

GUEST COLUMN

Why I'm Willing to Take a Stand



Jeffrey M. Weiner

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When a public service announcement on gun violence prevention at schools came out in September, I felt compelled to write about it in “Thoughts of the Week,” my

weekly personal blog.

You may have seen it. The PSA opens with kids doing what many of our children did this year on the first day of school, happily breaking out brand new school supplies—a backpack, a binder and noise-cancelling headphones.

Then you see a teacher trying to secure a classroom door in the background from an active shooter. Students flee and start using their new gear to protect themselves. A boy uses his new sneakers to run away from a gunman. A student breaks a window with his new skateboard. A little girl arms herself with scissors. Another uses a pair of new socks as a tourniquet. Sandy Hook Promise, a group that formed after the mass shooting at Sandy

Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012, created the PSA.

As a father with three children still in K-12 schools, it was heart-wrenching for me to watch this. In my blog, I mentioned how disappointing it was to see the lack of progress we’ve made in protecting children and the public in general from mass gun violence—and applauded a group of CEOs from companies such as Levi Strauss, Dick’s Sporting Goods and Uber, who came together and sent a letter to Senate leaders asking Congress to get tough on gun violence. I would have signed it myself if given the opportunity, as I shared in the blog.

Julie Lindy, editor of *Public Accounting Report*, reminded me of how important it is to express my point of view when she sent me a note asking me to write about my blogging in this piece. She shared a personal story of an experience with a gunman some years ago that permanently affected her father and her family. “The devastation caused by these crimes ... never really ends, and we as a society are robbed by them in uncountable and unfathomable ways,” she wrote.

Some leaders might be worried about sharing their views on topics like this with clients and other centers of

influence who might disagree with them. A few readers did chew me out and said I didn't know what I was talking about. I'm sorry they felt that way but I'm willing to take my chances. Readers know this is my personal blog, not the mouthpiece of our firm. If some people disagree with me, so be it. I firmly believe most of us can—and should—work productively with people who have many different views—including opinions different from our own. It's part of living in a diverse society built on freedom of speech. It's also the only way to succeed in life and business.

Take a look at what's going on in Washington right now. I firmly believe that our failure to listen, to truly hear each other, is the root of our nation's current dysfunction. I can only hope that things will change for the better, although that will take a herculean effort, not to mention a genuine commitment on both sides of the aisle. But I digress.

I'd like to see more business leaders speak out on the issues that matter to them and that affect their teams and their clients, our workplaces and the next generation that will be running our workplaces in the future—even if sometimes their views are not popular. Yes, we all have to be mindful of the messages we're sending to our key stakeholders, such as clients and employees. And CEOs of public companies obviously have to be mindful of their regulatory responsibilities.

Still, we're in a rare position to promote dialogue and, in doing so, to help bring people together. Gun violence is a workplace catastrophe that is preventable, but only if we actually discuss it and take steps to stop it before it starts. I believe leaders like myself have experiences and insights that can help move the conversation forward. In case you're wondering, gun violence isn't the only thing I talk about in my blog, though it is very important to me. I've covered a lot of topics in the six years or so I've been writing Thoughts of the Week. Some of them are very serious, and some not so much. I try always to leave readers with something to think about or even a laugh. I once wrote about a wave of tuba thefts that caught my attention. Another favorite was about the dumb mistakes people make—like the Secret Service agents who crashed a car into a White House barricade after a night of partying

and drove straight into an investigation of a suspicious package alleged to be a bomb.

Some of the key takeaways I've put out there recently include these:

- New York City should never have let local politicians and community organizers drive Amazon away from bringing 25,000 new jobs to Queens.
- College tuition shouldn't cost \$100,000—which is where it's heading as we say goodbye to meritocracy.
- Greed created the vaping crisis, and we need to hold industry leaders accountable.

That said, I don't write about every topic I have a personal opinion on. Knowing when to speak up and when to remain silent is part of being a leader. But there's no rulebook for it, and I've made a few mistakes over the years.

Readers set me straight when I railed against corporate greed, basically indicting a whole bank for wrongdoing. Shortly after that, a flurry of emails and calls from friends of our firm who work for the bank changed my mind. The gist of what they said was that the fraud was not a reflection of the whole institution and that there were many good people who worked there. I wrote a blog the following week apologizing to them and commending the board for taking difficult but necessary action.

That said, I have no regrets about any column I've written. I'm glad to have an opportunity to open a dialogue with clients and colleagues, and I have deep respect for the platform. I look forward to hearing more of everyone's views on the issues that matter to me. Even if we have some differences of opinion, I am confident that our common bonds as Americans transcend how we feel about the day's headlines.

Jeffrey M. Weiner is chairman and CEO of Marcum LLP, a national accounting and advisory services firm. Headquartered in New York City, Marcum has offices in major business markets throughout the U.S. and select locations overseas. His Thoughts of the Week column appears on Fridays and can be found at <https://www.marcumllp.com/thoughts-of-the-week>. ■