



COMMUNICATING DURING A CRISIS

Client injuries or death can sometimes result in negative media coverage, even if your agency has not done anything wrong. Is your agency prepared to handle a media crisis? If there is one lesson to be learned about a crisis, it is important to know that releasing timely, accurate information is critical. There are many textbook examples of how major corporations mishandled a company crisis simply because they ignored the problem.

If you have taken the time to create a crisis plan for your agency, you and your staff will have a much greater level of comfort going into crisis mode. Part of that plan must include communicating to internal and external audiences. Educate yourself on working with the media and how to handle situations internally. This will be a key component to successfully managing a crisis.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Be Honest

There is no hiding from the truth in a crisis situation. Denials and lies will only make matters worse. Try to put the crisis in the best light possible, distribute the information and be ready to announce actionable solutions to correct the problem. Be forthcoming with numbers regarding how many people were affected or how widespread the damage may be. Again, do not fabricate or diminish the truth.

Designate Only One Spokesperson

Designate only one person from your agency to serve as spokesperson. Your spokesperson will conduct all interviews and field all questions from the media or other public entities. Keeping this role centralized will help you avoid misinformation, inaccuracies and varying opinions on how the crisis started. Inform your staff that they should not conduct interviews or answer questions, and they must direct all inquiries to the designated spokesperson. Periodically reminding your staff to do this will benefit your public persona in the event of a crisis.

Stick to the Facts

Keep your message contained to the facts of the particular crisis, and do not deviate from them. Also, do not offer personal opinions or speculation, no matter how expert such thoughts may seem. This stance will keep you on track and in control of the situation rather than wandering into other

topics or territories for which you are not prepared. It will also help protect your agency against potential legal liabilities. In the event people interpret your publicly stated opinions as the corporate policy or position, they could use those statements to take legal action. Staying focused will keep media interviews and written materials in line with what you would like communicated, rather than letting the media guide you.

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