

CASE STUDY

A once proud and respected professional franchise has fallen on hard times because the owner decided a few years ago to milk his cash cow until she was empty and on her deathbed. At that time, the owner decided to sell the franchise for what turned out to be a tidy profit of \$25 million more than he paid for it.

Unfortunately, you joined the organization just six months before the team was put up for sale. Life for you has been unsettling, knowing full well that a new owner is likely to clean house of some of the senior-level staffers and that most often a new communications person is brought in. However, you are relieved of your fears and not your responsibilities. Because you are a proven sport communications specialist with a great reputation, the new owner keeps you on board. You remain in charge of all communications activities, including media relations and community relations.

During your first six months, you were unable to convince the previous owner to implement many of your communications strategies, and therefore the organization is suffering internally and externally. The team payroll was slashed in half as star players were traded for unknown rookies and league journeymen or were allowed to leave through free agency. Thus, the team has been in last place for the past three seasons, the season ticket base has dwindled, the media have become apathetic, and most staff members are sullen and full of negativity. The change in ownership has perked everyone up a bit, because things can't get any worse and they might even get better.

You have your work cut out for you. You have to jump-start the communications process for the new owner and the organization as a whole.

Questions for Discussion

1. You have to plan the press conference to announce the change in ownership. The owner turns to you 30 minutes before the press conference and asks you what he should say and which questions are likely to be asked by the media. Prepare some key messages you think the owner needs to communicate and develop a mock question-and-answer sheet of the top five questions likely to be asked.
2. Discuss some ideas to re-engage the community in an effort to win back the public's affection and support.
3. Staff morale needs to improve. What are some internal communications methods that could be used to inspire and engage the staff?
4. Discuss some creative ideas that should be used in an advertising campaign for print, TV, Internet, and radio to promote the club under its new regime.