



Standing Up for Your Values, Avoiding Political Backlash

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Page Conversation*

Political and social movements have affected companies through employees, customers, investors, and their communities

Key constituencies expect companies to 'speak out' on these issues



What should an organization do?

- When should you speak out?
- How should you prepare and position your response?
- Should your company take the lead in driving the conversation, or is it better to partner with other organizations to have a more meaningful influence on the issue?
- Or, perhaps most interestingly, should you avoid speaking out at all?

According to a Weber Shandwick survey in 2024, 59% of senior executives agreed their company has a responsibility to speak out on societal issues.



Three questions to guide your approach:

1

Does the issue *align with your company's strategy*?

Look to mission, values, vision and strategy to determine whether the issue is relevant to the company and do not act against the strategy.

2

Can you *meaningfully influence* the issue?

This includes having the relevance (i.e. expertise, past exposure to the topic, etc.), resources, and willingness to invest those resources to affect the issue.

3

Will your *constituencies agree* with your speaking out?

Are there constituencies that disagree? Leadership must discuss and carefully weigh the relative importance of those constituencies to the business (e.g. a small customer segment with limited power vs. your largest investor).



Should you speak out? A framework for responses:

# of “Yes”	Does this issue align with your strategy?	Can you <i>meaningfully</i> influence the issue?	Will your <i>constituencies</i> agree with speaking out?
3	Speak out as a <u>leader</u> about the issue		
	Maybe speak out as a <u>follower</u>		
	Conduct research to understand risk/ consider firing stakeholders	NO	
2	Find a partner to increase influence	NO	Avoid being perceived as disingenuous
	NO	Consider evolving strategy – you may be overlooking an opportunity	
1	Do not speak out for now continue to <u>monitor</u>		
0	<u>Do not speak out</u>		



A deep-dive into the framework

To provide a deep dive on the “Speak Out” framework, let’s review a few recent events based on the following 4 factors:

- 1 Known/recognizable brands
- 2 Rich with documentation and nuance
- 3 Recent and noteworthy examples
- 4 Large scope and complex scenarios



3 YES's – Starbucks Racial Bias Training



“Speak Out” Framework – 3 YES

- ✓ Aligns with company strategy
- ✓ Meaningful influence on issue
- ✓ Constituents agree

Situation

- April 2018 – Philadelphia Starbucks Manager calls emergency services on two black men who were denied access to the bathroom and were arrested for not leaving the store

Starbucks Response

- Starbucks apologized
- Issued a new bathroom policy
- Closed 8,000 stores down for anti-bias training



No constituency agreement? – Reevaluate Partnerships

- “If you want me to do things only for ROI reasons, you should ***get out of this stock.***”
- In so doing, Cook ‘fired’ his stakeholders who did not agree with Apple’s stance on climate change.

“Speak Out” Framework – 2 YES, 1 NO

- ☒ Aligns with company strategy
- ☒ Meaningful influence on issue
- ☐ Stakeholders agree



Does this issue align with your strategy?

Can you *meaningfully* influence the issue?

Will your *constituents* agree with speaking out?

Cannot meaningfully influence? Develop partnerships



By partnering with organizations that have more credibility in humanitarian initiatives, Coca-Cola establishes credibility by association and uses their resources to have a bigger impact on a topic that is already part of their strategy

“Speak Out” Framework – 2 YES, 1 NO

- ☒ Aligns with company strategy
- ☐ Meaningful influence on issue
- ☒ Stakeholders agree

2 No and 1 Yes – Amazon and Abortion



“Speak Out” Framework – 2 YES, 1 NO

- ☐ Aligns with company strategy
- ☒ Meaningful influence on issue (for employees)
- ☐ Stakeholder agree

Following the leak of the draft Supreme Court decision on abortion, Amazon, the second-largest U.S. private employer, told its staff on Monday it will pay up to \$4,000 in travel expenses annually for non-life threatening medical treatments including abortions

2 Yes, 1 No – Meta’s reaction to 2024 election



“Speak Out” Framework – 2 YES, 1 NO

- ✓ Aligns with company strategy
- ✓ Meaningful influence on issue
- ✗ Stakeholders agree

Situation

- Meta is facing antitrust trial that the Trump administration may be able to impact

Action

- November 6th (day after election), Zuckerberg posted a congratulatory message on Meta platform Threads
- Meta announced an end to third-party fact checking program on January 7th, a move following Zuckerberg’s recent meeting with Trump

“Congratulations to President Trump on a decisive victory. We have great opportunities ahead of us as a country. Looking forward to working with you and your administration.” – Mark Zuckerberg, CEO



Takeaway: Teams should use this 3-question framework to determine when to speak out

1

Does the issue *align with your company's strategy*?

2

Can you *meaningfully influence* the issue?

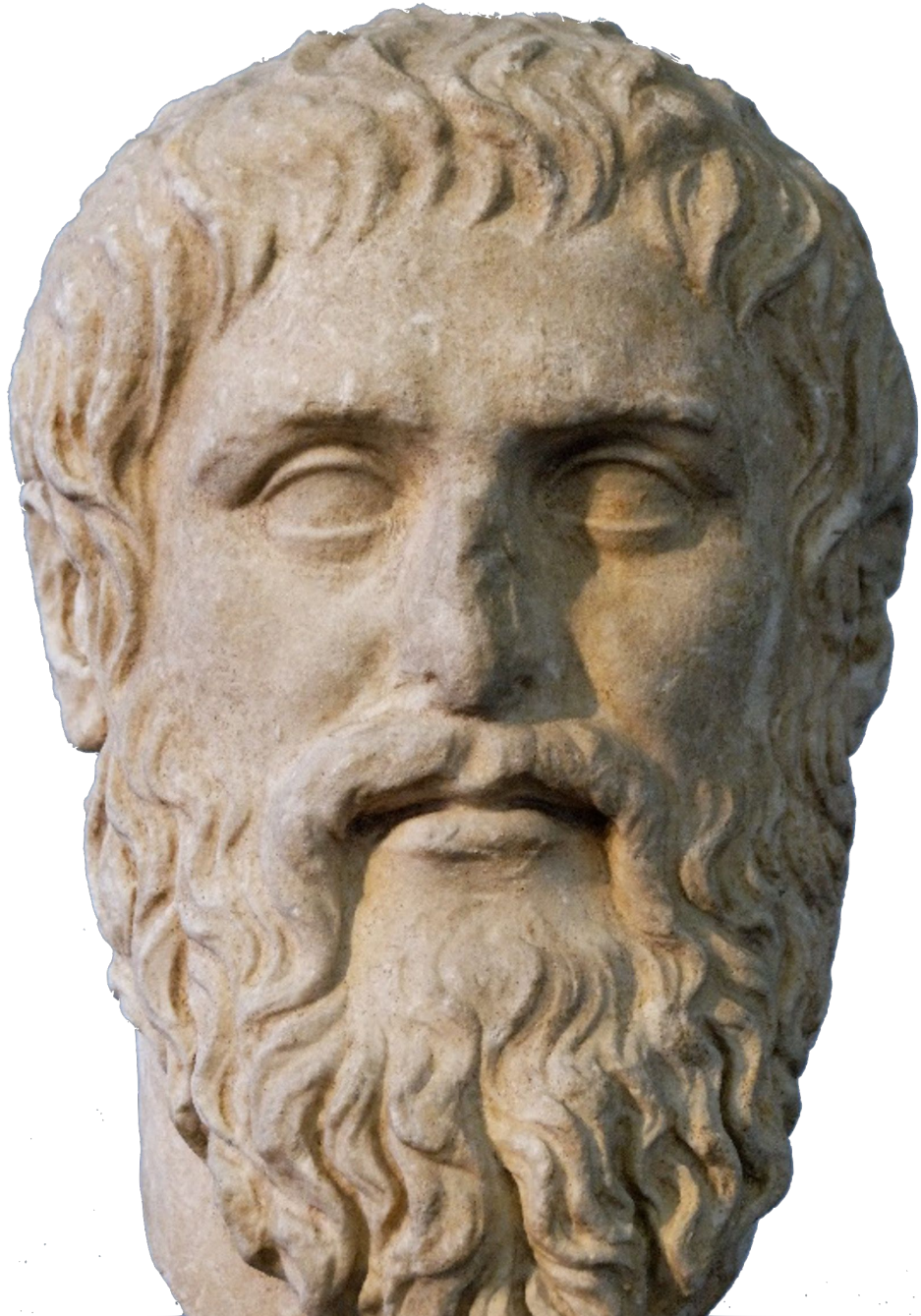
3

Will your *constituencies agree* with your speaking out?



- ❑ Equips teams with a framework that will help them determine when to speak out
- ❑ Offers a business case for how to speak out
- ❑ Enables companies to determine which issues are most relevant to their business to make a positive impact on society and the bottom line





*“Wise [people] speak because
they have something to say;
fools because they have to say
something.”*

- Plato