

'Rust' shooting: Alec Baldwin is 'hurting himself in unimaginable ways,' says crisis PR expert

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Various experts weigh in on Alec Baldwin's handling of Rust shooting. (Getty Images)

It's been two weeks since [Halyna Hutchins](#) was killed on the set of *Rust*, and there are still questions about how such a tragedy occurred. [Alec Baldwin](#), star and producer of the Western indie film, fired a gun during rehearsal that contained a live round. The actor initially issued a statement saying that he had "no words to convey my shock and sadness" about the accident. Baldwin's remarks about the tragedy have been sparse, but telling, since Oct. 21, the day of the events.

According to crisis and PR expert Eric Schiffer, Baldwin "broke the essential rules of managing a crisis: don't do any further damage."

"He is hurting himself in unimaginable ways, especially when the public right now is wondering why he ever allowed this to happen," Schiffer, chairman of Los Angeles-based firm Reputation Management Consultants, tells Yahoo Entertainment.

Baldwin was emotional when he spoke to the paparazzi last weekend, calling the production a "very well-oiled crew" as he expressed grief over the accident. He said he was instructed by the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office not to discuss the investigation. Days

later, however, he reposted a crew member's message calling claims of unsafe working conditions "bulls***." Schiffer believes Baldwin has displayed a "lack of self-control" during the two incidents.

"Baldwin is damaging his brand by continuing to defend himself in highly irregular ways that are painfully deluded and right out of the Donald Trump school of media relations," he adds. Schiffer would advise the actor to keep himself "away from the media."

"Make sure you're doing whatever you can behind the scenes away from the cameras to help the family of those that you've hurt and let the investigation reveal what it will. Don't pull over on a busy highway and give an interview that comes across as a traveling circus-like antic during a time that requires maturity and remorse," he adds.

One legal expert agrees that Baldwin is not helping himself by "trying to control the narrative of this case."

"While it is very difficult to sit back while involved in an active investigation, he would be best served to stop speaking directly about it and stop reposting," says white collar criminal defense attorney Rachel Fiset, managing partner of LA-based law firm Zweiback, Fiset & Coleman. "It does not help his case and it makes any helpful message he reposts look biased towards him or planned, which makes potentially helpful information less credible to law enforcement."

The message Baldwin shared was from *Rust* costume designer Terese Magpale Davis. In her Facebook post, she blasted crew members who walked off the set over safety and financial concerns as "jerks."

"I'm so sick of this narrative," Davis wrote, which Baldwin shared on Instagram. "I worked on this movie. The story being spun of us being overworked and surrounded by unsafe, chaotic conditions are bulls***."

Reposting messages like this "is an adoption of the post, indicating Alec agrees or wants others to see it," Hollywood legal commentator and [celebrity divorce lawyer](#) Christopher C. Melcher of [top family law firm](#) Walzer Melcher LLP tells Yahoo.

"That is a form of communication that is confusing because it is unclear why he is reposting it. He immediately expressed his condolences and met with Halyna's husband, which showed empathy," celebrity lawyer Christopher C. Melcher continues. "Alec Baldwin should either follow the sheriff's request not to speak about the incident until the investigation is complete or make his own statement rather than reposting someone else's."

Melcher believes there is a clear message that Baldwin needs to send.

"The statement he made to the paparazzi [last weekend] indicates that this was a freak accident because he cited to the history of using firearms on set without incident. That statement disregards the flagrant safety violations that led the Halyna's death. This would have been avoided had the armorer, property master and first assistant director followed movie industry standards for the use of firearms," he explains.

The investigation is focusing on armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, who was in charge of guns on the set, and Dave Halls, first assistant director, who handed the prop gun to Baldwin.

"Alec was handed a loaded gun and was told it was safe. Live ammunition should not have been on set. The gun and all dummy rounds or blanks should have under the exclusive control of the armorer or property master at all times," [celebrity lawyer](#) Christopher Melcher says. "It should have been checked before handing it to Alec and shown to him that it had no live ammo in it. There were multiple failures. If Alec is going to comment, it should start with an admission that this gun was not handled safely. Any attempt to explain away how a loaded gun was pointed at Halyna and Joel will show a complete lack of understanding of gun safety."

Schiffer says this is hardly the end of Baldwin's career.

"[His] brand has always tied itself to conflict. But this conflict involves something far different than tabloid headlines for spats. It centers around a loss of a human life from his actions when he was a producer and responsible for keeping crew members safe. It is a smoking crater on his reputation and will have an indelible impact on his brand negatively. But it won't be the end of his career. It will just impede it and suppress opportunities for a long time," he believes.