

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZidQAf8epE]

Even Fox News is berating BP for its callous and inapt public response to the oil blowout. And for good reason. As [Newsweek](#) says:

This hasn't been a good few weeks for Tony Hayward, the chief executive officer of BP. In the weeks since the huge oil spill in the Gulf began, he has struck an occasionally Churchillian tone: "We are going to defend the beaches," he proclaimed. "We will fix this." But the British leader he most calls to mind is Ethelred the Unready.

For CEOs in crisis, the playbook includes a proper appreciation of the gravity of the situation, a sense of calm urgency, and confidence-building rhetoric backed by confidence-building action. So far, Hayward is zero for three.

Is there any reason to care about this? Yes — two reasons, in fact.

One reason is that this bumbling is not a good sign about the quality of BP's management. That matters both for what it says about how well BP is probably handling the effort to contain the leak, and also because BP is a major corporation that does a lot of other things that affect people's lives.

The second is that appearances really *count* in politics. BP's PR disaster will impact future policy about off-shore drilling and maybe more generally about energy and environment issues. The effect may only be at the margin, but BP is making life easier for opponents of the fossil fuel industry.