

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS:

NO SURPRISES

ONE

WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

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CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS: NO SURPRISES.

If you are a C-Suite executive, hold the top communications job in a company or organization, or are the guardian of the reputation of an issue, product, or brand, then crisis communications must be a big bullet on your responsibility checklist.

Crises come in all shapes and sizes: surprise litigation, product liability, data breach, Congressional oversight, workplace misconduct, fraud, federal rules violations, technological failure or perhaps a groundswell of social media backlash. Solving each will be difficult, and complicated. Communicating how you are managing a crisis, and remediating the underlying issues, however, is critical to maintaining reputation. Are you prepared?

Do you have a crisis team picked? Do you know what outside help to call? What third parties will speak kindly on your behalf? Which media will you call first? Do employees know what to say to clients? And most importantly, am I forgetting anything?

At Curley Company, our veteran crisis team has been in the war rooms and courtrooms during litigation battles, with news crews at accident scenes, in conference rooms with clients during major business interruptions, and with Attorneys General when public outrage has reached a tipping point.

Our approach to crisis communications consulting is simple: “No surprises.” It’s not if a crisis will happen, but when.

We teach clients to follow the Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared! Get out ahead of a crisis. Work efficiently with the right team. Isolate the matter so it doesn’t contaminate the rest of the organization. Communicate timely and accurately with external stakeholders, and get on the path—quickly—to recovery.

We’ve outlined a few best practices for your team to consider.

OUR APPROACH TO CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTING IS SIMPLE:
“NO SURPRISES.” IT’S NOT IF A CRISIS WILL HAPPEN, *but when.*

ONE

WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

This is the question we most often ask during the beginning of a crisis communications planning session with our clients. It's no surprise that different people within an organization will answer the question quite differently. Collectively, however, the conversations create a web of vulnerabilities and watch-outs that are invaluable to communicators.

Legal, HR, operations, finance, risk, marketing, sales and C-Suite all have varying concerns, but can usually be effectively hypercritical of the issues their department faces that might rise to the level of a crisis.

Make a list of what is collectively troubling you. Determine the likelihood of each scenario, and what the tipping point would be to action. That's a great start.



TWO

SPEED KILLS

Speed kills, but so does inaction.

In the world of crisis communications, keeping pace with an issue is fundamental. Email, the 24-hour news cycle, and social word-of-mouth are all accelerants that can easily turn a smoldering issue into a five-alarm blaze in the blink of an eye.

Crisis preparedness is about building efficiency. The less time you spend on organization and logistics, the more time you can spend on problem-solving and remediation efforts. Process and practice are critical components. Understanding how to best make decisions, coordinate actions, and communicate your path forward toward resolution to all internal and external stakeholders makes the tasks instinctive and reflexive, rather than onerous.

Build a crisis team. Identify scenarios. Create a crisis checklist. Practice responses. Develop communications templates. Build lists of contacts. Review periodically, and improve your processes.

CRISIS PREPAREDNESS IS ABOUT BUILDING EFFICIENCY.

THREE

SOCIAL CRISIS Q&A

No crisis plan would be complete without a section that includes a discussion on social media crisis. Here's our take on some common social media crises questions, taken from an interview with CEO Jennifer Curley and Carolyn Proctor of the Washington Business Journal:

When A Social Media Storm Hits: What To Do — And What Not To Do

How do you prevent a social media problem from blowing up?

Anyone who's doing any kind of social media or is in the public eye needs a crisis plan in place. Our feeling on this is "no surprises" and "be prepared." You've just got to be prepared that something is going to go wrong. And you want to be able to handle it.

How can you best avoid the risks involved?

I think you can't always avoid it. You can't just put your head down. Everything about this has got risk to it. There's no safe way to do it unless you're not going to really use the tools. I mean, you can have a Twitter handle, and be risk-averse and basically not engage. But what good is that really doing your brand? So if you're going to use the tools in the way they're designed to be used, to further your brand and to have real, genuine conversations that show leadership, then there is 100 percent risk involved.

What's the first step if something strikes on social media?

You've got to own it. You can't hide. That's the thing about social media — it doesn't go away. You want to make sure that you're not escalating it, but you're owning it and you're pivoting back to the message and things that you want to get out there.

What do you tell clients about how to run their accounts?

The landscape is changing — it's not one size fits all. Everybody's different. You know, there's a pre-Trump world and there's a post-Trump world. There's just this new intensity to social media. There's new outlets, new tools you can use. Sometimes I think that's tricky for brands to navigate.

What's the absolute worst mistake a company can make on social media?

Being tone-deaf, I think is my biggest. Not understanding the context of what you're engaging, not understanding the bigger conversation that's going on around you. When there's a national conversation about race or sexual harassment or some of the big things we've been dealing with this year, and then you have a brand that tweets something, and you're like, "Whoa! Where did that come from? Weren't they paying attention?" We've just had a major cultural shift in some of these areas. So, you have to be watching it in real time and with a really sensitive eye.

FOUR

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Even the most seasoned executives need practice.

As audiences and mediums (think video, podcasts) continue to evolve, there is a “continuing education” approach organizations should take to stay on top of their crisis prep. Organizations need to be prepared for the external media piece of the crisis equation, but also many times need to communicate to the internal and external stakeholders, investors, elected officials and other decision makers most important to the organization’s brand.

Consider the best way to reach each audience and what the tailored messaging will be for that group. Can you tackle the different mediums and messaging in-house? Do you have a media-trained spokesperson? Consider getting outside support if not.

The best way to stay on top of evolving internal and external landscapes? Build a crisis plan, keep that plan current and practice potential crisis scenarios.

Running a crisis simulation will help your organization get comfortable following your crisis plan and – perhaps most importantly – identify any gaps.

Do you have the right people in the room? Is your message tight? Did you leave out an audience with whom you need to communicate? Scenario role-playing will help shine a light on these.

**BUILD A CRISIS PLAN, KEEP THAT PLAN CURRENT
AND PRACTICE POTENTIAL CRISIS SCENARIOS.**

FIVE

TIPS AND TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Here are seven tips for making your next crisis encounter productive, and much less painful:



ASSEMBLE YOUR TRUSTED TEAM. Consider who to have “in the room” to solve and respond to the crisis. Consider both internal and external people. Consider the value of employees with great institutional knowledge. Remember, you always need to have decision-makers available. Consider inviting a trusted “outsider” for a reality check.



CREATE A WAR ROOM. Contain the crisis team in a single room, so the rest of the company can conduct “business as usual.” Block a conference room for the foreseeable future. Attempt to insulate the business of the crisis team from the remainder of the company.



PUT TOGETHER A LIST OF YOUR FRIENDS AND ENEMIES. You may need to contact your friends to speak and/or act on your behalf. You will certainly need to monitor the words and actions of your enemies.



KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BIG PICTURE. Ask yourself periodically, as the issues unfold, what’s the best and worst possible outcomes? Where do you think you are now? What can move the needle?

FIVE

TIPS AND TRICKS OF THE TRADE (continued)



FIND A GOOD WRITER. It is always important to have the services of someone who can boil down ideas to concise thoughts. Use your PR team even if you don't think you'll be doing PR. Allow them to facilitate the group, capturing ideas and phrases.



BRIEF YOUR RECEPTIONIST IMMEDIATELY – OR WHOMEVER ANSWERS YOUR PHONES.

They are likely to have the first contact with media, shareholders, employees ... and be asked questions. Make sure your protocol is clear, what he/she should say, and to whom he/she should direct inquiries.



COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU CAN PERIODICALLY.

Sooner is always better than later. Only communicate what you know absolutely. Set firm deadlines for future communications. Consider all stakeholders – customers, shareholders, regulators, lawmakers, media, employees. Give a consistent message – always sing from the same hymnal.

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CURLEY COMPANY

OUR APPROACH TO CRISIS IS SIMPLE: NO SURPRISES.

Curley's experience ranges from developing crisis preparedness strategies and training, to building and leading multi-year crisis communications programs and handling an unexpected media barrage. We have expertise in responding to lawsuits and settlements with Attorneys General, to combating negative viral posts on social media and managing a negative regulatory environment.

We have managed corporate war rooms, had front-row seats at campaign headquarters and answered the midnight phone calls from both reporters and clients.

Our approach to crisis is simple: No surprises.

Whether you're in the midst of a crisis, see one barreling toward you, or want to be prepared with one less thing keeping you up at night, let us help you avoid surprises.

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH US NOW FOR A COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION

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THE CURLEY PROMISE

10 PLEDGES WE KEEP TO OUR CLIENTS AND OURSELVES