The Crisis Communications Plan and Crisis Prevention

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3rd Face-to-Face
Crisis inventory

A crisis communications plan’s usefulness is directly associated with how specific it is to a particular type of crisis.

Although there are several items in the plan for each type of crisis for maximum effectiveness. For example, a restaurant chain may decide that food poisoning and fire are its important probable crises.

If food poisoning crisis occurs, the media will want, and the public relations department should have, the following items readily available and in its crisis communication plan:
Crisis inventory

- Recipes
- A list of ingredients stocked
- A list of vendors
- Kitchen precaution and procedures
- Names of contact numbers of chefs and all other personal handling food
- And a list of medical experts for consultation and as spokesperson
- If a fire occur the public relation department should have, in a specific crisis communication plan
- Information about its evacuation procedures
- Its policy on using nonflammable decor items
- The floor plan of the structure
- And fire experts for spokesperson
Common types of crises

- Acquisition
- Age discrimination
- Alcohol abuse
- Bankruptcy
- Boycott
- Bribery
- Chemical spill or leak
- Computer failure
- Computer hacking
- Contamination
- Data loss/theft
- Drug abuse
- Drug trafficking
- Earth quake
- Embezzlement
- Explosion
- Fatality
- Fire
- Flood
- Hacking
- Hurricane
- Kickbacks
- Kidnapping
- Lawsuits
- Layoffs
Common types of crises

- Merger
- Murder
- Negative legislations
- Plant closing
- Product failure
- Protest demonstration
- Racial issues
- Robbery
- Sexual discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Strikes

- Suicide
- Takeover
- Tax problem
- Terrorism
- Tornado
- Toxic waste
- Transportation accident
- Transportation failure
- Workplace violence
Developing the crisis communications plan

- Once likely crises have been identified, the crisis communication plan can be written. A crisis communication plan can be part of a larger crisis management plan (CMP) or it may be a stand-alone document to help public practitioners handle crises more effectively.

- Public relations during a crisis focuses on communications with the company’s publics.

- The crisis communication plan states purposes, polices, and goals, then assign employees to various duties.

- When a crisis communication plan is ineffective, it is usually because the type of crisis was not anticipated or because variables arose that were not anticipated. For example spokesperson or supplies may not be available.

- Crisis communication plan sometimes fails because it is out-dated.
An effective crisis communication plan should have the following components arranged in an order that the best suits the organization and the particular crisis or disaster:

- Cover page
- Introduction
- Acknowledgments
- Rehearsal dates
- Purpose and objectives
- List of key publics
- Identifying the crisis communication team
- Crisis directory
- Identifying the media spokesperson
- List of emergency personnel and local officials
- List of key media
- Spokesperson for related organizations
- Crisis communication control center
- Equipment and supplies
- Pregathered information
- Key messages
- Web site
- Trick question
- List of prodromes
- List of related internet URLs
- Evaluation form
Cover page

- The cover page of a crisis communication plan is similar to the cover page of a term paper. There are many ways of doing one as there are ways of doing crisis communication plan. It should be at least the data when the plan was written as well as revision dates.

Introduction

- The head of the company or organization usually writes the introduction.
- The purpose of this component is to persuade employees to take the crisis communication plan seriously.

Acknowledgement

- This crisis communication plan component takes the form of an affidavit signed by all crisis personnel as well as by key executives, indicating that they have read the plan and are prepared to put it into effect.
Rehearsal

- Dates of rehearsal for all crises recorded here. The most damaging and most likely crises should be practiced at least annually if not every six months.

Purpose and objectives

- The purpose statement details the organization’s policies toward its publics.
- For example, in a crisis, an open and honest disclosure with the media shall be stressed.
- The objectives are responses to the question, what do you hope to achieve with this plan? Objectives should not be overly ambitious in difficulty or number. For example, a company may adopt the following goals:
  1. To be seen in the media as a company that cares about its customers and employees.
  2. To make certain that all communications are accurate.
List of key publics

The key publics list should include all publics, both internal and external, with which the organization must communicate during the crisis. The list varies with organizations, but may include the following as well as others:

- Board members
- Shareholders
- Financial partner
- Investors
- Community leaders
- Customers
- Clients
- Suppliers
- Retirees
- Vendors
- Neighbors of physical plants (s)
- Competitors
- Key management
- Employees
- Legal representation
- Media
- Union officials
- Government officials (city, state, country, federal)
Publics fall into following categories:

- **Enabling public** – those public with the power and authority to make decisions: the board of directors, shareholders, investors, and key executives. Notifying enabling publics is priority.

- **Functional public** – the people who actually make the organization work: employees, unions, suppliers, vendors, consumers, and volunteers in the case of nonprofit organizations.

- **Normative publics** – those people who share values with the organization in crises: trade associations, professional organizations, and competitors.

- **Diffused public** – those people linked indirectly to the organization in crisis: the media, community groups, and neighbors of the physical plant.
Notifying publics

- To notify publics, a system must be devised for contacting each public, and that system should be described in the crisis communication plan.
- An appropriate means to notification must be decided on for each public. A newsletter, for example, primarily for the news media, not for other publics.

Identifying the crisis communication team

- The crisis communication team members, along with back-ups, should be preselected. The team manager is usually, but not always, the head of public relations. He or she has specific responsibility: communicating with top management, making decisions, drafting or approving major statements, and notifying the rest of the crisis communication team.
Crisis directory

- The company should prepare a crisis directory, listing all members of the crisis team, key managers in the company, and key publics or organizations, along with titles, business and home telephone member, cellular phone members, fax and e-mail addresses, as well as business, home and vocation addresses.

- The crisis team should be large enough to get the job done, but no larger.
Identifying the media spokesperson

- The media spokesperson must be selected carefully. To the public this person is the company or organization. Actually sometimes several persons are spokesperson. Usually the spokesperson will be CEO, but sometimes he or she may not knowledgeable about a technical aspect of the crisis.

- In all cases, at least one, and preferably two or three, back-up spokespersons should be selected in case the preferred person is unavailable at the time of crisis.

- An effective crisis spokesperson must have some position in the company, and appear rational, concerned and empathetic. The spokesperson must also be articulate, powerful enough, to make decisions, accessible throughout the crisis, able to talk clearly in concise sound bites and pleasant to the eye of camera.
List of emergency personnel and local officials

- If the crisis is a disaster or emergency, various emergency personnel need to be contacted. A list should be made of contact numbers for police, fire officials, hospitals, the health department, utilities and paramedics.

- If the crisis affects large number of people or is a threat to the safety of people, government officials must be contacted.

- This list should include contact information for mayor, governor, city council members, country officials and state legislators.

List of key media

- After key executives are called, the media are the next most important public to notify of crisis. A list of media contacts –
  - Newspapers
  - Television
  - Radio
  - Wire service

Should be completed and listed in order of importance.
Spokespersons for Related Organizations

- If an organization face severe crisis, there may be spokespersons outside the organization who may be questioned.
- Thus, it may be effective to make a list of these people might be and how to contact them, to meet with them so that they familiar with your company, and how they can reach you – use cell phones.

**Example: Metro Transit case (Chap. 8) – bus accident and shooting**

- News media interviewed the bus company, police, fire dept., hospitals, etc.
- Bus company learned from news media that a gun was found on one of the victims – he had to find the police to get the exact/ complete information – if he had the police contact numbers, would be easier.
Crisis Communications Control Center

- Location of the crisis communications control center must be determined in case regular office space unavailable.
- Example, after disasters/ emergencies, office are often damaged – no power (electricity, etc.) or inaccessible.
- A few possible sites should be listed, including the person to be contacted.

Example: Local religion authority offered its conference room, we must know:
- Who gave the permission?
- Who can unlock the door of the building/ room?
- Does the permission include use of electrical outlet, furniture, etc.?
- Does the site have adequate space?
Equipment and Supplies

Determine and list all equipments and supplies needed by the crisis team, media and visiting publics.

Example of Equipments and Supplies:

- Chairs and desks
- Bulletin boards
- Flip charts and chalkboards
- Computers and printers
- Telephones and faxes
- Telephone/Contact list/Media directories
- Battery-powered TV and radio
- Maps of the crisis area/building
- Company letterhead/pens/pencils
- CMPs and crisis communications plan
- Food and beverages
- Etc.
Pre-gathered Information

- Prepare and gather various documents that may possibly be needed during a crisis.
- Keeps identical sets of documents in various locations – to ensure availability.

**Types of documents that can be gathered in advance:**
- Safety records and procedures
- Annual reports
- Photos
- Company maps, branch office locations
- Etc.

- Skeletal news releases can be prepared/ written in advance with blank spaces left for data to be filled (e.g. relevant dates and names)
Sample of Fill-in-the-blanks News Release

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Date ___________________________

Contact: ___________________________
(name/phone number)

_________________________ (name of celebrity) DIES

(SEATTLE) ______ (full name and title) ________________________ died
today of _____________________ (cause of death) at _______ (time of
death) _________ at Swedish Hospital Medical Center in Seattle. He/She
was ___ (age).

Further details will be released by ______ (name of person to make
announcement—family member or professional contact)
_________________________ at a news conference
scheduled for ___________ (time of news conference), at Swedish
Hospital, Glaser Auditorium, 747 Summit Ave.

Figure 10.3. A sample fill-in-the-blanks news release.
Web Site

- Placing news on organization web site and pre-appointing web-masters to keep updated information on the site will reduce:
  - Number of telephone calls from publics
  - Amount of time put into crisis recovery

- News put on the web site should be brief or detailed, depending on the nature of the crisis.

- **Example, Airplane crash:**
  - First, merely acknowledge the crash
  - After families of victims are notified, only then the names be listed
  - Regular notices of progress in the investigation would be posted

- The concern of company should be expresses and prominently displayed.
- A statement from the highest executive is expected by the public.
- The web site also can be used as:
  - For keeping safety rules, security precautions, etc.
  - A bulletin board for informing publics
  - Opportunities to be Model 4: two-way symmetric company (Chap.3).
Trick Questions

- During crisis, what questions can you predict the news media will asked spokesperson? (check Chap.3)

- Example, trick questions for restaurant spokesperson:
  - Off the record, didn’t you know this might happen?
  - If the fire happen during lunch hour, how many people might have been killed?
  - Don’t you buy your meat from meatpacker who sold bad meat to other restaurant?
  - As at most popular restaurants, the work here is very fast-paced and stressful, right?

- Reporters may not ask intentionally to trick spokesperson, but if a question is not answered carefully, can make the spokesperson and the organization look bad.
List of Prodromes

- Prodromes are the warning signs that a crisis may occur. List these in the crisis communications plan.
- If any of the prodromes actually happened, log into the plan what the company did in response and when. This helps in answering media, “Did you have any warning that this might happen?”
- Example of a prodrome:
  - Normally good employee become unusually stress and irritable – management notice the problem and get help for the employee.
  - Several near-accidents in the organization parking lot – management investigate and determine there are confusing directional signs, and has the signs redone.
- Heeding prodromes can often prevent a crisis and show the organization concern in resolving problems.
- Prodromes must be regularly updated.
List of Related Internet URLs

- List of URLs of organizations/companies that may have information you need during a crisis.
- Include brief descriptions of the data available at the URLs.
- Example, a restaurant might list the URLs for:
  - National Center for Infectious Diseases
  - The state department of health
  - The Food and Drug Administration
  - The Center for Disease Control
Evaluation Form

- Evaluation is a crucial step in preparing an effective crisis communications plan – it helps:
  - determine what did and did not work
  - prevent and cope with future crisis

- Evaluation form should be developed and placed at the end of the crisis communications plan for later distribution of internal publics for input.

- Organization environment where suggestions are made freely will add to the effectiveness of evaluation and crisis communications plan.
APPENDIX A

Generic Crisis Communication Plan for a Large Company
Definitions
Communication Objectives
Roles and Responsibilities
Notification of a Crisis
Communications Procedures for Handling a Minor Crisis
Communications Procedures for Handling a Major Crisis
Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Activation
Identification of a Spokesperson
Guidelines for Spokesperson
Format for Briefing Someone Identified as a Spokesperson for Interviews/News Briefing

News Release

Messages for the News Media During Environmental Crises
Audiences During a Crises
How People Receive Information During a Crises

Tools to Use During a Crises
DEFINITIONS

Define what is Crisis, Minor Crisis and Major Crisis.

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

Explaining in the event of a minor or major incident on any of the organization sites, every effort will be made to communicate to appropriate people, which will be done by the communication personnel including gathering data and handling the media, to alleviate employees’ concern, minimize speculation by media and ensure the organization position is presented.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Explain the roles and responsibilities of the Crisis Committee and the communications personnel, such as provide a representative at the EOC, control the release of information and maintain contact with media.

The responsibilities for each communication role are outlines, for PR Lead, Incident Command Interface and PR Back-up.
NOTIFICATION OF A CRISIS

Explain the importance of notification, which is initiated from the area where a crisis has occurred or been identified. The person who discovers the crisis or incident will notify the relevant senior officer, and after evaluating the magnitude of the crisis, may notify the management through chain-of-command channels. Once the initial notification occurs, the communication representatives should notify the Corporate PR offices, and then follow the procedure noted on pages xx through xx.

COMM. PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MINOR CRISIS

List the steps (12 steps) need to be taken in handling a minor crisis, after receiving notification until fielding media inquiries.

COMM. PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MAJOR CRISIS

List the steps (19 steps) need to be taken in handling a major crisis, after receiving notification until fielding media inquiries and analyzing communications aspects of the incident and lessons learned.
An Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a centralized location from which emergency response during a very severe crisis is coordinated and directed. If the site EOC is engaged, all crisis communications would be directed from that point. Determine who will be placed there, and list of equipment and items that should be available at the center.

IDENTIFICATION OF A SPOKESPERSON

Notify after initial assessment of an emergency, appropriate spokesperson must be identified – list down the possible rank/position that can be appointed as spokesperson.

GUIDELINES FOR SPOKESPERSON

List 11 guidelines to be followed by the spokesperson.

FORMAT FOR BRIEFING SPOKESPERSON FOR INTERVIEWS

List items to be briefed and prepared in advance to the spokesperson or executives scheduled to talk to the media even if the interview is only a brief telephone call.
NEWS RELEASE

Explain/ List preparations on:
- Circumstances that may require a news release.
- Writing an initial statement for release
- Information appropriate for release
- Information that is not appropriate for release
- Writing a news release

MESSAGES FOR THE NEWS MEDIA DURING ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

List of points to be mentioned during media interviews.

AUDIENCES DURING A CRISIS

Identify and list audiences (2 types – people directly affected & people whose attitude about the company might be influenced - can break into 7 categories – employees, community, to management, govt. officials, customers, news media & vendors/ suppliers) that need to be addressed during crisis.

Explain the importance of disseminating information to those audiences.
HOW PEOPLE RECEIVE INFORMATION DURING CRISIS

List of sources of information for each audience to be considered in communication strategy.

TOOLS TO USE DURING CRISIS

Explain/ List preparations on:
- Crisis contacts
- Key communications/ PR contacts
- Incident information sheet
- Telephone log sheet
- Example of initial statement for release
- Checklist for establishing a news conference center

The above documents are recommended tools that each communications group can use or adapt to specific requirements, such as documenting information related to incidents and keeping track of media inquiries.
APPENDIX B

Crisis Communication Plan for a Nonprofit Organization: Example, Big Brothers Agency
I. THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

A. Objective
B. Select a Crisis Event
C. Designate a Spokesperson
D. Prepare a Fact Sheet
E. Prepare a Contact List
F. Training Re: Crisis Intervention
G. Networking
H. Select a News Site
I. Get Management Approval
APPENDIX C

Crisis Communication Plan for a Small Business:
Example, UDUB Burger
Crisis Prevention
What is crisis prevention

- Organizational members act on the warning signs/prodromes to prevent crisis from occurring
Basic crisis prevention process

- Two basic component – change and monitoring
- Change - making changes to eliminate or reduce the likelihood of crisis occurring
  - taking action to manage issues, reduce risks, and build relationships
- Monitoring – monitor changes to determine if warning signs decrease or otherwise
Issues management process

• How to resolve an issue without it turning to crisis?
• Involve issue identification, analysis, change strategy option, action program and evaluation
• Issue action focus on communicating organization’s position regarding the issue to the stakeholders
Issues management evaluation

- Compare actual resolution to intended resolution
- Success = how closely actual resolution matches desired resolution
- Risk evaluation aversion = level of risk before and after evaluation
Risk Management Aversion process

• Risk management – attempts to reduce the risks faced by an organization
• Strategies to reduce crisis potential
• Factors in risk management strategy – costs and technical
• Compare costs of risks (deaths, injuries, litigation) to costs of reducing risks (equipment or actual work to reduce risks) e.g. Ford Pinto)
Relationship building

- Quality of organization-stakeholder relationships determine the effectiveness and success of organization
- Guidelines for managing favorable organization-stakeholder relationship – staying close, credibility, meeting expectations
Relationship building – staying close

• Dialogue to create mutual understanding
• Two-way communication to enhance the reputation of organization
• Staying close allows organization to identify problems early and prevent problems from developing into issues
• Eg. Nike logo resembling Allah (1997)
Relationship building – organizational credibility

- Credibility – receivers attitude towards the communicator
- Effect on persuasive messages
- Credibility – expertise and trustworthiness
- Expertise – knowledge about subject
- Trustworthiness – communicator’s goodwill toward the receivers
• Credibility increases believability
• More credible more likely that stakeholders believe the organization story
Meeting expectations

• Meeting expectations/conforms to the expectations of stakeholders – legitimate
• Legitimacy implies favorable relationship
• Favorable precrisis organization-stakeholder crucial for crisis management
5. Organization is considered to have a right to operate
6. Organization understands the performance expectations held by various stakeholders
7. Organization demonstrates that it is concerned about its stakeholders
8. The organization meets most stakeholders performance expectation
Reputation

- Product of stakeholders’ perceptions of what it does and says
- Staying close cultivates favorable organizational reputation thru mutual understanding and respect
- Credibility is used as a broad measure of reputation or the building blocks of reputation
• Reputation is a stable concept
• In an organization with favorable reputation the stakeholders will ignore bad news about organization because stakeholders are unlikely to belief that a good organization did anything bad
• Crises, a form of bad news, is deflected by a strong reputation
Building favorable relationship

• Elements:
  1. Regular two way communication: to identify and shape stakeholders expectation
  2. Matching organization’s words to deeds
Organization-stakeholders relationship evaluation

- Scorecard to evaluate organization social performance
- Scorecards tracks what the organizations is doing to meet stakeholders expectation for organizations performance
- ETHIDEX (Clarkson, 1995) stores, and provides evaluation system for analysing social performance
All the best...