



Crisis Communication Checklist

A crisis will happen in the life of most organizations. It's not so much a matter of if but when. Even if you think it will never occur, taking time to prepare for a crisis is your best defense. Use this checklist as a starting point for the development of your agency or organization's crisis communication plan.

Part I- Before the Crisis, Preparation

- 1. Organize a "what if" brainstorming session with others.** Come up with "what if" scenarios about potential crisis situations and write a general procedure for responding to the "what if" crises.
- 2. Select crisis management and crisis communication teams.** Who is responsible for communicating with the media during a crisis? Everyone in your organization should know the members of the crisis communication and crisis management teams.
- 3. Identify key audiences.** Determine to whom you want to communicate.
- 4. Designate a spokesperson.** One person should answer all questions and make all presentations to ensure that information comes from one source.
- 5. Anticipate the tough questions.** Make a list of potential tough questions and be ready to respond to them.

Part II- During the Crisis, Communication

- 1. Gather information.** Facts should be routinely updated; rumors should be verified or exposed as myths. Miscommunication heightens during a crisis and can be exaggerated by half-truths, distortions, or negative perceptions.
- 2. Develop messages and then communicate the messages and the facts.** Develop a few clear, simple messages for the media. The message should communicate concern about what is happening and explain what the organization is doing to address the crisis. In a crisis that involves physical harm or a health risk to the public, provide guidance to the public and get the public the information they need, quickly.
- 3. Provide graphics.** Using drawings, graphics, or diagrams helps you illustrate your point about a process that may be complicated.
- 4. Be active, not reactive.** Take the offensive when a serious matter occurs.
- 5. Centralize information.** Use one spokesperson who communicates effectively, knows your communication plan, and comes across as trustworthy and caring.

6. **Control the message.** Stick to the message and the facts. Control the information that is disseminated.
7. **Control the flow of information.** Hold regularly scheduled news conferences or reports so that the information gets aired frequently and reliably.
8. **Do not get angry.** Stay calm and friendly, even when you are asked the "hard" questions.
9. **Stay "on the record" in all interviews.** Any comment worth saying should be said "on the record."
10. **Do not say "no comment."** Try to have an answer for reporters' questions. Saying "no comment" appears to television viewers and newspaper readers that you have something to hide.
11. **Respond to the news media quickly and fairly.** Cooperate with reporters, be sensitive to deadlines, and provide all reporters with the same information.
12. **Keep track of media calls and requests.** You will use this information later as you evaluate your crisis communication plan and your response to the crisis.
13. **In any crisis situation, follow every order, direction, or suggestion from emergency officials.**
14. **Write everything down.** Maintain a crisis communication inventory of what was said, by whom and at what time. This way you will have a record of the event and how it was communicated. You can evaluate your responses to better be prepared if another crisis happens in the future.

Part III- After the Crisis- Evaluation

1. **Review why the crisis occurred.** Could you have done anything to prevent the crisis?
2. **Evaluate how the crisis was handled.** Was information disseminated through one spokesperson? Were there any miscommunications?
3. **Examine similar scenarios.** What would you do in a similar situation in the future? What did others do in similar situations?