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John Casella: Enough Is Enough - A Call For Civility

John Casella
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I have been in the waste management business for 45 years. Our business is not for the thin-skinned. People say all sorts of things about you. Some of those things are reasonable opinions based on real concerns about the best way to manage waste. Many of those things are founded on simple misinformation. Some, however, are nothing less than malicious lies intended to do real harm.

Even being in an industry that can provoke strong public opinion, it has been rare in my career that I have witnessed someone do or say something that crosses the line that separates civility from viciousness. And until now I have never experienced the kind of sustained, malicious attack on our company that Jon Swan of Dalton has carried out for nearly a year.

Since last year, Swan has repeatedly accused us, among other things, of criminal conduct, of “predatory” and “profiteering” practices, of harming the environment, of collapsing the Asian market for recyclables, and of “scamming” the elderly. All of these accusations are false and are part of what Swan has described as a “war” on our company.

On April 7, though, Swan took his maliciousness to another level when he created and posted on the Internet a video portraying me as Adolph Hitler and Casella employees and other private citizens as Nazis. Yes, Nazis.

This is not just tasteless, to stoop so low as to compare me to one of the greatest monsters in history and our company to the Third Reich, a regime guilty of the genocide of millions, all in an effort to win a community debate. This is the outright, vicious defamation of our organization and our people.

It crosses the line into hateful, gutter politics.

We have watched as Swan has spread his poison about us for months, determined not to let it distract us from the essential work that we do every day. But he has shown that, like all people consumed by hatred, he will continue to sink into increasingly vile and harmful conduct until someone puts a stop to it. We have decided that it is time to do exactly that.

As a result, we have filed a lawsuit for defamation against Swan and the people and organizations working with him. In all of my years in business I have never sued anyone for defamation, but I have also never come across anyone as thoroughly nasty as Swan.

This is a man who once openly mocked Muslims and the Quran, who once cheered a domestic terrorist who flew a plane into a federal building, and is a clear example of what is assaulting our civic traditions today. Civility has been replaced with viciousness, and the ends always justify the means.

Of course, you might guess what comes next. "It was just a joke," he may claim. He may try to hide behind his right to free speech, and cry out that he's now the helpless victim of a predatory company.

All this aside, this is not a big corporation or a CEO picking on the little guy. This is us, as human beings, saying "enough." Enough of the gutter tactics and hate speech. Enough of the belief that it's okay to equate your opponents with one of the worst mass murderers in history.

We're not trying to take away his rights to free speech either. We think he should be held accountable for the poison he has chosen to spread, and for the line he has crossed from debate into defamation. There is a reason that the law does not protect malicious liars who harm others.

When someone has shown us there's no line he won't cross, which line will he cross next? Now is the time to stand up to vicious things, and to hold Jon Swan accountable for vicious defamation.

John Casella is chairman and CEO of Casella Waste Systems Inc.