



Own the Narrative

Strategies for Local Government Leaders



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How Can We Own the Narrative?

Five Essential Steps to Lead Through Crisis

1. Gather Facts/Publicly Acknowledge Situation **ASAP**
2. Activate Crisis Communications Team
3. Communicate Early, Honestly and Frequently
4. Tailor Messages to Key Audience(s)
5. Monitor, Respond and Adjust

Agenda

Psychology of PR / Crisis | Pillars & Principles

Pre-Planning

When Crisis Happens

Crisis Winds Down

Crisis is Over

Five Essential Steps

Questions & Discussion

Local Government Crisis Case Studies

Questions & Discussion

PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND CRISIS

How people perceive, process, and react to uncertainty, threat, and loss of control.

Lack of information and visibility = fear of unknown

Consistency and predictability = feeling of safety and connection

Speed and transparency = builds and maintains trust

PILLARS | PRINCIPLES

Communications should [always]
reflect the five 5Cs:

Concern**
Commitment
Competency
Clarity
Confidence

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Relationships are Key:

Internal Community (all levels)
Residents & Other Stakeholders
Local Taxing Bodies/PIOs
Greater Public
News Media

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It's Okay to Fall on Your Sword

Admit Mistakes and Correct

Vulnerability + Truth + Transparency =

TRUST

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United Front Principle

Engage Your Entire Organization-First
(make them aware of, and included in the crisis information flow)

One Spokesperson, One Voice.

Consistency in All Messages/Mediums.
Information Epicenter is Your Website....

Creates a Circle of Protection

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It's a Race Against the Clock
Notifications/Information Flow
Order is Critical

Internal Organization (first)
Residents/Property Owners/Businesses
Other Stakeholders
Outside Taxing Bodies
News Media

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~~15 – 30 – 60 – 90 Minute Rule~~

10-30-45-60 Minute (or less!)

Beat the “Facebook Moms!”

- 10: Limited information
- 30: Elaborate on “sharable” details.
- 45: Spokesperson makes statement.
- 60: Press conference held (very serious situations, i.e. life/death, health/safety)

PILLARS | PRINCIPLES



IF a Press Conference Is Appropriate

Location/backdrop

Who Manages it?

A/V

Inviting News Media

Press Release (your messaging)

Maintain control – limit questions

End in timely manner

CRISIS PRE-PLANNING CHECKLIST

1. Spokesperson
2. Multimedia/multi-channel comms
3. Initial Responses-Boilerplates
4. Press Release Template/Media Lists
5. Plan for predictable, ongoing updates
6. Press Conference location & logistics (if necessary)
7. Practice, Practice, Practice! Mock Exercises



**A CRISIS IS
HAPPENING!**

A CRISIS IS HAPPENING...

1. Gather Facts/Publicly Acknowledge Situation **ASAP**

Get a message out on every single communication channel possible!

*“The City of Anywhere is aware of the **tragic accident that took place at 5th and Main streets**. Due to this evolving situation, information is limited at this time. City staff members are on the scene and are actively assessing the situation. As additional information becomes available, **all updates** will be published on the City website, social media pages and in our enewsletter. To access any of these communication channels, visit **cityofanywhere.com/communications**.*

Thank you for your patience as we manage this situation.”

A CRISIS IS HAPPENING...

2. Activate Crisis Communications Team

The War Room:

What is it, and who is there?

Define the Narrative

Vet the Narrative

Share the Narrative

Revisit the Narrative

A CRISIS IS HAPPENING...

3. Communicate Early, Honestly and Frequently

Take Your Community **With You** on the Journey

A CRISIS IS HAPPENING...

4. Tailor Messages and Timing to Key Audience(s)

The Order of Messages – and the Tone

Utilize Your Communications Partners (other taxing bodies)

If you don't have relationships now – begin to build them.

A CRISIS IS HAPPENING...

5. Monitor, Respond and Adjust

Assign Individual(s) to Track Social Media, News
Media – Any Other Information Sources

Revisit the War Room



THE CRISIS IS WINDING DOWN...

HOLD THE LINE!

THE CRISIS IS OVER

Reconvene War Room Group

Develop “During & Post Crisis Timeline”

Define Successes, Areas to Improve

OWNING THE NARRATIVE - RECAP

5 Essential Steps: Before, During & After Crisis



Successful crisis communications are really about what happens **before** the crisis hits.

1) Follow Pillars | Principles

Always consider the
psychology behind
crisis PR

2) Review Pre-Planning Checklist

Do what you can
(now) to prepare
ahead of time.

3) Work the Plan

Follow processes in
place – or establish
processes.
Hold the line.

4) Post Crisis Meetings

Review your actions-
continually fortify your
planning efforts.



QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION



PR CASE STUDY—LATE

Village of Anytown



Proposed industrial development prompts well-resident group to go on offensive.

PR CASE STUDY—ON TIME

Village of Buffalo Grove



Suburb: School District Hasn't Paid Its Share For Crossing Guards

By Steve Miller August 20, 2015 at 4:46 pm



Superintendent decides to stop paying Village for crossing guards after multi-year agreement, days before school started.

PR CASE STUDY — UNPREPARED

City of Edwardsville



Amazon facility hit by
an EF-3 tornado, seven
people were killed.



QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION



Thank you!

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