

Crisis Communications

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Crisis Communication Management-Types of Crises

- ◆ Emerging Crisis (i.e., Problems) – can be anticipated and minimized at early stages.
- ◆ Immediate crisis - often of the natural disaster or major emergency type (earthquakes, etc.).
- ◆ Sustained crisis – involves situations that may linger for years.

Crisis Communication Management

- ◆ Review and refresh a crisis communications plan periodically, especially when there is a change in personnel.
- ◆ Assign specific roles to team members.
- ◆ Train and retrain key personnel
- ◆ Rehearse with team regularly.

Crisis Communication Management – The Plan

- ◆ Develop a series of scenarios that reflect crises your organization may face.
- ◆ Pay particular attention to worst-case scenarios.
- ◆ Evaluate realistically the probability that the worst case will happen.
- ◆ Review current policies that may be affected.
- ◆ Draft Q&A for responses to possible crisis scenarios.

Crisis Communication Management – The Crisis

- ◆ Activate the crisis plan immediately.
- ◆ Define the crisis in terms of the triggering event-the cause (if known).
- ◆ Identify priority publics.
- ◆ Inform employees and your internal publics first.
- ◆ Demonstrate concern and communicate what the organization is doing or planning to do to solve the problem.
- ◆ REMEMBER: Anyone who works for the organization is likely to become a source, whether intentionally or not.

Crisis Communication Management – The Crisis

- ◆ Rumors can sometimes create more damage than the initial crisis.
- ◆ Have someone on call 24 hours a day during the most intense days of the crisis.
- ◆ Consider a “dark” website that is activated exclusively for crisis communication.

Crisis Communication Management – The Crisis

- ◆ Strive for a timely, consistent and candid flow of accurate information.
- ◆ The organization should continue to function as normally as possible, leaving it to the crisis management team to contend with the crisis.
- ◆ Set clear expectations and time for updates, and stick to them.
- ◆ Learn from the crisis experience. Review the cause of the crisis, how you responded and the outcomes.
- ◆ Update the crisis communication plan in light of the most recent experience.

Workshop Assignment

- ◆ Scenario followed by Chronology of events;
- ◆ After each “event” decide:
 - ◆ Level of problem/crisis
 - ◆ Necessary staff to involve
 - ◆ First steps to take & future expectations
 - ◆ Messaging

Scenario - 1

Listless Cruise Line while on cruise of the Western Caribbean Neutral Zone loses power, and is drifting aimlessly towards Cuba. First reports of what killed the power on the ship was an explosion in the ship's warp drive. The last transmission heard from the Chief Engineer was "Captain...I'm just an engineer not a miracle worker!" Facebook and Twitter are jumping with tweets and shares of stranded passengers and the phones in your office are ringing off the hook...

Chronology - 1

- ◆ (With evacuation impossible), passengers and the ship are running out of medication and food. A “Sink Listless Cruises” page is posted on Facebook with 3,000,000+ likes and growing....
- ◆ The ship is eventually towed to a safe harbor and passengers are disembarking into a waiting crowd of happy families, curious media and hungry lawyers....

Scenario - 2

It's "earning season" for law firms. Citibank and Wells Fargo have issued their reports on the state of the industry. Your firm is doing "ok."

While it carries relatively little debt, and you RIF'd partners and staff two years ago to "right size" (without much partner attrition), profits this year are below projections and the firm lost -- within the last 5 months -- a large high-profile (albeit failing) practice to a rival.

Chronology - 2

- ◆ The Managing Partner reports back to his close executive team, that while on a business trip to the firm's Dallas office, a Jr. partner awkwardly pulled him aside to ask how the firm was doing. He reports that he convinced him that things were fine....
- ◆ Within 2 weeks a member of the Managing Partner's close executive team (and head of the firm's lucrative regulatory practice) laterals to a rival. The receiving firm is really playing this up. Partners are beginning to ask a lot of questions.
- ◆ The firm's financials are leaked and they suggest a more raw interpretation of the firm's fiscal health than what has been articulated by management in the past – including funds being borrowed from staff retirement accounts. Recruiters are calling...American Lawyer is calling...the bank is calling....

Scenario - 3

It's "holiday season." Your firm is having a holiday party. It's staff only (no spouses). It's open bar.

Chronology - 3

- ◆ In a corner, near one of the less crowded open bars, three male heavy hitters from the lucrative tax practice have gathered to “interview” two new female associates. A waitress reports that one of the women looks uncomfortable.
- ◆ Before anyone can say anything, the group breaks up albeit with one of the heavy hitters leaving together with one of the associates.
- ◆ The next work day, the associate from the pair calls in sick. And over the course of the next couple of weeks her performance appears off.
- ◆ After 2 months she files a sexual harassment claim against not just one of the partners but all three....Media have taken note....

Scenario - 4

Your firm represents a large corporation in a business dispute involving a life saving medical device. The dispute centers on who owns the patent to develop the product (your firm's client or a basement inventor with whom your client had gone into development with). The device is being kept from the market (and from saving lives) until the patent issue is resolved.

Chronology - 4

- ◆ While the suit works its way through the litigation process, two children (one in Baltimore and one in California) die because this device was not available to save them.
- ◆ Your client, the large corporation, has been contacted by Good Morning America about the suit and has asked your firm's partners to do the interview.

Final Thoughts

- ◆ Something bad will always happen
- ◆ Where there is smoke there is usually fire
- ◆ Lawyer/Communicator/Leadership tension
- ◆ In the Court of Public Opinion everyone must take the stand
- ◆ The first with the most wins
- ◆ A crisis is an opportunity

More Final Thoughts

- ◆ Perception vs. Reality
- ◆ No Comment is a No-no
- ◆ Communicate with Internal Audiences First
- ◆ Fix the Problem
- ◆ Think Creatively
- ◆ Argue & Prove Your Case
- ◆ Educate the Media

Questions

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