

Media and Crisis Communication

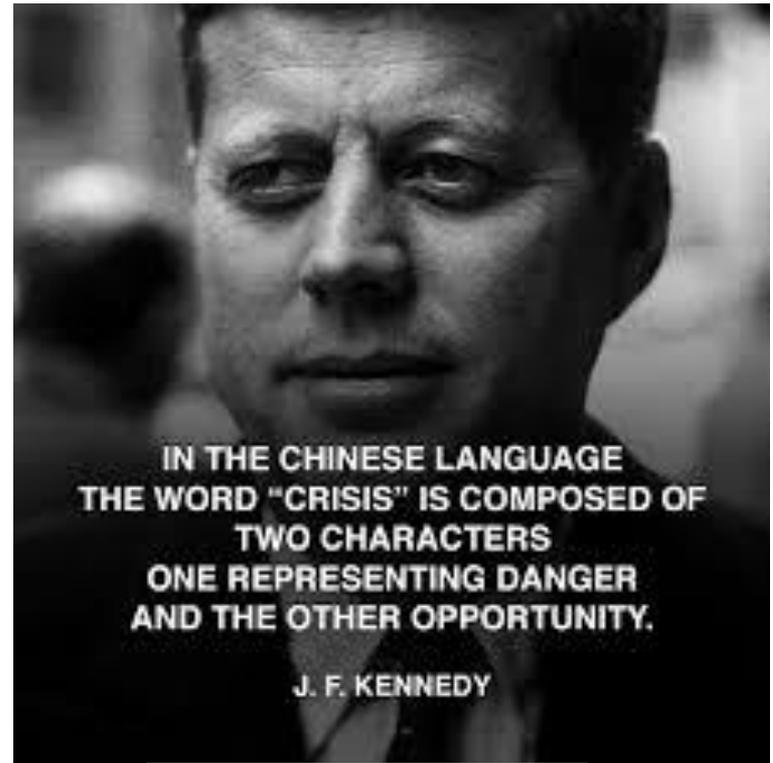
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Crisis Management

- In a crisis situation, you will react as you are organized and trained.
- Knowing what to do can be the difference between chaos and calm, or even life and death.
- The best safety policies are only as effective as the people who implement them.

Rick J. Kaufman, APR



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Danger Opportunity

Why is it so important?

- People remember how a crisis was handled longer than the details of the crisis
- Long-term damage to an organization is done before and after a crisis than during it
- Proactive crisis communications helps minimize damage, improve morale, encourages healing
- Need for communication grows the longer the crisis is prominent
- News media helps set community, region, national and world agendas
- News media has significant long-term impact on public perception and organizational reputation

Defining Crisis

A crisis is any event, issue or situation that **threatens to undermine the relationship between your school or district and one or more of its stakeholders**; or any event, issue or situation that may negatively affect the reputation of your school or district.

A crisis is a people-stopping, show-stopping, product-stopping, reputation-defining, and trust-busting event that creates victims and/or explosive visibility.

~ Jim Lukaszewski

Types of crises (Sudden vs. Smoldering)

- **Sudden (35%)** – (e.g., School Shooting)
 - Initial chaos; then “aftershocks”
 - School administrators can prepare for them!
 - Establish the facts and use consistent messages
 - Speed is crucial (possibly full-time coverage)
 - Updates every 30 minutes for first few hours, then hourly thereafter even if it means telling them there is nothing new to report
 - *“When the eagles are silent, the parrots begin to jabber.” – Winston Churchill*
 - Get it out, get it over

Types of crises (*Sudden vs. Smoldering*)

- **Smoldering (65%)** – (*e.g., School Threats Rumors*)
 - Much more likely to occur
 - More difficult to identify in early stages
 - Administration usually avoids, ignores or misunderstands the potential severity
 - Mismanagement or human errors are usually involved
 - Sometimes go away on their own
 - Reflect on the quality and ability of management, and are taken personally by administrators

Crisis...more specifically

- **Facilities** Crisis
Damage to a facility caused by an explosion, fire or natural disaster
- **Community** Crisis
Adverse conditions from a cause outside of your organization
- **Employee** Crisis
Includes death or injury of employees
- **Consumer** Crisis
Impact from a defective product within the organization
- **Image** Crisis
Includes unlawful or ill-perceived activities such as sexual misconduct, drug use, indictment or arrest

Preparing for a crisis

- Plan proactively
- Consider communications logistics
- **Anticipate** the need for extra staff
- Include contingencies
- Include first-responders in you planning
- Regularly **review plans** with staff

Responding during a crisis

- The first 30 minutes set the tone
- Gather facts
- Develop response options
- Select appropriate point person
 - * *may not be from your District*
- Share information ASAP – but with staff first
- Don't forget the media
- **DO NOT underestimate the speed of information**

Media during a crisis

- May learn about the crisis before you
- Will be on-site before you are ready
- May be adversarial
- See spokesperson as the “spinmeister”
- Want to assign blame
- Will seek out other sources

3 Cs of Crisis Communication

Cs = HOW you communication a crisis

- Control
 - We are in control of the situation
- Competence
 - We have competent professionals working on it
- Concern
 - We care
 - Here's how you can help
- It's not what you say, but *how* you say it
- Care + Concern = Credibility
 - Even over competence and expertise, dedication and commitment, honesty and openness *Source: Fleishman-Hillard, Inc.*

4 Rs of Crisis Communication

4Rs = WHAT you communicate in a crisis

(can safely say at almost any time)

Regret, Repay, Reform, Responsibility

- *“We deeply regret this has happened.”*
- *“We’re going to take care of anyone hurt by this.”*
- *“We’re going to do whatever we can to ensure it doesn’t happen again.”*
- *“We take full responsibility” (if you’re at fault)*
- Can be initial statements, even if you don’t have the facts yet

Communicating through a school crisis

- Fight emotion with emotion (e.g., anger at those who misbehaved or sympathy for those harmed).
- Tell child-focused stories
- Put a **human face** on the crisis
 - Humanize the school/district
 - Make it personal by helping people know why we exist and that we care
- Engage third parties
- **Consider all stakeholders**

Other Ways to Respond

- Use your **key communicators**
 - Staff, PTOs, elected officials, etc.
- Issue a statement
 - **A response that says nothing is still a response**
- Talk about your procedures
- Bottom Line ...
 - Simply the **perception of action by your district reassures parents and patrons**

Best practices in media relations

- Value Relationships
- Honor Deadlines
- Be **Accessible**
- Do Your Research
 - Know your topic or know what you don't
- **Develop Messages/Key Points**
- Identify the Appropriate Spokesperson
 - Are you directing or performing?
- **Know What's Best for Kids**

8 steps to successful interviews

1. **Research** (learn as much as you can about the topic)
2. Define your **communications goal**
“What are your questions to my answers?” – Henry Kissinger
3. **Anticipate** the reporter’s questions
4. **Practice** answering the questions
5. **Rehearse!** (listen to/watch yourself)
6. Set the stage/ground rules (live vs. taped, location, etc.)
7. Conduct the interview
8. **Evaluate** and learn for next time

What's in it for me?

When Developing Your Message...

- Remember radio station "W I I F M"
- Speak to the reporter's audience, not the reporter
- The audience is thinking, "what's in it for me?"
- Your answers should reflect their interests, not yours
 - *For example, if the story is about a fight at school, the audience will be concerned about student safety. Tell them you are, too, and that you will not tolerate this type of behavior -- even though you may think that's a "given" for you as an educator.*

Remember your home base

3 Ways to Answer a Reporter's Question

- Answer the question briefly, then bridge back to your message (when appropriate)
 - *Example: "Yes is it a lot of money, but we believe it's an investment in our kids' future."*
- I don't know, but I can find out.
- I'm sorry, due to _____ (reason), I can't answer that. But what I CAN tell you is _____ .
 - *Example: I'm sorry, due to privacy laws I can't discuss the specifics, but what I can tell you is ..."*

Bridging

- Techniques to retain control of an interview
- **Verbal bridges** allow an interviewee to:
 - Steers a reporter back to relevant topics
 - Move away from controversial, uncomfortable or unflattering topics
 - To end every answer to every question with a prepared, strategic message

Key Bridging Phrases

- What's most important is ...
- The real issue here is ...
- That's not my area of expertise, but ...
- Let me just add that ...
- That reminds me ...
- Let me answer you by saying that ...
- That's an important point because ...
- What that means is ...
- Another thing to remember is ...
- If you look at it closely, you'll find ...

Avoid Common Traps

- **Don't Repeat the Reporter's Words**
The question won't appear in the final version, but your answer will!
- **Don't Lose Your Cool**
A reporter may play devil's advocate just to get a colorful response but always get the last word.
- **There is No Such Thing as "Off the Record"**
If you don't want something reported, don't tell the reporter.
- **Don't Be Led Into Hypothetical Situations**
If the reporter says, "Assume that..." or "What if..." respond with: "I can't speculate on the unknown, however..." and restate your message.
- **Don't Fill (Awkward) Silent Pauses**

Remember the non-verbals

- Surroundings
- Attire
- Background
- Accessories
- Unintended Messages



In closing ...

“Go forth and do good things
for children!”

- *Bob Noyed, APR*

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