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Navigating the Crisis Communications Minefield

Chris Lukach, APR



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Chris Lukach, APR
CEO
AKCG – Public Relations Counselors





PART ONE: THE MOMENT IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES

Reason #1

*These past few school years
have been ... interesting.*



Reason #2

The pandemic has greatly disrupted our relationships; the social justice movement has compounded this sense of distance.



Reason #3

*Bonds are weakened.
We can rebuild them.*



Reason #3

*Crises may be unexpected,
but they shouldn't come as
a surprise.*



Three Facets of Crisis Comms:

Crisis Preparedness


Crisis Response

Reputation Recovery



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PART TWO: PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNICATING IN THE MOMENT



Set benchmarks.



**Train your team:
Noise is not impact.**





**Work in process
but speak in outcomes.**



**Answer logic with logic
and emotion with emotion.**



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SERVING &
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**Ask for feedback,
demonstrate listening.**

**Use disruptive channels
of communication.**





Flip it ...

***Could that email
have been a meeting?***





**Harness the power of the
unanticipated phone call.**



**Act with character and
keep *IN* character.**





PART THREE: THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE



Today's Media Landscape

News media are changing.



Today's Media Landscape

Being first is more important than being correct.



Today's Media Landscape

*We have re-defined the concept of newsworthiness.
Media have followed.*



Today's Media Landscape

If we aren't setting the tone, someone is setting it for us.



Today's Media Landscape

Media may be the squeakiest wheel, but our key audiences need the grease.



PART THREE:

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SELF-ASSESSMENT



Question One:

Do I have a crisis
communications plan?



Question One

- ❑ **Do I have a crisis communications plan?**
 - ❑ Do I really have a crisis plan?
 - ❑ Do I REALLY have a crisis plan?



Question One

- ❑ **Do I have a crisis communications plan?**
 - ❑ Does my plan address every situation that can affect my institution's goodwill or reputation?
 - ❑ Does my plan incorporate the sensational?



Question One

- ❑ **Do I have a crisis communications plan?**
 - ❑ Is my plan actionable?
 - ❑ Will my plan help my team communicate within 15 minutes?



Question One

- ❑ **Do I have a crisis communications plan?**
 - ❑ Is my plan in sync with our operational crisis plans?
 - ❑ Do those individuals with responsibilities know they have them?





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SAMPLE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN SCENARIO

Death of Student/Faculty (Non-suicide)

Scenario Description: A student or faculty member dies suddenly. Their passing may or may not be related to COVID-19.

Standby Statement:

This standby statement is intended to be the first statement, issued within minutes, prioritizing tone over details. In today's complex media landscape, we may not have the luxury of time to gather complete information before we need to begin communicating.

We are (shocked/deeply saddened/heartbroken) by the passing of one of our (students/faculty). The entire school community mourns the loss of (name), who passed away (last week/yesterday/last night/etc.) *IF APPROPRIATE* – reportedly due to complications from COVID-19.

We (wish his/her family peace/pray God brings peace) to (his/her) family during this unimaginably difficult time. As a community, we will rely on the love and support of one another to heal. We have made counseling services available to our students and faculty.

(PROVIDE DETAILS ON HOW TO ACCESS COUNSELING SERVICES.)

If appropriate: We will keep our community updated when funeral/memorial/service information becomes available.

If appropriate: As we navigate the challenging landscape of COVID-19, we are committed to providing the safest possible environment for our students, faculty and staff. With such a devastating loss, we will revisit our policies and practices to make sure we are protecting our community as best we can.

If appropriate: (COMMUNICATE DETAILS OF POSSIBLE EXPOSURE/QUARANTING MEASURES, ETC.)

Questions to Consider When Preparing Additional Statements:

While we cannot always prepare in advance the answers we must give – we can anticipate the questions we will receive. Consider these in advance and begin answering these questions at the earliest moment.

1. How did he/she pass away?
2. Did he/she die on campus or as the result of an injury on campus?
3. What are we doing to help his/her family?
4. What are we doing to help students directly affected by this loss?
5. What are we doing to honor his/her memory?
6. If appropriate: Will there be an internal or legal investigation?
7. If appropriate: Who will take over his/her responsibilities/classes/etc.?
8. If appropriate: Is the death somehow related to criminal circumstances?
9. If appropriate: Will the community believe this loss could have been prevented?
10. If appropriate: How many other members of your school community have tested positive for COVID-19?

Key Contacts: (Spokespersons for different levels of information):

Executive (Express the School's position, concern, caring and policy)

- Head of School
- Director of Communications & Marketing

Technical (Reaffirm concern; offer confirmed facts/details about the situation)

- Director of Student Life/Dean of Faculty

Who Communicates with the Key Audiences, and How?

Communicating during a crisis is about much more than working with the media – it is about engaging meaningfully with the audiences in whom we must preserve our trust and goodwill. Think about who these audiences are, and be clear about who is responsible for communicating with them.

<u>Audience</u>	<u>Communicator</u>	<u>Method</u>
Parents	Head of School	Email, Phone, Social Media
Students	Head of School Dean of Student Life	Email, In person, Social Media In person
Faculty & Staff	Head of School Dean of Faculty	Email, In person, Social Media In person
Parent-Teacher Association	Head of School	Email

Question Two:

Are my spokespersons trained
and ready to respond at a
moment's notice?



Question Two

- ❑ **Are my spokespersons trained and ready?**
 - ❑ Do I have a stable of spokespersons with different expertise and levels of authority?
 - ❑ Can my spokespersons convey sympathy? Empathy? Compassion?



Question Two

- ❑ **Are my spokespersons trained and ready?**
 - ❑ Do they recognize the difference between being a **spokesperson** and being a **communicator**?



Question Three:

Are we approaching social media through a crisis lens?



Question Three

- ❑ **Are we approaching social media through a crisis lens?**
 - ❑ Do we have policies and procedures to respond to issues that arise on social media?



Question Three

- ❑ **Are we approaching social media through a crisis lens?**
 - ❑ Does my front-line social media team have trained antennae?



Question Four:

Do we have reasonable
processes for approving
communications?



Question Four

- ❑ **Do we have reasonable processes for approving communications?**
 - ❑ Who has to sign off before we click send?
 - ❑ Do our policies permit communication within **15 minutes?**



Question Four

- ❑ **Do we have reasonable processes for approving communications?**
 - ❑ Are my back-pocket materials vetted by legal counsel?



Question Five:

Does communications have
a seat at the table?



Question Five

- ❑ **Does communications have a seat at the table?**
 - ❑ Do communicators have access to pertinent information in a timely fashion?
 - ❑ Are communicators empowered to work quickly?



Question Five

- ❑ **Does communications have a seat at the table?**
 - ❑ Beyond the **authority** to act, do communicators have the **confidence**?



Thank you!

Chris@AKCG.com

