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## Learning from Craig's crisis management

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What can former Idaho Sen. Larry Craig teach South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford?

How to manage a crisis and the media feeding frenzy surrounding it?

Or how not to?

Sanford's caught in a storm because he left his state unattended for almost a week to visit his mistress in Argentina. A former congressman, Sanford voted to impeach President Bill Clinton for his affair with a White House intern.

Two summers ago, it was Idaho's senior senator who was consumed in a vortex of scandal. Like Sanford, the self-righteous Craig had voted to punish Clinton. Then the Idaho Republican got arrested for playing footsie with a cop at the Minneapolis airport men's room, and pleaded guilty to disturbing the peace. When the item broke a few weeks later, Craig was the only story cable news cared about.

Sanford now finds himself where Craig was, just striving to survive. Sanford is term-limited. Craig's re-election prospects were finished in August 2007. The question is how to stay in office the remaining 18 months of his term.

Craig playbook - Deny. Obscure. Hide. Hold a press conference and deny you are gay. Pursue a doomed-from-the-start legal strategy of withdrawing your guilty plea. Appear at public events - such as collecting an Idaho Hall of Fame award. Pretend nothing has changed, leaving everyone else mortified.

Sanford play - So far, Sanford has been all contrition, all the time.

Craig playbook - Bring out the family to stand by your side at press conferences as well as television interviews.

Sanford play - Sanford stood alone. His wife Jenny has been elsewhere.

Craig playbook - Never get caught up in a scandal in a slow news month. But if you do, deflect attention by calling a second press conference at the end of the week, tell the nation that it is your "intent" to resign - and then remain in office for the next year and a half.

Sanford play - The South Carolinian has derived his own variation of that strategy, saying he considered quitting, but then thought better of it.

Craig playbook. - Vilify the press. Declare war on the largest newspaper in the state. Freeze out any reporter who works for that newspaper. In fact, avoid entering any newspaper in your state.

Talk radio's OK, though.

Sanford play - The governor seems to be going too far in the other direction. His most recent with the Associated Press is raising more questions about other women and generating renewed calls for his resignation.

Craig playbook - Stretch the rules when it comes to money. Until the Senate Ethics Committee stops you, use cash contributors expected to be spent on a re-election campaign for legal appeals.

Sanford play - Sanford is returning \$8,000 that was allocated for a recent trade mission to Latin America last year. During the trip, the governor stopped off to see his mistress.

Craig couldn't be dislodged from the Senate before his time. Sanford's grip on his job seems to be weakening. The larger question may be whether the governor eventually rehabilitates his public image. Even disgraced former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer seems to be making a comeback.

Unless Sanford follows Craig's path.

Then his downfall will be guaranteed. - M.T.