

# The Flow Of The River

January 29, 2008

## Bring Bad News Early



Amy Winehouse drives me nuts. Winehouse is a 24 year-old singer/songwriter who recently burst onto the music scene and could garner as many as six Grammys next month. Many compare her dusky soulful voice to Sara Vaughn. Her lyrics are sharp and clever. Prince wants to sing with her. Snoop Dogg says she's another James Brown. She is an incredibly skilled person. She is also incredibly self-destructive.

Her life is a wreck. One could blame her recently incarcerated husband or her outspoken parents or alcohol or the hounding paparazzi but habitual drug use seems to be at the center of a multitude of troubles. She's wandered in and out of rehab, canceled tours, had run-ins with the law, and gotten booed at concerts. As quickly as she leapt on to the world stage, she seems to be sinking into ruin.

Incredible talent, going to waste.

Here's the fascinating question: would a 'clean' Amy Winehouse still be Amy Winehouse? What if someone had grabbed her when she was still impressionable and sent her down a different, cleaner, path? What if we had the talent without the drugs?

Some say we wouldn't want that. Amy's artistry is transcendent because of her hardships. Her reality energizes her talent. Janis Joplin without heroin would have just been another singer.

I can't go there. There is a general rule in performance measurement that applies here: always bring bad news early. One of the reasons EPA tries to measure things on a quarterly basis is so we can spot where problems are developing and correct them before they get big. Sound mundane? It's not. Folks don't like reporting bad news. We have a natural tendency to avoid information that might make us look bad, or we ignore it once we get it or we explain it away or rely on wishful thinking.

A good management system not only forces people to consider how they are doing but rewards the early identification of problems. Bring bad news early. That means if you think your kid is using drugs the response should not be, "Well, she'll probably grow out of it" or "At least it will improve her music."

Regardless of what great work we may or may not enjoy because of Amy Winehouse's harsh reality, the current situation can't be good for Amy Winehouse.



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### Comments

This was the #8 headline in GovExec.com today... Let's stick to environmental issues and not be too judgmental about singers/artists we know little about (except what the media tells us).

I don't think EPA is a social services agency but I may be missing something. Maybe using different analogies to get our point across would be more appropriate (and less judgmental)?

Posted by: D S | [January 30, 2008 at 07:48 AM](#)

I just want to offer another viewpoint from the previous poster. Because I was linked to this entry, I had the opportunity to read this and a few of the other entries, and I really like them. I commend you for taking a risk and saying what you think - for me, you kept my interest and made your point. Please continue.

Posted by: | [January 30, 2008 at 01:25 PM](#)

WOW - at first I thought I had clicked on the wrong blog. But the story peaked my interest when I realized it was our site. In response to the first email, no, we are not a social agency, but social issues impact our environment, so I liked the analogy. But I must say that just acknowledging bad news is never enough - great start - but never enough. What really matters is how you plan to change the bad behaviour.

Posted by: CV | [January 30, 2008 at 04:38 PM](#)

mr.peacock,

you need to re-read your job description. i'll wait. . . . . finished? now, tell me - did you see anything regarding entertainment reviewer or music critic? did not think so. so now that we have that all cleared up, perhaps we can get back to some of our other issues - say, THE ENVIRONMENT

Posted by: motherearth | [January 30, 2008 at 05:00 PM](#)

I like your several analogies. I agree with you completely, and folks will always find out no matter how hard one tries to hide bad news. I personally like to tell the truth, but my team tends to say "Shhhh" at all the times and wants to "improvise" somehow.

Posted by: Jason | [January 30, 2008 at 05:29 PM](#)

Right on, CV. And the earlier you catch bad behavior the easier it is to change. For instance, I mentioned in "IT World" that we weren't able to encrypt all the agency's laptops, but the fact we found that out now means we are able to secure the 'noncompliant' computers in other ways so we avoid having an even bigger problem on our hands.

Posted by: Marcus | [January 30, 2008 at 05:38 PM](#)

The first five paragraphs dealt with Mr. Peacock's psychologic opinion of Amy's behavior. Dr. Phil's evaluations of Ms. Spears was not as detailed Mr. Peacocks opinions of Amy.

The last three paragraphs dealt with the EPA. As an EPA employee, I feel that Mr. Peacock should restrict the use of a government blog to EPA matters and not psychologic opinions. Would Mr. Peacock also use the President's past drinking problems in an anology?

Posted by: Nam | [January 31, 2008 at 09:36 AM](#)

I have to say, I was intrigued by the post, but then thoroughly amused by the comments! Who knew environmentalists had such strong feelings about Amy Winehouse? But it seems some are missing the point of the post- addressing problems early on can save on a lot of "rehab" later on.

Posted by: Molly | [February 01, 2008 at 08:24 AM](#)

Even though the post seems to be awkward for those who don't understand the point, I'm glad to see Amy has been served as analogy. The subject might not be related to environment but it was used to make a point that is related. That's what it matters. Answering the question 'will clean Amy will be the same Amy?' - Of course , drugs might enhance a talent , but does not CAUSE a talent . No drug will make you sing if you do not have a voice.

Posted by: Vinny | [February 01, 2008 at 11:24 AM](#)