

Crisis Communications - A Few Basics

- Develop your plan for communicating with all parties.
 - Create a crisis communications team.
 - This should include the CEO, PR person, spokesperson, back-up spokesperson, attorney, security officer, Web designer, and other important individuals.
 - When the crisis occurs, you'll want to add eye witnesses, experts and other people to this team who can provide support and/or research.
 - Prepare a contact sheet so you can get in touch with your team quickly.
 - Introduce yourself to the spokespeople at the local fire, police, Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations that you deal with so you know who to contact prior to a crisis.
 - Create your message (simple, direct and honest).
 - Your message should be truthful and conveyed right after the crisis occurs.
 - Develop a list of media venues that may cover a crisis at your organization.
 - Develop a list of worst-case scenarios and tough questions.
 - How will your organization deal with each?
 - How do you want to be viewed during each of these scenarios?
 - How will your messaging vary for each circumstance?
 - Who are the various audiences who might be involved?
 - Think how your audience feels. Don't ignore the situation.
 - How will your organization deal with each of these groups?
 - Who can help you support your messaging with each of these groups?
 - Be prepared!
 - Keep current facts and research on hand to support your positioning.
 - Regularly review and practice your "talking points" with key spokespeople.
 - Where are you going to hold press conferences and media interviews?
 - Rehearse messaging right before talking to any media members.
 - Confirm that staff members know the correct procedures.
 - Supply information and review regularly.
 - Create a contact log so that all media calls, requests and other inquiries are tracked and responded to accordingly.
 - Be ready to respond quickly to the media 24/7 with appropriate Web content, press releases, information brochures, fact sheets, press conferences, etc.
- Talk to the Media – Control the flow of information.
 - Admit mistakes up front and explain what is being done to rectify the situation.
 - Never say "no comment," speak "off the record," volunteer unnecessary information, speculate, or try to hide the truth.
 - Dispel rumors immediately, and make complicated issues as simple as you can for reporters.
 - Obtain media training.