

Preparing for the Unknown: Managing Communications in a Crisis

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What organizations have the potential for a crisis?

Defining a crisis



A crisis poses a significant threat that can have negative consequences for an organization.

It can negatively impact:

- Employee or public safety
- Financial stability
- Reputation or credibility



Factors present in a crisis

- Risk
- Uncertainty
- Time sensitivity
- The human factor
- Potentially severe consequences

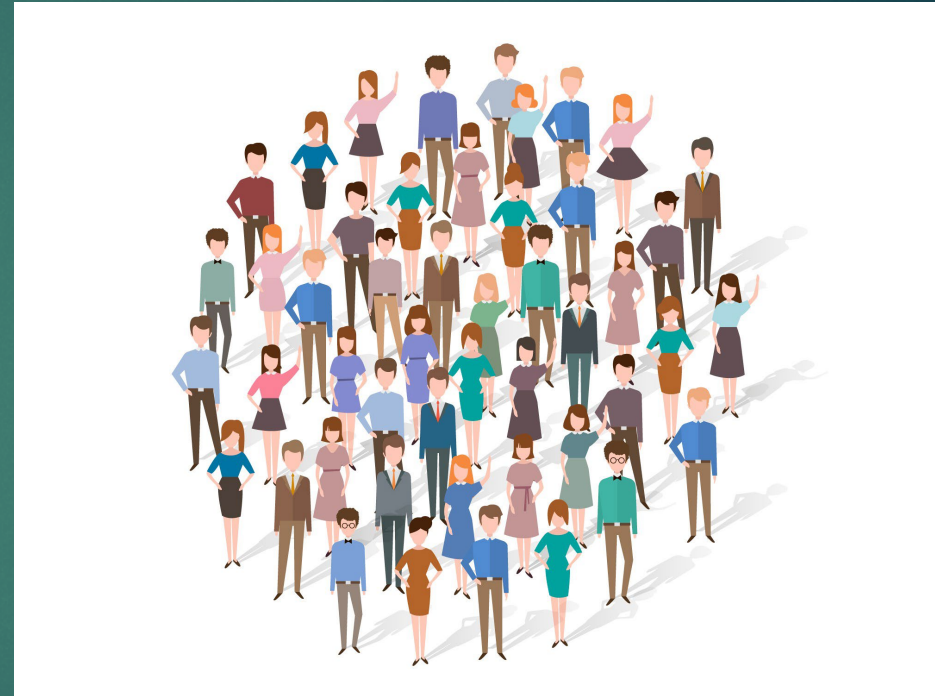
Communicating during a crisis



- **Controlled communication is essential**
- **Messages must be clear**
- **Employees are a very important audience**
- **Messages must be delivered with integrity and authenticity**

Key principles to success

- Be prepared
- Know your audiences
- Control communication
- Be proactive



Be prepared

- ✓ Identify potential crises
- ✓ Create and share a crisis plan
- ✓ Designate and train a crisis management team
- ✓ Test the plan and the team
- ✓ Anticipate questions, especially the hard ones

A written crisis plan



- Helps ensure success
- Clearly defines responsibilities
- Helps avoid inconsistencies
- Might include draft messages
- Should be updated regularly

Know your audiences

- ✓ Identify internal and external groups
- ✓ Understand how they best receive info
- ✓ Be aware of informal chains of communication
- ✓ Cultivate good relationships

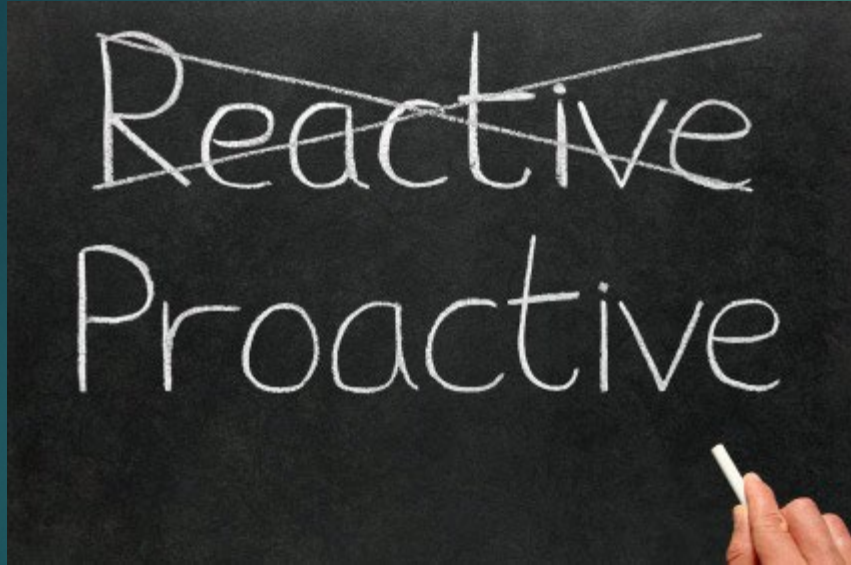




Control communications

- ✓ **Develop and share key messages**
- ✓ **Ensure consistent messages are delivered**
- ✓ **Identify communications responsibilities**
- ✓ **Ensure employees understand the media policy**

Be proactive



- ✓ Anticipate issues that might arise
- ✓ Seek out allies before you need them
- ✓ Monitor regional and national issues
- ✓ Address the crisis quickly

Responsibilities in communicating

- ✓ Communicate consistently and frequently using multiple channels
- ✓ Share all you can as soon as possible
- ✓ Allow time for questions and input
- ✓ Help staff and others understand how it will affect them

Responsibilities in communicating

- ✓ Admit when you don't know the answer
- ✓ Avoid sounding defensive
- ✓ Make leaders accessible
- ✓ Keep ahead of the rumor mill
- ✓ Be honest!

Communication channels

- Email, Slack, intranets
- Website
- E-newsletters, videos
- Social media
- Town hall meetings
- Meetings with community leaders and influencers
- The media



Case study:

Executive tries to poison a neighbor's dog

- The other partner wasn't notified of the arrest
- Animal rights group became aware
- Credibility and reputation were at stake
- Business viability was at risk
- Client loyalty was a key factor



Case study:

Bad behavior in public goes viral



- Dinner out resulted in severe reputation damage
- Client didn't understand the power of social media
- Case of illegal vs. unethical
- Our reputation with the media became very valuable
- Business took some big hits

Case study:

Crisis management for a national fraternity

- Reputation management services
- Frequent work on chapter related issues
- Message development and spokesperson services
- Proactively sharing positive stories
- Input on Jewish issues



Key takeaways

- No organization is immune
- Preparation is key to success
- Controlling the message is essential
- A written plan is a must

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