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Crisis management experts question Woods' approach



By Gerardo Mora, Getty Images

Security guards watch from the gate of the Isleworth community, which is home to Tiger Woods, on Monday in Windermere, Fla.

By **Michael McCarthy**, USA TODAY

Silence isn't golden in all cases, particularly when it comes to crisis management.

Tiger Woods has repeatedly refused to speak with police investigating his Friday morning accident. While legally sound, his silent approach could backfire.

"When you avoid the police, it not only hurts you in the court of public opinion but it also hurts you in the court of law," Mike Paul, president of MGP & Associates PR, said of [Tiger Woods'](#) team of lawyers and agents who are keeping mum about the world No. 1 golfer's early morning accident Friday.

In every celebrity crisis there comes a moment when the celebrity under fire must make one of two unpalatable choices: Take the risky step of trying to control the story by answering questions from law enforcement or the media, or take the equally dangerous step of letting their lawyers and spin doctors handle the crisis — and hope interest dies down by the next news cycle.

Woods and his advisers have clearly chosen Door No. 2.

That approach, some crisis-management experts say, could endanger Woods' lucrative career as the world's highest-paid athlete and endorsement king of Madison Avenue.

Paul said Woods' team of lawyers and agents forget there were more reputations at stake than that of their client.

"Guess what?" Paul said. "The police, the prosecutors, the potential judges, they all have reputations on the line, too. When you blow them off, that's a serious matter."

Crisis PR expert Ken Sunshine told Harry Smith on CBS' *The Early Show* on Monday Woods should have followed the example of [David Letterman](#).

"Mr. Perfect is never Mr. Perfect," Sunshine said. "The worst thing they did they stonewalled the cops. It looks like they're protecting something. Talk to the cops."

Others, however, including criminal defense attorney Joseph DiBenedetto, say Woods was smart to cough up only what he had to legally under Florida law: his driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance information.

"Unless you're willing to tell 100% of what happened, you're better off remaining silent," DiBenedetto says. "It's the half-truths that come back to bite you."

Crisis manager [Eric Dezenhall](#) said Woods was wise not to hold a news conference like [Alex Rodriguez](#) of the [New York Yankees](#) or go on some media apology tour. Woods isn't used to facing hard questions and probably wouldn't "acquit" himself well under fire, he said.

But it's one thing for Woods to blow off the media or limit public comments to his own website, said Dezenhall, who also believes Woods blew it by not privately telling police his side of the story.

"The press be damned. The media loves to say, 'If you talk to us, we'll back off.' Well, that's B.S.," says the author of *Damage Control*. "But the last thing you want is the police as your enemy. If you have some ambitious prosecutor with visions of becoming governor these things can last forever."

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