

Verizon Communications:

An Examination of Organizational Discourse “Before” and “After” 9/11

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Abstract

In this thesis, Verizon’s discourse was analyzed as a case study for corporate rhetoric. This rhetorical analysis examined Verizon’s discourse before, during and after the crisis of 9/11. Press releases, executive speeches, and other internal documents were analyzed while media reports provided a context for the discourse. Renewal discourse coupled with the theories of organizational identification and values advocacy provided the basic framework for this thesis. Verizon’s crisis situation during the crisis of 9/11 provided a unique context in which to study organizational discourse. By placing the response within a larger frame of the organization’s history, this study was able to provide insight into traditional crisis response scholarship that often only focuses on the immediate response to crisis.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

September 11, 2001 was the most catastrophic event to occur on American soil since the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The attacks struck at the heart of the U.S. economy, both literally and symbolically. All across the United States, companies were left with a sense of shock and dismay as the World Trade Towers crumbled. Corporate crisis communications' plans were no match for the catastrophe our nation faced.

Verizon Communications was central to the 9/11 response as the primary provider of landline, data, and wireless communication services throughout much of lower Manhattan and New York. The attacks disrupted service within a large portion of their network. Across the country, America relied heavily on Verizon's services to reach loved ones, gather information, and organize responses. Even though Verizon was not to blame for the disruption in their service on 9/11, the company's ability to respond would have major ramifications on the public perception of the organization. Verizon needed to restore service quickly and effectively to ensure successful communication in the aftermath of crisis. To meet these challenges, many employees banded together to aid in the service restoration efforts while launching one of the largest philanthropic efforts by any organization following 9/11. This thesis will demonstrate that Verizon's response to the events of 9/11 were excellent by all accounts.

Given the short, troubled history of Verizon, the employee response to 9/11 is impressive. Verizon was formed from the merger of two telecommunications companies on June 6, 2000, only a little over a year before the 9/11 attacks. In August 2000, 87,000 workers, almost one third of Verizon's entire work force, walked off the job in strike. Unions representing members of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) organized the strike. The unions were working to gain the right to organize in the wireless division of Verizon Communications. The strike forced 30,000 members of Verizon management to step in to fulfill the duties of the striking workers. The strike ended on August 23, 2000 when Verizon signed a new labor contract agreement with the two unions, but not all labor issues were resolved.

Union officials claimed that Verizon was still blocking attempts to unionize following the contract agreements. After investigation into the union allegations, the National Labor Relations Board was preparing to file a series of labor violations before the State of New York. The relationship between Verizon, its workers, and the unions was unsettled when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center. The labor dispute was set aside as Verizon employees banded together to help aid in recovery efforts following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers.

The impact of the terrorist attacks was felt immediately at Verizon Communications. Verizon housed a key data and call switching center adjacent to the World Trade Towers. The building suffered heavy damage that resulted in service outages through lower Manhattan. Verizon employees were working in both the World Trade Towers with an additional 1,800 employees at the data and call switching center. The crisis of 9/11 would prove to be a very important moment in the history of Verizon as it worked to ensure the safety of its employees and restore service following the attacks.

Eventually, the nation and Verizon returned to “business as usual” and old problems and issues returned to the company agenda. Verizon would find itself once again entrenched in a labor dispute with the CWA and IBEW. Despite the unified effort and excellent response to the 9/11 crisis, the relationships with union workers remained strained.

Thesis and Purpose

The role of discourse was extremely important for Verizon as it shaped the company and dictated its response in crisis. Verizon’s organizational discourse before, during and after the events of 9/11 warrants academic examination for three main reasons. First, Verizon’s response to the 9/11 crisis represents a crisis “type” rarely studied by PR scholars. Verizon was not blamed for the events of 9/11, yet the organization was still held accountable for its response to the crisis situation. Most examinations of crisis focus on situations in which company words or actions create negative public reaction. Thus, examination of Verizon’s crisis response contributes to crisis response studies. Second, Verizon’s case represents a unique situation in which

one crisis created an opportunity during another crisis. Verizon was offered the opportunity to “remake” its relationship with a key public, its employees. The relative short history of Verizon and the test presented by crisis created an unusual rhetorical moment for the organization. Lastly, by examining crisis response within the broader context of the organization’s history, we can begin to challenge some of the prior assumptions of crisis response literature. Verizon’s short history before and after the crisis present an excellent opportunity to examine crisis response within a broader context than most studies.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop and elaborate rhetorical analysis of crisis recovery and renewal discourse. The Verizon case will be analyzed as a case of crisis renewal while incorporating the theories of organizational identification and values advocacy to further this approach. The thesis will explore Verizon’s projection of identity in its organizational discourse and its attempts to manage its relationships with key stakeholders. The thesis will examine the interaction of organizational rhetoric before, during and after crisis. Crisis does not occur in a vacuum, instead it represents an important stage in the life cycle of an organization.

Thesis Overview

Chapter two will begin by discussing the relevant crisis literature. Apologia exists as the primary lens through which crisis response has been examined. Theories of apologia and other relevant crisis response literature fail to take into account Verizon’s unique crisis situation. Discourse of recovery and renewal is a relatively new theoretical foundation to examine Verizon’s response to 9/11. The chapter reviews the relevant crisis renewal literature while also examining similar theories of organizational identification and values advocacy. Chapter two concludes with an explanation of the methodology used to analyze Verizon’s discourse before, during and after the events of 9/11. Chapter three discusses the creation of Verizon Communications and how the company tried to create identity. The chapter then discusses the immediate challenges Verizon faced as it struggled with labor negotiations shortly after the company’s formation. Chapter four discusses Verizon’s response to and opportunity created by the crisis of 9/11. Chapter five examines Verizon after the crisis of 9/11. The chapter begins

by analyzing the discourse of Verizon co-CEO Charles Lee as he discussed Verizon's lessons learned from the crisis of 9/11 in a series of presentations following the tragedy. The chapter then discusses the return to labor issues for Verizon and its subsequent rhetorical response. Chapter six provides conclusions and implications of Verizon's case on current public relations literature as well as practice. Limitations of this study are also discussed as are suggestions for possible future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Methodology

Current literature regarding crisis often focuses upon the negatives or threats to an organization. Fink (1986) conceptualized crisis as events that include (but are not limited to) an escalation in intensity; close media or government scrutiny; interference with the normal operations of business; the jeopardization of a corporation's positive public image; or damage to the company's bottom line. Coombs (1999) defines crisis similarly: "Crises are threats, meaning that they actually do or have the potential to create negative or undesirable outcomes" (p. 3). Many other scholars have focused on the negative outcomes associated with crisis and how they could impact the organization (Barton, 1993; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1995; Fearn-Banks, 1996; Fitzpatrick, 1995; Hearit, 1996).

The definitions adopted by communication scholars promote a research agenda focused on immediate response strategies used to mitigate or reduce the negative effects of crisis. Coombs proposed the symbolic approach to crisis in order to analyze and predict the appropriate response to different types of crisis. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is concerned with selecting what type of crisis response is appropriate to the particular crisis situation (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Often, crises are the result of blame attributed to an organization for some wrongdoing. Attribution theory seeks to determine the varying attributions of organizational responsibility for a crisis and form judgments accordingly (Coombs, 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 1996). One major aspect of attribution theory includes personal control. There are differing levels of personal control in the various crisis types. Personal control is the perceived degree to which the organization could have controlled the crisis events and constitutes a key variable of attribution theory. The performance history of an organization is the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders (Coombs, 2000). A positive performance history moderates a public's response in crisis. A "good" organization that makes a mistake suffers far less public outrage. An unfavorable crisis history, a poor handling of a previous crisis, will often increase attributions of crisis responsibility. Both performance history and crisis responsibility affect the reputation of the organization. By determining the public's perception of an organization's level of responsibility and coupling it with a specific

crisis situation, scholars are better able to predict an appropriate communication response.

Similar to the work of Coombs, Benoit's typology of image restoration focuses on crisis response as a means to reduce or repair organizational image in the wake of crisis (Benoit, 1995; 1997). These response options stem from the rhetorical genre, *apologia*, or the discourse of self-defense. In image restoration, words and actions affect how the stakeholders perceive the organization in crisis. Certain strategies are utilized in image repair discourse depending on the crisis situation (Coombs, 1995). These strategies are meant to maintain a positive reputation for the organization. However, even when the crisis has not been attributed to an organization, *apologia* remains the dominant theoretical paradigm with which to reexamine the rhetorical responses of the organization and fails to adequately analyze some crises.

The problem with SCCT and attribution theory is that they do not adequately account for the crisis faced by Verizon during 9/11, because the approach focuses how stakeholders perceive and place blame on the organization during crisis (Coombs, 2000). Verizon was not to blame for the events of 9/11 as the terrorist attacks were the sole blame of the horrific events, yet the company held critical responsibilities in its immediate response to the attacks. Scholars have suggested that crisis managers in such cases only instruct people how to protect themselves in such a crisis with little to no attribution attached to the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). This simplification simply will not work when applied to the crisis situation at Verizon. Even though the cause of the service outages was attributed to the terrorist attacks, Verizon needed to restore service quickly or face a negative response from various stakeholder groups in need of the communication services that the company provided.

Image restoration theory also assumes organizations' communications following crisis are both a goal-directed activity and an attempt to maintain a positive reputation (Benoit, 1995). The Verizon situation is unique because the company was in existence for just over a year before 9/11. During that time, the labor issues had created an unfavorable reputation among unions and some, but not all, stakeholders. The crisis did represent a threat to Verizon's reputation as it was vital that Verizon restore service in affected areas. Yet, the crisis of 9/11 provided Verizon with opportunity to create a

favorable reputation with its various stakeholders. Most image repair strategies usually assume that favorable reputations exist prior to crisis and provide crisis managers symbolic resources to draw from during crisis. Verizon's case study provides a unique departure from these tenants, thus other theoretical foundations are needed to analyze this case.

Opportunity in Crisis

Sellnow and Seeger (2001) demonstrated the need to broaden approaches when analyzing local government's response to a series of floods which ravaged through South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and Canada in 1997. The floods left many people without homes and devastated many businesses. Due to the complexity of the environmental crisis, it was impossible to single out one individual or organization as being responsible for not anticipating and preparing for the flood. Instead, the floods were often described as an act of God. With more flooding expected, people at every level stopped trying to attribute blame and instead, engaged in what Benoit termed the strategy of corrective action (1995). By simply not focusing on only the immediate response, the crisis created opportunities for those involved in the floods. The affected areas were able to look back after crisis and rethink city and state government preparation in the event of another flood. By reexamining their preexisting crisis response strategies and not only focusing on the immediate response, these cities and states are more prepared in the event of future flooding.

The shortcomings with the aforementioned theories have led several scholars to examine the ways in which crisis presents both threat and opportunity for an organization (Guth & Marsh, 2003; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998). Guth and Marsh (2003) produced a list of potential benefits that can result from crisis:

1. Heroes are born. Those who respond well to crisis are often seen as heroes.
2. Change is accelerated. Organizations often resist change. Crisis can be the defining moment that accelerates change for either organizations or individuals associated with them.
3. Latent problems are faced. Organizations often must face and correct problems which existed prior to crisis.

4. People can be changed. New faces are brought in to bring fresh perspective and new ideas. Also, attitudes and behaviors of people can change as a result of crisis.
5. New strategies evolve. Crisis can result in a better way of doing things or new paths to opportunity for the organization.
6. Early warning systems develop. Crisis experience helps organizations to discover and detect warning signs that precede the crisis event.
7. New competitive edges appear. Because of changes that occur during crisis, an organization is often better prepared to compete in the new environment.

These scholars also examined crisis response in a much larger time frame to better contextualize the crisis response and to understand crisis within the broader life of an organization or community. They argue that previous literature focuses solely on the response to crisis, which includes evidence, locus of responsibility, or other causal events in the crisis (Coombs, 1999). By placing the crisis within a larger context of the organization's history, scholars are able to examine how previous limitations may be overcome and what new opportunities may be available beyond the crisis event. Sellnow and Seeger (2001) noted in the flooding crisis, "Crisis removed the assumption of the status quo and offered the opportunity for radical change and renewal" (p. 165).

In a similar study, Seeger and Ulmer examined the crisis response of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods as examples of two companies that were able to overcome crisis by engaging their various stakeholders in renewal discourse (2002). Malden Mills, a textile firm, and Cole Hardwoods, a hardwood lumber company, were both devastated by fires. As both companies sought to recover from the horrific crises, their CEOs played vital roles in communicating quickly and effectively with various stakeholders. Immediately following the fires, both CEOs announced plans to rebuild the facilities. These announcements allowed the organizations to receive additional support from both the surrounding communities and employees as they began the process of rebuilding. Both privately-owned companies were able to benefit from positive relationships prior to crisis to ensure successful operations could continue in the aftermath of crisis. As the organizations began the process of rebuilding, they capitalized on the positive precrisis relationships as customers were willing to accommodate delays. Their post crisis discourse created an optimistic future that resulted in increased support from the various

stakeholders associated with each organization. Both organizations were able to return to profitability not long after their facilities were rebuilt.

Verizon's case has both similarities and differences to the crises faced by Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods. Verizon is an entirely different company as it is publicly owned and operated as a corporation, Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods are both privately-owned businesses. Decision making in corporations is much more complex than in privately owned businesses as decisions must involve a larger group of persons. Verizon's case has similarities in the opportunities that were created after the crises. 9/11 provided corporate communications and public relations with an opportunity to establish themselves as more important functions within the organization (Wright, 2002). 9/11 made many corporations realize the value of relationships between worker and organization (Kelly & Stark, 2002). Although so much pain was endured as America struggled to recover from the terrible crisis, it is important not to overlook the opportunities created by the disaster. There is a vital need to expand upon the preexisting crisis literature by not only examining the threats to organizations, but also examining the opportunities that may arise during crisis and to contextualize crisis within the broader frame of relationships both before and after the crisis.

Crisis Discourse

The analysis of organization rhetoric has led both scholars and practitioners into new insights into the power of language in the workplace. Organizational rhetoric reveals patterns of relationships with both the external and internal environments. Corporate discourse is inherently persuasive as it seeks to manage relationships with key stakeholders. Some organizational discourse is designed to shape the organization's identity through its mission, values, goals and objectives by reinforcing or sometimes articulating values of its own. This stems from the ancient art of epideictic discourse. Perelman explained how the epideictic genre was central to discourse because of its role in adhering to values, adherence without which discourses that aim at provoking action which otherwise could not move people to action (1982). Value-centered messages often become the driving force in future corporate efforts to persuade stakeholders. Analysis of

corporate discourse reveals the explicitly articulated and implicitly communicated values guiding behavior and action in the organization.

Corporate discourse also reveals the identifications or symbolic linkages with internal and external audiences. These linkages are often efforts by the organization to adjust the relationships between the organization and its publics (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). By examining a corporation's symbolic representations, a scholar can identify the relationships the organization prefers and promotes as well as those it neglects or discourages.

Renewal discourse in particular provides an opportunity to analyze corporate symbolic action when the organization has not been accused of wrongdoing, yet its legitimacy is threatened as result of crisis. This rhetorical approach, developed by Ulmer and Sellnow (2002), focuses on three main communication strategies, which help an organization move beyond crisis. They are stakeholder commitment, renewal based on commitment to correction, and renewal based on core organizational values.

Commitment to stakeholders is the ability of an organization to engage in renewal discourse based on previous actions and mission, as well as its internal and external communication prior to the crisis (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Crisis recovery is often preceded by a strong relationship with stakeholders prior to crisis. Post-crisis discourse embellishes this relationship and focuses upon the organization's commitment to the various stakeholders it serves. Intuitively, it would seem that an organization would be most successful if a favorable relationship exists with stakeholders prior to expressing commitment to stakeholders. Given little time to develop relationships prior to the crisis and with ongoing labor concerns, the Verizon crisis response offers a case study in which an organization could build or enhance relationships not yet fully formed. Analysis of Verizon's commitment to stakeholders will specifically look for symbolic representations that identify key stakeholders and the company's efforts to build stakeholder relationships post 9/11.

A theoretical approach to organizational discourse that details rhetorical strategies to express and build commitment to employee stakeholders is organizational identification. Like renewal discourse, organizational identification theory is language-centered. Identity is "structural in the sense that it is a medium and outcome of

discursive acts; it is a source from which individuals construct expressions of self based on collectively generated identity types, such as “social workers,” “mother,” or “attorney” (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002, p. 7). Identification is both a psychological link with another individual and actions that reinforce this link (Cheney & Thompkins, 1987). Organizational identification is defined as “the linkage that derives something for the individual from his/her social resources and how the linkage directs (or “takes”) the individual in terms of making contributions to the organization” (Cheney & Thompkins, 1987, p.1-2). Organizational identification is utilized as a means to provide both an operational definition and conceptualizations that aid the researcher in examining how individuals link (or do not link) with organizational value premises.

Cheney (1983b) developed a set of three operationalized formal communication strategies used by organizations to foster identification with employees and other stakeholders. These three strategies are common ground, identification through antithesis, and the assumed or transcendental “we”. The common ground technique involves the rhetor linking him/herself with the object of their persuasive efforts in an overt manner (Cheney, 1983b). A direct reference such as “Verizon people” is the most explicit strategy. Others include expression of concern for the individual, recognition of individual contributions, espousal of shared values, advocacy of benefits and activities, praise by outsiders, and testimonials by employees (Cheney, 1983a). Each of these tactics encourages the employees to associate with the organization.

Identification can also be achieved through organizational rhetoric focused on opposition. Organizational members can unite against a common enemy. The enemy is almost always situated outside the boundaries of the organization. Part of the corporate response to 9/11 was to stand in opposition to the terrorists, to prove the ability of Americans to overcome and rebound. The external enemy created a focus for identification through antithesis not previously available to Verizon.

Several implicit identification strategies comprise the third type of organizational identification. The transcendental “we” is a persuasive rhetorical effort, which implicitly provides a linkage between organization and individual through language. This persuasive appeal often goes unnoticed but works subtly to create shared identity. A second implicit identification strategy is the use of enthymeme. When using an

enthymeme, an organizational rhetor leaves out one or more of the premises of an argument allowing the audience to “fill in” the missing ideas (Putnam & Cheney, 1985). The premise is often based upon the individual’s values, beliefs, and expectations, which hopefully are aligned with the values, beliefs, and expectations set forth by the organization (Sass & Canary, 1991). The extent to which the individual identifies him/herself with the organization is measured by the enthymeme’s alignment with organizational interests (Cheney, 1983b). The enthymeme is thus a persuasive tool an organization can use to create identification among individuals it wishes to persuade.

Organization identification theory has evolved to take into account several variables that ensure its explanatory usefulness. Recent work includes a distinction between the terms “commitment” and “identification.” “Identification is the ‘substance’ of action patterns; commitment is the ‘action’” (Cheney & Thompkins, 1987, p. 4). Therefore, an individual’s actions may indicate his/her commitment to an organization or his/her attachment to a social target outside the organization (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998)

Others have supported the claim that organizational identification and organizational commitment are interrelated yet distinct terms. “Identification as a product is held to be related to, but not commensurate with, commitment” (Sass & Canary, 1991, p. 281). Identification is the appropriation of identity (in which the individual accepts organizational representations) and commitment is the binding or pledge to action. This distinction allows for the classification of various levels of organizational membership, which in turn has implications on behavioral commitment research in communications.

The second aspect of renewal discourse is commitment to correction. This is exemplified by the organization’s message that transformation and rebuilding are part of a new era. Crisis is part of an evolutionary process in which organizations must “destroy themselves” in order to rebuild and mature (Hurst, 1995). Commitment to correction serves as a powerful rhetorical tool that allows for significant organizational change during crisis. The organization promises to be better, stronger, or safer as a result of the crisis.

The third aspect of renewal discourse is renewal based upon core values. Organizational discourse is often designed to garner employees' agreement with and adherence to values set forth by the organization. All across the United States, the 9/11 crisis was characterized by rhetoric asking the American public to embrace the values of patriotism, freedom, the "American way" and return to business as usual (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). This return to values serves as a very important persuasive tool in unifying members of the organization around these stated values. With the identified core values in place, publics can more easily accept the organization's persuasive efforts.

Other scholars have elaborated the importance of values discourse for organizations in general, not just in crisis recovery (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). Values are a central component of issue argument strategy. Values discourse used in issue framing can help an organization maintain positive identity and to garner support when engaged in political controversy (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987; Crable & Vibbert, 1983). Bostdorff and Vibbert identified three functions of values advocacy: to enhance organizational image, deflect criticism, and to prepare the organization for policy discourse (1994). Values advocacy provides public relations practitioners with numerous advantages in crisis.

Organizational image is an evaluative term that is defined socially by the various stakeholders of the organization. There is a reciprocal relationship in which images are often the publics' evaluative perceptions, but they also influence publics in particular ways specific to that image (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994). As a result of this reciprocity, organizations will often promote images that represent societal values. This emphasis on societal values has led to an increase in corporate philanthropic efforts and values-based marketing. It is estimated that Americans donated \$2.7 billion in the weeks following 9/11 (Kasindorf, 2002). These philanthropic efforts all provide organizations with powerful imagery to link the organization with the societal values associated with generous giving following 9/11. Across America, corporations gave large sums of money in aid to the victims and recovery efforts associated with 9/11. Even competitors of companies devastated by the attacks offered aid and support. Qwest, a competitor of Verizon, diverted a \$10 million shipment of local switching equipment to support Verizon's restoration efforts in lower Manhattan ("Qwest Donates," 2001).

Value discourse also helps foster employee identification when organizations announce new corporate “images” (Carroll, 1995). Everything from the company name to its statements of mission, goals, and values serve as touchstones for the employee decision and action and public responses to the company. As a newly formed company, Verizon’s strategic symbolic decisions clearly communicated its priorities and direction in the period immediately preceding the 9/11 crisis and created the context for its 9/11 response.

Those organizations that engage their various stakeholders in value discourse may be less susceptible to criticism. This will become a key point of analysis in the Verizon labor dispute. As Verizon engaged in values discourse following 9/11, the discourse created expectations among the public, union, and employees for the company’s response to ongoing labor issues. One goal of this thesis is to look for evidence of an impact of Verizon’s 9/11 crisis response on unresolved issues.

Values advocacy can also help prepare organizations for future policy discourse. By adhering to certain values, an organization can prepare for future possible action, such as a labor negotiation. Similar to the enthymeme (Putnam & Cheney, 1985), values advocacy gives the rhetor the opportunity to reinforce underlying argumentative warrants favorable to the organization’s preferred future position on issues (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994; Crable & Vibbert, 1983). Values advocacy does not contain a call to action, yet it prepares for future actions the organization may endeavor to undertake.

For all its possible advantage, values advocacy is not without potential liabilities. If organizations do not consider the ethical implications of value discourse, they could end up giving audiences cause to blame the organization for not adhering to such values (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994). Value-centered discourse is inherently persuasive as the rhetor seeks to link his/her values with the audience. If the audience feels as if they are being manipulated, they may hold such discourse in negative regard. As many organizations continue to engage their various stakeholders in value discourse, it is important that they consider the ramifications if they do not adhere to those principles. Inconsistency between expressed values and actions can result in charges of hypocrisy or worse.

The discourse of renewal and recovery offers scholars a valuable approach with which to examine organizational discourse in times of crisis. The three facets of renewal discourse provide a guiding theoretical basis to analyze Verizon's crisis during the events of 9/11. By coupling this approach with organizational identification and values advocacy, I will provide a richer analysis of Verizon's actions and discourse during 9/11 and the impact of the company's response for other issues.

Rhetorical Analysis

In order to assess Verizon's response to the events of 9/11, the company's discourse was analyzed in three time periods: before 9/11, immediately following 9/11, and in the crisis recovery period. Verizon's press releases were examined during each of the time periods listed above. Many of the sources for this information come from the news archive on the Verizon website located at <http://newscenter.verizon.com/nr/>. In the time period before 9/11, all press releases on Verizon's site with regard to the creation of Verizon and labor negotiations were examined. "The Verizon Promise" and Verizon's code of business conduct were also two very important documents that were analyzed during the rhetorical analysis. During the crisis of 9/11, all press releases listed under WTC events were studied. In addition, Verizon also has two special web page/press kits for the events of 9/11. The first chronicles the company's immediate response to the events, while the other revisits the events one-year following the attacks. These sites contain many of the same press releases found through the archive search, but it also contains pictures and other statistical information regarding Verizon's recovery and response after the terrorist attacks. In the time period following 9/11, the post crisis discourse of Charles Lee, Verizon CEO, was assessed as he traveled the country retelling the Verizon story to many different audiences. All press releases under the labor negotiations 2003 heading were examined during this time period also. All possible dates and time periods under each link were exhausted to ensure all of Verizon's press releases were studied with regard to each category. Press releases serve as an important part of this rhetorical analysis as they served as a valuable medium of communication for Verizon with its many stakeholders during the three time periods mentioned above.

Based upon the theoretical constructs provided in the literature review above, the tenets of renewal discourse, values advocacy, and organizational identification served as the guiding lens to analyze Verizon's discourse prior to 9/11, the immediate response to 9/11, and the post 9/11 discourse. Specifically, Verizon's discourse was examined for the following strategies:

- Statements of shared values
 - Discussion of philanthropic efforts and activities by Verizon or one of its subsidiaries
 - Direct discussion of “value” by Verizon employees or one of its key executives
- Commitment to Stakeholders
 - Statements regarding the concern for the safety or well-being of employees
 - Statements which speak to Verizon's commitment to its customers
 - Actions which reward individual's work or other efforts
- Common Ground
 - Statements which utilize “we” especially when describing the relationships between Verizon and its employees
 - Recognition of individual contributions
 - Statements advocating benefits and activities enjoyed by organizational members
 - Praise by outsiders
 - Testimonials by employees
 - Statements of membership in the organization
- Future Commitment
 - Statements by Verizon announcing correctives to the labor situation
 - Statements by Verizon announcing correctives to the network
 - Statements acknowledging any past wrongdoing by Verizon
- Antithesis
 - Statements expressing any type of opposition (e.g. “we” versus “they,” management versus unions, etc.)

I used media reports to provide context for Verizon's response to both labor disputes and 9/11. The discourse analysis revealed Verizon's approach to its stakeholders before, during, and after 9/11.

The following chapter begins the Verizon story with an overview of the merger which created Verizon, analysis of "The Verizon Promise" that first expressed corporate identity, and the labor disputes that followed shortly after the company's formation.

Chapter 3 – The Verizon Promise: Life “Before” 9/11

On June 17, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the \$65 billion merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE (Lane, 2000). On June 30, 2000, Verizon Communications was born. As a result of the merger, Verizon controlled 63 million telephone lines and became the nation’s largest wireless telephone service provider with over 24 million customers (Braga, 2000). The merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE positioned the company to become the industry leader in telecommunications’ services.

Although many felt the merger would provide Verizon with an unfair competitive advantage in the telecommunications’ marketplace, the Federal Communications Commission allowed the merger in an attempt to increase national competition for local phone service. In order to help produce a competitive market, Verizon agreed to spend \$500 million to enter local phone markets or serve 250,000 new customers outside their current territories within three years (Srinivasan, 2000). If Verizon failed to meet these goals, the company would have to pay \$750 million to the federal government. FCC Chairman William Kinard commented, “There will be those that will claim this merger brings us closer to a re-emergence of Ma Bell. The end result should produce more competition, not less” (Srinivasan, 2000, p. 2).

Verizon Communications changed the economic landscape of the telecommunications industry, as the merger was one of the biggest of its kind allowed in any industry in the United States. Bell Atlantic Chairman Ivan Seidenberg and GTE Chairman Charles Lee were named co-CEO’s of Verizon in an attempt have leadership from both of the merging companies. These two men faced the challenge of leading over 260,000 employees and a Fortune 10 company.

In order to celebrate the launch of Verizon and begin a brand rollout promoting the new logo, Verizon began a series of employee celebrations across the country. “The employees of Bell Atlantic and GTE have worked hard for two years in support of our merger. Great companies are created by great employees, and as we celebrate the creation of Verizon, we also celebrate the formation of one of the most skilled and diverse work forces in the world,” commented Co-CEO Charles Lee (“A Quarter

Million,” 2000). Indeed Verizon’s work force would play a key role as the company sought to become a leader in the telecommunications market.

Making The Verizon Promise

Verizon Communications’ executives penned a document entitled, “The Verizon Promise,” as a statement of the company’s identity. “The Verizon Promise” was located in the code of business conduct manual. The company name, Verizon, was a combination of “veritas”, the Latin word for truth, and horizon (Howe, 2000). The name captured the company’s key values. In “The Verizon Promise,” Verizon Communications explicitly stated the values encompassed in each of these two root words of the company name. “Veritas” focused on integrity and respect, while the horizon values were imagination and passion (“Code of Business,” 2004). These values were to be enacted in the service the company provided. In addition to stating the company’s values, there was also a statement of purpose that read, “We bring the benefits of communication to everyone.” This was followed by a company goal, “we will create the most respected brand in communications.” Lastly, the document contained a statement regarding the future of Verizon, “ We will be a successful company when we make and keep our promises to:...our customers...our communities...our shareholders...and our employees.” “The Verizon Promise” was an important testament to Verizon Communications’ commitment to its many stakeholders, both internal and external to the corporation, and it is important to note the order that Verizon prioritized these stakeholders in the document. “The Verizon Promise” does indicate a level of commitment with these various stakeholders, yet it does not necessarily indicate a genuine commitment by executives.

After “The Verizon Promise,” the code of business conduct contained a personal message to all employees from CEO Ivan Seidenberg. The letter reinforced Verizon’s mission statement to make the company the most respected brand in the industry. The theme for the code of business conduct was to connect through integrity. “Our success depends on our ability to connect through integrity with each other, our customers, and our many business partners” (“Code of Business Conduct,” 2004, p. i). For Verizon to

maintain its integrity, it needed to ensure that its employees were in step with the company's values and ethics every step of the way.

The introduction to the code of business conduct contains an interesting disclaimer which refers specifically to the use of the word "Verizon." "Throughout this code, "Verizon" refers to all subsidiaries and affiliates of Verizon Communications inc., except Verizon Wireless (which has its own code)" ("Code of Business Conduct," 2004, p. 1). Through Verizon's branding efforts, many people consider the wireless and the parent company to be one as both utilized the same Verizon logo on their promotional materials. Verizon's statement clearly differentiates Verizon Communications from Verizon Wireless.

The code then transitions to a listing of individual responsibilities of Verizon employees. The opening statement reads, "Individually, we* are a critical connection between Verizon and our business partners. As Verizon employees, we will conduct ourselves with integrity. This can be accomplished by meeting our responsibilities and standards in this code" ("Code of Business Conduct," 2004, p. 2). This asterisk by "we" refers to a disclaimer at the bottom of the page. The disclaimer reads, "While the use of "we" in this code refers to our common obligation to uphold Verizon's standards of business conduct, each of us is individually responsible for adhering to these standards" ("Code of Business Conduct," 2004, p. 2). This document utilizes Cheney's (1983a) tactic of the implicit "we" throughout, yet the disclaimer seems to give responsibility to individual employees with their decision making ability.

Though directed to all of its employees, the code of business conduct also has a special section listing additional responsibilities for members of management. Members of Verizon's management team were expected to fulfill leadership roles that were more demanding than the role of the ordinary worker. The last line reads, "demonstrate leadership by acting with respect and integrity" ("Code of Business Conduct," 2004, p. 3). Integrity and respect were the two principles that encompassed the "veritas" values of Verizon. Interestingly, the section for individual employees only speaks of integrity while the management sections speaks about employees adhering to both integrity and respect. These values are part of the foundation on which "The Verizon Promise" was made, yet it would appear that both values apply to management while other Verizon

employees are expected to adhere only to integrity with no mention of respect. This is an important distinction to members of management.

Both the code of business conduct and “The Verizon Promise” were attempts by Verizon to create a unified work force following the merger. However, Verizon faced substantial challenges in forging unified employee support. As the next section shows, Bell Atlantic had a history of poor labor relations prior to the merger with GTE. These conflicting attitudes toward unionization at Bell Atlantic would come into play as Verizon sought to reach contractual agreements with its unions.

Background for Verizon

Prior to Verizon’s creation, labor union representatives raised several concerns that the merger would result in lost jobs for employees. The Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) raised issues about possible negative results of the merger.

Both unions were aware of Bell Atlantic and its prior labor problems involving management practices. The two unions were still unhappy with the fallout of Bell Atlantic’s takeover of NYNEX. Poor relations between workers and management had resulted in a 17-day strike at the company in early 1989. They claimed the company’s top management had pursued a labor strategy which disregarded highly productive technicians, service reps, and other front-line workers while attempting to stop these workers from unionizing (Calvey & Early, 2000). Bell Atlantic faced another two-day strike in 1998. The National Labor Relations Board issued a series of unfair labor practice complaints related to the company’s alteration of employee benefits, work rules and other policies without proper notification of the union or individual employees (Greenhouse, 2000).

Negotiators from both unions began a series of discussions to ensure that employees of the newly formed Verizon would be able to unionize. Bell Atlantic employees showed their support of the unions by demonstrating in downtown Boston as talks began (Lewis, 2000). The impending merger between Bell Atlantic and GTE was not only an important moment for Verizon, but also for both the CWA and IBEW.

Members of the media noted Bell Atlantic's history of disregard for its employees and noted the possibility for major conflict as labor negotiations continued with the impending merger.

A major confrontation is possible. To avoid that outcome – and the resulting impact on employees, shareholders, and customers – Bell Atlantic must demonstrate far greater respect for its workers and their rights. It also must abandon its quest for a “union-free” future and recognize that it cannot succeed in the fast-changing telecommunications industry without the cooperation and support of its unionized work force. (Calvey & Early, 2000, p. E4)

Ironically, the unions' demands for respect would be addressed in “The Verizon Promise” which articulated respect and integrity as the “veritas” values of Verizon Communications. It would only be a matter of time before the unions would become disgruntled with Verizon. This disdain would lead the unions to take action against Verizon as they sought to earn respect in the telecommunications industry.

Beginning Negotiations at Verizon

In late July 2000, labor negotiations between Verizon and unions representing nearly 87,000 of its employees were at a near standstill, thus making a strike at Verizon a real possibility. The workers were all members of either the CWA or IBEW and were located from Virginia to Maine. They were in negotiations over a new contract that was set to expire on August 5, 2000.

The unions felt that the merger between Bell Atlantic and GTE was a sign of a maturing industry. CWA spokesman, Bob Master declared,

The union is looking at a situation where the industry is changing very fast and with the advent of wireless and Internet services and digital subscriber lines, we are battling with the company over keeping that work as union work. We want to see the industry change and grow, but we want the union to share in that growth and we want those jobs to remain good jobs that pay enough to support families. (Greenhouse, 2000, p. A1)

Indeed, the unions were looking to grow alongside the maturing telecommunications industry.

The wireless segment of Verizon Communications was critical in the contract negotiations because the unions considered wireless the future growth area of telecommunications. This was also an area where the unions had not organized many workers. Harvard Business School professor Quinn Mills stated, “The unions need to get members in the wireless area, because that’s where the business is going, and yet they’re not strongly organized there” (Goodman, 2000, p. E1). The unions were working hard for the right to organize workers in the wireless sector. The unions were also seeking a card-check union certification process over the traditional secret-ballot election process. The card check process was much shorter and did not allow Verizon the opportunity to campaign against the unions.

Bargaining Fails and Leads to Strike at Verizon

With neither side making any headway in the contract negotiations, the inevitable happened on August 6, 2000 when the CWA authorized the walkout of over 70,000 union workers. The IBEW quickly followed suit as they authorized another 17,000 workers to join in strike as both unions had yet to reach a contract agreement with Verizon Communications.

The strike against Verizon greatly affected the company’s management. In an attempt to continue service, some 30,000 management personnel stepped in to replace the 87,000 striking workers (Lindorff, 2000). The workload proved to be very heavy for the replacements. Many customers seeking service received recordings urging them to call back later. Verizon needed to resolve the strike quickly to prevent a loss of income, customer base, investors and employees.

The strike against Verizon was not peaceful. As with many labor strikes, violence erupted at picket lines. There were several reports of tension between picketing union members and management members whom had stepped in to fulfill their duties. The unions claimed that managers’ vehicles had hit nine picketers, but none were hospitalized (Romero, 2000). In response, Verizon claimed that union members had thrown bottles, eggs, and rocks at vehicles of management members as they attempted to enter company buildings. Although most of the cases were minor, several were more severe. One major case involved an employee and his girlfriend cutting what they thought was a telephone

line but in fact was a 2,000-volt electric cable (“Time Heals,” 2001). These cases of violence and destruction were not tolerated and law enforcement officials stepped in to keep the peace.

Responding to the Unions’ Concerns

Verizon first sent Eric Rabe, Vice President of Communications for Verizon Wireless, to speak to the media. Rabe played a pivotal role in communicating with the rest of the country through a series of in-person and phone interviews with the major television networks and newspapers.

In reports in the immediate time period surrounding the strike, Rabe explained the situation to the media regarding the strikes and where they were occurring. He also reminded the public that it was not Verizon Wireless employees involved in the strike. During a phone interview on CNN, Rabe proclaimed, “The Verizon Wireless, our wireless company, is not involved in the current labor disruption at all. That—those workers are at their jobs, they’re doing what they normally do, and if you’re a Verizon Wireless customer, you’re not affected in any way” (O’Brien, 2000, p. 1). Rabe not only reassured Wireless customers that their service would not be affected, but he also spoke to the fact that the strike only involved workers at Verizon Communications, not Verizon Wireless.

Verizon’s argument against unionization in the wireless sector was that Verizon Wireless must remain nonunion in order to remain competitive. Rabe stated, “The competitors in that business are nonunion. Verizon Wireless must compete with them” (Goodman, 2000, p. E1). With Verizon Wireless serving over 25 million customers, wireless was indeed a very important revenue generating section of the company.

Unions disagreed with Verizon’s claim that wireless was not in need of unionization. CWA officials cited union agreements with wireless providers SBC Communications/Cellular One and AT&T Wireless as evidence to refute Verizon’s claim that the wireless sector was not unionized. A CWA spokesperson commented, “Despite what the press says, we didn’t just discover there is a new economy last week. This has been a focus of ours for years. It’s our intent to unionize every aspect of new technologies” (Jackson, 2000). The unions felt that they must be allowed to organize in the wireless sector, otherwise, corporations, such as Verizon, would partake in large

financial dividends without adequately sharing the benefits with their workers and thus exploiting labor with decreased benefits and lesser working conditions.

Under increased pressure from its customers, shareholders, and the media, Verizon negotiators began to give into union demands. The strike ended on August 23, 2000 when Verizon reached tentative agreements with both the CWA and IBEW signing a three-year contract (“Verizon and CWA in Mid-Atlantic,” 2000). The contract provided a salary cap of 7.5 hours of overtime per week for customer service employees, a wage increase and increases in pensions and other benefits, and increased flexibility for employees seeking to transfer from one region to another. Lastly, the contract provided neutrality and card-check recognition for employees seeking to unionize in the wireless sector (“Verizon Wireless Announces,” 2000). Unions claimed this process would expedite unionization in the wireless sector as it replaced the lengthy process of secret ballot through the National Labor Relations Board. The new process called for only a simple majority of the employees to sign cards and present them to Verizon in order for the company to recognize the union. The seemingly successful strike represented a major step forward for union workers as they gained concessions to support unionization of the telecommunications industry (Jackson, 2000).

Proclaiming its Commitment to Its Customers

Verizon went to great measures to ensure its customers that service would not be affected as a result of the strike. As new contracts were signed Verizon reaffirmed its commitment to its customers. Verizon Chief Negotiator, Ron Johnson, announcing a new contract with the CWA in Texas during the time of the strike on the east coast stated, “The provisions of this contract will allow us to raise our standards of performance and workplace productivity, enabling us to provide even better service to our customers” (“Verizon and CWA in Texas,” 2000).

Even though Verizon claimed that the strike would affect service only minimally, the media reported that many customers were unable to reach directory assistance. Others claimed they were unable to reach the proper officials to set up new accounts with the company. In the 12 state region affected by the strike, repair requests swelled to 82,000 compared with 36,000 one month earlier (Romero, 2000). Despite Verizon’s

claim that management members had been able to fulfill all of the duties of the striking workers, the strike had indeed affected customer service.

As picketing workers came back to their jobs, Verizon publicly apologized for inconveniences experienced by its customers. Verizon Wireless Vice Chairman, Lawrence T. Babbio Jr. stated, “We apologize to any customers who have been inconvenienced by the strike, and we look forward to having all of our employees back on the job” (“Verizon Announces Details,” 2000). Statements like this offered reassurance to Verizon’s customers that they would once again be receiving the proper services through the company.

Proclaiming its Commitment to Its Employees

Verizon’s contract signed with the unions was an indication that the company valued its employees. Beyond providing decreased overtime hours, increased benefits, and greater opportunities for employees to become union members, Verizon also took extra measures to ensure employee satisfaction with the company.

As Verizon reached agreements with the CWA and IBEW in New York and New England areas, the company provided additions to the contract. Verizon instituted a series of measures to reduce workplace stress. The company established a Stress Relief Committee headed by both Verizon executives and CWA representatives. The committee was established in an attempt to reduce individual stress levels at the work place. Verizon also increased spending in various work and family programs by 10% for a total of \$18.6 million over the life of the new contract (“Verizon Announces Details,” 2000). Verizon’s actions indicated that the company was taking extra measures to ensure its employees’ satisfaction with the corporation.

Lastly, Verizon attempted to increase employee commitment to the organization by giving stock options to unionized employees. Under the terms of the new contract, unionized employees would receive options to purchase 100 shares of Verizon common stock prior to the end of the year (“Verizon Announces Details,” 2000). This action was a direct attempt to increase union employee ownership in and commitment to the company.

Praising Management During the Strike

Not only did Verizon show its commitment to its striking employees through the contract and its provisions, but Verizon's discourse also offered praise for its members of management who stepped in to ensure day-to-day operations could continue during the strike.

As media reports began to question whether service would be disrupted as a result of the strike, Eric Rabe assured Verizon's customers that management would continue to provide service to all Verizon customers. "We have 30,000 managers who are prepared to work shifts around the clock to make up for that – the absence of those people – and keep things humming along" (O'Brien, 2000, p. 1). Comments like Rabe's could be viewed as a strong testament to the high regard and faith that Verizon put in its managers to meet the demanding needs of its customers during the strike. Also, the comment "those people" seems to distance Verizon executives from the striking workers.

Lawrence T. Babbio Jr. stated, "Our management team has done an outstanding job helping to keep the business running during the strike. We look forward to having all of our employees back on the job to serve our customers" ("Verizon and IBEW," 2000). This sign of praise clearly indicated that Verizon executives were pleased that its management team had maintained service well with the absence of union employees during the strike.

Analysis of Verizon's Response to the Strike

Even before the merger between Bell Atlantic and GTE, the previous labor problems with Bell Atlantic seemed unresolved. Many scholars have made note of the importance of preexisting relationships for organizations experiencing crisis (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999; Heath 1997). With only two months as the merged Verizon, employees from Bell Atlantic would have seen very little in terms of this positive relationship.

Verizon's discourse and actions during the labor dispute would indicate that the company was trying to promote a shared identity with its employees while reassuring its customers that the company was working hard to continue service. Considering that the company had only merged two months prior to the strike, it would seem as though the

employees were struggling with identity. The question arises, did the employees identify with Verizon or with the CWA or IBEW?

According to Cheney, one way in which an organization can try to promote identification with its employees is through the assumed “we” (1983a). As Verizon announced its contract agreements with the CWA and IBEW, the company utilized “we” when describing the terms of the contract.

This agreement, like those **we** have previously reached with the IBEW and CWA in New York and New England, gives us the flexibility **we** need to compete in the Internet era, satisfying the company’s need to manage the work load while meeting customer demands for outstanding service and access to the latest technology. **We** will now be able to raise the bar on our standards for service and productivity so that **we** can exceed – rather than just meet our customers’ expectations. (“Verizon and CWA in Mid-Atlantic,” 2000)

As is evidenced above, Verizon’s discourse would indicate that the company is seeking to promote a shared identification with its employees following the strike while assuring its customers that the company would continue to raise standards of service and support to exceed their expectations.

Verizon praised its management members for their work during the strike. Another tactic of common ground is employee praise by an organization. The actions of the members of management indicated that they did identify with Verizon, and not the unions during the strike. The discourse of top-ranking Verizon officials seems to promote a stronger common ground between Verizon and these members of management by praising them for their work during the strike. At the same time, praise for management indirectly places blame on union workers on strike.

Another tactic of organizational identification is the use of antithesis (Cheney, 1983a). Often organizations will urge employees to unite against a common “enemy.” While the wireless division of Verizon does not tell its employees to rise up against the unions, its discourse does empower its employees to make their own decision to unionize without pressures from the unions. Many of the early media reports focused on the wireless unit of Verizon as the unions saw this as a vital part of their contractual deliberations. When the contracts between Verizon Wireless and the union were

announced, Verizon Wireless' discourse expressed the notion that the union was the "enemy." Verizon Wireless Vice President of Human Resources Mark Reed declared, "Our agreements are consistent with the view that this decision is not owned by the company or the union, but belongs to our employees alone. It should be clear that this agreement takes effect starting six months and even then does not automatically lead to unionization. Our agreement simply provides an expedited process from employees to make an informed choice in the event of an organizing effort by these unions. ("Verizon Wireless Announces," 2000)

Reed's statement seems to provide a sense of empowerment to the employees of Verizon Wireless in the event that unions would try to organize. The "event" would seem to parallel that of "invasion" by the unions. Even though a contract agreement had been reached, Verizon's discourse indicated that the organization views the unions as an "enemy" that stands between the organization's employees and Verizon as it continues its quest to become the global leader in telecommunications.

With the merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE, Verizon Communication became the largest wireless and landline provider of communications in the country. In "The Verizon Promise," the "veritas" and horizon values were held together by the service provided to Verizon's customers. Verizon's response to the labor dispute would indicate that the company placed their customers at the highest priority following the labor strike merely two months after the company's formation.

Verizon's discourse, above all, reassured its customers that service was one of their top concerns, even as over 87,000 workers hit the picket lines in protest against Verizon. Immediately, Verizon's management team stepped in to ensure that quality customer service would continue. As the last contract was signed ending the strike, Verizon's Lawrence T. Babbio Jr. proclaimed, "With this last agreement, all our employees will be back at work, and we can now focus all our resources on serving our customers" ("Verizon and CWA in Mid-Atlantic," 2000). With this final affirmation, Verizon could continue to focus all of its resources and energies on its customers.

Verizon's discourse during the labor dispute stayed true to "The Verizon Promise." Verizon first priority would appear to be its customers as the company reaffirmed them that it would work quickly to ensure service would not be disrupted.

Next, Verizon's discourse places community and stakeholders below customers as the company worked quickly to reach a contract resolution to ensure that day-to-day operations would continue as normal and not affect Verizon's profitability. Verizon's employees were the last priority. As Verizon praised management, its discourse placed blame on the striking workers. Comments such as "the absence of those people" would indicate that Verizon executives were indifferent with the striking workers. Their actions had caused the company to sacrifice customer service. To Verizon, this action went against its promise that customers came first as the actions of the union members would appear to be selfish in the eyes of Verizon management.

Reemerging Labor Disputes

With the three-year contracts signed, it would seem as though the labor troubles for the communications' giant would be over. Yet, Verizon's labor troubles surfaced once again when 100 advertising salespeople for Verizon Yellow Pages in Amherst entered the fray over a dispute as to whether or not they were union members (Williams, 2001). The debate was spearheaded by the CWA, which claimed that Verizon was blocking unionization in an attempt to thwart collective bargaining.

In June 2000, the CWA organized a series of rallies in New York to protest Verizon's attempts to thwart unionization in the organization. The CWA claimed that Verizon was not abiding by its contract, which it had signed a mere 10 months earlier. CWA Executive Vice President, Larry Cohen declared, "At Verizon, unfortunately, the attitude from management seems to be that they would do almost anything to avoid collective bargaining" (Kirchofer, 2001, p. B4). The rallies served as a strong testament to the CWA's commitment to the unionization of employees at Verizon Communications.

The rallies garnered enough attention to turn heads across the country. Many top labor officials, such as American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) President John Sweeney, began to take notice and called for an official investigation of Verizon (Williams, 2001). After investigating several dozen reports of irregularities from employees, the National Labor Relations Board was prepared to file 86 labor violations against Verizon at the Federal Court in New York (Romero, 2001). These violations included reports of physical assault and other threats

against employees because of union membership. The abuses were said to have occurred at Verizon operations in New York City, White Plains, Albany, Buffalo, Lake Success and East Meadow.

The action against Verizon was disrupted, however, because on the same day that the complaints were to be filed in a court only blocks away, terrorists destroyed the World Trade Towers. The majority of this dispute would be squelched in light of the attacks as workers and corporate owners united in restoration efforts in the affected areas. Verizon never did officially respond to the labor violations as it responded to the crisis of 9/11.

Chapter 4 – The Crisis of 9/11

With the impact of the first plane into World Trade Tower Building I, corporations located near ground zero were overwhelmed by the tragedy and devastation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Verizon Communications, with a key call- and data-switching center housed adjacent to the Trade Towers, was engulfed in crisis. The fallout from the terrorist attacks greatly impacted the organization as it struggled to cope in the wake of the damage.

One of Verizon's key data- and call switching centers located at 140 West St., sat adjacent to the Trade Towers {Figure 1}. The 140 West St. location served as a vital communications link between the financial districts of lower Manhattan and the rest of the world. The 140 West St. building suffered heavy damage following the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers across the street and the #7 World Trade Center building next door. Debris from the fallout caused significant structural damage to Verizon's facility {Figure 2}. Fortunately, the building remained standing. In addition to structural damage, Verizon's network which provided service to over 200,000 voice lines, 100,000 business lines, 3.6 million data circuits and 10 cellular towers was damaged as a result of the terrorist attacks ("The Verizon Service Standard," 2001). The 9/11 crisis proved to be a defining moment for Verizon as it struggled to account for employees near ground zero, restore network service, and aid with the recovery efforts of lower Manhattan, Washington D.C., and other areas affected as a result of the terrorist attacks.



Figure 1 – Verizon’s 140 West St. in background.

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Figure 2 – Damage inside the facility.

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Caring for its Employees

Though structural damage and service interruptions were severe immediately following the attacks, Verizon's primary concern was to ensure the safety and well being of its employees. When the first plane crashed into the World Trade Tower, securing and accounting for these employees became the number one priority for Verizon. They quickly moved to evacuate and account for all of the employees at the 140 West St. location. Verizon's first press release issued on September 11, contained the following excerpt:

Normally, Verizon has 488 employees, including some sales people, who work in the World Trade Center. They worked on lower floors of the North Tower. The company has accounted for most of these employees. At 140 West Street in Manhattan, the company's operations center was evacuated before the WTC buildings collapsed. Normally, 1,737 employees are assigned to that building. ("Verizon Reports Cellular," 2001)

Tragically, the company would learn that six employees died in the attacks. Like many other organizations near ground zero, the company wanted to ensure the safety and well being of its employees in the confusing aftermath of the attacks that rocked lower Manhattan.

Members of Verizon's management team expressed their concern for employees following the catastrophic events. Verizon regional president, Joe DeMauo stated, "My first thoughts on Sept. 11 were for the employees I had working at 140 West St., which is across the street from the World Trade Center buildings" ("The Verizon Service Standard," 2001, p. 2). For Verizon executives, the crisis did not compare with any disaster the company had ever experienced. Verizon vice president for network operations in New York and New England, Dave Rozenweig stated,

This was unlike anything I've ever seen, including damage from devastating hurricanes and massive snow and ice storms. Once I knew my team members were safely evacuated, I was consumed with one thought: there's no way this team was going to lose this building and its switching capability. ("The Verizon Service Standard," 2001, p. 3)

As the time progressed, the tragedy profoundly affected the mental well being of the victims and witnesses of the attacks. Verizon quickly worked to communicate with employees and families that had lost loved ones or been affected in some way. They provided grief counselors and employee assistance programs to help people cope with the harrowing tragedy of 9/11. Senior members of management went out to communicate with employees face-to-face to assess their concerns and provide comfort. The catastrophic mental and physical harm to organizations and employees located at or near ground zero changed priorities in the work environment.

All across lower Manhattan, employers were faced with the daunting reality that the workplace would never be the same. The attacks were meant to deliver a blow to the financial heart of America. The attack forced members of management teams nationwide to reexamine their commitment to employees. Magellan Health Services, which is the largest managed mental health care and employee-assistance provider around the country, received 130 calls an hour for help immediately following the attacks (Jones, 2001). Other firms around the country increased safety precautionary measures to give employees a sense of security. No matter what actions were taken, companies were forced to put extra emphasis on employee welfare. In addition to a deep concern for employee welfare, Verizon also expressed a commitment to restoring service to its customers.

Assessing the Damage

After accounting for all employees, the company focused its attention on its customers and emergency personnel in the area. Communication services were vital as emergency workers struggled to clear debris and people sought to contact loved ones to ensure their safety and security following the tragedy. Verizon quickly organized to begin repair to its cellular, data and landline networks that had been affected by the collapse of the towers.

The network restoration efforts proved to be a daunting task. The collapse of the towers covered much of lower Manhattan in debris. Near Verizon's 140 West St. office, the debris burst many underground water pipes. The resulting flooding covered many of the underground cables with soot and mud. Verizon had to clean up the debris before it

could properly assess the damage to its network. Verizon vice chairman for network operations in New York, Dave Rosenzweig, commented on the efforts to assess damage following the attacks,

Our Real Estate/Building group worked with us around the clock to clean the computers, stop the flooding in the basement and restore the air quality. By the weekend, we could see that for the most part the switching systems were intact, but we needed to quickly bring in portable generators and air conditioning units to keep the systems cool. (“The Verizon Service Standard,” 2001, p. 3)

Because extensive cleanup was needed before the networks could be repaired permanently, Verizon was forced to provide temporary enhancements to its network as it assessed the damage around 140 West St.

Making Cellular Connections

At the time of the attacks, Verizon was the largest provider of cellular service in the entire country with over 24 million customers (Braga, 2000). The attacks on the towers knocked out service to 10 Verizon wireless sites as the lines connecting these to landline service went through the World Trade Center (“Verizon Reports Cellular,” 2001). To provide temporary cellular service, Verizon erected 21 temporary cellular towers and brought in 220 free wireless pay phones throughout lower Manhattan (“The Verizon Service Standard,” 2001). Verizon’s cellular network had experienced 50-100% more traffic than normal on its nationwide network following the attacks. Verizon worked quickly to ensure its cellular customers would be able to communicate with one another following the attacks.

Verizon’s urgency in repairing the cellular networks was heightened by the media. There were various news reports of people reaching out to one another on their cellular phones during the crisis (Egan, 2001; Rinard, 2001; Scheiber, 2001). These reports added to the severity of the crisis for Verizon as they sought to reestablish cellular service following the attacks. Still other members of the media pointed out the reality that cellular networks were not able to handle the call volume of 9/11 (Romero, 2001). This reality forced many wireless providers to rethink their strategies in ensuring that networks would be able to handle massive call volume in times of emergency. Verizon

labored tirelessly not only to establish temporary service, but also to add new technologies to ensure their networks would be able to handle massive call volumes in the future.

Restoring Landline Communications

In addition to Verizon’s cellular concerns, they also worked hard to repair landline phone service at the West St. location. The building had provided service to some 200,000 voice lines for homes and small businesses with another 100,000 voice lines for several large businesses (“Verizon Makes Steady,” 2001). In order to quickly get service up-and-running, the company was forced to reroute cable above ground. The company made trenches in the concrete and laid the cable in the trenches until they were able to properly run the cables below ground {Figures 3 & 4}.



Figure 3 – Above ground cables provided temporary service following 9/11.

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Figure 4 – Trenches dug in the street to place cables.

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The damage to the facility was so extensive that even two weeks following the attacks, there were areas of the building Verizon workers still could not access due to safety hazards. Verizon vice chairman and president Larry Babbio stated,

Our people are focused on helping New York get back on its feet as fast as humanly possible. We've made significant progress, but we realize that each customer faces a different situation. We're working to provide a solution for all customers so they get the connections they need, where they need them.

(“Verizon Makes Steady,” 2001)

As Verizon continued to repair their networks, the company reassured its customers that it was working diligently to meet their needs.

The task of repairing the network was like nothing the company had ever experienced. Verizon employees worked 12-hour shifts around the clock to ensure that their communication services would be available. Executives of the company applauded

the countless hours and demanding physical labor put forth by the employees who were able to repair nearly 2/3 of the network just two weeks following the attacks. Verizon regional president, Joe DeMauo, reflected on the hard work of his employees,

I know it sounds obvious, but there's no way anything I've seen in my 32 years compares with this. But it has been wonderful the way Verizon's employees have risen to the occasion, when faced with a situation no one could have even imagined. At no point during this entire recovery effort did anyone approach me and say something couldn't be done. ("The Verizon Service Standard" 2001, p. 2)

Without this superb effort by the employees, Verizon could have faced a negative backlash from the many customers it serviced in the lower Manhattan area. Verizon implemented temporary service solutions to help those affected by the terrorist attacks communicate as it continued to repair its networks and restore full service to its customers.

Creating Temporary Service Solutions

While Verizon was working to repair their networks, the company needed to provide any temporary landline service it could. In order to allow communication in affected areas, Verizon first made calling on over 4,000 of its payphones in the area free of charge for local calls ("Verizon Offers New Yorkers," 2001). By allowing free calling on the various pay phones, New Yorkers were able to reach out to loved ones and coordinate relief efforts during the tragedy. Verizon reaffirmed their commitment to New Yorkers by giving emergency personnel and citizens another communication option as the city struggled to get back on its feet. Verizon's William Freeman praised the payphones,

These phones are a lifeline, a link to families, bosses and businesses. We've offered free calling since the tragedy occurred, first to help people throughout Manhattan cope with the shock of those first days and stay in touch if they couldn't get home, and now to help people in the disaster area stay connected. ("Verizon's Free Payphones," 2001)

Media reports indicated a positive response to Verizon's efforts. Throughout lower New York, citizens were having problems making cellular calls due to network

congestion. Miami resident Nadine Rog, in Washington, D.C., for a medical convention, couldn't get through on her cell phone to her brother in Alaska. She was finally able to use a payphone to reach relatives in Florida (Backover & Davidson, 2001). These media reports helped Verizon maintain a favorable image with the public as they continued offering free pay phone service to Manhattan.

Reopening the New York Stock Exchange

All across America, there was a push to get the New York Stock Exchange up-and-running as quickly as possible. The attacks caused Wall Street to shut down for the longest period of time since World War I (Strauss, Shell & Krantz, 2001). The attacks had not caused any physical damage to the building, yet the market could not function unless it was able to connect to the member securities firms that put up the capital to trade stocks (Berenson & McGeehan, 2001). Over 20% of the phone lines used by the New York Stock Exchange were controlled by the 140 West St. location (Strauss, Shell & Krantz, 2001). Verizon president Ivan Seidenberg spoke about the pressure for Verizon to get its network operational again in local media reports. Seidenberg stated, "The President, the governor and the mayor have all spoken to us about the need to get America up and running" (Blood, 2001, p. 23). Verizon was indeed a key element in this mix because the company provided many services in the financial districts of lower Manhattan. Trading did resume less than one week after the attacks. For Verizon, this was a huge success. They were able to reroute their communications services to provide temporary services in the face of the terrorist attacks. In addition to the welfare of its employees and restoring their networks, another priority for Verizon was to aid in the nationwide recovery efforts.

Providing Aid to Those in Need

The crisis of 9/11 has been compared to the attack on Pearl Harbor as a day of "infamy" in the history of the United States (Curtin & Ellis, 2001). It was estimated that 2,645 people died at the twin towers, 125 at the Pentagon, 87 on American Airlines Flight 11, 60 on United Airlines Flight 175, 59 on American Airlines Flight 77, 40 on Flight 93 in Pennsylvania and the 19 hijackers (Barron, 2003). In addition to those that lost their

lives, there were countless individuals who desperately needed help as America recovered from the attacks. Organizations and individuals alike worked to help those affected. While Verizon continued to repair its networks, it also stepped forward to help America recover in a variety of different ways.

Verizon employees began to ask the company how they could help. The Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the company, announced a three-to-one match for employee donations to the September 11th Fund spearheaded by the United Way. In addition, Verizon pledged more than \$1 million to three organizations in the areas affected by the attacks. Verizon foundation president, Suzanne DuBose declared,

We've received thousands of calls from Verizon employees asking how they might help in this time of tremendous need. We encourage everyone in the Verizon family to use the matching gift program we've created in order to leverage their donations to aid those directly affected by the terrorist attacks.

(“Verizon Employees Encouraged,” 2001)

Verizon announced the program would run from September 13th to October 13th and it would triple donations up to \$2,500 per employee. It also provided information to employees about donating blood or money to help those in need following the attacks. Verizon also donated \$1 million to the American Red Cross on behalf of the company's retired employees.

The Verizon Foundation's efforts proved to be a significant gift to aid those affected by the terrorist attacks. Verizon's employees donated over \$3.5 million with the company providing an additional \$10.5 million match to the United Way's September 11th fund (“Sept. 11 Response,” 2002). Co-CEO Ivan Seidenberg recognized the importance of these employee contributions, “Verizon employees are giving their time, their expertise, and from their pocketbooks, demonstrating a clear sense of purpose and urgency. It's a tremendous response, but just what I'd expect knowing this superb Verizon team” (“Verizon Donates More,” 2001). Indeed, Verizon's financial contributions from the employees and the company alike provided significant financial relief to the victims of 9/11.

Verizon was able to offer additional assistance to other charitable organizations by providing service assistance. The American Red Cross turned to Verizon for help

when the organization was overwhelmed with calls in the days following the terrorist attacks. Verizon designed a fully operational call center for up to 600 Red Cross operators three days after the non-profit organization had requested Verizon's help. Senior vice president of the American Red Cross Skip Seitz said,

This showcase facility will help us provide Americans with essential information in this time of uncertainty. We turned to Verizon with an urgent and vital requirement. Despite the tremendous demands being placed on their company, the employees were able to fulfill our request – even beating the agreed-upon delivery time. (“American Red Cross,” 2001)

Verizon's quick response to the urgent request of the American Red Cross helped solidify their relationship.

Verizon's philanthropic efforts following the attacks of 9/11 served as a sign of their strong commitment to Americans and the various non-profit organizations involved in the relief and recovery efforts. “Everyone associated with the Verizon family has been simply outstanding in the support of the Red Cross. Whether they have given their expertise, blood or cash, the contributions have been invaluable,” stated Skip Seitz (“Verizon Gives \$1 Million,” 2001). Seitz's statement speaks to the values of the Verizon “family” as the company aided in recovery efforts.

As the philanthropic campaign was initiated, it is important to note the change in Verizon's discourse. There is no longer a distinction between the wireless and landline segments of the company. Instead, the “Verizon family” was encouraged to partake in the matching gift program. The superb efforts “Verizon team” provided millions of dollars to help the victims. During this crisis response period, Verizon's discourse would indicate the company was one, not separate divisions.

Providing Comfort to the Victims of 9/11

In an unprecedented sign of Verizon's commitment to those affected by the tragedies of 9/11, Verizon offered free taped recordings of voice mail messages left by family and friends during the attacks of 9/11. “In light of the tragedies in Manhattan, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon, we wanted to offer the recordings to those who may have received messages from family and friends affected by the September 11th attacks,”

stated Verizon senior vice-president and chief marketing officer for Retail Markets, Maura Breen (“Recordings of Family,” 2001). This generous showing of good faith to those devastated by the terrorist attacks provided some degree of comfort to those who had lost loved ones during the attacks. It was also well received by the media as they praised the Verizon for the unusually kind act, “in an unusual gesture of corporate comforting” (Klein, 2001).

Helping American Business Get Back on its Feet

New York was devastated as a result of the terrorist attacks. It was estimated that the city lost 44,200 jobs during the month of October alone (Cortese, 2001). In addition to job loss, the cost of cleanup to the city was astronomical. The cleanup costs and physical damage were estimated at \$30 billion, with an estimated additional loss of over \$20 billion in economic activity (Cortese, 2001). In an effort to spur economic recovery in the area, Verizon partnered with Zagat Survey to produce a guide highlighting area restaurants, hotels, nightlife, shops and must-see attractions. The pocket-sized book promoted all the great attractions the city had to offer. Verizon President of Retail Market Groups Bruce Gordon reaffirmed the company’s commitment to the city: “This is a part of the city where our company has an important presence and it’s where our employees live and work, so we are deeply committed to its restoration and long-term success” (“Zagat and Verizon,” 2001).

As the city continued to recover from the devastating attacks, city officials acknowledged Verizon’s commitment to New York. New York mayor, Michael Bloomberg, praised the company for its efforts in aiding the city to recover from the devastating attacks.

On behalf of all New Yorkers, I am grateful to the Verizon Foundation for their support and assistance benefiting all those who have been affected by the events of September 11. This gift is a great example of the type of public/private partnerships that contribute to the renewal and enhancement of our city and we hope other good corporate citizens will follow Verizon’s lead. (“Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg,” 2002)

Statements like Bloomberg's reinforced Verizon's relationship with the city where the company did a great deal of business.

To demonstrate its support of American industry, Verizon stepped forward to help the airline industry recover from the attacks as well. The airline industry experienced an extreme economic turn as many people feared travel following 9/11. One year following the attacks, it was estimated that air travelers had decreased by 38.7 percent (Krantz, 2002). In an effort to offer some relief, Verizon's subsidiary, Airfone, dropped prices on its in-flight communication services, providing an extra incentive for passengers to travel by air. Airfone president Bill Pallone stated,

We appreciate the unique challenges the airlines are facing as a result of these terrorists, and we want to help our partners in any way we can. We hope these low rates provide an extra benefit to air travelers as more passengers begin to return to the sky. ("Airfone Dramatically Drops," 2001)

The hotel and tourism industry also was devastated as a result of the September 11th attacks. It was estimated that 41% of the hotel and restaurant workers were laid off in the Washington D.C. area alone ("Local Utilities," 2002). In an attempt to aid those struggling with financial hardships, Verizon, along with several other utility providers, offered discounts to members of the local hotel and restaurant union. Angel M. Cartagena, Jr., chairman of the D.C. public service commission praised the move, "The commission is encouraged by the initiative taken by these energy and telecommunications companies. This collective effort shows a strong commitment by the companies to the District of Columbia" ("Local Utilities," 2002). Verizon's show of support reaffirmed its commitment to its business customers as they struggled from the economic hardships as a result of the terrorist attacks.

Analysis of Verizon's Response to the Crisis of 9/11

Verizon's actions throughout the crisis would seem to indicate the company was working with their employees as partners to restore service and aid those in need. One of Ulmer & Sellnow's elements of crisis renewal is that an organization's discourse tactics will often exemplify a strong commitment to its stakeholders (2002). Verizon's actions

appear to communicate that the company is reaffirming its relationship with several of its key stakeholder groups.

Based upon its response, Verizon's first commitment during the crisis of 9/11 was to ensure that its employees located at or near areas of the attacks were safe. After evacuating employees from its 140 West St. location, company executives quickly began to ensure that all employees were accounted for and safe. Verizon's discourse seems to indicate that the company took measures to account for and prioritize the safety of its workers during the horrific events.

There are statements which clearly indicate that Verizon made employees its first priority during the crisis of 9/11. Verizon executives described how their first thoughts on September 11th were of their employees working in the Trade Towers or 140 West St. Verizon executives, Joe DeMauo and Dave Rozenweig, both stated how their first concerns were for their employees as the World Trade Towers crumbled around them.

Once Verizon had accounted for its employees, only then did the company focus its attention on correcting its badly damaged network. This action is consistent with the second position of renewal discourse, commitment to correction (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). This discourse is often characterized by a message of transformation and rebuilding as part of a new era. As Verizon repaired segments of their damaged network, they assured customers that the new technology was meant to overcome some of the shortcomings made evident in light of the terrorist attacks. "We fired up a brand new call forwarding technology and created a special wireless plan so lower Manhattan customers can receive their phone calls," stated Verizon senior vice president and chief marketing officer Maura Breen, announcing Verizon's new call forwarding technology ("Call Forwarding," 2001). Verizon also announced that the company had built a new technology within its network called SONET (synchronous optical network) ("The Verizon Service Standard," 2001). This technology was intended to provide additional capacity and ensure reliable service. These actions helped Verizon show its commitment to correcting and improving the network that had been so badly damaged by the attacks.

Throughout this period, Verizon's discourse exemplified a corporate connection with its employees through its company references. The use of the term "we" is often

used as a persuasive appeal to promote a shared identity between organization and individuals (Cheney, 1983a). Throughout the crisis of 9/11, Verizon management members began using “we” or other pronouns like “our” when describing the company and employees’ efforts to restore service. “We’re in the community now, with information about what we’re doing and how people can keep in touch while we get service back to normal,” stated president of Verizon New York, Paul Crotty (“Verizon Pounding Pavement,” 2001). Senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Verizon, Maura Breen, commented, “We’re doing everything we can to be sure our customers can make and receive calls so their lives can go on in spite of what’s happened” (“Call Forwarding,” 2001). Verizon vice chairman and president Larry Babbio stated, “Our people are focused on helping New York get back on its feet as fast as humanly possible” (“Verizon Makes Steady,” 2001). As Verizon worked indefatigably to correct its damaged networks, the company promoted the shared identity between the company and its employees.

Finally, Verizon’s discourse and actions indicated a strong commitment to another stakeholder group, its customers and community affected by the terrorist attacks. In an attempt to aid in recovery initiatives, Verizon pledged equipment, phones, and finances to help the city communicate as it worked to clean up and rebuild much of lower Manhattan. Their initial response to solidify this commitment was to enable free calling on their 4,000 pay phones located in lower Manhattan. As the company continued to repair its networks, it assured its customers that Verizon services would soon be back to normal. Verizon responded to the crisis of 9/11 with statements and actions that indicated its strong commitment to its customers and citizens of New York.

The Verizon Foundation’s massive philanthropic campaign launched at the urging of Verizon employees was also a strong indicator of the company’s unwavering devotion to its customers and communities affected by the terrorist attacks. The Verizon Foundation donated around \$14 million to the September 11th fund (“Sept. 11 Response,” 2002). Verizon’s discourse also suggests that these philanthropic efforts were used as an opportunity to promote a shared identity between Verizon and its employees. When referring to its employees, Verizon never made any distinction between members of management and other workers. The company attempted to foster a sense of unity by

expressing similar values among all employees. Verizon co-CEO, Ivan Seidenberg, praised Verizon employees for their many contributions to various relief efforts including the donation of food and clothing to the Salvation Army, blood to the local Red Cross, and over 8,000 Verizon employees also donated their time to staff phones for the telethon, “America: A Tribute to Heroes,” which raised over \$117 million for the United Way’s September 11th fund. “It’s a tremendous response, but just what I’d expect knowing this superb Verizon team,” stated Seidenberg (“Verizon Donates More,” 2001). For Verizon, September 11th had been a terrible tragedy, yet all employees came together as one to aid in the relief and recovery efforts.

Verizon’s discourse was directed toward an external audience of customers, media and American citizens. Verizon’s immediate response to the crisis was to communicate its concern for the safety and well being of its employees. Verizon’s subsequent responses were to confirm its commitment to rebuild its badly damaged network and its commitment to their customers and emergency personnel in the New York area.

Organizational campaigns are often designed to influence both internal and external audiences (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). As the company communicated with its primarily external audience of media and customers, its discourse contained statements that proclaimed Verizon’s commitment to its employees. In fact, Verizon employees were central to all Verizon efforts after 9/11. Seeger and Ulmer indicate that crisis can offer the opportunity for renewal and change, yet it is often preceded by discourse that confirms a strong commitment to its stakeholders and an immediate and unequivocal response to rebuild (2002). This strong commitment by Verizon provided an opportunity for the organization to proclaim the true meaning of “value” and for organizational renewal and change in the aftermath of crisis.

Verizon’s response to 9/11 was consistent with “The Verizon Promise” and the company’s values. Yet, the ordering of priorities and commitment changed in response to crisis. “The Verizon Promise” called for a first commitment to customers, then to communities, shareholders, and employees. Verizon’s crisis response and recovery efforts placed employees first, then customers, communities, and by default, shareholders last. Bottomline considerations, the most obvious measure of commitment to

shareholders, were sacrificed to all other commitments immediately following the World Trade Center attacks. Verizon sacrificed profit in the short term to uphold its most central relationships.

Chapter 5 The Verizon Promise: Life After 9/11

Verizon's response in the weeks following 9/11 focused on rebuilding the infrastructure and restoring service to lower Manhattan. As the initial crisis subsided, national leaders began to reflect on the meaning of 9/11 and focused more fully on recovery and renewal of the nation. All across America, corporations and citizens alike looked to the future and tried to put the horrific events of 9/11 behind them.

After the initial shock, rebuilding after 9/11 absorbed the time and energy of Verizon's leadership and workforce for several months. Eventually, Verizon's leaders began to reflect on the crisis and shifted into a final phase of crisis recovery characterized by organizational renewal and change based upon core values (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Co-CEO Charles Lee captured the meaning of 9/11 for Verizon in a speech delivered at the CEO2CEO Conference in October 31, 2001. The central themes of the speech were reiterated in two other speaking engagements over the next few months. For Verizon Communications, these remarks signaled the end of the crisis and the beginning of "life after 9/11." This chapter presents this final phase in recovery, starting with the post-9/11 speeches of Co-CEO Charles Lee.

Learning from 9/11

Verizon Communications co-CEO Charles R. Lee was a featured speaker at the CEO2CEO conference. He described the lessons Verizon learned in dealing with the crisis of 9/11. He spoke about Verizon Communications' values and how they were both challenged and changed as a result of the crisis.

"The Verizon Promise," the organization's mission and values, had provided direction to the company for barely a year. Lee begins the speech by noting the importance of the organization's values for its response: "We talk in the Verizon Promise about the values of imagination, passion and service – but we never dreamed they'd be tested – and realized – in such dramatic fashion" (Lee, 2001, p. 4). Presenting the crisis as a "test" and one Verizon passed "dramatically" speaks to the opportunity 9/11 offered this fledgling company.

Lee identified 9/11 as a turning point. He explicitly differentiated Verizon's identity "before" and "after" 9/11. In the "before," Verizon's focus was on philanthropic activities with the local communities, employees, customers and shareholders. Verizon was careful to put in writing that its core purpose was "to bring the benefits of communications to everyone." Lee stated,

In the world of 'before,' we had a certain view of what the Verizon Promise meant and how it guided our actions – in business, in charity, and all the rest. It was powerful – for the 260,000 employees we apprised of it in our first company-wide newsletter after our merger – and yet it was still just words on a page. It had never been put to the test. (Lee, 2001, p. 1)

According to Lee, the world "after" 9/11 was characterized by a realization of the words in action. For Lee, the disaster of 9/11 was a defining moment in the history of Verizon in which the company learned how strong and deep their values really were. No disaster plan could have prepared the company for the crisis and provide specific direction for Verizon employees in the chaotic aftermath. Lee said, "those on-the-spot decisions have to be made by instinct – and that's where the strength of your values as an organization really get tested" (Lee, 2001, p. 3). These instincts led the company to three basic priorities: its employees, its customers, and its community.

The first priority for Verizon during the crisis of 9/11 was to take care of its employees. "Now when disaster struck, our first thought was for our employees" (Lee, 2001, p. 2). Lee recounted Verizon's evacuation of its employees at 140 West St. He also shared his personal experience in speaking with employees face-to-face and how the experience had changed him. Verizon provided grief counselors and employee assistance programs to help these same people cope with the sense of loss, fear, vulnerability, and anger that resulted after the attacks. The crisis prompted personal connections between the highest-level managers and the workers on the ground. For a time, the distance and differences between union and management was diminished.

Lee also emphasized Verizon's concern for customers following the attacks. He spoke of the actions taken to restore service and make temporary service available to customers, and he praised employees for making this possible.

The final tests were completed at 5:30 that morning, and before that, some real heroic acts took place. One was that ten employees outfitted with moon suits and respirators walked up 23 flights of stairs in the 140 West facility to retrieve servers containing the software that transmitted quotes to the exchange floor.

(Lee, 2001, p. 4)

This message spoke of the heroism demonstrated by Verizon employees as they helped the company work to make communication systems operational once more. These “heroic acts” served as a strong reminder that Verizon valued the hard work and effort of its employees during crisis.

Lee’s third main point centered around Verizon’s efforts to take care of the community. He spoke about Verizon’s many philanthropic activities since the collapse of the World Trade Towers. Even with his comments about these philanthropic efforts, Lee still praised the work of Verizon’s employees in achieving these ends.

And through a 3-to-1 matching program through our corporate foundation – in which 22,000 employees participated – we raised over \$14 million for the September 11 Fund of the United Way. The United Way told us that as far as it knows, that’s more than any other employee-based relief effort in the country.

(Lee, 2001, p. 5)

Both the second priority, customer service, and the third priority, community support, depended on and flowed from the commitment and values of Verizon’s employees.

Charles Lee’s speech highlighted the transformative power of crisis for an organization:

It’s very hard to talk about any good coming of such a horrible event. But, for me, it was a defining moment for Verizon – one that transformed us and revealed us for the kind of company I believe we are. I am humbled by the way our values guided us in everything we did. (Lee, 2001, p. 6)

In its immediate response to the crisis of 9/11, Verizon’s discourse was marked by two aspects of renewal discourse, a strong commitment to its stakeholders and a commitment to rebuild their badly damaged networks making them more powerful and reliable than ever before. As time passed, the organization began to look more fully to the future.

Lee's speech signaled this final phase of renewal, the commitment based on core values (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002).

As evident in Lee's speech, crisis offered Verizon the opportunity to reshape its relationship with its employees. Lee's discourse disrupted the typical separation between management and union employees, elevating the workers on the ground to heroic status. The response of workers "humbled" the CEO. Typical roles and relationships changed during crisis. Hurst notes that crisis allows a network of relationships to form, which is held together by shared values (1995). These relationships allow the organization to focus on learning and the options available after crisis. More than pre-crisis rhetoric, Lee's focused on employees as central to Verizon's success.

Discourse in response to crisis often helps to liberate resources and energize efforts that accentuate the positive aspects of crisis (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). For Verizon, the positive aspect was the hard work and dedication of its many employees. This resource was symbolically significant as well. By praising employees and their contributions, Lee heightened both his own credibility and that of Verizon by association.

Others offered praise for Verizon and its employees, heightening the organization's and its employees positive associations. Multiple media reports featured the work of Airfone supervisor Lisa Jefferson. Verizon awarded her the company's highest honor, the Verizon Excellence Award, for her exceptional communication with passenger Todd Beamer during the final moments before the United Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania. In making the award, Lee said,

Lisa's outstanding performance under extraordinarily stressful circumstances serves as an inspiration to all our employees. With calm reassurance, she provided comfort to Todd Beamer during the last moments of his life and, at the same time, gathered important information to assist law enforcement officials. She also faithfully delivered Mr. Beamer's final messages to his widow and two small children. None of these duties were easy or routine. ("Verizon Honors Employee," 2002)

Jefferson personally delivered the message to Beamer's widow and children following their conversation.

Lisa Jefferson came to be known as a hero to the media. Todd Beamer's last words to Jefferson, "Our you guys ready? Let's roll," echoed throughout the media while praising Verizon's employee for her work as the flight went down (Harnden, 2001). These words would later come represent many of the heroes whom emerged following the crisis.

Beyond the acts of exceptional individuals, Verizon won accolades and praises from other organizations. The 2002 PBI Media Telecommunications Awards recognized Verizon's September 11 Crisis Communication Plan as winner in the Crisis Management category. Lee spoke of the business partners throughout the lower Manhattan area whom had praised Verizon:

Late last month we got a letter from Bill Harrison, Chairman of J.P. MorganChase. He said, 'Inside our firm, we refer to Verizon as our business partner. We saw the true meaning of partnership over the last ten days in your employees' every word and deed.' (Lee, 2001, p. 5)

Harrison's complimentary words strengthened the positive association between the organization and its employees following 9/11.

Lee emerged as the charismatic leader to give meaning to 9/11 for Verizon and its stakeholders. Hurst (1995) notes that leadership is important to crisis recovery:

Renewal begins in the confused aftermath of crisis, which shatters the previous forms of hierarchical control. Out of the confusion there must emerge one or more charismatic leaders – individuals who act in ways that express their values and their beliefs about how people ought to relate to each other. Their actions are rational, not in a means-to-an-end, instrumental sense, but in the sense that their behavior consistently expresses a coherent belief system. (p. 29)

Lee's articulation of crisis recovery was both words and action. Through his own response and then through his public expression of the meaning of the crisis for Verizon, Lee played a critical role in harnessing the rhetorical opportunity in crisis. In his post 9/11 speeches, Lee highlighted the initiative, creativity, and commitment of the individuals who found ways to restore service without a plan or direction; he praised the presence of mind and selflessness of Lisa Jefferson and all those who contributed to philanthropic efforts; he lauded the dedication of Verizon workers who supported

business partners in “getting back to work.” The values advocated symbolically united the individual, speaker, and company and created expectations and direction for the company and its stakeholders.

Returning to Business as Usual

The events of 9/11 disrupted, but did not end, the ongoing labor disputes between Verizon and unionized workers around the country. In a series of press releases following the attacks on the World Trade Towers, Verizon Communications announced a series of new contract agreements with both the CWA and IBEW throughout the United States. From Pennsylvania to California and even Hawaii, Verizon assured its various stakeholders, including customers, employees, and other stakeholders, that the relationship between Verizon and the unions associated with the company were firmly intact. “Capitalizing on their strong relationship, Verizon and CWA began negotiating more than four months before the current contract expires March 16, 2002, and reached tentative agreement with more than three months remaining on the current pact” (“Verizon and CWA Reach,” 2001). These official statements suggested that Verizon’s relationship with both the CWA and IBEW was on the mend. However, on the East Coast and more specifically the New York and New England areas, the hotbed of labor problems for Verizon was heating up.

The economy Verizon worked so hard to protect in reopening the New York Stock Exchange was in a steep decline and reduced Verizon’s profitability through 2002 and early 2003. Not only had Verizon suffered the challenges of 9/11 recovery, but it had lost 4.7 million local line customers since 2000 (Noguchi, 2003).

As the contract with New England workers neared its end, Verizon Communications began a process to layoff over 2,300 workers in upstate New York and other areas in the northeastern United States. The communications company claimed that the poor economy caused the need to eliminate the jobs. Verizon President and Vice Chairman Lawrence T. Babbio Jr. stated, “As our share of the market shrinks, it is inevitable that our work force must decrease also. We are now faced with the need to reduce the work force to more properly reflect the company’s current business

conditions” (Howe, 2002, p. B9). The company began negotiations with the unions in an already tense situation.

Verizon sought more flexibility to move work around the country and to increase union members share of their health care coverage. The company identified layoffs as a “last resort” but argued they would be necessary without union concessions. (Howe, 2002) The company continued to express a commitment to employees. In one advertisement directed to union members and the public, Verizon argued that union-represented employees had some of the best benefits in the industry (Greenhouse, 2003). Verizon spokesperson Eric Rabe said, “Even if the union accepts what’s on the table right now on health coverage, the workers’ plan would be much better than what the vast majority of American workers have, and better than what all other telecommunications workers have” (Greenhouse, 2003, p. C3). Verizon spokesperson Jack Hoey characterized the company’s proposals as,

An example of where the company is bending over backwards to find every reasonable avenue to reduce the need for layoffs. The harsh reality remains that we do need to resize the business because we’re continuing to feel the impact of the economy and competition. (Goodison, 2002, B3)

Verizon’s explanations of the proposed layoffs and contract negotiations remained true to their expressed priorities, but with yet another twist. As external pressures mounted, their words and actions highlighted customer and shareholder needs over community and employee concerns. Verizon’s discourse appeared to shift away from the use of “we” as the organization spoke of the contract proposal specifics.

The unions questioned the integrity of the company’s statements. Union representatives argued that Verizon, far from “bending over backwards,” was sacrificing union employees to management and shareholder greed. Jeffrey Miller, a union communications director, said, “This is a wealthy company that rewards its executives extremely well while it’s demanding such things as cutbacks in health care for active and retired workers” (Greenhouse, 2003, p. C3). A union ad featured an executive with pockets stuffed with \$100 bills and the tag line: “\$58.4 million for 1 guy or health care for 34,600 families? Verizon’s making the wrong choice” (Greenhouse, 2003, p. C3). Another union representative accused Verizon of refusing to bring contract work back to

the company to provide jobs for union employees: “You have people who are making \$60 million a year who decide it’s too expensive to have someone from IBEW do the cleaning work instead of a low-paid contract. It’s unconscionable” (Howe, 2002, p. B9). While Verizon attempted to create a unified front, the unions tried to drive a wedge between Verizon and union employees.

In an attempt to prevent the dispute from escalating into another labor crisis, Verizon executives met with members of the CWA and IBEW. Both unions worked in tandem while negotiating new labor contracts with Verizon Communications. The meetings were arranged immediately following the announcement of the company’s second quarter earnings. Verizon Communications appeared to be losing ground in the local phone market while its subsidiary, Verizon Wireless, had actually exceeded expectations by posting a large profit. CWA spokesman, Jeff Miller, spoke about Verizon Wireless’ good fortunes while stressing the need for more secure labor contracts, “The figures announced today bear that out. Revenues are up. Profits are up. They’re doing well in business” (Richtel, 2003, p. C1). Verizon Communications’ president of network operations Eileen O’Neill Odum countered, “Eroding margins would become worse if the company did not obtain more flexibility in managing the size and location of its work force” (Richtel, 2003, p. C1). Verizon Communications’ discourse focused on the sinking margins within the landline market. The unions were focusing on the profits posted in Verizon Wireless. Interestingly, Verizon Wireless still remained mostly not unionized.

When the August 3, 2003, expiration date arrived, Verizon still had not reached an agreement with the unions. In an attempt to speed up the talks, members of both the CWA and IBEW began to organize and discuss the possibility of another strike against Verizon Communications. CWA spokesperson, Steve Early stated, “Pickets could start at any time if things take a turn for the worse. We are working without a contract. There is no contract extension, no final contract” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. B9). As the discussions continued, union leaders did postpone the strike citing that Verizon was working with the leaders to ensure that a contract settlement could be reached.

In response to the unions’ threat of a strike against Verizon Communications, executives at the company declared they had taken several precautions in the event of

strike. Management personnel had received special field training, while outside contractors would be hired by Verizon to fill the missing workers' void. Of course, union workers labeled these workers scabs. Verizon still insisted it was working hard to sign a contract and avoid strike. Verizon spokesman Eric Rabe spoke of the immense difficulties at play in the negotiations (Fitzgerald, 2003). Indeed, there were many difficult issues that Verizon and the unions needed to agree on before a contract would be finalized.

In an attempt to further raise the stakes in the labor negotiations, labor officials began an online petition to collect names of people who would be willing to switch their service to AT&T. The petition was primarily directed toward Verizon union employees who were also customers of Verizon. AT&T was a competitor to Verizon in both landline and wireless phone services. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (A.F.L.-C.I.O.) coordinated the campaign along with the CWA and IBEW. The website, www.fairnessatverizon.com, allowed Verizon customers to log their names, addresses and phone numbers which could later be compiled for submission to AT&T. The move was said to put a digital era consumer twist on traditional consumer boycotts (Richtel, 2003). Labor officials felt the tactic would put tremendous pressure on Verizon Communications to meet the unions' demands as the industry continued to experience growth and intense competition for customers.

Verizon Communications claimed the strategy would ultimately hurt its union employees. Verizon spokesman, Jack Hoey, claimed that the company had already received many emails from employees denouncing the campaign (Howe, 2003). He claimed that the move by the unions could result in lost jobs, lost stock value, and even higher costs for phone service. Verizon employees received a 50% discount on phone service. By siding with the union, Verizon employees would be hurt not only as workers but as customers.

Almost one month after the original deadline, a five-year contract agreement was reached between Verizon Communications and the CWA and IBEW. Union officials felt the contract adequately addressed the job security issues while providing other improvements in health care, job relocation, and wage and pension increases. Verizon Communications officials were also happy with the contract terms reached with the

unions. Lawrence T. Babbio stated, “This five-year agreement, which is unprecedented, provides stability and certainty for both the company and our employees” (“Verizon and Two Unions,” 2003). Verizon spokesman Peter Thonis proclaimed, “When you look at the totality of the agreement, it successfully ensures the strength of our business, because the cost of implementing this contract is lower than previous contracts” (Noguchi, 2003, p. E1).

The Verizon Promise in 2003

As Verizon was faced with the possibility of another strike, its first response was to assure its customers that service would continue as normal. Not only did Verizon communicate this through its discourse, but it also indicated possible actions that would reinforce this message. Verizon’s Eric Rabe proclaimed how the company was determined – through its hiring of outside contractors and retraining of thousands of managers to handle field duties – to maintain service if a strike was launched (Fitzgerald, 2003). By maintaining favorable opinion with its customers, Verizon was building a base for later support. Public opinion can be a valuable resource which corporate public persuasion utilizes as an invaluable tool (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). By affirming its relationship with its customers, Verizon was building a base of support it could possibly later draw from as the contract negotiations progressed and the threat of another strike loomed.

As Verizon struggled to reach a contract resolution with the unions, there were both actions and words that upset the unions. Verizon’s post 9/11 discourse created expectations which the company was not able to meet. By stressing the values associated with the “heroic acts” of its employees, Verizon created expectations that its employees were the first priority of the company. Following 9/11, actions created division between Verizon management members and union officials. With the unions on the verge of striking, Verizon reassured its customers that management officials would step in and they also had received special training to do so. Verizon’s preparation signaled the division between management and union.

The union stumbled when it attempted to reach out to union workers in another capacity, their customer role. As the unions began their online petition taking names and

information of Verizon customers who would be willing to switch to AT&T, they soon realized that the message would be ineffective. Scott, Corman, and Cheney's work centered on the complexity of identification, which they deemed the duality perspective (1998). This perspective takes into account that identification is not merely constructed from a top-level communication which shapes identity, but also the individual's many identities which exist outside the organization produce, reproduce, and reshape these identities which in turn, compromise identification (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). During the online petition, the unions primarily appealed to Verizon employees as customers. The "customer" identity of unionized employees was very different from the "union worker" identity. If the petition succeeded, it would result in fewer union jobs at Verizon. By signing such a petition, employees could have essentially undercut their own job security.

Ultimately, this move by the unions may have caused greater employee identification with Verizon and not the unions. Verizon spokesman Jack Hoey stated, Many workers are shocked and outraged and have inundated company officials with e-mails denouncing the proposed campaign. The campaign would be a disaster for Verizon workers and threaten the very jobs the unions claim to protect. When customers leave Verizon, our revenues go down, and that means we can't employ as many union workers. (Howe, 2003, p. E1)

By sending emails to executives, Verizon's employees' communicative acts symbolized their identification with Verizon and not the unions that started the campaign. Verizon's response appealed effectively to the workers as employees and as customers. By speaking to this identity, they are promoting identification on two levels.

Over three years after the merger that created Verizon Communications, the company's employees were still struggling with their competing roles and identities. As the contract negotiations progressed, both Verizon and its unions sought signs of identification from its employees. The unions' discourse would ultimately create confusion among the various identities and send conflicting messages that did not correlate with the identity of both union employee and union customer. With the signing of a new five-year contract it would seem as though Verizon's troubles with the unions are over, at least for a time.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

Few studies in crisis communication have examined the opportunity resulting from a crisis situation. Also, few studies have placed crisis response within a larger time frame both before and after the crisis response. By examining the unique case of Verizon, we are able to make several observations of their response to the crisis of 9/11 and situate this response within a larger context of the organizational history. There are several key findings produced by this study that have implications for both theory and practice. The first is that the crisis of 9/11 offered Verizon the opportunity to engage its stakeholders in renewal discourse. The second key finding is that by placing Verizon's crisis response within a larger context we see clear shifting among priorities through each of the three time periods examined. Lastly, there are multiple identities within an organization at any one time and rhetors must recognize these identities in their discourse (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002).

Enacting Organizational Renewal

Current crisis literature is dominated with analysis of the immediate response to crisis in which the organization or individual is in some way to blame for the crisis (Benoit, 1995, 1997; Coombs, 1995; Fink 1986). While valuable, this research focuses on the threat posed by crisis and rarely addresses the opportunities crisis may present. The case undertaken here has examined the opportunities that resulted for Verizon during the crisis of 9/11. Verizon's immediate response to the crisis was to affirm its commitment to its stakeholders, the first position of organizational renewal (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2001). Verizon made sure its employees were safe and accounted for immediately following the terrorist attacks. Once this was accomplished, the company turned to a second element of renewal, commitment to correction. Verizon's worked hard to restore service and ensure that its network would be even better than before the attacks. The company also helped to correct damage suffered by individuals and business partners. Commitment to correction is the second position of renewal discourse (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2001).

Renewal based on core values is the last position of renewal discourse. The point of organizational renewal came during Charles Lee's speeches following the crisis. It was here where Lee spoke of The Verizon Promise and how "before" 9/11 it was only words on paper. "After" 9/11 was characterized by Verizon's actions, it was these actions that helped Verizon learn the true meaning of values. Lee's speech seems to mark a period of organizational change by differentiating between Verizon "before" 9/11 and "after" 9/11. According to Hurst, crisis is part of an evolutionary process in which transformation and rebuilding are part of a new era (1995). Verizon "after" 9/11 indicates that Lee is signaling a new era by living out the values that were learned as a result of crisis. This creative rebuilding allowed Verizon to signal a new era in the corporate history through the use of language.

Out of crisis, often a charismatic leader emerges to express the values and beliefs of the organization (Hurst, 1995). Both during and after crisis, co-CEO Charles Lee emerged as this leader as he spoke of "The Verizon Promise" and how it was realized following the horrific events of 9/11. Lee's subsequent disappearance from the second labor dispute and his retirement shortly after silenced the primary spokesperson for organizational values. The impact he might have made is unknown. What the case does demonstrate is a clear shift in discourse when Verizon negotiated with the union.

Several other observations can be made regarding Verizon's renewal discourse following 9/11. Value-based discourse gives organizations opportunity to reinforce underlying arguments favorable to the organization's future position on issues (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994; Crable & Vibbert, 1983). Verizon's value premises following 9/11 centered on its employees "heroic acts" to restore service and aid in the recovery efforts following the tragedy. Verizon's values drove its employees to act with selflessness in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The company sacrificed profit to aid others, to do the "right thing." If those values were central to Verizon's identity, they should guide action in other spheres.

The values also formed the basis for criticism. As Verizon laid off employees following the economic downfall after 9/11, it is not surprising that union representatives characterized Verizon's leaders as the opposite of the 9/11 values discourse. Rather than

self-sacrificing, they were portrayed as greedy and driven by profit. Values are the basis for both praise *and* blame. Renewal discourse can contribute to both.

Prioritizing Various Publics with Organizational Discourse

By examining Verizon's discourse in a much larger time frame than the immediate crisis response, we are able to see a clear shift in priorities during the three time periods examined. In the period before 9/11, Verizon prioritized its customers first, followed by community, shareholders and employees. The Verizon Promise explicitly lists those stakeholders whom the company must make and keep promises in order to be a successful company.

During the crisis of 9/11, these priorities clearly shifted. By examining Charles Lee's speeches with regard to the immediate crisis response, there is a clear indication that Verizon prioritized its employees first. Following its employees, Verizon's discourse indicated they valued its customers as it quickly moved to repair service in affected areas. Once service was connected, the company launched a massive philanthropic effort aimed at helping the affected communities recover. Verizon's last priority was its shareholders as its discourse mentioned little in terms of financial impact on the company or upon stock value in the wake of crisis.

The period following 9/11 is marked by yet another shift as Verizon faced the economic realities of the post 9/11 period and its upcoming labor negotiations. Its discourse would indicate the company prioritized its customers in the face of yet another labor dispute. Verizon provided additional training for management members to assure that customer service would not be disrupted in the event of another strike. Next, Verizon valued its shareholders as it cited the poor market conditions as evidence of a need to lay off employees. Following its shareholders, Verizon prioritized community as the company defended its actions to fire employees. Lastly, Verizon's discourse would indicate that its employees were the last priority in the period following 9/11. When challenged economically, the first action Verizon took was to fire employees. Though later overturned in federal court as a violation of contract with the unions, Verizon's words and actions indicated that the company no longer prioritized its workforce like it had during the events of 9/11.

By examining the shift in discourse during the three time periods, this study has shown evidence that there are other factors which must be considered when gauging the effectiveness of renewal discourse. The cases of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods investigated how two privately owned companies were able to successfully engage in renewal discourse following devastating fires to each of the organizations (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). Verizon's situation is unique because the corporation is publicly held with stock ownership. Economic factors play important roles when responding to crisis events for publicly held corporations. Aaron Feuerstein and Milt Cole, the CEOs of both Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods, were able to make decisions much quicker and easier without the need to consider stockholders. Verizon CEOs Charles Lee and Ivan Seidenberg were forced to take into account the will of the stockholders when faced with economic hardships in the post 9/11 environment. The decision to fire employees seemed to go against the priorities set forth in the discourse immediately following 9/11. Future research into renewal discourse may also need to expand to take into account other factors such as economics as organizations respond to crisis. Economic concerns may constrain renewal discourse as an option if the organization cannot afford to rebuild in the wake of crisis.

Managing Multiple Identities

Public relations often seeks to define target audiences and construct messages which speak directly to those audiences. This case study suggests that there are multiple identities that exist within one particular audience or even individuals. The traditional approaches of crisis response seek to define and craft messages for a particular public based upon the type of crisis and blame attributed to the crisis, yet they often do not acknowledge the multiple identities existing within the same public (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). This study has shown evidence that these multiple identities must be taken into account to successfully communicate with target publics. When promoting organizational identification, there are many identities that exist outside the organization which produce, reproduce, and reshape these identities and compromise identification (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). This thesis has shown that Verizon's employees had multiple identities that resulted in different identifications before and after 9/11.

The multitude of identities at play was especially evident among Verizon's workforce. As the CWA tried to get Verizon union members who were also Verizon customers to sign an online petition threatening to switch to AT&T, Verizon responded by speaking to both their employees and their customers. Their acknowledgement of both identities allowed them to successfully reach a contract agreement to avert financial disaster by articulating the possible negative aftermath of such a petition. Verizon's discourse marked a turning point where the company effectively spoke to both these identities. Future research should take into account multiple identities when crafting messages for a particular audience.

Another very important distinction made between identities is that of Verizon management members and union employees. When the first strike occurred, Verizon executives praised the actions by management to step in to fulfill the obligations and duties of the striking workers. Then, during 9/11, the management/union split disappeared because the situation dictated a unified response. Once work returned to normal, the previous alignments and relationship patterns returned to govern behavior.

However, the crisis of 9/11 would also challenge some of the theoretical assumptions regarding relationship history. Crisis literature posits that without a positive preexisting relationship in place, an organization may experience difficulties when responding to crisis due to lack of support from stakeholders (Coombs, 2000). In the period following 9/11, both Verizon management members and union employees banded together to help those affected by the terrorist attacks. Although Verizon's relationship with union employees was experiencing great difficulty prior to 9/11, this did not seem to affect the employees' commitment to Verizon following the terrorist attacks. Can crisis situations be so unique that current theory regarding relational history cannot predict the organizational response? Were the actions and words of Verizon employees a sign of commitment to helping America, and not simply Verizon. The case presented here would indicate that current crisis literature must expand to adequately account for such unique crisis situations.

Limiting Factors and Further Research

There are several factors that limit the conclusions from the study. First, it is impossible to determine intent from discourse. Interviews would be required to know what any of the key players hoped to accomplish. By utilizing dual methodologies such as coupling personal interviews with the literature examined, a richer analysis could be produced. Secondly, it would be to the researcher's advantage to also study the discourse of the unions before, during and after the labor disputes. This study did provide union discourse presented in the news media to help contextualize the Verizon response. However, there exists a wealth of discourse available through union websites, internal union communication, and union print literature that was not examined. Further research should take into account this discourse to help contextualize Verizon's discourse with regard to the unions.

Concluding Remarks

Verizon presented a unique case with which to examine the opportunities afforded during crisis. By coupling renewal discourse with the theories of values advocacy and organizational identification, this study provided additional insight into Verizon's discourse before, during and after the events of 9/11. Verizon responded to the crisis with an immediate and unequivocal response both committed to its stakeholders and committed to rebuilding their badly damaged network. Charles Lee's speech articulated the true meaning of the company's values by reflecting on the company's efforts during the crisis. By analyzing the discourse of the crisis situation within a larger time frame, we begin to see a shift in communication priorities both "before" and "after" the events of 9/11. This shift in priorities raises questions as to the ability to engage in renewal discourse for a longer period of time within large corporations. Privately owned corporations, such as Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods, are able to make organizational decisions without regard to stockholders as the sole financial responsibility falls on the owners of such organizations. However, Verizon must take into account finances and other stockholder obligations when dealing with stakeholders. This study has also shown how organizational rhetors must take into account the multiple identities that exist when communicating with various stakeholders. Organizational crisis is unpredictable in some

cases. This study has shown how discourse plays an important role when framing the organizational response to crisis within a larger time frame of the organization's history.

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VITA

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Upon graduation, Nathan plans to practice in the field of Public Relations.