

But of course the \$64 million question is this - who's going to pay for it and where will the money come from?

Reputation can be repaired

BORN TODAY

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Winona Ryder, US actress (1971-)

Her breakthrough came in 1988's *Beetlejuice*.

She followed that up with *Edward Scissorhands* and *Heathers*.

Was nominated for Oscars for *The Age of Innocence* and *Little Women*.

In 2002 she was found guilty of theft after shoplifting from Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills, California.



HISTORY

1929 - Prices crash on the New York Stock Exchange.

1967 - Musical *Hair* opens off-Broadway.

1982 - Trial of Lindy Chamberlain (pictured) ends with her conviction for murder.

1994 - A man armed with an assault weapon shoots at the White House.

1998 - John Glenn rides a US space shuttle into orbit at age 77.



WOLLONGONG means corruption. That's the unfortunate consequence of the investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the massive publicity.

There may be other places in Australia where corruption is as bad or worse, but no-one hears about them. Wollongong is the place stuck with the label. People in NSW now refer to Wollongong as a shorthand for local corruption.

What to do? The temptation is to put on a brave face, carry on and hope the stench goes away.

People do forget, but it takes a long time. Wollongong used to be known as a polluted backwater, a reputation derived from the steelworks and humorous references to Wollongong on The Aunty Jack Show. The reputation persisted for decades, even after pollution levels were greatly reduced and the city became more sophisticated.

Instead of just hoping the corruption stain will fade, is there another way? Peter Sandman is a consultant who advises companies about what is called "risk communication".

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Brian Martin



Maybe a company has taken a battering in the press due to a dangerous product, ill-treatment of workers or environmental damage. The instinctive response of managers is to close ranks, deny the problem is serious and attack those who criticise.

Mr Sandman says that is the wrong approach. He advises instead to be open about the problem - "the essence of risk communication is acknowledging all the bad news".

That scores points for honesty. Then say what you're going to do about the problem and follow up with open, transparent practices.

Sometimes, when a company is seriously tarnished, advisors

say it can be wise to embrace the problem. Accept the label and turn it around: do such a good job in reform that the company becomes known for its good practice.

So what would this mean for Wollongong? It would mean accepting and even adopting corruption as Wollongong's special problem. It would require key local figures owning up to dodgy practices - in fact revealing things that so far have remained secret.

It would mean turning around attitudes through a commitment to best practice. Not just pretend best practice - actual best practice.

Local politicians might refuse to accept any donations to their campaigns. Council staff might

set up processes for staff selection, training and evaluation that are best practice for anti-corruption. For policy making, new systems involving community consultation and scrutiny could be introduced that would give confidence in decision-making for even the toughest cynics.

This would be difficult to pull off because of the continuing vested interests in self-serving practices and point-scoring against opponents. But if it could be achieved, Wollongong's reputation could be transformed into a shining example of anti-corruption, of how to tackle entrenched problems and bitter infighting. Others would visit Wollongong to see democracy in action, to take the lessons home.

Wollongong's reputation could be turned around by owning the problem and bringing in best practice. The challenge is enormous, but a lot of people would get behind efforts to promote a Wollongong known for open and honest government.

Brian Martin is professor of social sciences at the University of Wollongong.