



Crisis Communications

Seven Steps to Success



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Why We're Here

- In 2016 the FDA recalled over 318 million total food items while the USDA (which oversees meat and poultry) recalled almost 60 million pounds of food.
- The two agencies combined reported 560 recalls this past year.





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Why We're Here





Crisis defined:

Any event or issue that threatens the reputation of an organization and its ability to operate effectively

Crisis = the unexpected



December 4, 1941

“No matter what happens,
the U.S. Navy is not going to
be caught napping.”

— Frank Knox
U.S. Secretary of the Navy



December 7, 1941

U.S.S. Arizona
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Crisis is not always a tragedy





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Every crisis is unique but..

.. common elements exist:



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Every crisis is unique but..

.. common elements exist:

- Triggering event
- Emotion
- Initial facts cloudy
- Events move quickly
- Outside parties weigh-in
- Light-speed, online communications
- Media attention
 - **Victims and villains**
- Public scrutiny and action

US
VS.
THEM



Crisis communications strategy

Re-frame the story:

US & THEM
VS.
THE PROBLEM



Getting in front of the seven steps...

BEFORE YOUR PHONE RINGS



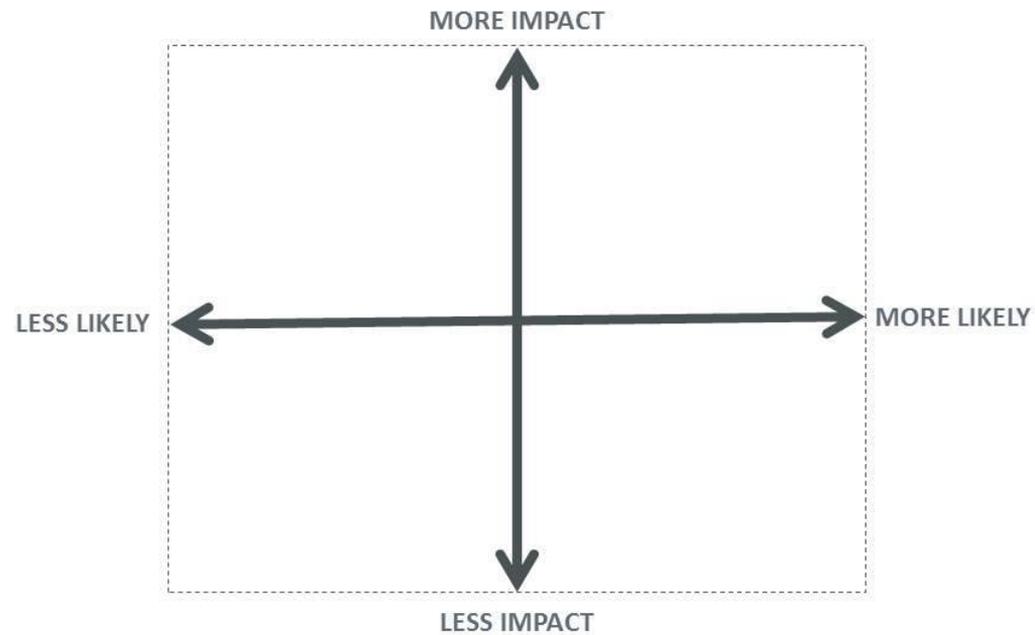
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Create Your Crisis Team

- Keep it small – you need action, not endless discussion
- Include people with authority to make decisions/take actions
- Represent all critical decision makers
- Remember most crisis are won or lost online these days
- If possible, include an outside crisis communications expert

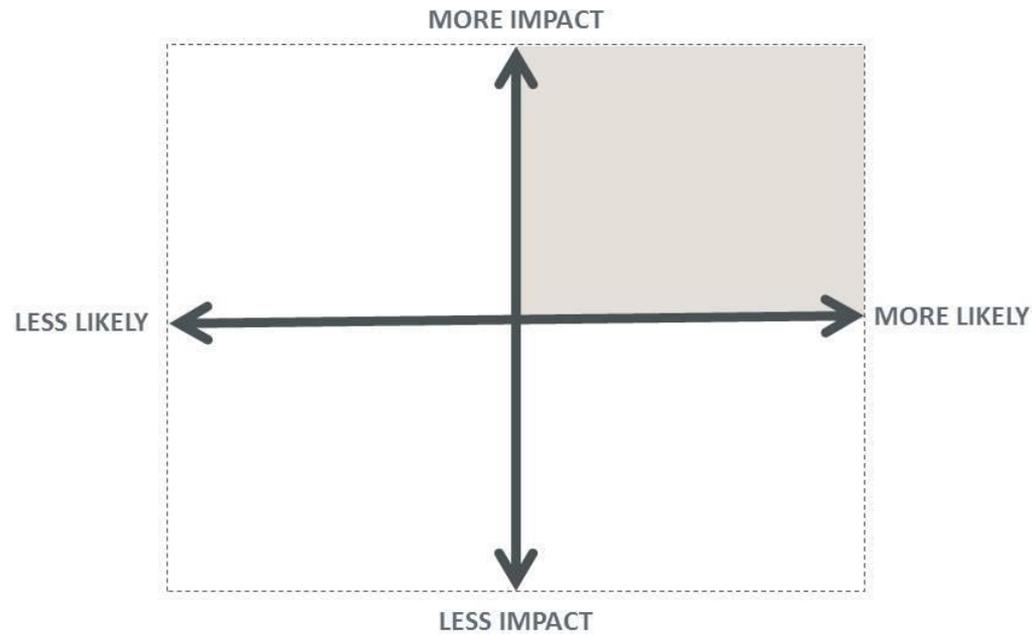
Plan Ahead

Assess risks



Plan Ahead

Create “starter” messages





Starter Messages Example

- *The California walnut industry has earned a reputation for producing the highest quality walnuts in the world*
- *From our farms to your store shelves, California walnuts are handled with great care and attention every step of the way*
- *The California walnut industry continually invests in food safety education, training and research projects*



Plan Ahead

- Create a “starter” playbook
 - Contact information for team
 - Basic roles and responsibilities (coordinator, monitoring, etc.)
 - List of people you may need to reach
 - List of people who will need to hear from you
 - List of existing communication channels
 - Other.....



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WHEN THE PHONE RINGS



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STEP ONE: Assemble your crisis team

- Choose a central location and gather *in person* if possible
- Gather all schedule and contact information from team to ensure constant lines of communications
- Based on specifics of issues do you need to add others to the core group (unique expertise)?



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STEP TWO: Gather all the information

- Don't let emotion trump strategy
- Assemble the facts. Avoid speculation!
 - Facts, figures, causes, effects – who, how, where, when
 - Determine how you'll fill in the knowledge gaps and how long it will take
 - Media will ask what happened? who is to blame? when did you know? what did you do at the time? what will you do to prevent it from happening again?
 - Assign responsibility for gathering the missing information
- Immediately confirm and/or enhance monitoring efforts

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STEP THREE: Get help

- Engage an experienced crisis expert
 - Do this while gathering information but before communicating outside of your crisis team



Dan Barber
GM, Sr. Partner
Sacramento



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STEP FOUR: Engage with relevant outsiders

- Appropriate member of crisis team meets with law enforcement, public safety, other officials who have immediate responsibilities for the situation.
- Tell what you know. Ask what they know. Don't speculate. Offer cooperation, but not explanations
- Media, politicians, etc. are NOT part of this engagement!



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Reminder – time matters

BRAND CAMP

by Tom Fishburne

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

PRESS RELEASE

WE ARE DEEPLY SORRY
THAT YOU TOOK
OFFENSE TO WHAT
ALLEGEDLY HAPPENED

LEGAL WILL REVIEW
FULLY BY NEXT WEEK,
BUT THEY SAID TO
REMOVE "DEEPLY"

MAYBE THE
PROTESTERS
WILL HAVE
LEFT BY THEN

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Respond even if you're not ready

“We are aware of the situation and are currently focused on learning more so we can provide accurate information and resources to both the media and the public. If I can take down your contact information, we will be back in touch when we have more to share.”



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STEP FIVE: Formulate an Action Plan

- What is the status of the emerging issue?
 - Possibility to resolve or clearly on the verge of becoming public?
- What is the appropriate role for the organization?
 - We don't want to overstep our bounds or unnecessarily "own" an issue
 - We do want to protect the well-earned reputation of our organization



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STEP FIVE: Formulate an Action Plan

- Can we coordinate communication with other entities on the front line of the issue?
- Is there a role for a third-party voice?
- Have we accounted for all our key audiences?
 - Assign specific audience outreach to team
- Is there a current void in communication being filled by uniformed parties?



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Watch out for Chuck





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STEP SIX: Communicate

- Deliver your messages – a credible, concise and consistent statement is almost always my first recommendation.



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■ Step Six: Communicate

- If needed, use a single, credible spokesperson.
 - The person should be appropriate to the type and severity of the crisis; they should be media-trained



“Does anyone here have any questions for my answers?”
- Henry Kissinger

- If possible, activate third-party experts/supporters to help deliver the facts



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■ **Step Six: Communicate**

- Tell what you know and what you've done. Don't speculate. If you don't know, that's the answer. And **DO WHAT YOU SAY**.
 - Show empathy with those who are affected, but don't make promises.
 - Say that you will communicate regularly/as soon as there is additional information. And do so.
- **Internal communication**
 - Stay consistent in messaging
 - Always assume any written transmission can become public



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- **Step Six: Communicate:**
 - Additional considerations
 - Password protected daily or weekly call for board members
 - Crisis specific microsite
 - Dedicated consumer hotline



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■ **STEP SEVEN: Monitor and Evaluate**

- Assign responsibility for monitoring media coverage, social media, and other external communications.
- Respond immediately to false information or inflammatory discussion – don't be defensive, just set the record straight.
 - Don't engage in an online debate or even a cordial "back and forth on the topic. Link people back to your statement.
 - Don't give up control of your Facebook page but remember that authenticity and transparency is the golden rule with social media
- Produce regular reports and circulate to team. Adjust FAQ and messaging as needed.



Recovery: communication considerations

- Letters to the editor/Op-ed pieces
- A media tour with a third-party and/or organizational spokesperson
- PR Advertising



In some cases, real reform is critical to recovery





A few final thoughts

- Crisis preparedness is critical.
- When a crisis happens always put public health and safety first.
- Provide the public and media with information they need – don't make people guess, because they will and to your detriment.
- Protect your reputation by acting quickly with sincerity, responsibility, transparency and facts
 - Don't try to hide unpleasant answers – a cover-up is worse
- Engage third-party experts to reinforce trust, reduce fear and mitigate losses
- Speak with a unified voice

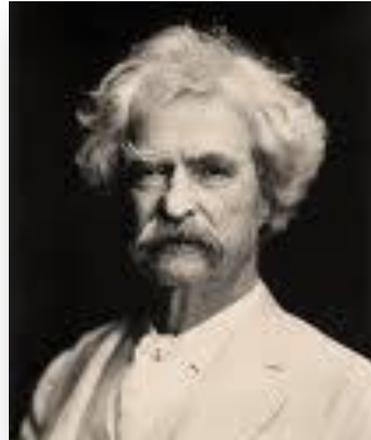


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Final thought

**“Always do right ... it will gratify
some and astonish the rest.”**

— *Mark Twain*





Thank You!

- Questions?