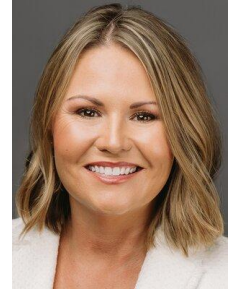


10 Practical Tips For Attorneys Navigating High-Profile Cases

By **Monica Smith** (October 21, 2025)

When a corporate dispute ignites public scrutiny, attorneys find themselves simultaneously litigating in the courtroom and the court of public opinion.

A stark example is the wrongful death suit filed in August against OpenAI Inc. and its CEO, Sam Altman. In *Raine v. OpenAI*, filed in the San Francisco County Superior Court, the parents of a teenager allege that ChatGPT encouraged their son's self-harm and ultimately helped him plan his suicide.



Monica Smith

It is believed to be the first case of its kind. It also underscores how a crisis can become the subject not only of legal claims, but also of public outrage and media attention. Cases like this illustrate a broader trend: Complex corporate litigation now often unfolds under the glare of a parallel trial in the court of public opinion, requiring attorneys to adopt a cohesive strategy for legal filings, leadership communications and narrative control.

The number of legal matters with national or viral visibility appears to be growing in tandem with the proliferation of social media, the 24/7 news cycle, legal influencers and citizen journalists. Social media accelerates public scrutiny, traditional outlets seek commentary and high-budget streaming services produce binge-worthy documentaries.

Communications teams may instinctively respond in real time, while legal counsel must guard against long-term outcomes. When either side works in isolation, responses risk overlooking key legal constraints or failing to understand how arguments play out publicly. A coordinated strategy is essential to protect both legal posture and reputation. Attorneys leading these cases must balance advocacy with strategic foresight, ethical obligations and communications counseling that extends well beyond legal filings.

This story mentions suicide. If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24 hours a day at 988 or online at 988lifeline.org.

The Dual Challenge of High-Profile Cases

High-profile litigation requires attorneys to operate on two fronts simultaneously. Every pleading, filing or procedural development has the potential to surface in headlines or trend online. Corporate executives expect their legal teams to anticipate and prepare for reputational fallout, as well as win the legal battle.

This heightened visibility also places those company leaders under extraordinary pressure, and some underestimate the difficulty of withstanding sustained public attention. Attorneys must therefore counsel not only on legal exposure, but also on the realities of the media cycle, guiding leadership to make informed decisions about whether to speak out and defend their positions, or to remain silent.

Another challenge lies in striking the right balance between confidentiality and transparency. Too much disclosure could put the legal strategy at risk, while complete silence can create a vacuum that fuels speculation. Unfortunately, in the court of public

opinion, parties are often guilty until proven innocent.

At every step, lawyers must also remain vigilant about ethical guardrails. Model Rule 3.6 of the American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct, which prohibits statements "that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know will be disseminated by means of public communication and will have a substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing an adjudicative proceeding in the matter," is designed to protect the fairness of proceedings while balancing the public's interest in transparency.

Counsel must walk a fine line: correcting misinformation where necessary, without making statements that could compromise a client's legal position or the integrity of the process.

Practical Tips and Checklist for Attorneys in High-Profile Cases

To translate these principles into action, the checklist below outlines concrete strategies for managing high-profile matters effectively.

1. Assess risk early.

At the outset, map out reputational risks alongside legal risks. Ask yourself: "If this filing appeared on the front page tomorrow, would we be comfortable with the framing?"

If the answer is no, that's an opportunity to adjust course before the document leaves your desk. Consider refining the language, removing unnecessary rhetoric or providing additional context to ensure the filing is accurate, persuasive in court and less likely to be misinterpreted by a broader audience.

In some cases, it may also mean coordinating with communications colleagues to prepare an accompanying media statement or internal Q&A document that ensures the narrative is grounded in facts.

Thinking through both the legal and public dimensions early allows legal teams to anticipate problems, rather than react to them.

2. Consider all communications channels.

When cases draw public scrutiny, the instinct is often to focus almost exclusively on external messaging. But internal communications are equally important and must align with legal strategy. Employees, board members and stakeholders will often be the first to ask questions, and inconsistent or unclear internal messaging can leak externally, creating confusion or undermining credibility.

Counsel should work with leadership to prepare talking points or FAQs that anticipate likely concerns. Aligning internal and external updates prevents contradictions, reassures staff and reduces the risk of unauthorized disclosures. In high-profile matters, every audience is a potential amplifier.

3. Establish a clear communication protocol.

Designate a single point of contact for media inquiries to avoid mixed messaging. Prepare holding statements for likely scenarios, recognizing that "no comment" rarely suffices on its own.

Counsel can decline to speak substantively while still signaling respect for the process and commitment to transparency, where possible. For example, counsel can say something like, "We respect the ongoing legal process and will not discuss details outside of court, and we remain committed to cooperating fully and sharing updates when appropriate."

Equally important, ensure that company leadership, the legal team and communications professionals understand what should never be said publicly, whether to reporters, on social media or at the water cooler.

4. Build a cross-functional response team.

Coordinate closely with in-house public relations, crisis management, compliance and internal stakeholders to ensure a response that is integrated rather than piecemeal.

Establish regular check-ins to ensure that messaging and strategy remain aligned as the case evolves.

5. Prepare your spokesperson for the spotlight.

Some company leaders may not be accustomed to sustained public attention. Provide media training for executives or individuals who are likely to be approached by journalists, emphasizing the importance of consistency and discipline in their responses.

6. Encourage ongoing positive messaging to balance the narrative.

In high-profile crises, the loudest messages dominate. Don't let the news be all doom and gloom: Encourage communications teams to continue spotlighting positive developments concurrently.

Whether it's corporate social responsibility programs, milestones, community outreach or progress updates unrelated to the litigation, these messages serve as a counterweight to crisis coverage. They remind stakeholders — and the public — that the company remains steady and purpose-driven.

7. Use court filings strategically.

Recognize that motions and complaints may double as public-facing documents. Reporters, investors, employees and even customers often read these filings — or at least the headlines they generate.

Draft with this broader audience in mind: Avoid unnecessary rhetoric that could inflame coverage, and ensure summaries or introductory sections clearly convey the company's position without exaggeration.

When sensitive information must be included, consider whether redactions, protective orders or careful phrasing can mitigate reputational harm while still meeting legal obligations.

In short, filings should be both legally sound and resilient to being quoted, excerpted or taken out of context in the court of public opinion.

8. Monitor the information ecosystem.

Set up alerts for case mentions across both traditional media outlets and social platforms. Where misinformation arises, be proactive in correcting it, but take care not to amplify rumors by overresponding. A measured approach builds credibility.

9. Guard the record, and reassure leadership.

Document all strategic decisions regarding communications to maintain a clear record of the rationale behind them. This record can be invaluable if decisions are later questioned by regulators, opposing counsel, or even internally by board members who want to understand why certain choices were made.

It demonstrates that the communications strategy was deliberate, ethical and aligned with legal obligations, rather than reactive or ad hoc.

At the same time, reassure leaders that silence in the press does not equate to weakness in court — restraint can be a strategic asset.

10. Maintain professionalism at all times.

Finally, avoid using inflammatory language in public statements, regardless of how heated the matter becomes. Anchor all responses in fact and law, not emotion. Professionalism is not only an ethical obligation; it is often the most persuasive message in the court of public opinion.

Conclusion

High-profile cases demand legal acumen, foresight and effective communication. Attorneys who prepare thoughtfully and collaborate across disciplines can safeguard both courtroom outcomes and corporate reputations.

In the end, every lawyer must remember they are trying two cases at once — the one in the courtroom and the one in the court of public opinion. Professionalism, restraint and consistency remain the most persuasive messages in both.

Monica Smith is the founder and principal at Integer PR.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of their employer, its clients, or Portfolio Media Inc., or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.