

Crisis Communications

Practical tips for navigating challenging events

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What's a crisis?



Dupont Trail Derailment



Plane Downed on Ketron Island

Photo courtesy of John Waldron, CNN



Facebook Outage



hello literally everyone

10:27 AM · Oct 4, 2021 · Sprinklr

417.4K Retweets 139.4K Quote Tweets 2.1M Likes

📌 Pinned Tweet



We're aware that some people are having trouble accessing Facebook app. We're working to get things back to normal as quickly as possible, and we apologize for any inconvenience.

9:16 PM · 04/10/2021 · [Twitter Web App](#)

A photograph of a two-lane asphalt road with yellow double lines. A large section of the road has collapsed into a deep, exposed earth embankment, illustrating a crisis. The surrounding area is covered in green vegetation.

Many crises start out as issues that can and should be anticipated

A crisis versus an issue

Best practices overview

1. Anticipate crises
2. Identify your crisis communications team
3. Identify and train spokespersons
4. Develop holding statements
5. Establish notification and monitoring systems
6. Identify and know your stakeholders

Before a Crisis Hits





Start with preparing for likely scenarios

- Select the most likely or most damaging
- Draft initial messaging to tide you over



Beyond Natural Disasters

- Death of the executive
- Financial malfeasance
- Workplace violence



Latent Negatives

Predictable crises based on what you do

- REI sells equipment that can kill you
- Banking is vulnerable to customer data breaches, lending issues
- Geography can dictate
 - We are currently meeting in the shadow of an active volcano!

Anticipate crises

1. Accidents, Violence & Other Disasters
 - Act of Violence_with injuries_death
 - Auto Accident_Employee misconduct
 - Auto Accident_Major_No injures
 - Automobile Accident with injuries_death
 - BioTerrorism with Injury_Death
 - Bomb Exploded_No injuries
 - Bomb Exploded_with injuries or death
 - Bomb Threat or Bomb Found
 - Hazardous Materials Accident_with injury_death
 - Haz-Mat_Emergency
 - Human_Hostage_Incident
 - Human_Hostage_Incident_Injuries
 - Major_Power_Outage
 - Potential Disease or Illness
 - Riots-Internal or External
 - Site-specific_Non-Natural_Disaster
 - Site-specific_Non-Natural_Disaster_Injuries
 - Train_or_Plane Accident
 - Violence at Facility

Anticipate crises

2. Donations Issues
 - Donation of Suspicious Item
 - Donations-Employee Theft
 - Donations – Negative Perception
 - Donations Left Outside_Theft
 - Donations Left Outside_Ruin

3. Employee & HR Issues
 - Diversity Issues
 - EEO_Lawsuit
 - Embezzlement_Theft_Fraud
 - Employee Job_Related Injury_Death
 - Employee Non-Work Fatality
 - Employee Unrest
 - Employee_Applicant Discrimination
 - Employee_Misconduct
 - Employing Undocumented_Immigrants
 - Picket Line

Anticipate crises

4. Financial or Fundraising Issues
 - Criminal_Activity_Fraud
 - Financial_IRS Issues
 - Financial Impropriety
 - Financial Mismanagement
5. Natural Disasters
 - After_during_natural_disaster_weather_no injuries
 - After_natural_disaster_weather_injuries or death
 - Earthquake_no_injuries
 - Earthquake_with_injuries_death
 - Preceding_natural_disaster_weather_event
6. Operational & Technology Issues
 - Banking_Technology_Failure
 - Data_Theft-Identity_Theft
 - Technology_Failure_Data_Loss

Anticipate crises

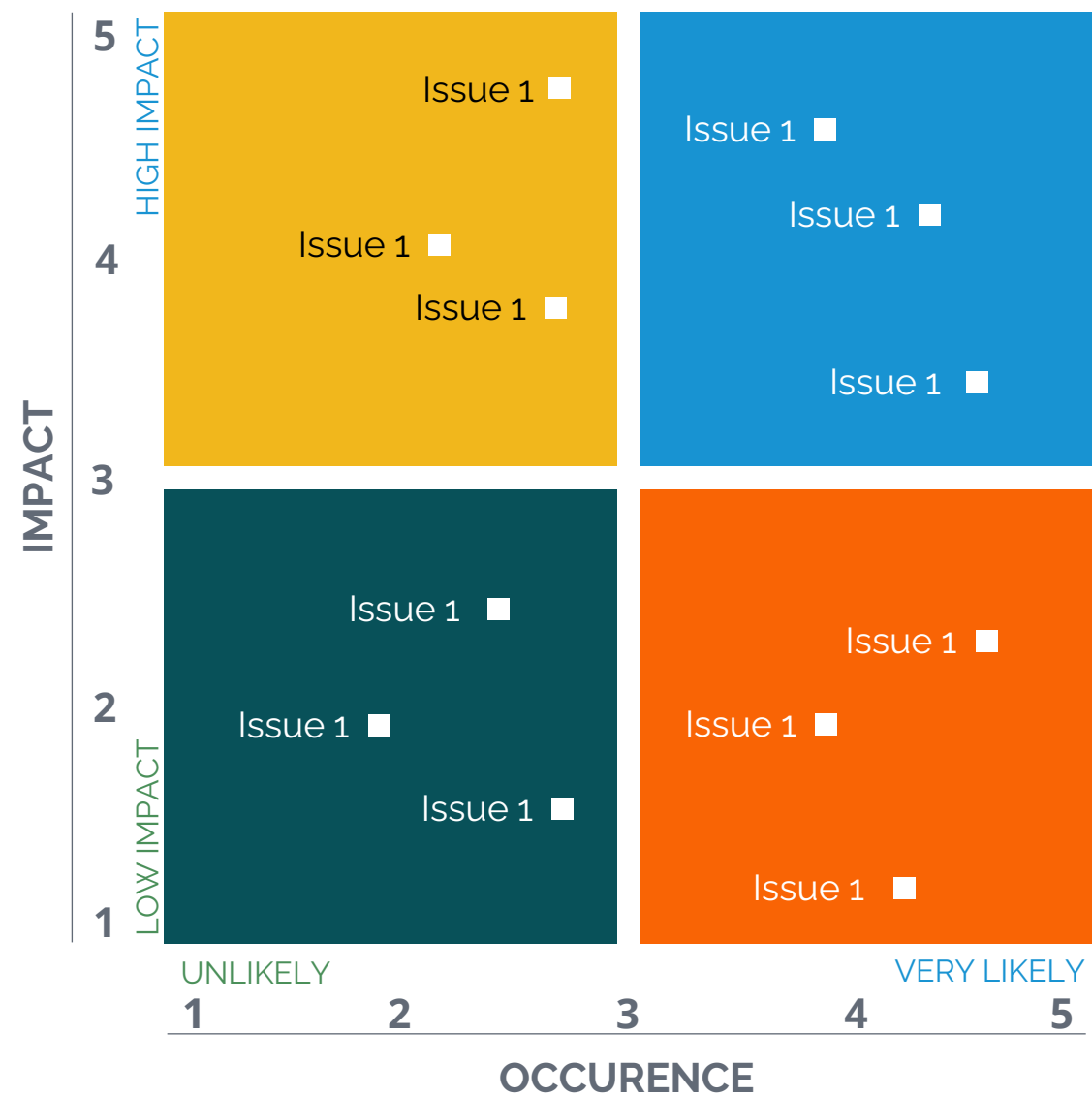
7. Organizations & Regulatory Issues
 - Regulatory_Failure to Comply
8. Partner Agency Issues
 - Constituent Agency_failure to perform
 - Partner Agency_Bad Publicity
9. PR General
 - Misuse of Name
 - Criticism of Parent Organization
10. Program Issues
 - Criticism ExOffender Program

Anticipate crises

11. Retail Store, Facility & Customer Issues
 - Child Kidnapping
 - Criticism_Ebay, Pricing, Computers
 - Customer Injury_Death
 - Public Theft from Store
 - Retail Issues_Misconduct
 - Retail_Recalled Product Sold_No Injury
 - Retail_Recalled Product Sold_with injury_death
 - Robbery_Injuries or Fatalities
 - Robbery_No Injuries
 - Specific Item New Recall

Likelihood of occurrence x Severity of Impact = Score
Institutional controls

Issue heat map





Identify Roles

- County officials
- Councilmembers or Commissioners
- Law enforcement
- Prosecutor's Office

Crisis Management Team

- The purpose of the CMT is to have a group of leaders who are prepared for and ready to respond to an incident.
- The CMT is responsible for high-level impact assessment, decision-making, oversight, and resource approval.
- The CMT will guide and support business continuity and recovery teams through an incident.

Crisis Management Team

The responsibilities of the CMT at time of incident include:

- Oversee response to a large-scale disaster or incident
- Activate department Business Continuity Plans (BCP)
- Work to ensure employee and resident health and safety
- Make workplace recovery decisions
- Allocate resources among recovering department BC Teams
- Coordinate efforts between response and recovery teams
- Approve incident-related purchases
- Lead communication and information flow

Crisis Process and Protocols

- Create a step-by-step process
- Understood by all who will be activated
- Digitize tools as not everyone will have the full plan with them
- Have paper back-ups in case of power outages or a loss of technology

Sample Wallet Card

Step 1: Assess Impact – Asset Protection

1. First Responder notifies appropriate help (fire, police, etc.).
2. Immediate actions are taken to protect employees, customers, and guests.
3. **First Responder notifies PA** via the pager.
4. **Asset Protection alerted by PA** and determines next steps.
5. CMT Leader will be notified if:
 - Employees and/or customers have suffered serious injuries or fatalities or there is a threat to their safety)
 - Significant business disruption
 - Significant reputational risk
 - Large-scale impact from natural or man-made disasters
 - Threat of or actual violence
 - Full activation of any department Business Continuity Plan or to IT Disaster Recovery Plan

Step 2: Alert CMT Leader

1. Once the CMT Leader is informed of incident, he will determine whether the rest of the CMT should be notified or activated. In addition, emergency notification system may be activated, depending on event circumstances.
2. In a **notification** situation- CMT stands by and prepares to activate if the incident escalates; **OR** if CMT is **activated**, CMT Leader follows steps 3 – 7 below.
3. Secure a meeting location:
 - During work hours and HQ Campus not impacted, use Mt. Rainier Conference Room
 - If HQ not available, use alternate Emergency Operations Center (EOC) (see EOC box on right)
 - If outside work hours or remote meeting is required, use CMT Conference Line #1
 - If HQ building is evacuated, go to your assigned Evacuation Assembly Area to check in; confirm alternative EOC

Step 3: Initiate CMT conference call or meeting

1. Dial CMT Conference Line #1 for primary locations; **OR**
2. Meet at designated EOC

Step 4: Incident meeting

1. Use predefined meeting Agenda.
2. CMT Leader to provide an overview of the situation.
3. Discuss event details, human impacts, business impacts, action items and determine schedule for update meetings/conference calls.

Step 5: Assess need to implement recovery strategies

1. Decide if the incident is a “disaster” – if yes, activate department Business Continuity Plans and recovery sites.
2. For high impact, non-disaster events, create appropriate working teams.
3. Establish ongoing communication with CMT members, Leadership Forum, Board, activated department teams, and employees according to crisis level and with support from Public Affairs.
4. Implement communication strategies to inform and address relevant internal and external stakeholders.

Step 6: Implement event response tasks

1. Follow prioritization goals: (1) Keep people safe and pay them; (2) Maintain near-normal operations at stores and online; (3) Maintain cash flow and product flow; (4) Recover the business.

Step 7: Close event

1. Debrief and capture lessons learned.

Crisis Numbers

- PA Pager 1.206.XXX.XXXX
- Employee Hotline 1.888.XXX.XXXX
- Employee Service Center 1.800.XXX.XXXX

CMT Conference Lines

Main Conference Line #1:
Support and Communications Team
 1.866.XXX.XXXX Pin: XXXXXX
Optional Leader Code: XXXXXX

Breakout teams use:
Conference Line #2:
Business Operations Team
 1.866.XXX.XXXX Pin: XXXXXX
Optional Leader Code: XXXX

Conference Line #3:
Business/Systems Recovery Team
 1.XXX.XXX.XXXX Pin: XXXXXX
Optional Leader Code: XXXXXX

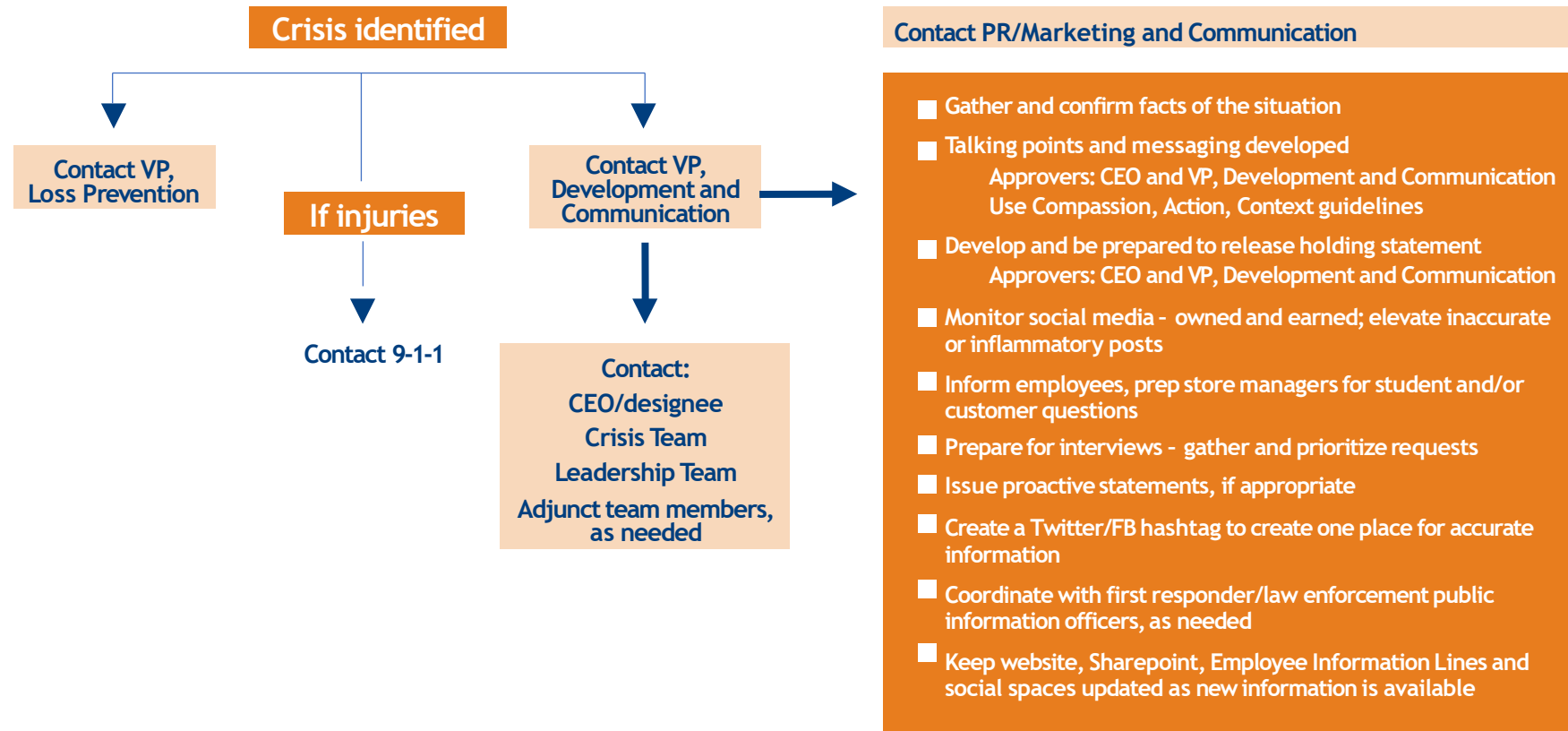
Emergency Operations Centers

Primary: Anderson Bldg– 253. XXX.XXXX
Mt. Rainier Conference Room
 HQ Campus

Alternate #1: Seattle Store – 206.XXX.XXXX
Door Code XXX
 Address

Alternate #2: Sumner DC – XXX.XXX.XXXX
Dragontail Peak Conference Room
 Address

Sample process



Process questions

- Who is accountable for your plan?
 - Emergency management?
 - Executive's Office?
 - Communications?
- What are the legal ramifications of the situation?
 - Consider liability and insurance considerations
- What is the priority order for communication during a crisis?
- Who receives a copy of your crisis communication plan?
- How do you communicate if the Internet goes down or power goes out?

Crisis Preparation



Prepare Channels

- Social Media
- Website
- Prepare "dark site"
- Media
- Employees
- Other stakeholders
- Emergency notification systems - Text
 - Everbridge (PC Alert, PC WARN)
 - MIR 3
 - Others

Crisis Preparation

Identify stakeholders

- County residents
- County health department
- County elected leadership
- County administration
- County fire departments
- Pierce County Sheriff's Department
- Health care community (hospitals, doctors, nurses, etc.)
- Civic organizations and unions
- Tribes
- Business and community leaders
- Community-based organizations
- Homeless shelters
- Assisted living facilities
- School districts
- Local Parent Teacher Associations
- Ethnic organizations
- Statewide, regional and local general and ethnic media
- Joint Base Lewis-McChord leadership

Who has been **left out**?

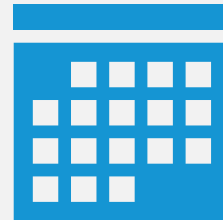
- Equity and inclusion during a crisis
- Language barriers
- Needs of disabled residents – sight or hearing impairments must be addressed
- Access barriers – not everyone uses social media
- Trusted messengers can be important advocates

Crisis Preparation



**Media
Training**

Crisis Preparation



Test plan quarterly

During a crisis



Context

- In our world today:
 - **Speed** is everything
 - Real-time tweeting and posting pushes **quick decisions** and approvals
- Seek out ways to enhance or **burnish your organization's reputation**
- Be clear on your **relevant practices, policies and regulations**
- Do the alleged actions align with or conflict with them?
- Rather than asking if coverage was “positive,” evaluate coverage for accuracy, **key message pick up**, tone and public commentary

During a crisis

Using a Joint Information Center

- A JIC can augment your communications team or serve as one
- Research Team oversees preparation of news releases, daily summaries, media advisories, feature articles, fact sheets, public service announcements, and other written materials;
- Media Operations oversees responses to incoming media calls, provides information on latest developments, answers inquiries, monitors news coverage, manages news conferences, assesses public opinions, beliefs, and current knowledge, and provides background information on response activities; and
- Logistics Team ensures all JIC functions are operating efficiently, and supervises all operational and administrative activities, including staffing and inter-office communications.

During a crisis

Social Media

- Don't let pace of social media to force you into saying or doing things out of haste
- Make sure you have someone assigned to monitor for tone and accuracy
- Authorize them to reply, if needed
- Create a hashtag to allow media and interested people to follow and receive updates

During a crisis

Messaging

- Acknowledge situation
- Identify priorities
- Confirm available facts
- Express concern
- Do not speculate
- Refer to authorities, as appropriate
- Remember: “Compassion, Action, Context”

During a crisis

Media interviews

What to avoid:

- Showing frustration
- Repeating negatives
- Speculating
- Going "off the record"

How to take control:

- Remain calm
- Use active listening
- Embrace the pause
- Use bridging techniques

During a crisis

Bridging

A transition comment that allows you to use your key messages:

- What's important to keep in mind is.....
- I don't have those details at this point but what I can tell you is....
- What we know right now is....
- We don't comment on pending litigation but...

Hold True to Your Values



Transparency

- Ferry App Potential Breach

Hold True to Your Values



Accountability

- Credit monitoring offer

Hold True to Your Values



Honesty

- Building near collapse

Hold True to Your Values



Be Proactive

- Layoffs

Hold True to Your Values



Integrity

- Act in the best interests of those involved

After a crisis



After a crisis

Once you are safely past a crisis:

1. Assess the current state
2. Update and adapt key messages
3. Post-crisis analysis
 1. Reflect on lessons learned
 2. Identify gaps and opportunities
4. Refine and strengthen crisis protocols

Need help?



FEMA



LinkedIn Learning



Your Community Partners

Questions?

