The 5 Stages of Crisis Communications

Eventually, your organization will be faced with a crisis – that’s a given. What’s not given is how you respond to the crisis. Be prepared to respond well, and you’ll emerge on the other side of the situation stronger than ever.

Note that much of your response to a crisis is dependent upon your preparation and planning beforehand. Having operational protocols and communication plans in place will make all of your communication easier.

With that in mind, here are the 5 Stages of Crisis Communications. While these stages tend to happen in roughly chronological order, that isn’t always the case. They may also take place concurrently.

1. **Identification**

   The initial stage of crisis communications is identification. During this stage, you are focused on identifying the nature of the crisis by asking the same questions that a reporter would: Who is involved? What happened? Where? When? Why? How?

   What you should do during this stage:

   A. Seek out credible information about the crisis.

   B. Identify the audiences you’ll need to speak to.

   It is not necessary to give definitive answers to the media or public at this time, because there is likely information that you don’t have yet. Focus on your goals – keeping people safe, investigating, etc.
2. Containment

During the containment stage, the focus is on keeping the issue within as small an area and as short a timeframe as possible.

What you should do during this stage:

A. Follow the safety procedures and communication plans that have been prepared in advance. Issue alerts about what will happen next.

B. Focus on protecting your people, and communicate that.

You should still refrain from giving absolute answers at this time. Communicate what you do know, and wait until conclusions are reached by investigative teams to offer corrective statements.

3. Communication

Your activity during the communication stage should focus on getting to as many people as possible with good, solid information.

What you should do during this stage:

A. Provide good information to those deeply affected and to their loved ones. They deserve to hear from you. Failing to provide them with good information will reflect poorly on your organization, and is one of the most common reasons that organizations are criticized in the wake of a crisis.

B. Distribute news to the public. Crises create headlines, and if your organization can assume a role as a credible spokesperson, you’ll be able to have more influence as to what those headlines will be.
4. Correction

The correction stage involves communicating the resolution of the crisis, and the steps you’ve taken to prevent future issues. While you may not have been able to foresee the crisis, you will likely carry some responsibility in the public eye based upon their perception of your preparedness.

What you should do during this stage:

A. Let the public know that correcting this issue is important to you. However, until your investigation is complete, you won't know what that correction will look like.

B. After the crisis, clearly communicate what you have done or are doing to address the current situation and prevent future issues.

5. Recovery

If your employees or the community don’t believe that you have their best interests at heart or if they think you are hiding important information, they will never trust you and you will not reach the recovery stage.

The recovery stage is the prize you get for moving through the first four stages correctly. Reaching the recovery stage means that people may remember the crisis, but they don’t hold it against you. People no longer fear the incident’s recurrence, and there are no longer negative connotations associated with your organization because of it.

Reaching the recovery stage of a crisis successfully will depend on the credibility you already have going into the crisis as well as how you handle the first four stages of the crisis as it is happening.
Thank You!

We hope that you found this whitepaper useful.

About Us

The Ammerman Experience is a communications skills development firm that does one thing and one thing only: we show people how to effectively and confidently reach and influence others through the spoken word.

We ask them to change the way they think about communicating, and show them how to eliminate comfortable, but outdated and self-defeating, communication patterns. For over 40 years we’ve trained thousands of people to face the media, manage a crisis, speak at public meetings and deliver memorable, effective analyst, sales and other business presentations.

We offer crisis communications training to help you and your organization prepare to communicate well, even in the midst of a crisis.

Contact us and tell us about your situation or needs. We’ll be happy to offer our perspective or develop a proposal for your review.

Phone: 281-240-2026
Online: ammermanexperience.com