



Chapter 17: Crisis Management



In an uncertain world.....

- The only certainty is that people and organizations will find themselves in real trouble and require savvy counsel.
- Crisis, or “unplanned visibility,” can strike at any time.
- Expert crisis managers are among the most highly respected and paid professionals in public relations.
- Smart managers and CEOs value PR advice in planning for, and developing responses to crises.
- Helping to manage a crisis is the ultimate assignment for a PR professional.

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Societal issues

In these days of managed care and more competitive hospitals, health care institutions have accelerated communications appeals to the public to deal with individual crises.



If you can't do a thing about the way you look, call us.

Beauty is only skin deep. But if you're a battered woman, you know you're not alone. And you can make up, but it never lasts. You're not alone. One of every six women in America will be abused by a man at some point in her life. You deserve one better. So get a life. Call Rose Brooks? 24-hour advice line at 800-438-6804. Because you can't keep turning the other cheek.

 Rose Brooks

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Issues Management: being proactive

".....is the capacity to understand, mobilize, coordinate, and direct all strategic and policy planning functions and all public affairs/public relations skills, toward achievement of one objective: meaningful participation in creation of public policy that affects personal and institutional destiny."

W. Howard Chase, 1976

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Issues Management...(cont'd)

Is a five-step process that:

1. Identifies issues with which the organization must be concerned.
2. Analyzes and delimits (set the limits of) each issue with respect to its impact on constituent publics.
3. Displays the various strategic options available to the organization.
4. Implements an action program to communicate the organization's views and to influence perception on the issue.
5. Evaluates its programs in terms of reaching organizational goals.

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Issues Management...(cont'd)

Encompasses the following elements:

- anticipate emerging issues
- identify issues selectively
- deal with opportunities and vulnerabilities
- plan from the outside in
- bottom-line orientation
- action timetable
- dealing with the top

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Risk communication

This approach emerged in the 1990s as an outgrowth of issues management.

- Modeled on the concept that “perception is reality.”
- Intense emotion flows from lack of knowledge and understanding, creating risk.
- Frequent, forceful communication is needed to inform, educate, and minimize emotion.

Rule #1: Take the risk seriously!



Planning a risk communication program

1. Recognize risk communication as part of a larger risk management program. It is all based on politics, power, and controversial issues.
2. Encourage management to join the communications loop and help train them to deal with the news media.
3. Develop credible outside experts as news sources.
4. Become an in-house expert in your own area of risk to enhance credibility with the media.
5. Approach the news media with solid facts and figures before they approach you. Verify the veracity of data.
6. Research perceptions of your organization by the media and other publics to gauge credibility and help determine if your messages will be believable.
7. Understand your target audiences and how the news media can help you communicate effectively.



Managing in a crisis

What is a crisis?

“A crisis is a situation that has reached a critical phase for which dramatic and extraordinary intervention is necessary to avoid or repair major damage.”

Harvard Business Review



In any event.....

It is essential that crises be managed intelligently and forthrightly with:

- The news media
- Employees
- The community



What are the warning signals of a crisis?

- ❖ When crisis strikes, these warning signals appear:
 - Surprise (i.e. a natural disaster)
 - Insufficient information
 - Escalating events
 - Loss of control
 - Increased outside scrutiny
 - Siege mentality
 - Panic

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Planning for a crisis

As with much in life, the key is preparation.

Guidelines:

- For each potentially impacted audience, define the risk.
- For each risk defined, describe actions that mitigate the risk.
- Identify the cause of the risk.
- Demonstrate responsible management action.

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The watchwords for any crisis plan are:

- Be prepared.
- Be available.
- Be credible.
- Act appropriately.

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Communicating in a crisis

- ❖ In the court of law, attorneys have traditionally advised their clients to:
 - Say nothing.
 - Say as little as possible, and release it as quietly as possible.
 - Say as little as possible, citing privacy laws, company policy or sensitivity.
 - Deny guilt and act indignant (angry) about the charges.
 - Shift the blame, or if you must, share it with others.

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Communicating in a crisis...(cont'd)

- PR practitioners, on the other hand, operate in the court of public opinion.
- The most effective crisis communicators provide prompt, frank, and full information to the media.
- Follow the cardinal rule for public relations:
 "Tell it all and tell it fast!"
- Research shows that when people hear "no comment," 65 percent already believe you are guilty.
- ❖ "Bad news is a lot like fish. It doesn't get better with age." Jody Powell, press secretary for President Jimmy Carter

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Goals of crisis management

1. Terminate the crisis quickly.
 2. Limit the damage.
 3. Restore credibility.
- ❖ The quickest way to end the agony and rebuild credibility is to communicate through the media.

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Engaging the media

Handling the media is the most critical element in a crisis. Here are the “battlefield rules”:

- Set up media headquarters
- Establish media rules
- Media live for the “box score”
- Don’t speculate
- Feed the beast
- Speed triumphs
- Cable television rules

❖ Review Question:

- Define crisis, explain how PR practitioners should communicate in a crisis and list the goals of crisis management.