Small Town Gets Turned Around

Normal is a town located in the middle of Illinois. It is side by side with another town called Bloomington. It also houses two of the biggest universities in Illinois, not including some community colleges. With those things there, the Bloomington/Normal Police open themselves up for a level of extra problems. One of those extra problems is the abduction and murder of college students.

On October 15th, three different organisations became involved in a tragic crisis. In the evening of the 13th around 9:00pm, an Illinois State University student, Olamide Adeyooye, was last seen at a local Video Store. The morning of the 15th, the Normal Police Department, the FBI, and the Illinois State University Public Relations Department were brought into this event. The main player in the investigation was the Normal Police Department.

The facts that the police department have released to the public are as followed. Olamide Adeyooye was 21 and a senior (fourth year student) at Illinois State University. She was last send at a local video store in the Bloomington/Normal area around 9:00pm. Her family reported her missing on the 15th to the “law enforcement authorities” in Normal. She also did not arrive to work over the weekend or to school on Monday, October 17th, reported the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They also released the detail that her 1996 Toyota corolla was missing as well as her license plate information.

The main organisation that I am going to focus on is the Normal Police Department. Mostly because they are the ones who know the most about the current crisis and are the key players within the investigation. Granted, their public relations staff is not as famous as some, but still, they are dealing with a crisis on their hands. Their main public relations go to is a gentleman by the name of Detective Sergeant Scott Johnson. He is also the primary individual investigating the case. Right there, I notice a weakness because he is the individual closest to the scene. In my opinion, instead of spending time focusing on dealing with the press and media and writing press releases, he should be investigating the details surrounding the case.

In the first press release, they mention that they currently do not expect foul play. I feel that is a conflict right there. I feel like they are not analyzing or dealing with the situation. I feel as though they have stated to the public that they are not serious about the dilemma. Not only does this express to me that they do not take any situation like this seriously, but I am sure that the family is having a hard time trying to grasp the problem at hand.
Another thing that I know that many people have found over critical on the situation was the minimal coverage that was given in the media. Many of her friends and family found that the police department did not utilize the national media at all. There was only one mention of it on MSNBC and very little on the knowledge of it on the local news. I think that if the police used more of the major networks like Fox and CNN they would have at least exposed the nation to the problem. If you analyze the disappearance of Natalie Holloway, her parents and the police force took full advantage of the media. Everyone knew about what was happening and it even happened in the Caribbean. Maybe, if they utilized the media, she might still be alive or maybe her car might be found by now and they might know who murdered and killed her.

Some of the strengths are the utilization of a hotel conference room to hold press conferences every day, but Saturday and Sunday, at 3 pm. I feel that they provided the press and media with a chance to be fully updated by the key players of the investigation. Just recently, they have discontinued the daily briefings, but they stated that the location for any future briefings will stay the same. I feel that this is a wise choice for the investigation because it allows the media to know that something behind their communications with the Normal Police Department will remain the same.

After seeing some of the strengths and weaknesses that the Normal Police Department possess, I know that I would have gone about some things differently. In the states, everyone is always glued to the television if someone, especially a child, teenager, or a college student disappears. It does not matter the colour of their skin. I know that I would have utilized the media, like the major television stations, to the maximum to release the current information. Especially once they discovered that her body was found in a different state, I know that at that point it opens up to a larger realm of exposure. More people know about what is going on and that means that more people are aware or know information that needs to be found out.

When briefing the media, local and national, I would make sure that they knew how serious we were about this investigation. The fact that normal is a small town, does not mean that they are a stupid town. When they decided to openly state at the beginning that they did not believe there was foul play involved, I felt that they opened them up for a serious media attack. With this in mind, if the public relations individual goes in and expresses how serious the situation is, this allows the media to know that the PR team as well as the Police Department that they are truly serious about the crime and situation at hand.

Unfortunately, besides the planning of role-playing exercises, and the idea that they can study previous incidents, each kidnapping or abduction is a truly unique case. They need to know as much as possible about the situation before making an attempt to speak and utilize the media. I
would also take the idea that they used in stating that if they need to meet they will, but at this point in time there is no new information and when any arises, I will alert the media.

Overall, I feel that the Normal Police Department is a small town agency that has a lot of potential. I also feel that although they did not use the main forms of media, they know how to use the media that come to them and set up a sense of normalcy in an investigation.