

How To Handle Communications When Crisis Hits: Part Two

There are few guarantees in ministry today. Unfortunately, one of them is the inevitability of a potential crisis occurring in our country, your community or even your church that could have a major effect on your congregation and even your reputation.

A crisis is an event, precipitated by a specific incident, natural or man-made, that attracts critical media attention and lasts for a definite period of time. Recent church crises include a devastating hurricane in Houston, a gunman in Nashville, or a public moral failure of a national leader.

When your church finds itself in the midst of a crisis, the ripple effects can disrupt lives and operations for the foreseeable future if public opinion is not properly addressed and stewarded.

Skillfully managing the perception of the crisis can determine the difference between an organization's life or death. In the pitched battle between perception and reality, perception *always* wins.

If this feels ominous and overwhelming to you, take heart. There is a solution – you can prepare for the inevitable crisis by a proactive and preventative method for preempting potential crises. Finding yourself in a crisis situation is bad; not being prepared when a crisis occurs is devastatingly worse.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Crisis Management](#) by Richard Luecke

All organizations are subject to crises. Leaders whose organizations encounter a crisis must act quickly, yet few leaders receive any formal training in this critical area.

In today's volatile work environment, avoiding disaster is more important than ever. *Crisis Management* helps managers identify, manage, and prevent potential crises.

Full of tips and tools on how to prepare an emergency list and how to utilize pre-crisis resources, this book shows managers how to shepherd their teams from crisis to success.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION - **Craft and communicate your response.**

There is no one who can speak effectively for you and your organization than you. If your organization finds itself in a crisis situation – and even more so if you are the victim in a crisis – both your constituents and the public need to hear your voice.

Failure to make yourself heard in a crisis is a very risky move, almost as much as failure to communicate at all.

It is inevitable that there will be a time in the future when you find it essential to take your

important and time-sensitive message to the public. In most cases that will involve communicating your message through both mainstream news media and social media platforms.

Those who reach out on behalf of your organization should be well briefed on not only what to say but what questions might arise and how those questions should be answered so that the entire organization is speaking with a single voice.

Communication through the media – newspapers, television, and radio – must be used to accurately frame the crisis in the public’s mind. Fail to deal with the media effectively, and your side of the story may never be heard.

Give intense attention to how you communicate with the public through the media. Your messages should be accurate and candid. They should also represent your point of view and include facts that support it. If you get your messages out early and often, there is a good chance that you will successfully frame the story in the public’s mind.

Give Them the Facts

One way to get across the story you want told is to (1) anticipate the questions that news reporters are likely to ask and (2) make a list of the five questions you would *least* liked to be asked and then be prepared to answer them. Be assured someone will ask those difficult questions. By anticipating media questions, you can form and articulate clear, complete responses that present your side of the story.

Use the Right Spokesperson

Who should be the spokesperson? In most cases it should be the identifiable leader, usually the CEO. When the crisis involves highly technical issues on which the CEO is not a credible authority, consider a team approach to speaking with the media. In this team approach, the CEO provides context and an overview of the situation. He or she will then ask a more technically knowledgeable subordinate to fill in the details – in nontechnical terms, you hope.

Segment Your Audience

Audience segmentation is the basis of an effective communication plan. First, segment your audience by interests. Once you have segmented your audience, you will have a better idea of the messages you need to develop and convey to each segment. You will need to develop different messages for different audiences. Just be sure those different messages are consistent and do not contradict one another.

Select the Most Appropriate Media

As a crisis communicator, you must match the media to the audience. Do this by first answering these questions:

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With which audience segments should I communicate?

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Which are the best media for reaching each segment?

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What particular information will each segment value most?

Richard Luecke, [Crisis Management](#)

A NEXT STEP

If you have a Crisis Management Plan (see Solution #1 above), make sure the individual in charge is following the above suggestions when dealing with the media following a crisis.

If you do not have a Crisis Management Plan, designate a senior team member or board member to be the spokesperson in a crisis situation. Once this person is selected, convene your leadership team and board for a working session to work through the above points. This process will give the designated spokesperson the relevant information needed to convey to the media in any future crisis.

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix 92-2, released May 2018

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