to quickly take cover. The swimming pool was a sea of blood.

Officers from Pinehurst's Police Department, assisted by Eastover Medical Center's security guards, immediately locked down the entire medical center. The establishment's emergency management plan was enacted, with all senior managers and other critical parties reporting at once to the facility. The medical center was searched to ensure that other destructive persons or things were not on the premises. Casualties were addressed by the emergency department at the medical center. A short time later, officers discovered Brian's car in the parking lot and, on its front seat, the note he had left detailing his plans for the massacre, blaming Theresa for destroying his life. Law enforcement officers were all too familiar with this type of scenario, educated on such as a result of its periodic occurrence across the nation, where a spurned lover goes about seeking revenge in a most brutal way. Within an hour, the facility was declared to be secured.

Almost immediately, the massacre became a local and then national news story. Satellite trucks from news stations appeared seemingly instantaneously, with their reporters eager to get details. Susan Norton, Eastover Medical Center's President and Chief Executive Officer, provided a brief statement extending her condolences to the friends and families of the victims, as police and medical center personnel worked to identify victims and notify loved ones. This was the tragedy of tragedies.

Eastover Wellness was immediately closed until further notice. The 2-year-old establishment that served as a bastion of health and wellness, in the matter of an instant, became the symbol of death and destruction. Over coming days and weeks, funerals were held, media reports continued, internal and external investigations were conducted, and tears were shed. Susan, in meetings with her senior managers, wondered how the institution would ever recover. After such a massacre, she could not imagine how confidence could ever be restored.

DISCUSSION

1. In this case, Eastover Medical Center faced the tragedy of tragedies in that a domestic matter spilled over into the workplace and, unfortunately, resulted in loss of life, not only for the primary target, but also for a number of patrons of the medical center. Setting aside the human tragedy of the event, what actions would be required of the institution's marketing department in the days, weeks, and months following the tragedy?
2. Despite the human loss resulting from the massacre, Eastover Medical Center eventually will have to move on. What actions might Eastover Medical Center take to restore the public's confidence in the institution? What role would the establishment's marketing department play in this restoration?
3. The case indicated that, after the massacre, Eastover Wellness was shut down indefinitely, but we have no indication of what eventually happened. How do you think Eastover Medical Center should handle Eastover Wellness? Should it be reopened or not? What options might be considered? Which option would you choose and why?
4. Eastover Medical Center and Eastover Wellness were physically connected, meaning that the tragedy could just as easily have occurred in any area of the establishment. Given this, what sort of impact would you anticipate the Eastover Wellness massacre to have on the other services offered by Eastover Medical Center? How might the institution work to separate Eastover Wellness from Eastover Medical Center in the minds of consumers?
5. Both the medical center and its wellness component shared the same brand name—Eastover. In technical terms, Eastover Wellness is known as a brand extension, carrying an existing brand name that, in this case, is that of its parent company. There are advantages and disadvantages to this sort of thing. Using a standard marketing textbook and other marketing resources, make a list of the advantages and disadvantages associated with using brand extensions as opposed to newly developed brand names for given products. Having read this case, you already know of one disadvantage.