

Communicating in Crisis



A Guide to
Managing
the Message
When
it Really Counts

crisis: (kri-sis) *n* plural (ses)

"A people-stopping, show-stopping, product-stopping, reputation-defining event that creates victims and/or explosive visibility"



- James Lukaszewski

Or ...

"Any incident where the effectiveness of the first responders' action is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community."

- National Policing Improvement Agency, UK



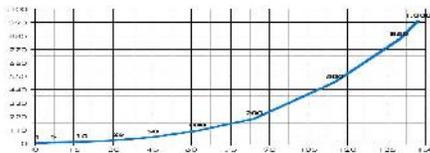
Crisis Defined

- Generated inside or outside of your organization
- Sometimes predictable, but most times they are not



Characteristics of a Crisis

- Escalating intensity



Characteristics of a Crisis

- Public scrutiny



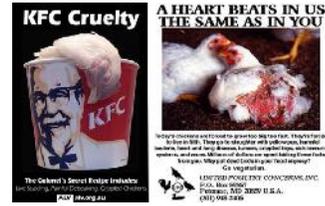
Characteristics of a Crisis

- Interference with normal operations



Characteristics of a Crisis

- Can jeopardize image



Characteristics of a Crisis

- Damage the bottom line



Or simply put ...

"As a public relations specialist, you learn early on that when *60 Minutes* calls, it's not going to be a good day."

Noelia Rodriguez
Former press secretary to Laura Bush



Crises Defined

- Tend to fall into one of seven categories:



Crises Defined: Product

- Tylenol
 - Fall of 1982, seven people killed in Chicago
 - Market share of Tylenol collapsed from 35% to 8%,
 - Rebounded in less than a year, a move credited to J&J's prompt actions and crisis communication



Crises Defined: Service Industry

- Southwest Airlines
 - April 2
 - Grounded 79 aircraft
 - More rigorous testing demanded



Crises Defined: Environmental



Crises Defined: Corporate Issues

- Enron
 - Late 2001
 - Accounting scandal
 - Shares dropped from about \$90 to less than 50 cents a share
 - Millions lost money
 - CEO and others jailed



Crises Defined: Employee Issues

- Atlanta Police Dept.
 - 3 APD officers charged in the shooting death of Kathryn Johnson after botched drug raid
 - All three convicted and jailed



Crises Defined: Virtual Attack

EPSILON TARGETING PURPLE@EPSILON MARKETING TECHNOLOGY EMAIL & DIGITAL SOLUTIONS RESOURCE CENTER

Epsilon Notifies Clients of Unauthorized Entry into Email System

ISLAND, TEXAS—April 4, 2011—Our clients' data is their lifeblood. When a breach of trust or a client's confidential data were revealed to an unauthorized party, it's a crisis. The situation that we've recently experienced is no exception. In an unauthorized access, we discovered that our email system had been accessed by an unauthorized party. We have taken immediate steps to secure our system and are working with our legal counsel to investigate the breach. We will continue to work with our legal counsel to ensure that our clients' data is protected. We will continue to work with our legal counsel to ensure that our clients' data is protected. We will continue to work with our legal counsel to ensure that our clients' data is protected.

For more information, please call 800-441-4499 or email epsilon@epsilon.com.

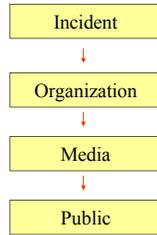
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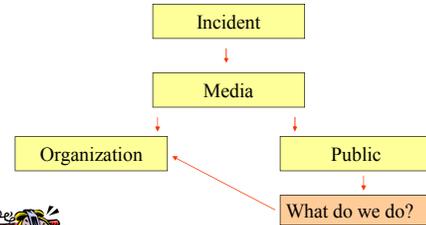
Crises Defined: Terroristic Acts



Normal flow of information



Reverse flow of information



Seven Stages of a Crisis

1. Surprise

- Call from a reporter or from the public is often the beginning

2. Insufficient Information

- Important to be in the right place in your organizational chart



Seven Stages of a Crisis

3. Escalation of event

4. Loss of control

5. Intense scrutiny

- sharks in the water
- What may not have been news before, will be now



Seven Stages of a Crisis

6. Corporate "siege mentality"

7. Short-term focus



What to Expect

- Multi-jurisdiction information sources are scattered
- Agencies are under pressure to release information
- Media is under pressure to perform



What to Expect

- Information sources are scattered/ many will talk
 - Politicians, “experts”, other agencies
- Competition among media sources will be intense
- Incorrect information will be disseminated



Crisis Communication vs. Media Relations

- Exaggerated responses by media and public
- Empowerment is key
- “Action” messages are important
- KISS principal to the nth degree
- Speed counts



Successful communication will ...

Get the **right** information ...
to the **right** people ...
at the **right** time ...
so they can do the **right** thing!



Expectations of the Public

- What you say in the first few hours, sets the stage for the entire event
- The public has high expectation of public officials as “experts” in crisis situations



Expectations of the Public

- They will be told what to do
- Officials will have answers immediately
- Officials will be coordinated and prepared



Four Simple Rules For Communicating in Crisis

- State the obvious
- Don't lie
- Present a unified message (JICs)
- Keep emotions in check, but not hidden



“The main thing is keeping the main thing, the main thing.”



Key Message Development

- When a crisis strikes there is no substitute for an open and honest leader who can speak in layman’s terms
- What you have to say is likely more important than the questions the media may ask ... so keep to your messaging strategy.



Key Message Development

- People will want to know:
 - Am I safe?
 - How will this affect me?
 - What should I do?
 - Who caused this?
 - Can you fix it?
- Media wants to know:
 - Who’s in charge?
 - How will you help?
 - Is it ‘contained’?
 - What can we expect?
 - What should we do?
 - Why did it happen?
 - What aren’t you saying?



Key Message Development

CAP and PEP Principles

- **CAP**
 - Concern
 - Action
 - Perspective
- **PEP**
 - People
 - Environment
 - Property/money



Key Message Development

- Acknowledge the incident
- Express empathy
 - “They will only care about what you say, when they know you care.”
- Answer the question, “Are we OK?”
- Convey message, “We are in control.”
- Convey message, “We will go on.”



Key Message Development

- Don’t over-reassure
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Acknowledge fear
 - People have the right to be scared
 - Acknowledge it’s “normal”



Key Message Development

- Three plain language messages
- Tell people what you will tell them
- Use numbers or short lists
- Use positive words
 - What **can** be done versus what **can't**



Key Message Development

- I don't know
- It can't be done
- No comment
- Didn't happen
- That's not true
- We won't release
- We can't talk about that
- The allegations are false
- This isn't our fault
- Do not ...



Key Message Development

- Develop three simple messages and repeat, repeat, repeat!
- Stay within your scope of expertise – never hypothesize
 - Manage your message
 - Repeat your message
 - Control your message (monitor)



"Block and Bridge"

- Technique to answer questions the way you want
 - Simple response to question or BLOCK
 - BRIDGE
 - Respond with your messages (preferably two)



During a Crisis

- If it's 'your fight', take immediate control of communication as the primary source of information
 - Remember, employees may be your biggest and most important audience at times ... they will take your message to the masses!



During a Crisis

- Find out what the public knows (or what they **perceive**, be it truth or fiction) and determine what they **need** to know.
- Be 'seen' in control



During a Crisis

- Monitor the media
 - Is your message getting through?
 - Rumor control
 - Fact versus fiction
 - Nip falsehoods in the bud
 - Correct errors
 - Remind media to be responsible
 - Watch for "PIO roulette"



Probable Message Killers

1. Mixed messages
2. Late release of information
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Lack of rumor control
5. Public power struggles



Potential Message Killers

- Not letting others speak for themselves
- Moving off point
- Not providing "allies" to media
- Not monitoring the media



Dealing with Victims

- Types of Victims
 - People
 - Animals
 - Environment



Dealing with Victims

- Why does media love victims?
 - Conflict/crisis
 - EMOTION!!
- Questions victims ask:
 - Why me/my loved ones?
 - Why now?
 - Who's responsible?

Dealing with Victims

- Victims feel:
 - Anger/betrayal
 - Frustration/helplessness
 - Inadequate/alone

Personal Issues

- Media try to elicit personal emotion
- You are not required to answer personal questions – you are representing your agency
- Use “WE” never “I”
- Personal opinion can make you the focus of a story



Other Agencies

- Media try to 'localize' stories
 - Katrina; Virginia Tech
- Attempt to stir up controversy
- Respect other agencies
- Appropriate to politely tell media it's unfair to compare agencies – refer to national organizations



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

1. Be pro-active
 - Anticipate
 - Be on the look-out for early warning signs of a potential crisis



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

2. Respond rapidly
 - Don't let attacks that appear to have credibility go unchallenged
 - But, pick your battles carefully
 - Use social media to get 'in front' of public at the same time as the media
 - Be “the source”



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

3. Frame the issue(s)
 - Put crises into perspective before the media do so
4. Manage the tone
 - Avoid sounding arrogant or unconfident
 - Always be professional, empathetic and courteous



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

5. Adopt a front door approach
 - Be open to the media
 - Open the front door willingly, or they'll kick in the back, or break a window
6. Reach out
 - Contact opinion leaders and credible third-party advocates to support you



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

7. Admit mistakes
 - Take responsibility
 - Best to eat crow warm ...
8. Communicate internally
 - Tell employees first before they hear it from the media



10 Tips for Communicating During Crisis

9. Be first with bad news
 - Get it all out and over with
 - Avoid negative news from leaking out slowly, prolonging the negative publicity
10. Communicate early and often
 - As soon as it happens, communicate quickly, accurately and often



After a Crisis

- Give people something constructive to do!
 - Provide people a way to make themselves feel useful
- Define an "end" to the crisis
- Rebuild, re-connect, hot-wash
- Don't forget! (Memorials)



Questions?

Suggested reading:
"Communicating from the Heart"

Richard Brundage

Judy Pal
10-8 Communications

949.910.2731

Jpal.usa@gmail.com

