Managing Crises of Confidence: When Bad Things Happen

AAPA PR/GR Workshop
San Pedro, CA
February 2013
Review of Materials

- Plan table of contents
- Response/roles
- Information flow
- Checklists
- Procedures flow chart
- Sample messages, holding statement
- Transition phrases
- Budget: a reporter’s checklist
- The art of a Q&A
- Why good companies (and local agencies) say dumb things
- Biographies
Principles of Crisis Response

• Tell the truth
• Public and customer’s right to know
  • Why did this happen?
  • Could it happen again?
  • What will change?
• Generate confidence
  • Support ongoing decisions
  • Support when things go wrong
  • Support when voting
Phases of the Crisis: Triggers

- What triggers a crisis communications response?
- Types of crises*
- Initial response
- Must move from business as usual
  - Drop what you’re doing, anticipate, plan, implement, follow-up
  - Relentless focus
  - Resist temptation to place blame on a specific agency
Phases of the Crisis: Initial

• The most critical moments
• Notification
• Recognition: we do have a crisis
  • Not always obvious
  • Why is this the case?
• Pull all key players together
  • Role of elected officials, board
  • Communications: role of the PIO
Phases of the Crisis: Flow

- Incident flow chart
- Gather information
  - Many sources: list?
- Verify information
  - How do we do this?
- Develop crisis approach
  - Audiences, messages, tactics, follow-up
- Dissemination
  - Use as many communications tools as possible
  - Media relations
Phases of the Crisis: Checklists

• First 60 minutes
• First 90 minutes
• First half day
• End of day one
• Day two
• Ongoing
• Procedures flow chart
Audiences / Messages / Tactics

• Basic communications strategy:
  • Who are you trying to reach?
  • What are you trying to say?
  • How will you say it to each audience?
Audiences

- Consider everyone who will be impacted
  - Those most directly affected
  - Customers
  - Internal: employees, managers, commissioners
  - Opinion leaders
  - Business community
  - Elected leaders throughout region
  - Seniors, parents, neighbors
  - Investment community, analysts

- Be creative
Key Messages: What You Say

- What you want listeners/readers to think after the story
- Keep it simple: 3 to 4
- The port’s point of view
- Not optional!

Messages are the 50,000-foot view
Key Messages: How to Create

• What does the public need to know about the crisis? *NOT* facts!

• *Support* each message with:
  • Facts, anecdotes, testimonials, actions, results

• What is your purpose?
  • Inform?
  • Generate confidence?
  • Bring action?
Messaging *Can* Make a Difference

- Two retreat stories
- First: not well handled
- Second: better with messages
Tactics

- How do you get the message out?
  - Usual tools
  - Need extraordinary ones, too
  - Media relations
  - Face-to-face: best way to gain credibility
  - Social networking sites, Twitter

- Be creative!
Tactics: Must Have These

• One-page message document
• Q&A
  • External, internal
• Press release or fact sheet
• Other helpful tools:
  • 90-second video “story” for web, CATV
  • Background: 2-3 pages
  • Visuals
  • Testimonials: list of observers for media
Bad Press Coverage: Lessons

- Shoot from the hip
- PIO reporting relationship
- Timeliness
- Can’t control all info
- Failure to anticipate, plan, prepare
- “Why should we talk to the media” mentality
- Who talks to the media
- Inadequate spokesperson training, prep
- Unauthorized, unprepared, undaunted
- Communications advisors not involved
Phases of the Crisis: Ending

- Returning to business as usual
- Ready for the next one?
- Consider staying in contact on long-term basis
- Report back to targets on progress
- Be aware of who provided good judgment from within the overall response team
Building a Message Platform

• **Message #1**
  • Proof Point #1
  • Proof Point #2

• **Message #2**
  • Proof Point #1
  • Proof Point #2

• **Message #3**
  • Proof Point #1
  • Proof Point #2
Case Study

- Stuck to message
- National stage
- Transformed from defense to offense
- Became heroic
Break-out Exercise

• Choose one of six topics
  • Scenarios to be distributed
• Determine who is in what role
  • Elected official
  • PIO
  • Commissioner
  • Subject matter experts
• Devise communications strategy
  • Messages, audiences, tactics
• Determine media briefing structure
• Conduct media briefing