

# Crisis Communications Planning and Implementation

November 24, 2011

# Today's Agenda

- Overview of the purpose – what you can expect to learn.
- The difference between an issue and a crisis.
- How an issue can become a crisis – and how to avoid that.
- Preparing a crisis communications plan.
- Selecting and coaching spokespeople.
- The importance of practice.
- When to call for help to manage a crisis response.
- Dealing with stakeholders and the media during a crisis.
- Recovering from a crisis.
- Questions and discussion.

# Today's Learnings

- The difference between a crisis and an issue.
- Crisis response and crisis communication are different -- but also the same.
- The importance of planning and practicing.
- Dealing with the media and stakeholders.

# Crisis or Issue?

**Issue** – emerging or unresolved; creating a rift between you and your stakeholders.

**Crisis** – usually sudden and unexpected; may put some stakeholders at immediate risk; often very public; requires rapid action.

“A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good names. It interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization.”

**Kathleen Fearn-Banks, *Crisis Communication: A Casebook Approach***

An issue is “a gap between your **actions** and stakeholder **expectations**.”

**Teresa Yancey Crane, founder and president of the Issue  
Management Council**

# How do Issues become Crises?

Problem



Issue



Crisis

# Issue to...





# ...Crisis



# Crisis Prevention

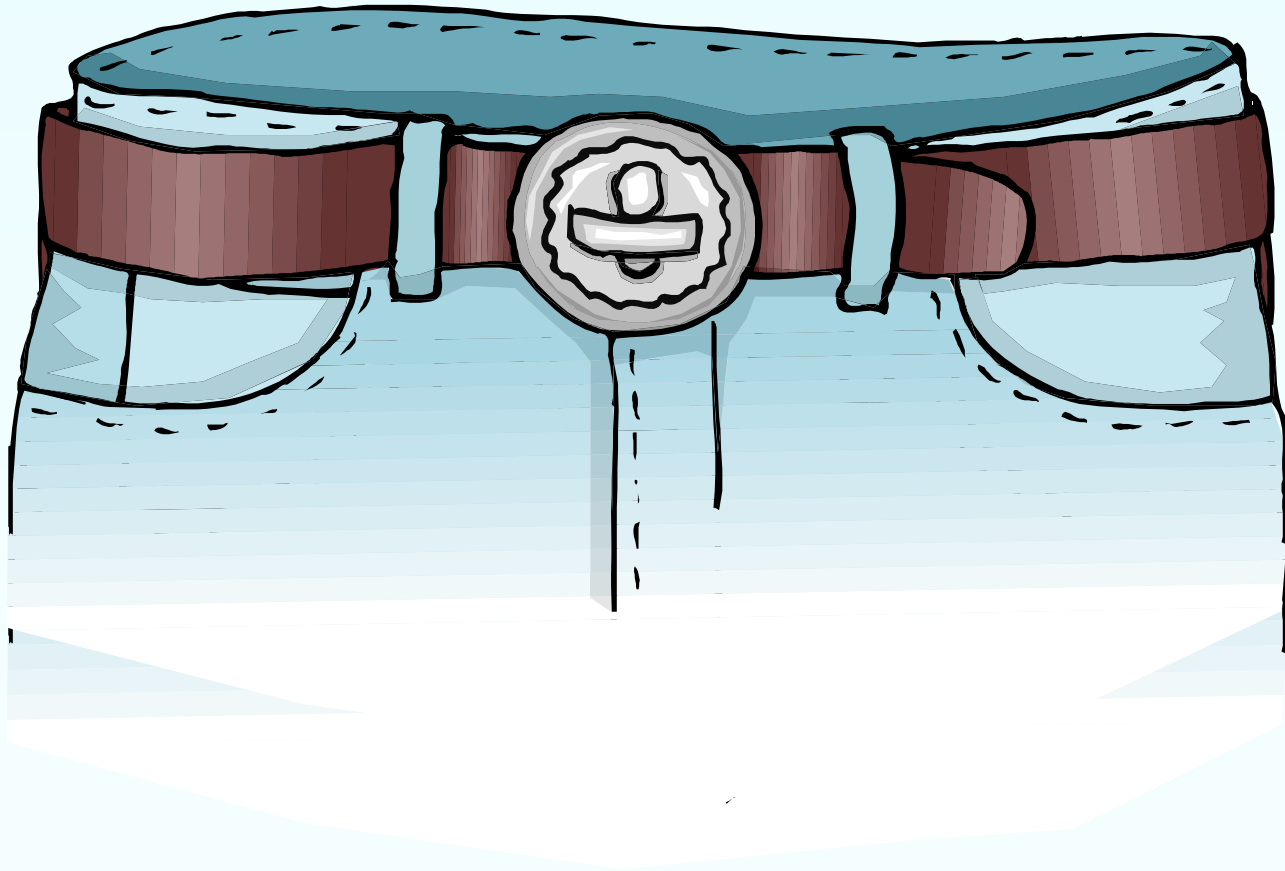
- Not all crises can be prevented, but many can.
- Deal with problems to avoid issues; deal with issues to avoid crises.

# How Crises Develop

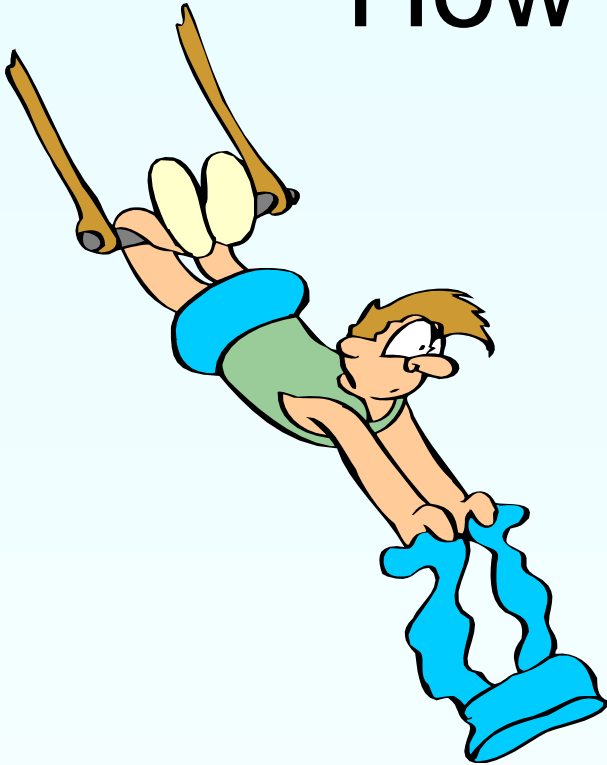
Crises generally fall into two categories:

1. Sudden - accident, unexpected event, natural disaster.
2. Smoldering - a problem that may or may not be apparent; financial abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse, bullying, cheating.

# How Crises Develop



# How Crises Develop



Many crises have a clearly identifiable progression – from problem to issue to crisis.

# What Happens in a Crisis?

- Crises tend to be uncontrollable, particularly in the early stages.
- They generally attract immediate and sustained media attention, which in turn plays a major role in shaping public perception.
- But it's not only media attention that defines a crisis.

# What Happens in a Crisis?

- Events unfold quickly and change constantly.
- If unprepared, management can panic.
- There is an immediate need to take as much control as possible of the communications around the crisis.

# In a Crisis don't...

- Delay communications: what's happened, why and what are you doing about it?
- Minimize the fears and concerns of stakeholders.
- Under-estimate the length, severity and cost.



# Remember What's at Stake

- Your organization's reputation.
- The reputation of leaders and supporters.
- The support of sponsors, members, volunteers, clients.
- The very existence of your organization.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Accept that all crises cannot be prevented.
- You cannot prepare a specific response to every possible crisis.
- The process when a crisis happens is just as important as the product you produce to deal with it.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Risk assessment and reduction – communicators must be part of the process and must be responsible for the communications element.
- Getting management's buy-in – arm yourself with evidence.
- Be prepared to take on the role of risk manager if necessary.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Crisis response manual.
- Crisis response coordinator.
- Trained spokesperson/s.
- Writer.
- Media relations officer.
- Community relations officer.
- Internal communications officer.
- Government relations officer.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Alternative means of communication,
- A media gathering point.
- Back up – an agency or contractor to assist if needed.
- Other resources – counsellors, security, restoration.
- Regular testing of your process.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Know when to call for help – don't make matters worse by muddling through.
- Know when to take a back seat – sometimes the crisis is beyond you.
- Don't make decisions for others – consult with stakeholders.

# Prepare for a Crisis

- Guilt by association – you are left wearing someone else's crisis.
- Children involved in the crisis.
- Business continuity.

# Crises and the Media

- Crises generally make news – often big and sustained news.
- Dealing with the media during a crisis can be challenging and tense.
- Often the media will be looking for someone to blame – that could be you.
- Avoiding the media will only prolong a negative story.

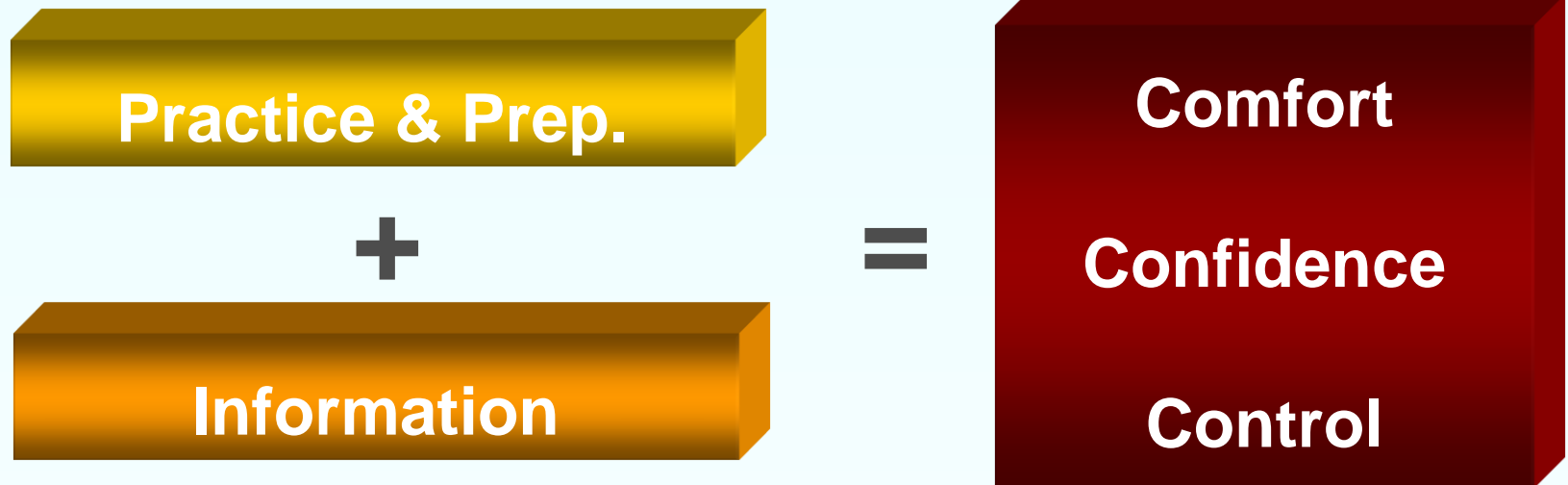


# Crises and the Media

You will need to answer questions like:

- What's really happening?
- Who's affected?
- How/why did it happen?
- What are you doing about it?
- What should the public do?
- When will things get back to normal?
- Who's to blame?

# Crises and the Media



# Crises and the Media

Today's media environment

- Shorter deadlines.
- Content on multiple platforms.
- Immediate reader/viewer/listener input.
- 24/7 news cycles.
- Reporters have a job to do – and are also under pressure.

# Crises and the Media

- Obligation to keep clients, customers and other stakeholders informed.
- Public has a right/need to know what's going on.
- Opportunity to tell your side of the story.
- If you don't, someone else will – often uninformed and biased.

# Crises and the Media

“It’s not the question that will hurt you, it’s the answer.”

Sam Donaldson, ABC News anchor

# Crises and the Media

*“Anything you say can and will be used against you...”*

# Crises and the Media

- Who is the audience?
- What action is required by the audience?
- What does the audience need to hear from you to encourage the desired action?

# Crises and the Media

- Keep it simple
- Aim to be perceived as credible and trustworthy
- Provide facts and figures
- Provide a timetable for updates.



# Crises and the Media

- Stick to the facts and areas of expertise.
- Everything is “on the record.”
- Restate your message.
- Clarify if misunderstood.
- Pay attention to body language.
- Don't answer questions that you don't understand.

# Crises and the Media

- Stick to your key messages
- Don't express personal opinions or speculate.
- Don't fear "I don't know, but we will get that information."

# Crises and the Media

- Be honest – people will be judging you
- Show empathy with the victims.
- Show determination to put things right.
- Don't hide behind privacy or legal concerns – unless you can justify it in a credible way.

# Crises and the Media

Remember: your actions to avoid the media can be just as newsworthy as whatever you say to them.

# Crisis Aftermath and Recovery

- Your work is not over when the crisis ends.
- Media will want to know what's happened since the crisis.
- You will need a crisis recovery plan that includes a communications element.

# Questions and Discussion

