**Brief Report on ISOC Training Program in London**

(21st September 2018 to 4th October)

By: Abdulrazaque Bello-Barkindo (Head Media & Publicity NGF)

The ten-day training program started on a convivial note, like all other training programs would, with the introduction of several participants comprising of top management level officers most of whom, I later realized, were brand managers from various globally reputable companies and organizations.

There were representatives of Procter& Gamble, Hewlett Packard, Micheline, Oracle, Pfizer, DXC Technologies, Papyrus among many others, while the group was handled by a Team Leader, who happens to be one of the top-flight officials of ISOC, Barbara Bedike, an experienced media personality, with nice memories of her time in Nigeria. She had worked with US politicians and was a mobilizer in various states before joining ISOC. This ordinarily created a bond between us, Bedike and I, being the only two that work or have previously worked, with people, and not just products.

This realization occurred when each was given five minutes to talk about his organization. It became apparent that most of my course colleagues were experienced brand managers who, however, look at crossing over to the political stratosphere at a later point in their lives, as not just a veritable, but a very desirable possibility.

The import here is that while I thought that I was likely to have drab deliberations because of the discrepancy, or is it difference, in our portfolios, the class became more interested in hearing about how they could tap from my experiences of working in an organization that serves that many politicians and still keeps its head in the right place, with all the explosive political activities that hit the headlines around the world, that they hear about Nigeria.

This gave me the opportunity to sub-lead in several group discussions and answer a barrage of questions from hard thinking reputation managers of the modern world. By the end of the first week, we made forays into how brands can be made user-centric and what people within organizations needed to take cognizance of before word gets out from an institution. And the same goes for personality handlers.

The take-aways from one of the group discussions is that employees of organizations are the very first group of culprits that malign the product before the general public is even aware of its existence. As reputation managers, we were therefore invited to bounce around with the idea of how to sanitize the work environment of the filthy mustard seed within, before seeking to place your product alongside those produced by other organizations that compete with ours. Interestingly, the teams concluded, media managers must educate their work places about what and how people portray their organizations as they are the ones that set tongues wagging with unhealthy news about the product which eventually goes viral. Each participant was asked to identify one person in his organization who usually goes around with such. In the NGF, I identified X XV.

The team concluded on this golden rule: Employees must be discouraged from voicing the weaknesses of the product, at work or at home.

Another key point that kept rearing its head was that executives needed to understand the principles of communication because practitioners complained that executives would keep taking decisions without thinking of the implications on communication or the overall reputation of the organization until it goes burst, often times making things worse for the PR team.

Rule 2: always “get a seat at the table”. Communications is at the heart of ANY HEALTHY ORGANISATION. When a crisis breaks, or a new product is unveiled, or a new brand launched, or even an employee policy is implemented, it must be properly couched in the best language that protects the integrity of the organization. It is the work of the communications department to ensure that this protection is sacrosanct and clinically delivered.

As part of the company’s or organization’s communications strategy, the PR Department must, through tweets or other social media formats always keep the organizations personnel abreast of its latest information and LORs so that the least important officer knows the lines to put out whenever questions are asked about the company’s products or the company itself.

Finally, we were discharged with a quote that ISOC holds so dear. “One of our favorite quotes that sums up the value of PR is from Bill Gates: “if I was down to the last dollar of my marketing budget, I’d spend it on PR”