

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS – AN OVERVIEW

TYPES OF CRISIS

NORMAL ACCIDENTS		
Physical crises <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Industrial accident▪ Vessel fire▪ Groundings/founderings	Economic crises <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recession▪ Stock market crash▪ Hostile takeover	Personnel crises <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strikes▪ Staff exodus▪ Workplace violence▪ Vandalism
ABNORMAL ACCIDENTS		
Criminal cases <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Piracy▪ Kidnapping▪ Hostage taking▪ Terrorism	Information Crises <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Proprietary info theft▪ Record tampering▪ Cyberattacks	Reputation crises <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rumours▪ Slander▪ Logo tampering
NATURAL DISASTERS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Earthquakes▪ Floods▪ Tsunamis		

A crisis can be defined as an event that:

1. Potentially threatens your reputation
2. Is perceived negatively by the outside world

Regardless of type of crisis (fire, environmental, finance, etc) problems occur when there is a perception that the issue is a result of managerial wrongdoing, incompetence or both.

The most frequent means by which a business problem is transformed into a crisis is media attention which brings the issue into the public realm. Today, that media attention can be generated by anyone carrying a cell phone: passengers, crew, dock workers, etc.

For most organizations there are actually two crises: the operational problem and the public perception of the issue. If you fail at either, you fail at the whole.

CRISIS LIFE CYCLE

- Surprise
- Confusion resulting from a lack of reliable information and clear facts.
- Escalating flow of events, coupled with intense scrutiny from outside sources and continuous media pressure, which leads to a loss of control. The result is often:
- Panic, siege mentality and short term focus.

CRISIS PREPAREDNESS – the 4 R’s: Risk, Response, Reputation and Readiness

What can be done to minimise the odds of a crisis and the damage should one occur?

- Have a plan that includes a risk assessment
 - Although most CEOs acknowledge that crisis is as inevitable as death and taxes, few are prepared.
 - Ensure your crisis communications plan complements, or better yet, integrates with, the emergency response plan. Many industrial operations have plans to respond to technical crisis but not the ensuing media/public crisis
- Determine:
 - Who will lead the communications strategy
 - Who will speak
 - Who are the target audiences
 - What are the key messages in times of crisis
- Test the plan
 - Can the team follow it and make it work?
 - How can it be improved?
- Update the plan regularly

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Crisis communications is a responsible and ethical program to minimize damage to your organization’s reputation through active management of employee and public communication.

Getting started:

1. Define the real problem
2. Centralize your information flow – both incoming and outgoing
3. Assume a worse-case scenario for planning purposes
4. Never underestimate the need for communication

You will also need to:

- Appoint a spokesperson

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- Provide regular updates: make all available information public as long as it does not involve security or confidentiality issues
- Express concern, action and commitment. Accept responsibility for the outcome.
- Remember all stakeholders groups - not just the media - and think from the mind of the audience including:
 - Employees
 - Shareholders/investors
 - Regulators
 - Suppliers
 - Customers

SOME COMMON CHALLENGES

- Thinking strategically when required to respond to the immediate information needs of a crisis
 - It is critical to predict issues that are likely to arise and prepare a response
- Planning for the next operational period – if you are in a crisis you need to plan for shift changes and prioritized objectives must be set, evaluated and renewed as objectives are achieved
- Making certain the spokesperson is adequately briefed. Technical people need to make the time to prepare for media encounters – and often don't feel they have the time. But one 90 second story on a major television network can influence millions of people and shape their opinion of your company.
- Closing the loop