

Crisis Communications

Lessons from the Field

Patrick Cook
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Macro International Inc.

Our Role



- Under contract with SAMHSA, SHS/Macro International provides:
 - Strategic communication services
 - Communications & social marketing training and technical assistance
- Lifeline, Safe Schools/Healthy Students, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Crisis Counseling Program.

Defining a Crisis



- Harms people
- Diminishes reputation, confidence or trust in your organization
- Interrupts services or operations
- Depreciates the value of your organization or service
- Threatens financial performance
- Destroys property

Mental Health Crisis (Opportunity?)



- Natural Disaster
 - Hurricane Katrina, WV floods
- Human Crisis
 - 9/11
 - Murder/suicides at Columbine, Red Lake, Virginia Tech
 - Suicide hotline going “dark”
- Is there really a silver lining in such dark clouds?

Suicide Hotline Transition



- Anticipated potential change in name and number: 800-Suicide > 273-TALK
- Developed messages and potential scenarios
- Invited input from stakeholder groups
- Designated and trained spokespeople and enacted plan
- Callers had two options rather than confusion

10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



1. Plan for a crisis

"You'd better have a hose if you want to put out the fire."

- Rene Henry, Innovative Communication Corp.

- Invest in developing a plan
- Form a crisis team and make sure team members know their roles
- Recognize and decide when to enact crisis your plan



10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



2. Tell it all, tell it fast, tell the truth
 - Know when to enact crisis plan
 - Enacting a well-thought-out plan will enable you to be direct with rapid response and accuracy
 - Do it right by telling it all, telling it fast, and *telling the truth*

10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



3. Don't just rely on your reputation

- Don't rest on your laurels, be proactive
- How you handle a crisis will determine your long-term reputation

10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



4. Work with the media

- Recognize and understand role of media
- Establish *and train* media liaison and a spokesperson to deal effectively with media
- Build relationships with media before the crisis; help them do their job

10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



5. Be proactive instead of reactive
6. Use language your audience will understand
7. Listen to your stakeholders
8. Pay attention to perception, not just reality
9. Talk to the media in person

10 Tips To Manage a Crisis



10. Address people's feelings, along with the issues

"In high concern situations, people want to know that you care before they care what you know."

- Vincent Covello, Center for Risk Communication

- Put the welfare of people above all else
- Allaying fears is critical

Contact Information



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