Media and Crisis Communication

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Agenda for Today

9:45 Welcome and housekeeping

9:55 Media Scenarios/Interviews

11:00 Presentation Crisis Communication and Media Relations

12:15 Break for Lunch

12:30 Watch Media Interviews/Critique

1:15 Wrap Up
Earning Your Stripes

Media Relations and Crisis Management

Remind others of our value

Allow you to demonstrate your abilities as a strategic advisor
Crisis Management

• In a crisis situation, you will react as you are organized and trained.

• Knowing what to do can be the difference between chaos and calm, or even life and death.

• The best safety policies are only as effective as the people who implement them.

Rick J. Kaufman, APR
Why is it so important?

- People remember how a crisis was handled longer than the details of the crisis.
- Long-term damage to an organization is done before and after a crisis than during it.
- Proactive crisis communications helps minimize damage, improve morale, encourages healing.
- Need for communication grows the longer the crisis is prominent.
- News media helps set community, region, national and world agendas.
- News media has significant long-term impact on public perception and organizational reputation.
Defining Crisis

A crisis is any event, issue or situation that **threatens to undermine the relationship between your school or district and one or more of its stakeholders**; or any event, issue or situation that may negatively affect the reputation of your school or district.

A crisis is a people-stopping, show-stopping, product-stopping, reputation-defining, and trust-busting event that creates victims and/or explosive visibility.

~ Jim Lukaszewski
Types of crises (Sudden vs. Smoldering)

**Sudden** (35%) – *(e.g., School Shooting)*

- Initial chaos; then “aftershocks”
- School administrators can prepare for them!
- Establish the facts and use consistent messages
- Speed is crucial (possibly full-time coverage)
- Updates every 30 minutes for first few hours, then hourly thereafter even if it means telling them there is nothing new to report

“When the eagles are silent, the parrots begin to jabber.” – Winston Churchill

Get it out, get it over.
Types of crises (Sudden vs. Smoldering)

Smoldering (65%) – (e.g., School Threats Rumors)

- Much more likely to occur
- More difficult to identify in early stages
- Administration usually avoids, ignores or misunderstands the potential severity
- Mismanagement or human errors are usually involved
- Sometimes go away on their own
- Reflect on the quality and ability of management, and are taken personally by administrators
Crisis...more specifically

**Facilities** Crisis  
Damage to a facility caused by an explosion, fire or natural disaster

**Community** Crisis  
Adverse conditions from a cause outside of your organization

**Employee** Crisis  
Includes death or injury of employees

**Consumer** Crisis  
Impact from a defective product within the organization

**Image** Crisis  
Includes unlawful or ill-perceived activities such as sexual misconduct, drug use, indictment or arrest
Preparing for a crisis

**Plan** proactively

Consider communications logistics

**Anticipate** the need for extra staff

Include contingencies

Include first-responders in your planning
Responding during a crisis

The first 30 minutes set the tone

Gather facts

Develop response options

Select appropriate point person
  * may not be from your District

Share information ASAP – but with staff first

Don’t forget the media

DO NOT underestimate the speed of information
Media during a crisis

May learn about the crisis before you

Will be on-site before you are ready

May be adversarial

See spokesperson as the “spinmeister”

Want to assign blame
3 Cs of Crisis Communication

Cs = HOW you communicate a crisis

Control
  We are in control of the situation

Competence
  We have competent professionals working on it

Concern
  We care
  Here’s how you can help

It’s not what you say, but how you say it

Care + Concern = Credibility
  Even over competence and expertise, dedication and commitment, honesty and openness

Source: Fleishman-Hillard, Inc.
4 Rs of Crisis Communication

4Rs = WHAT you communicate in a crisis
(can safely say at almost any time)
Regret, Repay, Reform, Responsibility

“We deeply regret this has happened.”

“We’re going to take care of anyone hurt by this.”

“We’re going to do whatever we can to ensure it doesn’t happen again.”

“We take full responsibility” (if you’re at fault)

Can be initial statements, even if you don’t have the facts yet
Communicating through a school crisis

Fight emotion with emotion (e.g., anger at those who misbehaved or sympathy for those harmed).

Tell child-focused stories

Put a human face on the crisis

- Humanize the school/district
  - Make it personal by helping people know why we exist and that we care

Engage third parties
Other Ways to Respond

Use your **key communicators**

- Staff, PTOs, elected officials, etc.

Issue a statement

- **A response that says nothing is still a response**

Talk about your procedures

Bottom Line …

- Simply the perception of action by your district
Best practices in media relations

Value **Relationships**

Honor Deadlines

Be **Accessible**

Do Your Research
  - Know your topic or know what you don’t

**Develop Messages**/Key Points

Identify the Appropriate Spokesperson
  - Are you directing or performing?

**Know What’s Best for Kids**
8 steps to successful interviews

1. **Research** (learn as much as you can about the topic)
2. Define your **communications goal**
   “What are your questions to my answers?” – Henry Kissinger
3. **Anticipate** the reporter’s questions
4. **Practice** answering the questions
5. **Rehearse!** (listen to/watch yourself)
6. Set the stage/ground rules (live vs. taped, location, etc.)
7. Conduct the interview
8. **Evaluate** and learn for next time
What’s in it for me?

When Developing Your Message…

Remember radio station “W I I F M”

Speak to the reporter’s audience, not the reporter

The audience is thinking, “what’s in it for me?”

Your answers should reflect their interests, not yours

For example, if the story is about a fight at school, the audience will be concerned about student safety. Tell them you are, too, and that you will not tolerate this type of behavior -- even though you may think that’s a “given” for you as an educator.
Facts and Messages

Key Points – CHS Wrestlers with Staph Infection

BACKGROUND INFO
- Two CHS wrestlers have been diagnosed with a staph infection
  - Wrestler #1 was diagnosed on Jan. 18
  - Wrestler #2 was diagnosed weekend of Jan. 21/22
  - In accordance with District policy, both students were kept home from school until they had been on antibiotics for 48 hours
- Two wrestlers from Ladue were diagnosed with staph about the same time
  - CHS has not wrestled Ladue recently but has been as some of the same meets
- In light of above information, District consulting physician recommended that all wrestlers be checked and receive medical clearance before being allowed to return to practice or competition
  - Jan. 24 meet against Priory has been cancelled
  - Physician will be at CHS on Jan. 25 to check wrestlers
  - Wrestlers should be back in action for Jan. 26 meet at the latest
- Communication has included
  - Letters to wrestling parents on Jan. 18 and Jan. 20
  - Calls to wrestling parents on Jan. 23 and Jan. 24
  - Letter to all CHS families on Jan. 24
  - Letter to all Orange Room parents on Jan. 24
  - Little Orange Room has used wrestling room during inclement weather
  - Draft letter provided to Center of Clayton for classes that use wrestling room
- Letters were sent to parents today as an informative and precautionary measure ONLY
- We take all matters that involve the safety and well-being of our students very seriously

NORMAL PRECAUTIONARY PROCEDURES AT CHS
- The District has procedures in place to address issues such as this
- Normal procedures include
  - Cleaning wrestling mats daily with an industrial-strength disinfectant specifically designed to eliminate bacteria such as staph
- Additional precautions taken as a result of these events
  - All wrestlers being medically-cleared before returning to practice or competition
  - Wrestling mats are being cultured to test for the presence of staph
  - CHS locker rooms were closed and thoroughly disinfected

INFO ABOUT STAPH INFECTIONS
- Staph is not transmitted through casual contact
  - Requires direct physical contact with a wound or drainage from a wound to spread
  - Parents should take action if son/daughter has a wound that becomes infected or changes rapidly
- Standard precautions are your best defense
  - Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently
  - Do not share personal items or athletic gear
  - Be aware of any sudden change in a sore, especially in a sore that becomes a boil
3 Ways to Answer a Reporter’s Question

Answer the question briefly, then bridge back to your message (when appropriate)

*Example: “Yes is it a lot of money, but we believe it’s an investment in our kids’ future.”*

I don’t know, but I can find out.

I’m sorry, due to _____ (reason), I can’t answer that. But what I CAN tell you is ________.  
*Example: I’m sorry, due to privacy laws I can’t discuss the specifics, but what I can tell you is ...”*
Bridging

Techniques to retain control of an interview

**Verbal bridges** allow an interviewee to:

- Steers a reporter back to relevant topics
- Move away from controversial, uncomfortable or unflattering topics
- To end every answer to every question with a prepared, strategic message
Key Bridging Phrases

What's most important is …
The real issue here is …
That's not my area of expertise, but …
Let me just add that …
That reminds me …
Let me answer you by saying that …
That's an important point because …
What that means is …
Avoid Common Traps

Don't Repeat the Reporter's Words
The question won't appear in the final version, but your answer will!

Don't Lose Your Cool
A reporter may play devil's advocate just to get a colorful response but always get the last word.

There is No Such Thing as "Off the Record"
If you don't want something reported, don't tell the reporter.

Don't Be Led Into Hypothetical Situations
If the reporter says, "Assume that..." or "What if...." respond with: "I can't speculate on the unknown, however..." and restate your message.

Don't Fill (Awkward) Silent Pauses
Remember the non-verbals

Surroundings
Attire
Background
Accessories

Unintended Messages
Break for Lunch

Evaluation:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/PRBC2017
Let’s Watch

Consider what we’ve just discussed about media relations and crisis management

- What kind of issue was it (smoldering/sudden)?
- What key messages did you hear?
- What did they do well?

Would you add or subtract anything differently?
Continuing Your Own Professional Development

ENJOY THE SUNSHINE WHILE YOU CAN...

EVENTUALLY, WE ALL END UP IN A RECIPE.
**Your own professional development**

**Spend time thinking** – stop doing for 10 minutes a day and ponder

**Change your perspective** – allow yourself to think about issue differently, not just from communication angle

**Keep learning** – expand beyond communication

**Pick something to stop doing** – decrease your pile of work

**Go home** – take care of yourself!
In closing ...

“Go forth and do good things for children!”

- Bob Noyed, APR

Stay connected!

Complete PRBC evaluation

www.surveymonkey.com/r/PRBC2017

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