

CRISIS



CRISIS  
COMMUNICATIONS

**WE'VE GOT A  
CRISIS...WHAT'S  
THE PLAN?**

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*Resources to develop your crisis communications plan*

# WE'VE GOT A CRISIS...WHAT'S THE PLAN?

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Few circumstances test a businesses reputation or calls to question your competency as significantly as a crisis. Crises are inevitable and most of us are not prepared to respond and in a crisis situation, the need to communicate and respond is immediate. The impact of a crisis situation can severely affect your business and preparation, sound judgement and effective execution of a crisis plan are critical.

A large, stylized, light-colored word 'CRISIS' is visible in the background graphic on the right side of the page. The letters are bold and slightly shadowed, giving a 3D effect. The background is a dark grey with abstract, curved shapes.

# ANTICIPATE A CRISIS

Spend some time with key members of your team to brainstorm at least ten potential threats/crises that could negatively impact your business. Also, be sure to identify the type of threat or crisis and what level crisis it is.

**POTENTIAL THREAT**

**TYPE**

**LEVEL**

**Select All That Apply**

		<input type="checkbox"/> Employee/Internal <input type="checkbox"/> Public Safety/External <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation <input type="checkbox"/> Financial
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# IDENTIFY CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Establishing a crisis team is very important as part of the overall plan. The team will assemble and work together when the crisis occurs and will be critical to the management and resolution of the situation.

The team has the resources and authority to respond on behalf of the company and management – this includes board, staff, etc. Your team should assemble in advance of a crisis to do a “dry-run” to ensure that everyone understands their role and is comfortable responding accordingly if a real crisis arises. **Scheduling quarterly meetings to review the plan and discuss any changes or new potential threats is recommended.**

The team should include appropriate senior staff that represent the functions and responsibilities critical to managing the specific crisis. Some positions to consider (based on the crisis) include the CEO, Public Relations, Legal, Human Resources, Board Chair, Company Spokesperson and Crisis Consultant.

You may also need to add internal or external subject matter experts, including Technical Experts, Regulatory, Labor, IT, Security, Medical, Law Enforcement, etc.

Crises can happen at any time, so it is essential to ensure that you have accurate and up to date contact information for each member of the team. You will need to be able to reach and assemble your team quickly.

**NOTE: Your crisis team may be different for each threat.**

**THREAT:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>TEAM LEADER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PHONE</b>	<b>EMAIL</b>

**TEAM MEMBERS**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>TITLE/ROLE</b>	<b>PHONE</b>	<b>EMAIL</b>

**We will need to communicate with these stakeholders during and after the crisis**

**Select All that Apply**

- Employees/Families  Public Safety (Police, Fire/ Emergency Responders)
- Media Neighborhood/Community  General Public  Customers/Members
- Suppliers  Board of Directors  Shareholders

# IDENTIFY AND TRAIN SPOKESPERSONS

Identifying a spokesperson in a crisis is very important. Many assume that it is the company's top leader, but that is not always the case. The type of crisis and the severity of the crisis should dictate who is chosen as the spokesperson. Another consideration is training and comfort level of the person identified.

The crisis team should gauge the severity of the crisis. The CEO and top leadership should be engaged but may not be needed in every crisis as the spokesperson. In some instances, the crisis may involve the CEO, and in that instance, he/she should not be the spokesperson.

You'll also need to determine the level of knowledge of the spokesperson and what is needed. For example, if the crisis involves a financial issue, then the CFO may be the appropriate spokesperson. In this instance, the CFO and another spokesperson (PR rep) may work together.

Your spokesperson also needs to be the right person to represent your company and its brand/reputation. They must have the proper training and knowledge to deliver the information that you will need to convey to your stakeholders.

Your spokesperson should:

- Be able to articulate the issue and have knowledge of the company/industry
- Be prepared to convey trust, compassion and be relatable
- Have training in serving as a spokesperson in a crisis as well as media training. This person may be communicating with multiple audiences.

## Training

Media training and crisis communications training are vital for the spokesperson. If you have an internal Public Relations professional, this person may be able to train the spokesperson (if they are not the same person) or there are several individuals and companies that specialize in this type of training.

**NOTE: The spokesperson's info should be added to the crisis team form.**

# ESTABLISH AND COMMUNICATE PROTOCOLS

Establishing protocols in the event of a crisis allows everyone involved to have a common understanding of the steps involved in activating the crisis plan. The protocol can be developed and reviewed with key managers or department heads that will have critical roles in sharing information or responding to employees in a crisis.

Think of a fire or tornado drill or maybe even your company's safety plan. At certain times of the year these are reviewed with employees so that in the event of an emergency, they know what to do.

This information is shared at a high level but provides enough guidance to ensure compliance.



# IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Review the ten threats that you and your team identified and for each one, select your key audiences/stakeholders. These are the people that will need information during and after the crisis.

Your Stakeholders May Include:

- Employees/Families
- Public Safety (Police, Fire/ Emergency Responders)
- Media
- Neighborhood/Community
- General Public
- Customers/Members
- Suppliers
- Board of Directors
- Shareholders

**NOTE: Stakeholder groups should be added to the communications team form at the bottom of the page.**

# DEVELOP STATEMENTS

Effective communications during a crisis are critical. You must consider both internal and external audiences. Externally, having statement templates prepared in advance of a crisis allows you to respond to your stakeholders without delay. There are several types of statements that should be developed.

## Holding Statements

What information can you quickly share within the first few minutes of the crisis? Holding statements can be used for a variety of scenarios while more targeted messages are being developed. Using the "Five W's and How" as your guide can assist you in providing some necessary information.

**WHO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHERE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHEN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOW:** \_\_\_\_\_

Take the information from the Five W's and How and develop a few sentences that can be used as a basic holding statement.

### **How will the information be shared?**

Will you issue a press release, post on your website, hold a press conference or use social media?

**NOTE: All holding statements should be reviewed (if possible) by the team leader of the crisis team, company spokesperson and your public relations lead.**

## Proactive Statements

Identify information that is readily available to you for use. You can pull data from company collateral/marketing material, company history, previous positive press/media coverage, annual reports, etc.

## Reactive Statements

During a crisis, the media, public and key stakeholders can ask tough questions. You need to be prepared to respond. Take a moment to think about some tough questions that stakeholders may ask you.

Use the space below to identify the tough questions each of your stakeholder groups may ask you.

**Employees/Families** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Public Safety (Police, Fire/ Emergency Responders)** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Media** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Neighborhood/Community** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**General Public** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Customers/Members** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Suppliers** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Board of Directors**

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**Shareholders**

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**Develop an opening statement that outlines the situation, articulates the company's position and actions.**

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## **Communicating**

What methods of communications will you use to issue your statements and information? Consider both your internal and external audiences and stakeholders. You should consider communicating across several channels to ensure that your message reaches the intended audiences.

### **Internal**

- Employee Memos
- Email Blasts
- Company Bulletin Boards
- Company Internal Signage
- Company Cell Phones – Text Messages
- Office Phones/Broadcast Voicemail
- Employee Meetings

### **External**

- Website
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, etc.)
- U.S. Mail – letters to customers, etc.
- Press Release (sent to radio, television and news media – print and digital)
- Press Conference
- Personal Phone Calls
- Public Safety
- Community Meetings

# ASSESS THE CRISIS

When a crisis happens, your team will likely be focused on two areas: resolving the problem(s) that led to the crisis and communicating both internally and externally about the actions you are taking.

Ensure that your crisis plan and the individuals involved are addressing all of the tasks to bring the crisis to an end. It is important to have adequate information to act.

The crisis communications plan allows you to respond immediately while giving you and the team time to gather additional information and develop more specific actions.

# KEY MESSAGES

Once the crisis has been assessed, the team can begin to develop key messages that will be used and likely replace the holding statements used early on. Keep it simple. Develop three to five key messages for your stakeholder groups.

The key messages should be distributed to the team and the company spokesperson.

- Keep it brief
- Never speculate
- Clarify misinformation
- Demonstrate progress

# POST CRISIS ANALYSIS

You made it! Now it's time to gather the team and review how you handled the crisis. This also provides an excellent opportunity to review the crisis communications plan and make any necessary adjustments.

Most businesses think, "It won't happen to us," and that is certainly what you hope, but the cost of being prepared and never having to activate a plan certainly outweighs the risk of not having a plan.

In reality, most businesses will face some sort of crisis – small or large and knowing how to properly respond is critical to the survival of your business and your brand.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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