La Croix and BPA: Journalist Celebrates That She Caused Millions in Losses

By Alex Berezow, PhD — June 13, 2019

Journalism is thoroughly inept and corrupt. The quality of journalism has gotten so bad that I have whittled down my trusted sources to merely a handful. Even then, when it comes to science, these sources often get it wrong.

The reason is two-fold: First, journalists aren't experts in anything. Many of them went to journalism school, which taught them absolutely nothing useful. An editor at *The Economist* once told me that the newspaper did not hire journalism majors, preferring people who majored in "something real." The craft of journalism can be learned on the job. Besides, as science communicator Mary Mangan once wrote, "Every crank in the crankosphere has either a politics degree or a journalism degree."

Second, too many journalists believe their primary job is to "change the world" rather than "report the facts." If it seems like many journalists behave like partisans or activists, it's because they really are partisans and activists. Truth matters less than fulfilling an ideological mission. This attitude was summed up best by Michael Wolff [2], who once said, "If it rings true, it is true." Really, who needs facts when you have feelings?

Putting this all together, we shouldn't be surprised when a journalist goes on social media to celebrate when her (poor) reporting causes a company to lose hundreds of millions of dollars in market capitalization.

**Business Insider Journalist Celebrates a Massive Loss of Wealth**

La Croix is a popular beverage that I refuse to drink because I think it tastes like fizzy horse urine.
But plenty of other people like it, which is one reason why its parent company, the National Beverage Corporation, has a market cap [3] well over $2 billion.

Like several other high-profile companies, La Croix has been the target of a junk science lawsuit. The company was accused of using synthetic chemicals instead of natural ones as advertised, a distinction without a difference, as my colleague Dr. Josh Bloom explains [4].

Now, they are the subject of another lawsuit, this time revolving around bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical that is used as a liner to protect the integrity of cans. There are no known health effects caused by the tiny doses to which humans are exposed, and the FDA [5] declares BPA "safe." So, what's the basis of the lawsuit?

According to court filings reported [6] by Business Insider, the president of the National Beverage Corp. planned to lie about the BPA content of its products. Specifically, he allegedly planned to announce that the company no longer used BPA months before the cans would actually be BPA-free. When a high-level executive voiced opposition, he was fired. The lawsuit, then, is for wrongful termination.

There are two facets to this story: (1) The science of BPA; and (2) The conditions surrounding the termination of the employee. As already discussed, (1) is perfectly clear. Yet, despite the fact that the FDA has declared BPA "safe," Business Insider originally called the chemical "toxic." The article was eventually updated to remove that completely inaccurate descriptor.

The exact details of (2) are unknown. The only thing we know is that allegations have been made in a lawsuit. But Hayley Peterson, the author of the Business Insider piece, not only seems to have concluded erroneously that BPA is dangerous, but that the company is guilty of wrongful termination. How else can we explain her decision to go on LinkedIn and brag that her reporting cost the company 10% of its market cap?
How a Responsible Journalist Would Cover the La Croix Lawsuit

Instead of just cursing the darkness, I will attempt to light a candle. Here's how a responsible journalist would cover the La Croix lawsuit.

First, it would be discussed in-depth that the entire basis of the controversy -- namely, the presence of BPA -- is entirely misguided because it's a safe product. Whether the company engaged in wrongful termination is far less important than the larger discussion about BPA, which is used in many different products. Second, it would be made clear, if it is eventually found that the president planned to lie and that he acted illegally by terminating an employee, that this has no bearing on the safety of BPA. BPA is safe whether or not the president is a jerk. Third, a responsible journalist wouldn't go on social media and brag about how they destroyed hundreds of millions of dollars of wealth.

Essentially, I'm asking that journalists be competent, well-informed, and well-behaved. I know that's asking a lot in 2019.