

3. How much does Wakefield's previous experience with a different superintendent influence his understanding of how the district works? How did this "workplace" socialization influence his ethical thinking?

Macro Issues

1. To whom should Wakefield be loyal?
2. Should he ever have told members of the community of his own personal views?
3. How does Wakefield's job compare with that of a press secretary for a political figure?
4. Is it ever appropriate to keep journalists in the dark about how political decisions are made?

CASE 4-H

HOW ONE TWEET RUINED A LIFE

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On Dec. 20, 2013, Justine Sacco boarded a plane in New York headed for South Africa via London to spend the holidays with her family. By the time the final plane landed, her life would change forever.

Sacco had a dream job. At the age of 30, she was senior director of corporate communications at IAC (NASDAQ: IAC), a 20-year-old company that billed itself as "a leading media and Internet company comprised of widely known consumer brands such as Vimeo, Dictionary.com, Dotdash, The Daily Beast and Investopedia." Among IAC's other holdings at the time was their popular "dating portfolio" that included Match and Tinder and their home services sites such as HomeAdvisor and Angie's List. Headquartered in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, with offices worldwide, IAC called itself "a trailblazer at the crossroads of e-commerce, media and the Internet, with brands and products that delight and engage millions of people all over the world."

On this day, Sacco took to Twitter to share with her 170 followers the struggles of travel. The first couple of posts were aimed at fellow passengers and observations from her layover. One such tweet said:

Weird German Dude: You're in First Class. It's 2014. Get some deodorant. Thank God for pharmaceuticals.

Another during her layover in London's Heathrow airport read:

Chilly—cucumber sandwiches—bad teeth. Back in London!

Then one additional tweet written just before she boarded the plane for Cape Town took things to a whole different level. That tweet read:

Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!

Sacco boarded the plane for her 11-hour flight—the last leg of her long journey home—and would not realize until landing in Cape Town that her tweet had gone viral. Without her being aware, Sacco's Twitter feed had quickly filled with tweets from others labeling her a racist. Thousands of social media enthusiasts were counting the hours until Sacco's plane landed to observe her pain via social media. The hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet tracked Sacco's whereabouts and allowed other users to post their thoughts as well. One Twitter user drove to the airport to tweet her arrival live. And even though Sacco's friend deleted Sacco's Twitter account, the tweet lived on.

As her plane was taxiing the runway in Cape Town, Sacco noticed texts from people she had not spoken to in years. Many were offering her condolences for some reason that she couldn't even surmise at the time. The confusion continued until her best friend reached her and explained to Sacco that her tweet was the No. 1 worldwide trend on Twitter. Enraged tweets and blatant threats were among the many responses that shot Sacco to the top of the social media world. Even though Sacco released an apology statement, she was forced to cut her vacation short as workers threatened to strike at the hotels she had booked if she showed up. She was told no one could guarantee her safety if she stayed.

In an article entitled "How one stupid tweet blew up Justine Sacco's life," author Jon Ronson (2015) recounted how Justine, with a Twitter following of 170, had been "outed" and become an international phenomenon in less than a day. In that article for the *New York Times Magazine*, Ronson reported that blogger Sam Biddle was the first to retweet Justine's misguided attempt at humor. Biddle was then the editor of "Valleywag," Gawker Media's tech-industry blog. He retweeted it to his 15,000 followers and eventually posted it on Valleywag accompanied by the headline, "And Now, a Funny Holiday Joke From IAC's P.R. Boss." While doing his research for the article, Ronson received an email from Biddle in January 2014 explaining his reasoning: "The fact that she was a P.R. chief made it delicious. It's satisfying to be able to say, 'O.K., let's make a racist tweet by a senior IAC employee count this time.' And it did. I'd do it again." In that same email, Biddle later claimed to

“certainly never hope to ruin anyone’s life” and ended by saying she’d be “fine eventually, if not already.”

After issuing an apology statement and losing her job, Sacco still struggled with the mistake she had made. In the only on-the-record interview she gave on the topic, she told Ronson (2015), “I cried out my body weight in the first 24 hours. It was incredibly traumatic. You don’t sleep. You wake up in the middle of the night forgetting where you are.” Later, she sent an email to Ronson that read, in part, “Unfortunately, I am not a character on ‘South Park’ or a comedian, so I had no business commenting on the epidemic in such a politically incorrect manner on a public platform,” she wrote. “To put it simply, I wasn’t trying to raise awareness of AIDS or piss off the world or ruin my life. Living in America puts us in a bit of a bubble when it comes to what is going on in the third world. I was making fun of that bubble.”

Micro Issues

1. Of the millions of tweets sent daily, many of them far more controversial than this, why do you think this one went viral?
2. Is Biddle’s motivation for what he did justified? Is his motivation relevant to determining whether his actions were ethical?

Midrange Issues

1. Do you agree or disagree with Biddle that those who work in the field of public relations or as a publicist be held to a higher standard given their background and training? Justify your answer.
2. Do you agree or disagree with Sacco that the tweet would have been acceptable had she been a comedienne? Do those who seek to make us laugh have a larger license when it comes to offensive words or offensive statements?

Macro Issues

1. Part of the appeal of certain social media sites such as Snapchat is the anonymity factor. Should free speech be absolute on such sites? Why or why not? What are the consequences of your decision?
2. Sacco later said: “Living in America puts us in a bit of a bubble when it comes to what is going on in the third world. I was making fun of that bubble.” If the tweets are viewed in the light of social commentary, is the sarcasm expressed in the tweet any less racist?
3. What is the major lesson, if any, to be learned from Justine Sacco’s story?