

## CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CHEAT SHEET

No company truly expects a crisis. But insurance companies often demand that you prepare for them. High rises, schools, and hospitals plan for natural disasters and terrorism, for example. And they have plans for communicating with their stakeholders and the media.

Your crisis may be less dramatic, but could be just as damaging. Perhaps the owner of the company gambles away company money in Vegas. Maybe someone becomes ill from food they consumed at your event. Or one of your key employees was arrested for downloading inappropriate material on the Internet.

You will likely have to handle a crisis in your career, so you need to know:

- Crisis management and damage control should be part of your portfolio.
- Aggressive, early and candid communication is key to success.
- Ideally, your response is the product of a well-thought-out crisis management plan.

### Crisis Management Fundamentals

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- Take control of the information flow with a single point of contact; only one media spokesperson.
- Keep employees informed so they “speak with one voice” and can respond accurately.
- Release your version of the story as soon as possible. If you tell it first, you define it.
- Be on the offensive not the defensive.
- Tell what you know, when you know it. Don’t wait to get all the facts; correct inaccuracies later.
- Share your bad news as soon as possible and get it behind you.
- Tell it like it is. Tell exactly what happened. Don’t dance around the issue or try to be clever.
- Tell people what you’re doing to fix the problem—tell it rapidly and widely, and provide details.
- Take your story directly to your constituents; don’t rely on the media.
- Do what’s right, regardless of how bad it is. You may get the benefit of the doubt.
  - Be ready; have a crisis management and damage control plan in place that includes: potential crises and their impact—and possible responses
  - established and ready-to-go communication channels
  - designated spokesperson(s)
  - subject matter experts and others who can help you in a crisis
  - procedures for controlling information flow
  - current media list and stakeholder (Internal and external) lists
- Update your plan regularly.

## Two Types of Crises

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1. “Surprise!” – an unexpected, unanticipated or unforeseen crisis.
  - Natural disasters, accidents (e.g. explosions, terrorism)
2. A “We-ought-to-have-been-smart-enough-to-see-this-coming-but-didn’t” – the result of bad decisions, bad planning, bad execution, stupidity, greed or unethical behavior.
  - Embezzlement, oil spills due to drunken captains, racism, abuse of funds, etc.

## Remember...

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- Be fast and thorough. Today, response time is measured in seconds or minutes, not in hours or days.
- Be confident in your own capabilities and be able to handle confusion, pressure and lots of uncertainty.
- Crisis PR requires mental and professional ability, creative and analytical skills, judgment, character, personality and stamina. If you’re not up to the task, hire a professional (like me)—immediately.