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As a business owner, you must be prepared for a [crisis](#). You'll encounter any number of setbacks ranging from mild dustups of confusion and frustration all the way up to category five storms that threaten your company's very survival.

Weathering a crisis successfully takes attentiveness, good planning, and well-developed business systems that are already in place. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to overcome your company's next crisis successfully.

1. Spot the crisis before it develops.

Of course, no one has a crystal ball to pinpoint a crisis on the horizon in all situations. You can, however, be proactive in designing and implementing systems that spot signs of impending trouble. Entrepreneurs need social listening tools on their side, as well as foresight and creative thinking.

You don't need that crystal ball, really, when it comes down to it. Simply give some thought to thinking about what could go wrong, and what that might look like. Then create at least a basic crisis response plan with the input of key personnel that can be implemented when necessary.

2. Use social media in an open yet controlled way.

Without doubt, social media has revolutionized company-to-customer communications. This is especially true with customer service. However, you can and should also use these channels to identify looming brand crises, as well as to respond to and manage them.

Use your brand's [social media](#) channels to calm rough seas, not fan flames of dissent. It's easy to take an aggressive stance and defend your brand's reputation when it's being challenged. But the better approach is to stay "LIT":

- **Listening:** Listen to what people say. Monitor conversations about and mentions of your brand.
- **Involvement:** Stay involved in discussions, even if it's just to say, "We're listening, and we are grateful for your input."
- **Transparency:** Whatever you do, definitely don't delete comments on your Facebook page, blog or elsewhere just because they're critical. Attempting to silence the critics will only backfire.

Always start by at least acknowledging the issue. Radio silence usually inflames already stirred-up emotions. It creates more drama. It's natural to want to refrain from commenting until you've gathered more factual information. However, even a statement along the lines of "we are aware of the issue and are conducting our own internal investigation, and we'll respond more when we've concluded that process" will help reassure your audience that you're on top of the matter.

Related: [How You Should Be Rethinking Social to Minimize Your Next Brand Crisis](#)

3. Practice active, deep listening during the crisis.

Listening deeply to conversations surrounding your brand can be very uncomfortable and even provoke significant anxiety. No one wants to listen to someone else criticize them harshly, even when you know there's some truth to the accusations.

Yet that's exactly the right move to make. Managing a public crisis is like a delicate negotiation, except that you're negotiating with a nameless, faceless mob. And the first principle for any skilled negotiator is to listen deeply and carefully to the other side.

Sometimes all it takes to turn an angry customer into a thrilled one is your full attention and an apology. Other times, the angry customer simply wants to be heard. If you can head off the stampede before it happens, everyone wins. [If you can't](#), at least you listened enough to know what's at stake.

Related: [7 Ways to Recover After a Reputation Crisis](#)

4. Get input from trusted mentors and advisors.

When tempers flare and criticism spreads, you may want to seek out counsel from your own advisory panel. Consider forming your own ad hoc council of "elders." Seek people who work in your field or have more experience than you (ideally, both). These folks can advise you more fully on your best next steps.

Relying on input from advisors means you may get conflicting pieces of advice. You'll need to process those conflicts in some way. Take into consideration the length and experience backing up those conflicting statements. Then, use your own intuition to make a decision on how to proceed.

Related: [Use These 7 Emotional Intelligence Tips to Be a Better Leader](#)

5. Know when to hire professional PR firms and attorneys.

In those fever-pitch conflicts when the fire is spreading far more quickly than you can put it out, hire a professional public relations firm. If civil or criminal legal exposure is a potential outcome, also retain the services of an experienced business law firm in your jurisdiction. Don't make it worse by attempting to control a situation that's already out of control.

In the final analysis, all you can do, and all anyone else can expect you to do, is to make the best decision you can. After that, be willing to [take responsibility](#) for the consequences of that decision. Take the time to listen to your critics, explore your options and seek the best advice you can before you make that final decision.