

Third Edition

Crisis Communications

A Casebook Approach



Kathleen Fearn-Banks

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Third Edition

Kathleen Fearn-Banks
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*This book is dedicated to
my very special and supportive uncles,
Attorney Henry G. Marsh
and the late Reverend Dr. Clinton Marsh
who, in their careers,
handled crises in distinctly different ways*

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Preface

This, the third edition of *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach*, like the previous editions, is concerned with how organizations, companies, and individuals cope with the communications aspect of crisis management. How do they, or should they, communicate with the news media, employees, and consumers? They must choose the best possible words to convey their message, the best possible method of delivering the message, and the precise and most appropriate public(s) or audience(s).

Some cases in this volume feature communications professionals who handled crises well, whereas other cases show they did not. Readers will know why the cases were mishandled after reading the informational chapters as well as other cases. The book suggests that professionals plan for crises by developing a crisis communications plan.

Some researchers do not advise planning because a crisis never strikes in the exact manner that one would expect. Although that is true, many communicators who have had plans before crises struck say that even though they were unable to follow the plan to the letter, it was still a guide, a kind of functioning supplementary and complementary brain, when the stress and trauma of the crisis made them forget or process thoughts less swiftly than in normal operations.

There are four new case studies included in this volume. “Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans” was the major U.S. crisis of 2005 and the worst natural disaster to ever hit the United States. The case here centers on the communications and the lack of communications from various agencies and businesses during the first week of the crisis that will not end for years, if ever. “AIDS in Africa” is the story of numerous communications programs designed to alleviate the HIV/AIDS crisis in specific African countries where there are cultural barriers preventing the use of programs effective in Western countries. “Columbine High School and the Shooting Tragedy” discusses the infamous incident where students and teachers were killed and injured by two boys; it is told from the point of view of the head of communications of the school district. “Wendy’s and the Finger-in-the-Chili Hoax” was a consumer-caused crisis that hit a totally innocent company and caused great financial loss.

For academics, chapter 3, “Crisis Communications Theory,” covers more theories relevant to crisis communications than the previous editions and also concentrates on the Excellence Theory developed specifically for the relatively new field and subject of crisis communications.

Since the previous edition of the book, new technology has provided tools for battling crises and also has been involved in causing crises. Chapter 1, “Crisis Communications: Then and Now,” is concerned with the rapidly changing face of communications technology. Chapter 2, “Managing a Crisis,” revised in various ways, features a section on “Communicating Directly With the Masses,” particularly through Web sites and blogs.

Web sites are utilized in “AIDS in Africa.” Blogs are addressed in the expanded chapter, “Rumors and Cybercrises.” Web sites and blogs are also included in “Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans.”

There are three crisis communications plans in the appendices and all have been revised to include the new technology. Numerous cases and mini-cases from previous editions are included because they teach effective lessons no matter when they occurred. Some of them have been condensed or combined; most have been updated.

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At Southern University in Baton Rouge, I was assisted by Keisha LaCour, Derick Hackett, Professor Dedria Givens, and her graduate students in public relations, and particularly New Orleanian Courtney Scott, who read the case study for accuracy despite the sadness it brought back. Instructor/communications professional Frances Spencer provided the poignant story about blogs on www.NOLA.com.

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CHAPTER ONE

Crisis Communications: Then and Now

When Gutenberg invented moveable type in 1454 and printed the Bible, the print communications revolution began. Printing books became a sensation; printing presses sprang up all over Europe. This was a great departure from the spoken word that had been king since the beginning of time. What the printing press did was to add permanence to words, phrases, and speeches. Print would rule for about 400 years when the electronic media brought in the second great communications revolution.

In the mid-1950s, television entered the homes of nearly everyone on the planet and changed every aspect of life. The first coaxial cable was connected in 1951 making national television possible. In addition to entertaining us, television educated us and socialized us—even when we were not aware. This was also the communications revolution that, though not dead, will be dominated by the next communications revolution—digital communications.

When the second edition of this book was published in 2001, the crises in the book were minimalized by the largest attack ever made on the United States on its own soil on September 11th. However, when it comes to crisis communications, the technology of the past few years, more than the terrorists' attacks, made some of the techniques in the book somewhat outdated.

The invention of the World Wide Web in 1990 by Tim Berners-Lee and the later development of Internet protocols (such as IP, TCP, FTP, and e-mail) as a means of gathering and delivering free information made an even greater impact on the communications revolution. This is a new communications revolution and it's largely digital—computers, the Internet, Blackberries, PDAs, and so on. All of these have already begun a new transformation into the lives of the world's people.

Crisis communications, as described in this book, is concerned with the transferring of information to significant persons (publics) to either help avoid or prevent a crisis (or negative occurrence), recover from a crisis, and maintain or enhance reputation.

Crisis communications necessarily has existed since time began, although the subject has been studied and the practice has been identified for less than 25 years.

Before the print communications revolution, crisis communications was obviously oral presentation, persuasion, and argument. Anyone willing and able to get an audience could communicate. During the print and broadcast communications revolutions, skill and expertise were needed to get access to the tools of the trade; there are editors and other gatekeepers preventing or permitting access to the publics. However, in this new digital communications revolution, again the channels of communications are open to nearly everyone with a desire. Considering the numbers of people there were on earth before Gutenberg and the population now, the communications possibilities are enormous and promise to grow even more, making the world an even smaller place than it is now.

Although we have embarked on the digital information age, print, broadcast, and oral communications are still important and necessary. Each new technology has affected the way previous tools were used, but has not eliminated them.

The communications tools of the revolution will help solve some crises, although they will also cause some crises as well.

CRISES ALLEVIATED OR PREVENTED BY RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: BLOGS

Blogs are becoming a necessity in crisis communications. The word *blog* is a contraction of the word *Weblog* and organizations can develop these blogs with software that creates a page of the organization's thoughts on a particular subject or issue. If a company or organization sets up its own blog, it can offer updates to an issue or crisis on a regular basis and remain accessible to its publics. A written message on a blog is called a *post* and posts can be linked to other data on the Web like the organization's Web site, other Web sites, news stories, other blogs, even photo and video images. Search engines like Google and Yahoo! help information seekers locate this information, so if the organization is on its toes, it can have a store of support. It also provides a record of response to a subject or issue. We see that blogging can be part of a crisis communications plan; however, it does not replace it. (See "Communicating Directly With the Masses" in chap. 2.)

One of the positive aspects of blogging was evident when U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announced her retirement and John Roberts, Jr. was nominated by the President to take her seat. When previous seats on the court were becoming available, a public demonstration, a televised man-on-the street interview session, or a radio call-in show might have sparked public concern. This time, instead, the Internet was the tool as bloggers expressed their opinions and predictions. The positive aspect was not whether Roberts would be accepted, but that more people were involved in the discussion and in influencing the subsequent decision making. Within an hour of O'Connor's announced resignation, an interest group had sent out nearly a million e-mails. The Pew Internet and American Life Project said that 37% of Americans used the Internet to gather information, debate the issues, or make contributions. It made it easier for ordinary citizens to express themselves to senators and to influence their families, friends, and associates.

Another positive aspect of blogging was after a destructive situation. After the terrorist bombings in London in July 2005, bloggers told their experiences to the world in great numbers. There were approximately 100,000 blogs on the Web, according to Technorati, a company that tracked the more than 12 million blogs on the Web at the time of the London incidents. It said that 16 of the 20 most popular search terms were about the bombings. There were dramatic eyewitness accounts, graphic photos posted from digital cameras or camera phones, and simple notes telling family and friends, "I'm OK." (For blogging crises, see chap. 5.)

At the end of 2005, there were an estimated 10 million people blogging with a new blog started every 7 seconds. Fortune 500 companies began to keep their own blog or online journal, to be used as a public relations tool.

Digital media users were the heroes after the Asian tsunami on December 26, 2004. They became reporters text messaging accounts including photographs and videos of the tragedy. Families used the Internet to find missing people. Digital photos of bodies were placed online for identification. A blog, Tsunamihelp.com, received 20,000 hits within 2 hours on the morning of the tsunami. Another blog, TsunamiHelpWiki.com helped connect donors, volunteers, and relief agencies with communities that needed aid.

CRISES ALLEVIATED OR PREVENTED BY RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: CELL PHONES

A combination of old and new technology was instrumental in saving lives in the Katrina-torn Gulf states of the United States. Persons stranded by floodwaters on the roof of a house in New Orleans could not reach help by the 911 systems, so they used a cell phone to contact a relative in Baton Rouge. That person contacted another who got in touch with the American Red Cross, where a ham radio operator involved in the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) was used to funnel the request through Oregon, Utah, and back to Louisiana to save the 15 people and get them to a shelter. In another incident, a family of five was trapped in an attic in Diamond Head, Louisiana. Again they used a cell phone to call out; a ham radio operator realized it was an area struck by the storm surge and contacted the Coast Guard. A search and rescue team was dispatched.

CRISES ALLEVIATED OR PREVENTED BY RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: INTERNET/WEB SITES

Internet Notification Service for Partners or Tricks (InSPOT) was launched in California to allow gay and bisexual men with sexually transmitted diseases to anonymously e-mail former partners of possible exposure. The e-mail service was started in San Francisco and is expected to be adopted worldwide. The program was praised for being an online solution to an online problem because men finding men on the Internet for sex seemed to be on the rise. One possible negative outcome is that there is no way for recipients to know whether the e-mail is a prank or a legitimate concern; users need not prove that they have tested positive for STDs.

A seismologist at the U.S. Geological Survey developed a Web site (pasadena.wr.usgs.gov/step) to calculate the probability of earthquakes in California. Californians can go online and check for the possibility of jolts or aftershocks in the next 24 hours. It does not necessarily warn of the “big one,” however.

The Roman Catholic Church frequently assimilates new technology. Vatican Radio was first used in 1931; the Vatican’s first Internet Web site was launched in 1996, 3 years before the government of Italy launched its first Web site. Shortly before Pope John Paul II died in 2005, he appeared before his flock via a remote satellite hookup. John Allen, a correspondent for the U.S. *publication National Catholic Reporter*, said, “We are increasingly looking at the prospects of some kind of electronic or virtual papacy. We don’t know exactly what that means yet, but it will become clearer over time.”

The San Diego Zoo installed its first Internet camera in 1999 so that animal fans across the globe may watch the polar bears, apes, and elephants. In 2005, 637,000 “visitors” to the site of the National Zoo in Washington, DC, watched the birth of a male panda cub over a 3-day period. Attendance in zoos has dropped over the years and the zoos hope the virtual visits will spark an interest in actual visits.

To counter the negative Internet chatter about its labor practices, Wal-Mart developed a Web site (www.walmartfacts.com). In addition, information seekers can reach the site through search queries like “walmart-labor,” “walmart lawsuit,” “walmart trade,” and “walmart sexism.” This way, the company is able to tell its own story.

CRISES STARTED WITH RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: E-MAIL

Fraudulent e-mails claiming to seek donations for victims was perhaps the most horrible outcome of the aftermath of natural disasters. Just days after Hurricane Katrina, the charity scams began online as well as by other methods. The FBI estimated that more than 4,000 Katrina-related sites sprang up and that most were believed to be criminal. "Fraudulent ones are popping up faster than we can pound them down," a leading cyber-official said. After the Asian tsunami, a man in Pennsylvania sent 800,000 e-mails claiming that he represented Mercy Corps and asking for contributions for victims. In the United Kingdom, a man with no access to information was arrested for sending e-mails to families who were missing relatives, claiming knowledge that the relatives had died. The Web site CharityNavigator.org evaluates organizations soliciting donations.

E-mail rumors have continued to cause crises for product companies. A rumor circulated claiming that an antiperspirant caused a woman's liver, kidneys, and lungs to collapse and that antiperspirants are the leading cause of breast cancer. She shaved her underarms with a blade and then used an antiperspirant and apparently developed *hidradenitis superativa*, an infection that can start in the sweat glands in the underarm area. The American Cancer Society responded to the e-mail in its online news center, saying the antiperspirant may be "slightly irritating" to someone recovering from that infection, but that there is no study to even suggest the antiperspirant is a risk factor for breast cancer. (For other e-mail rumors, see chap. 5.)

Nigerian E-Mail Scam

In the Nigerian scam, usually an e-mail message is distributed to long mailing lists saying a wealthy person in a foreign country needs assistance moving huge sums of money from his country to a U.S. bank (or a bank in any country). The person who agrees to help will ostensibly be given a great percentage of the fortune, from hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions. However, problems always occur and excuses are made: "We're waiting for the paperwork" or "The funds are being held up because of red tape here in my country." The solution to the problems is always to have the victim send \$5,000 or more to expedite the process. The victim thinks \$5,000 is nothing compared to the million dollars to be received when the transaction is completed, so he or she forwards the money. However, the transaction is never completed and the victim's bank account is eventually sucked dry.

It's called the Nigerian scam, because many of the e-mails come from Nigeria, but they can come from any country. Law enforcement in Nigeria has made efforts to curtail the scamming, but some of the con artists are actually working out of Canadian cities where, if arrested and convicted, they are likely to receive light sentences. Always, the scams are international so the victim's law enforcement agencies have little or no jurisdiction over the con artists.

Phishing

Phishing is sending out bogus e-mails that appear to come from legitimate financial institutions asking for personal data with which they will help you solve some banking

problem that you may not have. Savvy computer users usually spot the scams, but crooks count on the naïve.

Pharming is even more sophisticated than phishing; its online swindlers use crime software aimed to trick frightened consumers into revealing personal data, also through e-mail.

CRISES STARTED WITH RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: HACKING

In November 2005, a laptop containing Social Security numbers, birthdays, and banking data of 161,000 Boeing Company employees was stolen. Boeing alerted the employees and assisted them in enrolling in fraud prevention programs.

DSW Warehouse, a national shoe retail store, sent letters to its credit card customers that hackers violated an ill-protected database and might make charges to credit card accounts.

Hackers in June 2005, in Tucson, Arizona, infiltrated computers at a credit card processing center and stole 40 million card numbers from CardSystems, Inc. This was done by a rogue program planted inside the computer network. More than 68,000 accounts had fraudulent charges posted to them, according to MasterCard International. It was the largest security breach up to that date.

A spy program called 2Search is a bogus eBay link that secretly hijacks Google searches by presenting fake results along with legitimate results, making victims believe nothing is amiss. “Spyware” is the suspect; that’s a term for software installed on computers without the owner’s knowledge. The purpose seems to be to make money by installing advertising and spy programs on more computers. Webroot Software, Inc., a security software vendor, spotted the program and said the number of Internet sites pushing unwanted software is growing fast and is harder to detect.

The Trojan horse is another uninvited program that looks innocent but opens a computer up for installation of other bad software. In 2005, 20 top-ranked professionals in Israel were arrested for pilfering private documents from business rivals by sending Trojan horse files disguised as e-mail from trusted sources.

CRISES STARTED WITH RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY: WEB SITES AND BLOGS

Wikipedia, the ultra-successful free online encyclopedia that allows users to post and edit articles, suffered a challenge to its credibility when journalist John Seigenthaler discovered a Wikipedia article that falsely asserted that he had been a suspect in the assassinations of both John and Robert Kennedy. The writer said he thought Wikipedia was a gag site and his false assertion was a prank. The situation not only challenges Wikipedia, but also challenges truth on the Internet.

Retail giant Wal-Mart was accused of racism when its Web site urged consumers who bought the DVDs *Planet of the Apes* and *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory* to also

consider purchasing DVDs with African-American themes like *Martin Luther King Jr.: I Have A Dream* and *Unforgiveable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*.

Wal-Mart apologized, said its “mapping” system was malfunctioning and promised to shut down its entire cross-selling system overnight. Other companies with retail sites also direct users to similar products, including Amazon.com, and books.

The first complaint was posted on a blog and a reporter brought it to the attention of Wal-Mart management. Within hours, the blog was on two other sites and more than 100 comments had been posted.

Longtime TV news anchor Dan Rather stepped down from his position as anchor and managing editor of the *CBS Evening News* after an attack of blogs. Rather had come under fire for a report on *60 Minutes II* on September 8, 2003, during the presidential campaign between President Bush and Senator John Kerry. The report said that President Bush had evaded the military draft and used his connections to join the Texas National Guard. A blog soon appeared on FreeRepublic.com discussing the issue and soon 47 more blogs had been posted. A person named “Buckhead” suggested that the documents *60 Minutes II* used were forged. Other bloggers investigated and followed with additional charges. *60 Minutes II* discovered that part of its documentation was based on one man’s invented story. So Rather announced his resignation from the *CBS Evening News*. The incident has been called “Rathergate.”

Whether a crisis begins with something as simplistic as a crudely written flyer posted in a high school (see chap. 5: Snapps Restaurant), or a multilevel disaster like 2005’s Hurricane Katrina (see chap. 6) that impacted thousands of citizens and government officials on the federal, state, and local levels, communications must be used to bring about recovery. Whether a simple phone call or news release is used to communicate the message or the latest technological invention is used, some things are still very basic. In crisis communications, one must craft the best message by the most effective method of communications to the appropriate publics. It all begins with a basic understanding of terms.

WHAT IS A CRISIS AND WHAT IS CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS?

A *crisis* is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. A crisis interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization. A crisis can be a strike, terrorism, fire, a boycott, product tampering, product failure, or numerous other events (see the list on p. 291). The size of the organization is irrelevant. It can be a multinational corporation, a one-person business, or even an individual.

Public relations professionals often say, “I have a crisis every day.” This is an exaggeration, of course. The term *crisis* denotes something more serious than a “problem.” Public relations people deal with problems—solving them or avoiding them. By definition, however, a crisis interrupts the normal flow of business, so a crisis cannot be a normal part of this flow.

On the other hand, a crisis is not necessarily so catastrophic that the life of the organization is destroyed. Exxon suffered the crisis of crises after its oil spill in 1989. It still suffers from a bad image, but it continues to thrive in business. (See Exxon, chap. 4.)

This book advises you to plan for the worst that can happen, whether it be a crisis or problem. This brings us to another expression: “Be prepared.” This book shows you how to prepare yourself and your organization to cope with crises that may occur. It deals with preparations made far in advance, as well as with strategies and tactics to be used during a crisis. It examines the experiences of public relations professionals in crises, describing what they did, what they wished they had done, and what hampered their progress. You can learn from their successes and failures.

In a crisis, in contrast to a problem, emotions are on edge, brains are not fully functioning, and events are occurring so rapidly that drafting a plan during a crisis is unthinkable. Simply following one is difficult.

Crisis management is a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny.

Crisis communications is the dialog between the organization and its public prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence. The dialog details strategies and tactics are designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization.

Effective crisis management includes crisis communications that not only can alleviate or eliminate the crisis, but also can sometimes bring the organization a more positive reputation than it had before the crisis.

Public relations deals with publics. *Publics* are the specific audiences targeted by programs. People frequently use the term general public, but public relations professionals are usually more specific in their targeting. Examples of corporate publics include the following:

- Employees.
- Customers.
- Stockholders.
- Community Members.
- Board Members.
- Unions.
- Retirees.

There can be numerous others. An organization depends on these publics for survival because they have some stake in the organization.

Public relations is concerned with reputation. It exists to avoid a negative image and to create or enhance a positive reputation. It is largely the fear of a negative image that causes organizations to develop public relations departments, hire public relations agencies, or both.

Too often, an organization does not consider utilizing public relations until it is in a crisis. Then it wants a speedy recovery.

Research shows (see chap. 3) that companies with ongoing two-way communications often avoid crises or endure crises of shorter duration or of lesser magnitude. Research also shows that companies with a crisis management and/or crisis communications plan come out of a crisis with a more positive image than companies without such a plan.

Whether an organization is a large multinational company or a small business, a *crisis communications plan* is needed. A crisis communications plan is preferably a part of a

company-wide *crisis management plan* that would include sections on evacuation, work sites, equipment, and so on. If a company does not have a crisis management plan, a crisis communications plan is still advisable, even urgent.

The media to which you have tried unsuccessfully to pitch ideas for news stories, the media that toss “perfect” news releases in the trash, the media that never return phone calls—that media will call on you in a crisis. They will probably not telephone in advance. They will show up on your premises “in your face.” The media, seeing themselves as advocates for the people, can be the principal adversaries in a crisis.

This is a time when public relations takes front and center—in a very crucial way. This is not to say that public relations will operate independently—that might be a greater disaster. It is a time, however, when the CEO may listen to the PR pro whose name he can never remember.

Even in a crisis, sometimes, the head of the company or organization does not listen because business schools often teach CEOs to make their own decisions. There are many documented cases of disasters during which CEOs acted independently. The Exxon crisis, again, is an example. Exxon’s CEO, Lawrence Rawl, did not respond as the media and environmentalists would have preferred. He did not accept responsibility as rapidly as critics felt he should have. He did not fly to Valdez to express concern. All the moves the public relations experts would advise, Rawl ignored. Rawl is not alone in his response among corporate heads, but the number of bad responses is declining as organizations learn the effects of public opinion.

In a crisis, when everyone else is in a state of panic, public relations practitioners must have a calming attitude of “This is not as bad as it seems,” or “This could be worse. We cannot turn crises into catastrophes. This is what we do....”

THE FIVE STAGES OF A CRISIS

A crisis has five stages:

1. Detection.
2. Prevention/preparation.
3. Containment.
4. Recovery.
5. Learning.

Detection

The detection phase may begin with noting warning signs, or what Barton (1993) referred to as *prodromes* or the *prodromal stage*. Some crises have no noticeable prodromes, but many do.

When an organization in the same business as yours suffers a crisis, it is a warning to your organization. The 1982 Tylenol tampering case was a prodrome to other manufacturers of over-the-counter drugs. Most companies heeded that warning and now use tamper-proof containers. Imagine how many crises were avoided by noticing that what happened to Tylenol could happen to other companies.

On the other hand, Johnson & Johnson itself had little warning before it was hit with this crisis. No one had ever before poisoned an over-the-counter painkiller; it was not a crisis Johnson & Johnson had anticipated. The only warning the company had was a

phone call from a journalist from the *Chicago Tribune*, taken by a Johnson & Johnson public relations staff member. The journalist asked questions about the company's holdings, the spelling of names, and so forth. The employee reported the call to supervisors, who called the newspaper and found out that there were deaths attributed to Tylenol (see chap. 4: "Johnson & Johnson and the Tylenol Murders").

The Exxon *Valdez* oil spill was a prodrome to other companies as well as Exxon itself. Oil companies now know better how to prevent spills, how to clean up spills, and how to react to the public after spills.

There are other less obvious prodromes. Employee discontent over any issue is a sign of a brewing crisis. Perhaps there is an increase in complaints about work hours, work conditions, or unreasonable supervisors. Any one of these and many more issues can be an early sign of a work stoppage. The same prodromes can be early signs of workplace violence.

If you know that your chief executive's salary is especially exorbitant, you also know that this can be fuel for public concern, especially if you are a nonprofit organization. This was a prodrome for the United Way of America when its chief executive, William Aramony, was criticized for his salary and perks.

An organization should watch for prodromes and make attempts to stop a crisis at this stage before it develops into a full-blown crisis. To detect these early signs, organizations form employee committees that function like lighthouse keepers watching for vessels at sea, watchdogs, or whistle-blowers. These whistle-blowers report warning signs to organization officials who can implement plans to avoid the impending crisis or at least have time to prepare to address the media or other publics.

Roy Betts, former media representative for the U.S. Postal Service, speaking of the postal workers' violence prevention program, said "You should be aware of your surroundings. There are warning signs if you look for them and consider them carefully." The U.S. Postal Service installed hotline telephones so workers can report odd or potentially violent behavior. Each call to the hotline is considered seriously.

Crisis detection also refers to a system within the organization in which key personnel are immediately notified of a crisis. An organization has a considerable advantage if it knows about a crisis before its publics do, especially before the news media get the tip. This gives the organization time to draft a statement, make preparations for a news conference, notify the crisis team, and call in spokespersons. As mentioned earlier, the phone call from a *Chicago Tribune* journalist gave Johnson & Johnson some lead time before the public knew about the Tylenol murders.

Crisis Prevention

Ongoing public relations programs and regular two-way communications build relationships with key publics and thereby prevent crises, lessen the blows of crises, or limit the duration of crises.

The establishment of a corporate culture conducive to the positive and open interaction of members also minimizes crises, as does including crisis management in the strategic planning process (see chap. 3, "Crisis Communications Theory").

There are other specific tactics and actions that an organization may adopt to prevent crises. These tactics must be communicated to appropriate publics. A company must not only do what is right; *it also must tell its publics that it is doing so*. Crisis prevention tactics include the following:

1. Fostering the continued development of organizational policies that allow for updates and changes based on variances of publics and mission.
2. Reducing the use of hazardous material and processes.
3. Initiating safety training and providing rewards for employees with stellar safety records.
4. Allowing the free flow of information from employees to management with no punishment of employees who deliver bad news.
5. Following up on past crises or problems.
6. Attending community meetings.
7. Developing a community board with key outside members who are public opinion leaders.
8. Circulating a newsletter to frequent consumers.
9. Offering scholarships for employees and their children as well as to other children in the community.
10. Hosting community or employee picnics.
11. Sponsoring community activities, such as Little League teams and charities.

In communications, diligence can sometimes prevent crises. A public relations executive in the Midwest told of a telephone call from a West Coast journalist at 5 p.m., just as she was leaving for the weekend. She could easily have refused the call, but she decided to take it.

The reporter was preparing to write a story for a big-city newspaper about the failure of a product manufactured by the PR executive's company. The story was one that could have sparked a full-scale crisis. The PR person took the time to locate information that proved the information to be baseless. The reporter was satisfied and the crisis that could have been was averted.

If all members of the management staff are trained to be media savvy, numerous crises can be prevented. Using the same story, the PR executive could have consulted a respected expert on the issue to refute the charges and nip them in the bud. Public relations personnel and key organizational leaders should always be aware of who these experts are and of how to reach them in emergencies. Prompt responses to media inquiries are also a plus.

Crisis Preparation

Crisis preparation is necessary for dealing with crises that cannot be prevented. Pepsi-Cola had no way of anticipating the scare in which hypodermic syringes were found in cans of Diet Pepsi. The presence of these syringes in the cans cried "AIDS," and fear of the illness and death far surpassed brand loyalty. Pepsi could not have prevented the crisis, but it was prepared to deal with it (see chap. 9, "Pepsi and the Syringe-in-the-the Scare").

The crisis communications plan is the primary tool of preparedness (see chap. 10, “The Crisis Communications Plan”). This plan tells each key person on the crisis team what his or her role is, whom to notify, how to reach people, what to say, and so on. The crisis communications plan provides a functioning collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotions of the crisis event.

Containment

Containment refers to the effort to limit the duration of the crisis or to keep it from spreading to other areas affecting the organization.

Pepsi used an advertisement to end its crisis. After several hoaxes had been exposed without the discovery of one documented case of a syringe in a can after the original incident, the company decided the crisis was over and told the world so. And it was.

Foodmaker, parent company of the Jack-in-the-Box fast-food chain, was charged by PR critics with delaying resolution of the E. coli crisis, which killed several children and one adult in 1993, because the company did not take responsibility for the tainted meat soon enough. On the other hand, as long as people, especially children, were sick and dying, there was no way Foodmaker could curtail the crisis. It was contained to the Pacific Northwest and did not affect all outlets of the chain. Also, Jack-in-the-Box communicated to consumers that other food products in the restaurants were not contaminated.

Recovery

Recovery involves efforts to return the company to business as usual. Organizations want to leave the crisis behind and restore normalcy as soon as possible. Recovery may also mean restoring the confidence of key publics, which means communicating a return to normal business.

Snapps, a fast-food restaurant in Fort Pierce, Florida, suffered from a rumor that one of its managers had AIDS and had infected hamburgers. To implement recovery, health department officials participated in a news conference telling the public that all managers had been tested, that none had the AIDS virus, and that the virus could not be transmitted through hamburgers (see chap. 5).

Exxon attempted to recover from the *Valdez* oil spill by efforts to persuade tourists that Alaska was still a beautiful place to visit. It is particularly interesting that Exxon looked beyond its own recovery to the way its crisis had affected the tourism industry.

Learning

The learning phase is a process of examining the crisis and determining what was lost, what was gained, and how the organization performed in the crisis. It is an evaluative procedure designed to make the crisis a prodrome for the future.

One might think that this is like closing the barn door after the cows have escaped. Any farmer will tell you that once the cows are back in the barn, they will escape again unless you close the door this time. Just because a company has suffered one crisis is no indication that it will not happen again.

Johnson & Johnson, after its second tampering crisis, learned its lesson by selling over-the-counter medications in tamper-proof containers. Other companies followed suit. Public relations personnel set about the task of telling the public about the new safety containers.

Another example of the learning phase is illustrated by the case of U.S. airlines, which had been plagued with hijackings during the 1960s and 1970s. The airlines set up metal detectors at airports for persons boarding planes. The procedure was extended to cover employees after an irate employee boarded a plane with a gun, shot a supervisor, and caused a fatal crash. The airlines' public relations personnel informed passengers of the new safety procedures.

The learning phase brings about change that helps prevent future crises.

PUBLIC OPINION

In a crisis, the public perceives truth to be whatever public opinion says. An organization in crisis must prove to its publics, and often to the general public, that the prevailing negative opinion is not factual. In contrast to a U.S. court of law where a person is innocent until proven guilty, in the court of public opinion, a person or organization is guilty until proven innocent.

Public opinion is difficult to define, but it is based on individuals' attitudes toward specific issues. These attitudes are based on age, educational level, religion, country, state, city, neighborhood, family background and traditions, social class, and racial background. All of these help to form each individual's attitudes, and a predominance of similar attitudes makes up public opinion.

On any given issue, people are in favor, against, neutral, or so disinterested that they could not care less. Most people, unfortunately, fall into the last category. Public relations aims to reinforce positive attitudes, change negative attitudes, and provide information in a way that causes the unopinionated and neutral to form the opinion most conducive to the organization's function.

An organization has no choice in accepting a crisis. A crisis is forced on it, and the organization must cope with it. Organizations can ignore a crisis and hope it will go away. Occasionally, it does. More often, it does not. A crisis ignored is an organization failing.

The essential role of crisis communications is to affect the public opinion process and to be instrumental in establishing and communicating proof that the prevailing "truth" is not factual or not wholly factual. Then, explanations of how much is true must follow. If the organization is actually at fault, owning up to it is usually the best policy. The public is forgiving if measures are taken to prevent recurrence.

The news media are a prime tool for changing public opinion. The media can reach the masses in a short period of time because most Americans utilize some form of the news media, primarily television. Radio is popular during prime traffic hours. Public relations experts are trained in knowing how to reach the media, when and how to call a news conference, when and how to conduct one-on-one interviews, and when and how to disseminate written material.

Crisis communications, like public relations, is not merely the distribution of news releases. Neither is it only media relations. Frequently, community relations, consumer relations, employee relations, investor relations, government relations, and many other kinds of public relations are involved.

MINI-CASE: WHITE STAR LINE'S *TITANIC* SINKS

To illustrate terms, let's examine a well-known crisis: the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912.

Titanic was one of several ships of the White Star Line, which had a primary rival: the Cunard Line. The Cunard Line had two famously fast ships—the *Lusitania* and the *Mauritania*. White Star decided not to compete with Cunard on speed but to surpass it, as far as public opinion was concerned, in size, elegance, sumptuousness, and safety.

The White Star Line planned to launch three ships—the *Olympic*, the *Titanic*, and the *Gigantic*, in that order. In the area of media relations, advance publicity praised the immensely luxurious ships. Postcards went out claiming the *Titanic* was “the largest moving object in the world.” A promotional brochure claimed the *Olympic* and *Titanic* were “designed to be unsinkable” (Ziakas, 1999, p. 109). The trade journal *The Shipbuilder* bragged about the *Titanic*'s opulence—its grand staircase, its elevators, its Turkish baths, and, of course, its “unsinkable” construction.

Titanic personnel were chosen to appeal to a celebrated and wealthy clientele, the targeted public. Captain E.J. Smith, called the “millionaire's captain,” was the highest-paid captain on the seas and a celebrity in his own right. The musicians were the tops in their field and could play a wide range of music. White Star felt it had thought of everything and had attained the highest form of customer relations.

Crisis management plans and crisis communications plans were believed to be unnecessary. After all, if the ship couldn't sink, what could happen? There were medical facilities on board should passengers suffer a heart attack or some other unforeseen illness. The ship had state-of-the-art communications equipment; if help was needed, personnel could radio other ships.

We've learned that it was always possible, though unlikely, that the ship would sink. A long gash in the hull was the worst case scenario, and that is exactly what happened. So, the nonplanners were short-sighted. What about fires? Certainly the ship could burn. An adequate number of lifeboats would still be needed. In fact, a fire out of control on a ship could have been a worse disaster.

A crisis management plan would have detailed what would be done in the event of fire and other tragedies—how evacuation would take place, how to conduct practice drills for the crew and possibly for passengers, who would lower the lifeboats, who would ensure that passengers were guided safely to the closest lifeboats and ships, who would contact persons ashore by radio, when crew members would save themselves, and so on. A crisis management plan would also include making sure effective insurance policies were in place. In today's crises, one must be sure payrolls can be met; special insurances may be necessary to cover computers.

The crisis management plan would include the crisis communications plan. The crisis communications plan would include notification of the home office, where personnel acting as public relations professionals would, in turn, notify the press, White Star Line executives and employees, and passengers' relatives. These were also key publics. (The

term *public relations* was not used at the time, although that management function has always been important to the success of any company or organization.)

The crisis communications plan would also include details about who would be spokesperson once the passengers were brought to safety. If Captain Smith had survived, he would be the best spokesperson. As it was, Smith went down with the ship. However, the managing director of White Star, J. Bruce Ismay, was aboard, survived, and was rescued from a lifeboat sent from the *Carpathia*. Many felt he should have given his place on the lifeboat to a passenger. However, because he survived, he should have been the spokesperson. Instead, he hid in the luxurious quarters of the *Carpathia*'s physician until the ship docked in New York, hoping to avoid the other survivors who huddled on floors and under tables.

There were two persons connected to White Star who participated in the media communications. Harold Bride, a radio operator on the *Titanic* who worked for Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, was among the passengers picked up by the *Carpathia*. He wrote a first-person account of the tragedy that he sent to the *New York Times* by wire from the rescue ship. Phillip A.S. Franklin, who had been hired to head White Star's New York office, called together a kind of crisis communications team. This came after David Sarnoff, also a Marconi employee, heard the signal from the *Olympic* that the *Titanic* had run into an iceberg and was sinking fast; Sarnoff gave his story to the Associated Press. Franklin attempted to stop the Associated Press from running the story, saying that even though the ship had run into an iceberg, he had "absolute confidence in the *Titanic*.... We are not worried about the ship but we are sorry for the inconvenience of the passengers" (Ziakis, 1999, p. 116).

The morning before the sinking, the *New York Times* ran a story announcing that the "The New Giantess *Titanic*" would soon arrive in New York. The story was a PR person's dream, a proactive story aimed primarily at a public of potential passengers and at educating and informing the general public, thereby assuring that when asked, "What is the biggest, most elegant ship afloat?" anyone would say, "The *Titanic*." The *Times* story described the ship's impressive size, luxury, and illustrious passengers aboard its maiden voyage.

On April 15, White Star was in a reactive mode, as is almost always the case in a crisis. Presented with information from the Bride and Sarnoff stories, the *New York Times* ran a story with this headline:

**NEW-LINER TITANIC HITS AN ICEBERG; SINKING BY THE BOW AT
MIDNIGHT; WOMEN PUT OFF IN LIFE BOATS; LAST WIRELESS AT 12:27
A.M. BLURRED**

A later *New York Times* headline read as follows:

**TITANIC SINKS FOUR HOURS AFTER HITTING ICEBERG 866 RESCUED BY
CARPATHIA, PROBABLY 1250 PERISH ISMAY SAFE, MRS. ASTOR MAYBE,
NOTED NAMES MISSING**

Other newspapers' April 15 headlines indicated that the editors were much less aware of accurate details of the story. The *New York Sun*'s headline was "All Saved From *Titanic* After Collision." The *Washington Post* apparently chose to believe the spokesperson for White Star, Franklin. The *Post*'s headline was the following:

**TITANIC'S 1470 PASSENGERS ARE NOW BEING TRANSFERRED IN
LIFEBOATS TO CUNARD LINE**

Twenty Boat Loads Have Already Been

**Transferred to the Catania, of the Cunard Line.... No loss of Life Is Feared....
Officials Confident Throughout Long Period of Suspense... Halifax Hears That
Titanic Is on Her Way to That Port**

(Note that newspapers made estimates of the numbers of passengers rescued and deceased in early coverage. Also, the *Washington Post* thought the rescue ship was *Catania*, not *Carpathia*.)

The *Manchester Guardian*, on April 16, wrote about the miscommunications of White Star. Newspapers love to write about corporate mistakes; it's the stuff of which interesting articles are made. Under the headline "The Day's Strange Reports in America," the story was a timeline of every arrogant message from White Star's Franklin and from other reports. One message from the Government Marine Agency in Halifax said that the *Titanic* was sinking, whereas a message from Franklin said that "all passengers are saved, and the *Virginian* is towing the *Titanic* towards Halifax" (Ziakas, 1999, p. 117).

Franklin finally received a telegram confirming that the ship had sunk, and he later described his reactions: "...it was such a terrible shock that it took us a few minutes to get ourselves together. Then at once I telephoned, myself; two of our directors, Mr. Steele and Mr. Morgan, Jr. and at the same time went downstairs to the reporters. I got off the first line and a half where it said: 'The *Titanic* sank at two o'clock a.m.' and there was not a reporter left in the room—they were so anxious to get out and telephone the news" (Ziakas, 1999, p. 117).

At Pier 54 in New York harbor, the surviving passengers came ashore and were regarded as celebrities from that point on. An embarrassed and tearful Franklin went aboard

In the presence and under the shadow of a catastrophe so overwhelming my feelings are too deep for expression in words. I can only say that the White Star Line, its offices and employees will do everything humanly possible to alleviate the suffering and sorrow of the survivors and of the relatives and friends of those who perished.

The *Titanic* was the last word in shipbuilding. Every regulation prescribed by the British Board of Trade had been strictly complied with, the master, officers, and the crew were the most experienced and skillful in the British service.

I am informed that a committee of the United States had been appointed to investigate the circumstances of the accident. I heartily welcome the most complete and exhaustive inquiry, and any aid that I or my associates or our builders or navigators can render is at the service of the public and the governments of both the United States and Great Britain. Under the circumstances I must respectfully defer making any further statement at this time.

Figure 1.1. Formal statement made by J.Bruce Ismay, managing director of White Star, following the sinking of the *Titanic*. Ismay was aboard the doomed ship and issued this statement after consultation with Phillip A.S.Franklin, who headed White Star's New York office (Source: Ziakas, 1999, p. 120).

Carpathia to meet with Ismay, who was in a state of mental and physical collapse. Ismay and Franklin drafted White Star's official reaction to the disaster and came ashore long after the passengers had left. Ismay and Franklin also were present at a stressful media availability event and later issued the formal statement (shown in Fig. 1.1).

The surviving passengers issued their own statement, which read in part:

We, the undersigned surviving passengers from the steamship *Titanic*, in order to forestall any sensational or exaggerated statements, deem it our duty to give the press a statement of facts that have come to our knowledge and that we believe to be true.... We feel it is our duty to call the attention of the public to what we consider the inadequate supply of live-saving appliances provided for on modern passenger steamships, and recommend that immediate steps be taken to compel passenger steamers to carry sufficient boats to accommodate the maximum number of people carried on board. (Ziakas, 1999, pp. 120–121)

The survivors were viewed as heroes, as was Captain Smith, who went down with the ship. Ismay was cleared of any wrongdoing by both British and U.S. inquiries, but his reputation never recovered. In motion pictures about the *Titanic*, Ismay was portrayed as a villain. The denotation of *Titanic* was “huge, colossal,” whereas its connotation was “doom.” White Star Line became synonymous with bad management. It suffered financial problems during the European Depression and, in the 1930s, merged with Cunard, with Cunard holding 62% of the shares. Both flags were flown on the ships until 1957, when the White Star flag was withdrawn. White Star liquidated its ships and Cunard bought the remaining shares. By 1958, White Star no longer existed. Cunard went on to produce the *Queen Mary*, the *Queen Elizabeth*, and the *Queen Elizabeth II*. The *Queen Elizabeth II* still makes transatlantic crossings.

Prodromes for the *Titanic* tragedy were ships that sank previously. White Star thought it had made, in the construction of the ship, all the necessary adjustments to warning signs. The company concentrated on the positives rather than the negatives. It did not examine the worst case scenario: “What if this doesn't work?” That question was apparently never asked or heeded.

Prevention and preparation would have included making sure there were enough lifeboats and the development of crisis management and crisis communications plans. Containment would have meant recognizing the danger as soon as the iceberg was sighted and putting into effect the crisis management and crisis communications plans. However, much arrogance (“This ship is unsinkable”) existed. Although there were a limited number of lifeboats, many went unfilled because of poor crisis management. There was apparently time—if there had been a plan to be carried out—to save many more passengers.

Total recovery was not likely in this crisis. The reputation of White Star remained damaged after nearly a century had passed. If the company had done anything right in the prepunching, the sinking, or the postsinking, there might have been a possibility of recovery of their reputation.

In some cases, a company in crisis can seem to be a victim of crises, but this was not true in the sinking of the *Titanic*. It was guilty of its own negligence and arrogance.

CHAPTER TWO

Managing the Crisis

COMMUNICATING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

There are three possible results of a crisis: (a) The organization is put out of business, ruined, possibly sued, and key executives possibly charged with crimes; (b) the organization continues to exist, but it has lost some image and respect in its publics' eyes, and perhaps a great deal of financial position; (c) the organization, in a hard-fought battle, has won a war of public opinion and is seen as favorably as before or perhaps more favorably.

Information about a crisis reaches publics through the media more than through any other means. An organization may have to work very hard to get the media's attention during normal times. Its public relations (PR) personnel may struggle even to get a news release used. However, during times of crisis, the media will find the PR personnel.

It is true, unfortunately, that bad news sells. This has always been true. Even Shakespeare wrote about it in *Julius Caesar*: "The evil men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones." A negative story is deemed more newsworthy than a positive one; the media consider your positive news "puffery."

It is the PR practitioner's dream that every news publication and every electronic news outlet will run prominent stories saying, "Company A is the greatest. Its products and services are the greatest, and it has the best PR people imaginable."

Plan a system in advance whereby you are notified of erupting crises. You want to be among the first, if not the first, to know. This can be done by instructing company telephone operators to reach you 24 hours a day, leaving a voice-mail greeting on your personal line during nonbusiness hours, and cultivating friendly relations with key personnel in the media, the fire department, and the police department—people who can notify you in the event of a crisis affecting your organization.

Prevention

Warning signs, called *prodromes*, are crucial because prevention is the best cure for a crisis. Strong community relations programs that get play in the media and endear your company to its publics will help this effort. Actually, ongoing proactive public relations programs of any kind are insurance policies against crises.

A strong people-centered corporate culture, rather than a profit-centered one, is also an effective crisis prevention tool. Corporate culture is the way an organization does business, its unwritten but firmly established values. The corporate culture must be established in such a way that honest, open communication is a basic value. Problems such as the CEO's not speaking to the head of public relations and ignoring complaints from consumers are signals of an impending crisis that can be devastating. Employees who are stressed from overburdened workloads can ignite a crisis as well.

Before a crisis, or at the onset of a crisis, you must anticipate what the news media need and want. Looking at the big picture, the media want to sell newspapers and win

ratings wars. The media give the public what it wants to know rather than what it needs to know. There is a fine line between news and entertainment, and crises make for entertaining news. The public is perceived to enjoy watching, reading about, uncovering, and lambasting organizations, companies, and individuals who might have done harm to people, or even worse, to animals.

Never say, “No comment!” to the public; refusing to comment appears to be an admission of hiding information or even guilt. If you do not respond, the public does not hear your side of the story and will conclude, “Company *X* refused to comment and, therefore, it must have done something terrible.” If there is some legal reason for not revealing certain information, explain this as much as possible and promise to reveal the information at a specific time. Do all you can to make that information available at the time you specified.

Do not assume that the crisis story will go away. The media can do their stories without you. They can build a case against your organization, portrayed as “the bad guy,” by talking with disgruntled employees, volunteers, and customers, and even more often, by seeking out disgruntled former employees, former volunteers, and former customers. The media can also use computer files and call up long-forgotten problems and mistakes and, in a few seconds, regurgitate them and place them before the eyes and ears of the public. The people thus hear the negative story.

In a TV interview, Carl Bernstein (1994), who with Bob Woodward investigated the Watergate crisis for the *Washington Post*, said, “There are always people, if you work hard enough, who will want to tell the truth.” In other words, do not wage a war with an enemy who buys ink by the barrel, paper by the ton, and controls the airwaves.

What will the media want to know in the event of a crisis?

WHAT THE NEWS MEDIA WANTS TO KNOW

- What happened?
- Were there any deaths or injuries?
- What is the extent of the damage?
- Is there a danger of future injuries or damage?
- Why did it happen?
- Who or what is responsible?
- What is being done about it?
- When will it be over?
- Has it happened before?
- Were there any warning signs of the problem?

If your organization has erred, it is usually best to reveal the mistake at once, apologize, and make amends. The story may end right away as long as the crisis itself is not continuing. Cover-ups make a crisis persist. Whether your company has erred or not, do all you can to get control of the situation as much as possible and as soon as possible. When you release your own bad news, you decrease the likelihood of rumor, supposition, half-truths, and misinformation.

If the disaster or crisis has already resulted in injury or death, or if it poses a threat to the safety or well-being of groups or individuals, contact the media immediately and

indicate that you are looking into the situation, that you “just found out 5 minutes ago.” This way, the media representative will realize both the crucial aspect of the problem and that your company cares about people and understands the media’s needs. This action may buy you an ally as well.

If the situation is not urgent (be certain of this), it is advisable to look into the situation, to make attempts to fully understand what took place, and to have answers prepared for the media’s questions.

If reporters contact you first and you are unaware of the crisis, do not rattle on without knowing details. Ask if you can call back in a few minutes, saying frankly, “I need to find out what’s going on.” Get the facts and then call the reporter back at the appointed time to communicate them.

Remember that the media and the public are entitled to have the facts about a crisis. The idea is to help the media cover the story accurately and with minimum criticism of the organization or company. The overall goal is to keep or get the public’s trust through the media. The media needs you for information for interesting stories. Your organization needs the media to communicate with the public en masse. By keeping this symbiotic relationship in mind, the public relations professional will be in a more proactive position during a crisis and feel more in control of the organization’s bad news.

The spirit of cooperation must be established. In a crisis, there are three types of response to a media request:

1. We know and here’s all the information.
2. We don’t know everything at this time. Here’s what we know. We’ll find out more and let you know.
3. We have no idea, but we’ll find out and tell you.

Give the media access to the material they need: background information, statistics, photographs, and spokespersons.

Spokespersons

Identify one primary spokesperson for your company. Designating one primary spokesperson reduces the possibility of conflicting statements, organization values, or explanations being released to the media. Speaking with one voice is more crucial in a crisis than during normal operations.

The CEO is considered by most public relations professionals to be the spokesperson of choice during a crisis, especially if people have been injured, if there is danger of physical harm, or if there are millions of dollars in damage. The CEO usually has the most credibility with publics and the media. He or she is seen as a true representative of the company, as a per-son who can make decisions, and speak for the company. If the company has a heart, it is the CEO’s, at least, that’s the public’s perception.

Alternative spokespersons should be selected in the event the primary spokesperson is not available during a crisis. Supportive spokespersons, people who can speak authoritatively on technical subjects, are frequently of value, too. For example, if patrons of a restaurant get food poisoning, a physician might serve as a supportive spokesperson responsible for telling the public about symptoms and treatments.

News Conferences

If a news conference is warranted and can be arranged swiftly, arrange one. Be certain to have a prepared statement read and distributed to the media. This assists you in setting the tone for the rest of the session.

Spokespersons, whether the CEO, other top executives, experts, or public relations professionals, should have major talking points. Also called *key messages* and *speaking points*, these talking points are one- or two-sentence summaries used to remind you of messages you want to be sure to get across to the public. They might provide details about the crisis or positive information about the company, such as the company's safety record, safety procedures, evacuation procedures, and other information that says, "We are very concerned; we care."

During the 1993 crisis in which consumers claimed to find hypodermic syringes in cans of Pepsi, the Pepsi-Cola Company, as well as some of its local bottlers, released to the media information about its canning process (see chap. 9). After the public learned of the bottler's precise and cautious procedures, it was difficult to imagine how the syringes could have been placed in the cans during the canning process. The release of this crucial information was credited with shortening the acute crisis stage.

Be mindful during a crisis, however, that it is not the time to bring up unrelated community service projects, no matter how many you have. When lives are in jeopardy, no one wants to hear about how much money you give annually to scholarships.

Spokespersons should rehearse their statements and talking points enough to be comfortable with the information, to be comfortable in front of TV cameras, and so prepared that he or she need only glance occasionally at notes. Preferably, before a crisis, practice sessions should be held in which employees ask the most difficult, rude, pointed questions of the spokespersons to simulate an actual crisis news conference.

Do not prolong the crisis by calling an unnecessary news conference or by engaging in other activities that can keep the crisis in the news. During a crisis, you want to get off the news pages and broadcasts.

10 Do's for Media Interviews

When dealing with the media or when being interviewed by the media, whether in a one-on-one situation or at a news conference, note the following 10 do's for media interviews:

1. Do listen to the whole question before answering.
2. Do use everyday language, not the jargon of your business or profession. Even if the reporters use the jargon, use the common vernacular unless the interview is with a professional publication.
3. Do maintain an attitude showing you are calm, courteous, responsive, direct, positive, truthful, concerned, and, if necessary, repentant and apologetic.
4. Do understand the reporter's job. Respect deadlines and return phone calls promptly.
5. Do be accessible and pleasant.
6. Do try to treat the reporter as a partner, an ally in maintaining or restoring the company's good image.
7. Do tell the truth, the whole truth. Misleading or omitted facts are also forms of lying.

(Some seasoned public relations practitioners disagree with this position and even insist that no organization in a crisis is ever totally open and honest with the media or anyone else from the outside. This is an arguable point in a moot debate. Even these skeptics would agree that it is important to appear open and honest.)

8. Do look the reporter in the eye. In your response, address each reporter by name if possible.

9. Do use your crisis communications plan.

10. Do keep employees informed of the crisis. They may be volunteer spokespersons.

10 Do Not's for Media Interviews

At the same time, there are do not's when dealing with the media:

1. Do not be a wimp! Being concerned and empathetic does not mean that you must shake in your boots.

Do not guess or speculate. Either you know or you don't.

3. Do not get overly upset about being quoted out of context. Unless a complete transcript of your interview is printed, you are almost always quoted out of context to a degree. If the quote is completely wrong or libelous, that is another matter. Asking an editor for a retraction or correction is permissible if a reporter has been undoubtedly biased. A friendly letter delivered immediately and followed by a phone call is generally most effective. "Demanding" a retraction should usually be a lawyer's job, as is a charge of libel. Proving libel is difficult and costly.

4. Do not play favorites with the media. Always favoring one newspaper or one television station is bad business. It can haunt you later.

5. Do not pull advertising from a newspaper because reporters are not cooperative. The purpose of advertising is not to help the newspaper anyway.

6. Do not consider your news release "golden." It will be changed except in small-staffed newspapers. If it is written well with real news, you have done the best you can do.

7. Do not stick to a story if it has changed, just to be consistent. The media realize that things change. Johnson & Johnson experienced this during the Tylenol crisis (see chap. 6). It had initially announced there was no cyanide in its plant but later discovered that there was. Johnson & Johnson's public relations staff told the media the truth. No publication made a big deal over it.

8. Do not be trapped into predicting the future.

9. Do not wear sunglasses or chew gum.

10. Do not smoke—unless you are in a place such as Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where the economy is based on cigarette sales and smoking is a way of life.

TRUTH IS ESSENTIAL: THE DISSEMINATION OF ERROR

In these days when news is disseminated instantly, it is even more important than ever to make sure the information is accurate. This is a concern of communicators and news media.

An illustration of what happens when miscommunications spread is the Sago Mine tragedy in January 2006. Twelve men died in the mine blast; another was rescued barely alive.

The tragedy was compounded because the families and friends of the miners, after waiting and hoping that the toxic fumes detected were not where the men were believed to be, were told that 12 men had survived and only 1 had died. Then, 3 hours later they found that the good news was wrong and the bad news was right, that 12 had died. Understandably, they were devastated.

The miscommunications occurred like the children's game of "Telephone." A worker in the mine communicated by two-way radio that 12 were deceased but as the message traveled like a chain to various points through the mine to the ground above, the details were reversed. An official called 911 in anticipation of the rescue and asked for medical crews. This was the phone conversation:

911 operator: What am I telling them (the medical crews)?

Mine official: 12 and bringing them out.

911 operator: And they're alive?

Mine official: As far as I know.

"As far as I know" is not confirmation. However, people—and there were apparently many people—on the scene were so eager to get good news that they clung to what they wanted to hear and delivered the good news to the people waiting at the church. It also went to the news media gathered who assumed it came from someone in authority to speak. Newspapers and television news broadcasts went with the story as heard.

It was never revealed where the mistake occurred and it was obviously a mistake, not a lie and not a cruel trick as some people thought immediately. Management of the mine should have had a way of being certain before giving information. They possibly did, but the head of the mine, interviewed on television news (CNN), seemed to have been misled himself.

The news media knows with whom to check for official word, so their participation in informing the world is less forgivable. It is likely that each news outlet was afraid his or her operation would be the only one not carrying the great story of survival. Heads would roll! Without doubt, some reporters worried about whether it was fact, but the story had wings and was traveling all over the world.

Hopefully, news outlets saw their error and have set up systems whereby this will not happen again. Considering cell phones, Blackberries, and various other technology, the dissemination of errors can be swift and disastrous.

Trick Questions

Although news reporters must make sure their information is accurate, communications professionals representing companies in crisis must be careful of their response to reporters. A media critic once said, "Being interviewed is like playing Russian roulette. You never know which question will kill you." Sometimes reporters stray from the typical who, what, where, when, and why questions. Metzler (1994) identified several types of questions that reporters have been known to ask. Metzler's questions as well as a few others follow.

Speculative questions begin with “if.” These can be embarrassing and dangerous. For example, a reporter may ask, “If the earthquake had happened during business hours, how many people would have been killed or injured?”

Leading questions imply that the reporter already has the answer; you are merely to verify it. For example, “You do agree that the company could have avoided this tragedy, right?”

Loaded questions are designed to elicit an emotional response. Some television reporters thrive on these because responses to them make for more exciting videos. A sample might be, “Isn’t it true that you knew there was asbestos in the ceiling and failed to do anything about it?” In the case of a loaded question, rephrase it and answer your own question. You could say, “Do you mean, ‘Were we aware there was asbestos?’ No, we were not.”

Naïve questions indicate that the reporter had not done any homework and does not know what to ask. “Tell me, what does your company do?” is an example. Reporters who ask such questions are dangerous because they desperately need a story. Make sure they get the story you want them to have. Give them media materials such as press kits, “backgrounders,” biographies, and news releases.

False questions intentionally contain inaccurate details. If the question is, “You fired half of your over-50 staff, right?” the public relations professional, knowing the statistic is wrong, could counter with, “No, only 40%,” not realizing the reporter was aiming for that information all along.

Know-it-all questions begin with “We have the story. I just need a few wrap-up facts.” The reporter may want you to merely confirm an already formed viewpoint. He or she may not have a story at all but wants you to release only “the dirt.”

Silence, or an absence of questioning, is used by reporters who want you to spill your guts, to talk on and on. Many people tend to babble because there is silence. Remember, silence is the reporter’s problem, not yours. Use this opportunity to reinforce positive statements or continue to be silent.

Accusatory questions are designed to force you to blame others. Never fall for this. Maintain your innocence if that is true, but do not cast blame on others. The court of public opinion does not react kindly to this.

Multiple-part questions can be confusing to you as well as to the public. Ask which part you should answer first. Then answer each part as a separate question. Also, you can say, “I’ll take the first part first.” Then restate it yourself the way you want to answer it. Do the same for each subsequent part.

Jargonistic questions are those in which technical words or professional jargon are used. In response, use everyday language. Jargon builds a barrier between you and your publics and erodes their trust.

Chummy questions are those in which the reporter, pretending to be your buddy, may ask, “Say, pal, off the record, what do you think...?” The PR practitioner should remember that nothing is off the record and should be careful about supposed friendships.

Labeling questions aim to make issues negative or simplistic by seeming to ask for clarity, as in “Would you call the company’s work schedule ‘stressful?’” You should not accept the reporter’s labels unless they are fair and accurate.

Good-bye questions are posed at the end of an interview and may even come after the camera or tape recorder is turned off. The reporter shakes hands and says, “By the way...” Watch out for what follows. The interview is not necessarily over. Remember—in all media questioning—to be positive, concerned, empathetic, and apologetic, if necessary.

Reporters

The preceding discussion of trick questions may seem to be a warning that reporters are sinister creatures whose life goal is to harass public relations practitioners. This is usually not the case.

There are jerks in every profession, including the news media. If you stay in public relations long enough, you will come in contact with them. Know who the jerks and enemies are. Sometimes you can work around them by dealing with other reporters. Other times, you can follow the advice of former President John F. Kennedy: “Forgive your enemies, but never forget their names.”

There are also those journalists who apparently make themselves feel better by labeling public relations people “flacks.” There is no reason to take this to heart. Reporters do not hate you or your profession. In fact, many of them will seek public relations jobs.

Newspaper and broadcast journalists, in record numbers, are becoming public relations practitioners. Newspapers are failing. Most on-the-air personnel in television cannot expect to have jobs in their middle age. Everyone is downsizing. Public relations is the fastest growing communications profession, largely because of crises and the forecast of crises to come.

Reporters are frequently not knowledgeable about, or interested in, the issues they cover. A story may have been assigned to them. Their task is to bring back an interesting story, a story that will get them a promotion, a raise, an extended contract, an Emmy, or a Peabody. They want their stories prominently displayed in the newspaper or at the top of the broadcast. They want to get this award-winning story back before the deadline. All would rather that you would assist them than be an obstacle to them. Obstacles make awards and raises difficult to obtain.

After reporters have filed stories, they are frequently finished with them. They do not write the newspaper headlines that you hate—that’s the job of editors you rarely, if ever, see. Sometimes, if the story continues, other reporters will be assigned.

If you are breaking the news of a crisis or a development in a crisis and you know of reporters who are known to be fair and accurate, you can sometimes give them your story. This does not mean that if you dislike the reporter assigned, you can call another. This works only when no other reporters are involved, and you cannot be charged with playing favorites.

Choosing the news outlet for bad news is not an unheard-of or new tactic. When death was imminent, physicians attending to King George V injected lethal doses of drugs into his veins to hasten his death. They wanted him to die in time to make the deadlines of the *London Times*, a morning newspaper considered more responsible than what was, in 1936, considered the “inferior news organs of the afternoon.”

In dealing with reporters, one must consider the pressures they are going through especially when covering an emotional story.

COMMUNICATING WITH LAWYERS

Lawyers frequently advise clients in crisis to (a) be silent, say nothing, circle the wagons; (b) say as little as possible but reveal what information you have as quickly as possible;

(c) deny blame and guilt; (d) shift blame to others or share it with others; and (e) remember that anything you say can be used against you in a court of law.

A public relations counsel suggests that a client be open and honest. “No comment” is perceived by the public as an admission of guilt: Anything you do not say can be used against you in the court of public opinion.

Both professions must be heard and considered. There are times when lawyers are right; spokespersons can speak too much. There are times when speaking up pays dividends in both courts of law and the court of public opinion.

Courts of law proclaim that a person is innocent until proven guilty, whereas the court of public opinion often declares a person guilty until proven innocent. When your company loses in the court of public opinion, it also loses its reputation, good name, and positive image—the very qualities that make for its success.

The public believes that an innocent person can answer a police officer’s questions without having a lawyer present. After all, what does the person have to hide? The public also believes that this innocent person can go on the stand and plead his or her innocence, showing emotion in the process. However, lawyers frequently advise clients to refrain from all these actions and reactions. Some lawyers think public relations is publicity, getting somebody’s name in the newspaper. Others know what public relations really is, but they choose to ignore it.

Sometimes lawyers may be cautious at a time when public relations professionals feel that open communication with publics is crucial to the positive conclusion of a crisis. The lawyer’s job, after all, is to protect the company, organization, or individual. Sometimes public relations counsels may not anticipate threats to their own clients.

Lawyers know that any persons with knowledge of the organization in trouble can be called into court for depositions against the client. Sometimes communication with publics can put the organization in a perilous situation.

A case of law versus public relations occurred in 1985, when a Delta Airlines plane crashed. After the crash, high-ranking Delta employees showed great concern for survivors and families of victims. They sent flowers. They visited. They attended funerals. The company’s public relations effort was so impressive that many lawsuits were avoided as a result. Nevertheless, some lawsuits were filed. In court, the lawyers for Delta were said to be vicious. They accused one plaintiff of being a cocaine addict and of having a child that was not her husband’s. They implied that another victim, a homosexual, might have died soon of AIDS.irate news stories resulted in calling the company a “monster.” At least one newspaper wrote prominently of the airline’s “Jekyll-Hyde” behavior.

Delta was upset over the negative publicity, but its lawyers insisted that they had to introduce relevant information, acquired legitimately, to fight money-hungry personal injury lawyers (Thompson & Hess, 1986). A solution to such a dilemma is a bond of mutual understanding, a marriage of the two fields, a careful balance.

The legal profession is much older than the recognized field of public relations (although, in effect, public relations has been practiced for centuries). As a profession, public relations is moving toward a day when professionals will have to pass a kind of “bar exam.” The Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credentialing offered by the Public Relations Society of America is a step toward this certification.

Lawyers are becoming more adept at public relations. The American Bar Association provides media training for its primary officers. It realizes that a defendant can win a battle in a court of law and lose it in the court of public opinion.

In 1991, for instance, a crisis team consisting of public relations and legal representation for Snapps restaurant in Florida made a decision not to prosecute or sue a teenager who had helped spread a rumor that caused a drastic loss of business (see chap. 5). The members of the team decided that although they might win a victory in court, it would be a case of winning the battle and losing the war. The teenager had apologized publicly and had behaved properly repentant. The public might have boycotted the restaurant had further action been taken against her. It would have been a matter of the powerful restaurant ruining the life of a well-meaning child who made a mistake in judgment.

Conversely, a defendant can lose in court and win in the battle of public opinion. Sometimes the latter offers a brighter future. This was the case when Mayor Marion Barry of Washington, DC, was convicted of a drug charge, served time in prison, and then returned to the nation's capital to resume his political career. Although few voters doubted that Barry was a drug user, there was resounding public resentment of the way he was supposedly "setup" for the arrest. Anger at those believed to be responsible for the "setup" translated into support in the court of public opinion for Barry, who was reelected as mayor in 1994.

More and more, lawyers are influencing public opinion outside the courtroom. We have seen the results of this when a lawyer representing a prisoner convicted of a serious crime persuades *60 Minutes* or *20/20* to tell a story of the innocence of the client. The lawyer may have exhausted all legal channels or the client may have been unable to afford the legal battle. An effective letter to the television news magazine may change everything.

The public is often not aware of how the news magazine series got the story; true public relations professionals (or lawyers performing public relations acts) are more concerned with their client's needs than with promoting their own visibility. Thus, a televised account of a "poor, innocent" man imprisoned for years for a crime he did not commit is a public relations tool that appeals to the court of public opinion. In many cases, on the basis of the convincing television profile, viewers appeal to courts for new trials, or judges grant new trials in anticipation of public reaction. Sometimes the prisoner is subsequently freed.

The necessity of merging law and public relations leads to an even greater need for precrisis planning by representatives in both fields. Effective precrisis planning sets up scenarios for each type of crisis likely to affect the organization. Different strategies and tactics should be outlined for each kind of crisis. Examples are reflected in such statements as these: "If there is a loss of life, we will..."; "If there is no loss of life, we will..."; "If the media is unaware of the story, we will..."; "If the media is pressing, we will..."

A balance between public relations and law should, as much as possible, be determined before the crisis. The PR professional should communicate with the organization's lawyer before communicating with external publics, even if it's not a matter of getting permission. A balance often cannot be accomplished effectively after the manufacturing plant has exploded.

Lawyers who have not adapted to public relations procedures should be advised that some key stakeholders can be dealt with personally, whereas others will get their impressions from the media.

Refusing to talk to reporters will not make the story go away. Reporters will get the story—and it may not be the story the company wants to be told. The board of directors of the United Way of America was not aware of this when, in 1991, its CEO, William Aramony, was accused of excessive spending. No one on the board would talk to the media. The story started as a brief section in a long, basically flattering article about Aramony in one newspaper. Editors of other newspapers read the article, focused only on the negative aspects, and soon public perceptions of misuse were nationwide.

The news media is a conduit to the public. The public rarely has any real evidence, at least not as much as juries in courtrooms do. Even though the public is well aware that reporters err, people still tend to believe what they see and read in the media. They make decisions based on sound bites and articles selected and written by reporters.

The court of law and the court of public opinion will remain crucial in deciding the fate of individuals, groups, organizations, and corporations. Both the public relations professional and the lawyer must learn to put clients in the best light in both courts to gain the best possible outcome to a crisis.

Lawyer Practices Public Relations

Bill Marler is an example of a lawyer who uses public relations in personal injury cases. As part of the firm Marler-Clark, Marler handles cases on a national basis that involve food poisoning. His first client was Brianne Kiner, a little girl from Washington state who sued Foodmaker after she contracted the E.Coli virus from hamburgers at a Jack-in-the-Box in 1993. Marler settled that case for \$15.6 million. He negotiated an E.Coli case with Odwalla, Inc., for a reported \$15 million.

Marler is known not only for earning millions of dollars in settlements for his clients, but also for his publicity efforts. According to one reporter, “While many attorneys handle food poisoning cases, few relentlessly court the news media like Marler. When outbreaks occur, he fires off press releases and e-mails offering expertise and interviews” (Leung, 1999, p. A1). The lawyer and his consulting firm give lectures to company officials on the dangers of improper food handling, including videos of children near death from the effects of tainted foods. Marler also lobbies legislative officials urging them to pass laws on food safety: “If you think I pitch newspaper people, I’m merciless when I pitch politicians” (Leung, 1999, p. A1).

COMMUNICATING WITH INTERNAL PUBLICS

Internal publics include all classifications of employees—labor, management, hourly workers, interns—as well retirees and stockholders. In a non-profit organization, volunteers are also an internal public. Internal publics are crucial in a crisis because they are the most believable spokespersons. Because internal publics may not be hired or paid to speak for the company, the news media seek them out for comment.

In many businesses such as retail stores, employees are a link between the company and the consumer public. They are the principal representatives of the company and have

the power to make a potential customer a loyal customer or to make a loyal customer a former customer.

Communication with internal publics before, during, and after a crisis is vital. For each internal public, you must choose the correct message and the correct medium.

Proactive Communications Prior to a Crisis

Companies and organizations are wise to develop programs designed to achieve the following objectives with internal publics, particularly with employees:

1. Employees must learn what positive performance is and how it will benefit the organization and the employee. Employees need job descriptions and perhaps instructions on how their jobs should be done. In some public relations departments, employees admit that they write news releases on a “monkey see, monkey do” system—they use previous news releases and make new ones fit the same format, a kind of formula writing. This may work occasionally, but each news release should have its own unique elements and style. If an employee needs a formula to write a news release, it may be time for writing classes. Demonstrations, practice, and special training or a reference manual may also be helpful.

Employees also need to know the consequences of a job well done and of a job poorly done, including consequences to the company and to the individual employee. It is important for all employees to feel as if they are part of the company. It’s a feeling of “we,” not “they.”

2. Employees must learn what the job priorities are. Employees and management could have various opinions of what jobs or tasks are priorities. It is important for both employees and management to be on the same page. Either side may adjust to the other, but it is important that management and employees agree on priorities. This, again, requires effective communication.

3. Positive performance must be rewarded. Employees perform well when their work is recognized and rewarded. Conversely, they perform poorly when their work is not rewarded. Although managers say the paycheck is enough, they are the very managers likely to suffer crises arising from internal conflict. Research shows that positive reinforcement re-suits in continued effective performance. Rewards may include money, trophies, certificates, an afternoon off, a free lunch, compliments, announcements on a bulletin board, a temporary parking place of honor, and other forms of employee recognition. Even a minor recognition in the form of a letter, memo, or e-mail message can be effective and encouraging when it is provided on a regular, perhaps daily, basis. Such a message might say, for example, “You worked very hard to get that report completed on time and I appreciate your hard work.”

4. Poor performance must be punished. Conversely, poor employee performance should be punished. If an employee not doing his or her job well is never reprimanded, the good workers become discouraged. Proper communications with poor performers include formal or informal documents and face-to-face conversations, but they should never include public humiliation.

5. Punishment for good work must be avoided. Many times in companies, an employee who does work well is given more work to do. An employee who makes useful suggestions winds up having to carry out the suggestions. An employee who comes in

early or stays late is despised by other workers. These are examples of punishing employees for exceptional work. First, communication is necessary to reward the good performance; then an effort should be made to provide the training, mentoring, and advising necessary to bring the other employees up to the standard set by the exceptional worker.

6. Help employees cope with personal problems. Whether management likes it or not, employees will have personal problems that may interfere with their work. Management should learn to recognize the symptoms of a personal crisis. A personal crisis may exist when an employee does the following: spends an unusual amount of time on the telephone, makes an unusual number of errors, is unproductive, abuses equipment, arrives late or leaves early, stares blankly into space, yells and is otherwise irritable, or spends excessive time in the restroom.

Because personal crises can turn into company crises, it is imperative to help employees cope with the issues affecting their performance. Allowing employees time off for personal business (with or without make-ups) is one way to handle these situations; providing on-site psychologists and advisers is another. Some companies even have on-site physicians and dentists available to employees to save time away from the job.

Large companies have employee relations departments to cope with issues surrounding employee problems and employee benefits. Many companies provide outstanding benefits that are a real plus in earning employee loyalty. They may also provide stock options and extensive vacation time. J.P.Morgan grants a free lunch. Fel-Pro pays \$3,000 a year to send employees' children to college. Johnson & Johnson has a benefit whereby employees who have worked there for at least 5 years get an extra week's paid vacation when they get married. Johnson & Johnson also has a child-care center and an on-site fitness center.

Communicating With Internal Publics During a Crisis

Once a crisis has occurred, employees and other internal publics must be advised of what has happened early in the notification process (see chap. 10, Fig. 10.2). Whenever possible, internal publics should not learn of the crisis from the news media and they should know about it before external publics do. If the onset of the crisis occurs after office hours, telephone trees are often organized so that perhaps each manager is notified, and the manager telephones some employees and they telephone others. The telephone tree must be in place before a crisis. As a crisis develops, the employee public, called a *functional public*, should be kept apprised of what is occurring at every step. Common methods for keeping employees informed include meetings, closed-circuit television programs, e-mail, the public address system, and bulletin boards.

Many companies can utilize their intranet, internal networks designed to improve productivity and the circulation of proprietary information. The intranet is better than the Internet in the case of crises because it allows the company or organization to communicate only to its own people, whereas anyone can access the Internet.

Crisis communications researcher W. Timothy Coombs (1999) advises that "the beauty of the intranet is the speed of accessing information (p. 85)." The crisis team can access information directly with keystrokes on a computer instead of going through telephone

calls or through other means. Information may be stored on the intranet, updated regularly, and any employee can access it. Coombs also warns that all information cannot be collected by Intranet. Some interpersonal communications may be necessary, but the relevant data can be stored there after it is gathered.

During a crisis, internal publics generally want to know what they can or should do. During the Snapps restaurant rumor crisis (see chap. 5), managers volunteered to take AIDS tests to prove that no manager could have spread the AIDS virus through food products. If it is important for employees to make some effort to continue the business, convey that to employees and tell them why. If there are crisis tasks employees need to take on, they should be preadvised and pretrained. If the nature of the crisis eliminates jobs—either temporarily or permanently—employees need to be carefully told what options are available and what the future is likely to hold.

As in normal operating mode, it is crucial that employees feel a sense of “we-ness” during a crisis, that they are part of the battle. Many companies order employees to remain silent about company issues relating to the crisis; they are especially told not to talk to the news media. They are told to let the appointed spokesperson do all the speaking. Often this is an advisable move; too many people can make for a confusing story. However, some companies and organizations encourage their employees to talk to the media, confident that employees like their jobs and their company and do not fear the news media will get out of hand.

COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL PUBLICS

External publics include consumers/customers, community members, government officials, labor unions, dealers, suppliers, trade associations, competitors, and other outside people related in some way to an organization. As in all types of communications, it is important to strategically plan the correct message and the appropriate medium for communicating with each external public, both before and during a crisis.

Organizations tend to form alliances with key external groups that will make members of these groups feel like they are part of the company. The airlines have been very successful with the frequent-flyer programs, so much so that other businesses are trying “frequent” programs too. Boards of directors and community advisory boards are also popular efforts at bridging the gaps between companies and organizations and the business world and the community, respectively.

Precrisis Communications With Customers/Consumers

Generally, a business has five primary objectives designed to build sales and gain loyal customers. These objectives are the following:

1. Keep the old customers. Longtime contented customers bring other customers. Programs, like the frequent-flyer programs and exclusive discounts, are examples. Other communications, like newsletters and individual letters, are also frequently used. Assuring loyal customers of the constant effort to have quality products and services as well as competitive prices is important.

2. Attract new customers. Good prices, excellent quality, and word-of-mouth referrals from loyal consumers help to attract new customers. Interpersonal contact with sales staff and other employees is also effective in this area. Open houses and other special events bring the company to the attention of potential customers. Publicity about the company's outreach programs also attracts new customers.

3. Market new services and products. Customers and consumers want to see that a company or organization is constantly making efforts to better itself in every area. They want to know what the new products and services are, why they are better than the older ones, and that prices are reasonable.

4. Handle complaints swiftly. A customer who complains and is subsequently satisfied will return and bring other customers. One who does not complain or is not satisfied after a complaint will switch loyalty to a competitor. If four people complain, one can usually assume that there are 24 others who were dissatisfied and did not speak out. Complaints in some organizations are handled by a middle person who mediates between the complainant and the company. He or she may simply say, "We're sorry and will make amends." Or a letter might be written explaining the company's actions. The overall message to the customer is: "We want you to be happy. We want your business."

5. Educate customers. Companies develop programs to educate customers about products and services. A store with a new line of cotton garments might inform customers—through ads, publicity, newsletters, and Web pages—of the advantages of cotton, how to recognize well-made garments, and so on.

The Nordstrom Consumer Policy

The Nordstrom chain is known for its "customer is first" policy, a prototype and model for other retail stores. A Nordstrom store manager said, "Employees are instructed to make a decision that favors the customer before the company. They are never criticized for doing too much for a customer, [but] they are criticized for doing too little" (Spector & McCarthy, 2000, p. 88).

The company works on the principle that if it takes care of customers' needs and concern first, the dollars will come. The corporate organizational chart shows customers at the top of an inverted pyramid and the co-chairs at the bottom. Perhaps the most well-known aspect of Nordstrom customer relations is its returns policy: If a customer is dissatisfied with a Nordstrom purchase for any reason, the store takes it back with no questions asked. Bruce Nordstrom advised his salespeople that "if a customer came into the store with a pair of 5-year-old shoes and complained that the shoes were worn out and she wanted her money back, you have the right to use your best judgment to give my money away. As a matter of fact, I order you to give my money away" (Spector & McCarthy, 2000, p. 98). Although the returns policy invites consumer abuse, Nordstrom believes that 98% of its customers are honest and should not be punished for the dishonesty of a few. This policy has forced other retail stores to adopt a more liberal returns policy to compete with Nordstrom.

In the area of community relations, companies and organizations adopt outreach programs in an effort to build loyalty among persons in the community surrounding its place of business. This may include making donations to nonprofits, schools, and the like. Or it may mean actually getting involved: A drug store may offer colon cancer screening.

The police department might mentor fatherless teens. McDonald's runs the Ronald McDonald Houses providing temporary houses for families while their sick children are treated at nearby hospitals. The Internal Revenue Service includes photos of missing children on its income tax forms. The Alpac Corporation, a bottling company, had the support of the community and the local news media when a customer reported a syringe in a can of Pepsi because the Behnke family, owners of the company, was known for its philanthropy (see chap. 9).

In outreach programs, it is important to publicize your efforts—if your purpose is to build positive relationships with the community. Some organizations feel that publicizing their good deeds is bragging. If you do not publicize, only those people who have benefitted will know about your actions.

Communicating With External Publics During a Crisis

Other than through the news media, organizations should communicate with loyal consumers to inform them of the crisis and progress toward normalcy. Various methods must be evaluated—letters, newsletters, notices on Web sites, telephone calls, and so on. You want customers to remain loyal throughout the crisis and continue to patronize the organization. So tell them all the five Ws of the crisis—who, what, when, where, and why. Pepsi, in the syringe-in-the-can crisis, set up hotlines whereby consumers could ask questions directly of staff members (see chap. 9).

Snapps had a hamburger giveaway to show that its hamburgers were not tainted (see chap. 5). Community members should be reached through key community leaders on advisory boards. Flyers could be circulated in communities and posters could be put up in public places and on bulletin boards. Like consumers, community members will want to know what happened, what was the cause, what is being done, when the crisis will be over, and so forth. The U.S. Postal Service, in response to its workplace violence crisis, organized a symposium on workplace violence attended by corporate, government, academic, and community leaders (see chap. 8).

Labor representatives and government officials should be among the first notified. Key messages should be conveyed because these people, depending on the nature of the crisis, may be called on by the news media to comment.

FACTS TO REMEMBER IN CRISIS INVENTORY AND DURING A CRISIS

You Don't Learn Much When Your Mouth Is in Motion

When on a fact-finding mission among internal publics to determine likely crises, listen attentively to others. You need to listen to what is said, how it is said, under what circumstances, and who said it. Watch facial expressions; they may be indicative of a story beyond the information you actually gather. Employees may fear reprisals from superiors or want to avoid “ratting” or whistle-blowing. There are numerous reasons for omissions, half-truths, and lies. A diligent researcher will see clues and hints of a need for further investigation.

An example of this was exhibited when a specific brand of automobile was found to be dangerously defective. It was discovered, after numerous cars rolled off the assembly line and had been sold, that the workers on the line knew about the defect. They were afraid to pull their supervisors' coattails, afraid of the workplace culture of "Kill the messenger of any news that causes a slowdown."

Never Ask a Manicurist If You Need a Manicure

If possible, when you hire an outside company to evaluate your company for safety, make sure that this company does not do repairs. If you ask a contractor to check for problems, be prepared for a bill for roof repairs, a new roof, or some other costly job. Sometimes shady companies suggest costly repairs because they want to benefit financially when actually some inexpensive repairs are ignored. An overlooked crack in a walkway can become a disaster. If the walkway topples and people are injured, the news media and publics will want to know why the problem went unnoticed. Blaming the contractor for being greedy is not an acceptable response. A good practice is to organize employees and other internal publics to be on the lookout for anything that might escalate into crises—from cracked pipes to the emotional problems of an employee. This is a form of issues management.

It Is Usually Impressive to Allow Others to Describe Your Good Qualities

When there is an opportunity to let impartial experts speak about your company's diligence, sense of responsibility, or innocence in a crisis, permit them to be spokespersons. In the Snapps restaurant case (see chap. 5), medical officials spoke at news conferences telling the public that AIDS could not be spread to food by an HIV-positive food handler. In the Pepsi syringe crisis (see chap. 9), the FDA told consumers that AIDS could not be spread through contaminated syringes in soft-drink cans. In the cellular phone crisis (see chap. 9), the manufacturer asked an independent bioengineer to participate in a news conference to explain that the power in cell phones was too low to cause damage to human tissue.

No One Listens Until You Make a Mistake (or Have a Crisis)

When there is no crisis, it may seem that the news media are uninterested in your organization. When a crisis occurs, many times you have the opportunity to tell what your organization does. This was found to be the case when boatloads of Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada (see chap. 6). Spokespersons for the federal office of Citizenship and Immigration in Canada were then called on to tell the public about their mission and work. After the crisis, Canadians better understood the functions of the federal office.

A Closed Mouth Gathers No Foot: Never Miss a Good Chance to Shut Up

Sometimes companies in a hurry to speak up, be heard, and get the crisis in the news do not wait until they have gathered enough facts to speak intelligently. Ignoring the news

media and publics is not advised, but making statements as if they are facts—before you are very sure—can make you seem unreliable. It is best to answer only the questions you can reliably answer and defer the others until you have answers.

Johnson & Johnson (see chap. 4) initially told the news media there was no cyanide in its plant and, therefore, there was no way Tylenol capsules could have been contaminated during the manufacturing process. Later, the company discovered that indeed there was cyanide in the plant. If the news media had found out about the cyanide through its own investigation, the picture would have been ugly. However, Johnson & Johnson, in an act said to be indicative of the company's overall reputation for integrity, contacted the press and revealed its own lie, thus avoiding the foot in their corporate mouth.

A spokesperson should say just enough to get his or her talking points across effectively—and no more. There is a fine line between overspeaking and underspeaking; planning and practice help the spokesperson determine that line.

Never Underestimate the Damage That Can Be Done by Decisions Made by Groups

At some point in a crisis, there must be a decision maker, a person who says, "This is what we shall do." Groups are good for preidentifying issues that may turn into crises and for crisis training. However, when facing an actual crisis, there must be a crisis team leader.

If an organization hires a public relations agency to do the crisis communications and to call the shots, then the agency should have been preselected prior to the crisis. After the plant explodes, valuable time is lost getting a team together to interview and hire agencies.

If You Tell the Truth, You Don't Have to Try to Remember Anything

When there is no time for research, when the news media tell you the news, or when the spokesperson must speak to the news media before there are any real answers, what should you do? In these cases, although you make no definite answers about how or why, the best rule is to tell the truth as you know it, saying repeatedly, "I just learned about this, so I don't have all the answers." If you know, for example, that your company practices safety precautions, say so: "This company is very concerned about employee safety. There are hard and fast rules. There are rewards for safety records. If anything happened, it was not because of a lack of concern for safety. But we are very sorry that it happened." An early, earnest response can sometimes set the tone for how the public will perceive the company in a crisis. If these safety precautions are a part of normal routines, one does not have to worry about recalling them.

Never Mess Up a Sincere Apology With an Excuse

Know the difference between an apology and an excuse. An excuse passes blame to others; an apology does not. Do not say, "We didn't realize..." when you should have realized. An apology is a sincere admission that you are sorry for whatever happened. An excuse was not what the consumer public wanted to hear when people, especially children, were sick and dying from E. coli that had tainted Jack-in-the-Box hamburgers.

Saying the meat-packer was responsible for the E. coli infections was not an apology. If your company had sold such a product, you would owe the public an apology: "We are sorry. We will do everything we can to make amends. We take responsibility for medical treatments."

COMMUNICATING DIRECTLY WITH THE MASSES

With relatively new communications technology, it is possible to get information out to the masses with the use of the print media or the broadcast media. The Internet made it possible to communicate with vast numbers of people through e-mail, blogs, Web sites, and so on. Currently, the communication is going to "niche" publics, but there is the possibility of reaching the masses. Between the date this book was written and the date it is published, a new means of communications will be developed.

This is mind-boggling when people living today recall when the manual typewriter was the most modern writing tool. There was a job title called typist. Newspaper printing meant setting each letter in type on brass dies individually on a Linotype machine. Newspaper boys delivered and persuaded people to buy the newspapers. Radio was the best broadcasting tool, not television, not satellites. When computers were born, they were giant machines that occupied a huge room. Now, in a flash, one person can send a message read by thousands, even millions of people.

This is progress but few people have considered how this swift dissemination of information should mean new policies of accuracy. Historically, research tells us that people believe the written word more than the spoken word. This was because newspapers go through layers of editors before articles are published. Most books (except self-published books) go through fact checkers before they are published. So, people are inclined to think of data on the Internet as factual when it's not necessarily so. Some information has gone through editors whereas other information came straight from the writer who may be biased or wrong. Readers and researchers must discern what is true and credible.

Because information on the Internet remains primarily textual, some people may be inclined to think of it as factual. However, research findings from the USC Annenberg School's Center for the Digital Future suggest that experienced information-seekers rank media and government sites as more reliable than those published by individuals.

The growing demand for news has made the Internet a valuable source of supplemental information. The traditional news media are still the primary sources of news for the unwired American, but as many as two thirds of Internet users have accessed some of their news online and about one third do so three or more times a week. In addition, the tragedies of September 11, 2001 made it clear that news-seekers want more immediacy than newspapers, commercial television, cable television, and radio can offer.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, the 24-hour news services reported to more than 100 million people. According to Nielsen Media Research, nearly 50% of all television households watched CNN's coverage. The commercial stations also had high ratings that day. However, according to researchers Paul N. Rappoport and James Alleman (2003), the demand for more coverage and instantaneous updates led large numbers of people to the Internet. They say there is anecdotal evidence that the Internet,

that day, became overwhelmed and left users without access or reasonable connections, but when it did catch up, it was an effective means of supplementary news.

Between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. Eastern time, MSNBC.com experienced a 50% increase in traffic; CNN.com, a 450% increase. The sites were ill prepared for such surges as more than 30 million people sought online news. Many sites urged people to go to television and some had a written statement saying, "Many online services are not available, because of high demand." Time will tell whether this remains the case, but the Internet sources have and probably will become more capable of handling the task.

Nevertheless, researchers conclude that the public has accepted online news sites as sources of credible news, although most Americans obtain their news from television—local, network, and cable.

Among the values of Internet news sources, according to Rappoport and Alleman, are the following: (a) information sources may be tailored to meet the specific objectives of the user; (b) the user may get the news at any time, no more "News at 11;" (c) news maybe linked to other sources; (d) in-depth analyses may be available, even more in depth than newspapers because the medium is not restricted by column inches or minutes or airtime.

Organizational and corporate Web sites provide background information and, in a crisis, what the organization believes is the truth. This gives the information-seeker the organization's side of the story. A Web site is normally a one-way means of communications but the Internet can easily link one to other points of view.

Blogs

Blogs, or weblogs, are a type of Web site that consists of commentary from the author with comments from various readers. The writing style is more casual and often more personal than organizational or corporate Web sites. Blogs are one form of personal publishing and have several distinctive characteristics:

- Reverse chronological journaling (format).
- Regular, date-stamped entries (timeliness).
- Links to related news articles, documents, blog entries with each entry (attribution).
- Archived entries (old content remains accessible).
- Links to related blogs (blogrolling).
- RSS or XML feed (ease of syndication).
- Passion (voice).

A Web site is rather standard as an organizational communications tool and blogging is growing in usefulness and importance. Because blogs can easily facilitate dialog between information-giver and information-seeker, they may be more believable than a traditional Web site. Blogs are good for public relations purposes, to provide accurate information for persons seeking information about your organization.

Blogs are akin to buzz. Whatever subjects or issues are occupying the minds of the public can be brought to the attention of many on a blog. Political blogs are popular, but all kinds of blogs are developing from commercial business to education to basic gossip. In addition, the person wishing to post his or her opinion about an issue will find the blog more accessible than other forms of electronic expression.

Companies and organizations are being urged to develop blogs to garner Web-based commentary about their products or services from consumers. The numbers of blogs are growing constantly and they can be accessed by search engines like Google, Yahoo!, Technorati.com, or GlobeofBlogs.com. Technorati is one of the oldest blog search engines whereas GlobeofBlogs classifies blogs by subject. Information published in blogspace is disseminated faster than more traditional forms of communications through a technology called RSS (Real Simple Syndication). Textual blogs have given birth to video blogs and audio blogs, often known as podcasts.

In some cases, companies may need to have a blog format to show their publics that they are savvy about current technology. Companies and organizations may also find a blog to be the preferred publishing medium when an issue is constantly changing and it is urgent to get the latest information out as soon as possible.

Blog expert Kathy Gill asks, "What does the audience expect when they visit the Web site?" If the public is technically savvy, it will expect information in a blog format. Gill also notes that the voice of a blog is "personal" and cautions that "personal" is difficult for some organizations that require various levels of approval and sign-off. They tend to distrust having an unmoderated voice speak for them. In blogspace and in a crisis, there is often no time for multilayered decisions.

Blogging software makes the process of creating and updating a professional-looking Web page relatively easy and less expensive compared to a webmaster setting up a site. Some companies offer free hosting for blogging services. These blogs can be linked to other data on the Internet, other blogs, a corporate Web site, news articles, photo images, and audio files. The blogosphere is the word for the blog network with blogs interconnected to other blogs on the Internet.

There are five basic types of blogs:

1. *The corporate/organizational blog* provides commentary about a specific company or organization. Key executives usually are the bloggers and their goal is to tell their own story, to correct misinformation of others. It is considered unethical for a corporate executive or employee to respond to a blog without revealing who he or she is and the connection to the organization. Will PR professionals ghost-write blogs? Probably. However, if the information seems like puffery, the readers will soon distrust it.

2. *Subject blogs* are comments relating to various subjects or issues written by experts on these subjects. Smudde (2005) says these blogs are like white papers or keynote addresses "as if to impart sage wisdom."

3. *Industry blogs* are centered on the status quo of a particular industry or field and otherwise are similar to subject blogs.

4. *Publication blogs* come from media sources like newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Editors and reporters are the bloggers and sometimes readers. They are usually a way of keeping up to date on a continuing news story.

5. *Personal blogs* express opinions of individuals on any matter they choose to discuss, often politics, issues in the news, or products, especially high-technology. Smudde says personal blogs are the most potent type because subjects covered can be beneficial and helpful or hurtful to an organization's reputation.

The Harvard Business School's online tool "Working Knowledge" suggests the following reasons (in italics) for a company having its own blogs:

1. *You can influence the public conversation about your company.* Journalists can locate accurate information, the information you want them to have. You can correct misinformation and provide new information.
2. *You can enhance brand visibility and credibility.* This can give the company a human voice. Debbie Weil of BlogWrite for CEOs advises that companies not let their PR departments write blogs. This is true if the blogs are puffery, but not true if the PR writers can present the facts. Some PR firms are already offering expertise in “blog relations.”
3. *You can achieve customer intimacy* because customers can speak directly to you, whether positive or negative comments. This is a kind of electronic, immediate, suggestion box.

Newspapers have begun to have blogs to supplement their publications. Different from an online edition of the paper, the blogs are updates on specific issues, continuing stories that may change several times before the next issue of the newspaper. Years ago, metropolitan daily newspapers used to do many editions throughout the day to always have the latest news; however shrinking budgets and shrinking readership ended that production.

Crisis communications researcher Amiso George (2005) at Texas Christian University writes of a newspaper’s blog:

The *Nevada Appeal*, Carson City, Nevada, newspaper developed its first Web log before breaking news on its Web site www.NevadaAppeal.com to keep the public updated on the Waterfall Fires of 2004. From the onset of the fires on July 14 until it was contained on July 20, the newspaper provided frequently updated information on the fires. The paper’s editor, Barry Smith, said that the initial coverage of the story followed traditional news coverage format, until he realized quickly that merely updating the news was no longer enough... The paper updated the Web log 50–60 times a day for the duration of the fire. Smith noted that the web log generated “terrific response” from people outside the Carson City and Reno, Nevada areas as people were interested in getting details of the fire and checking up on loved ones.

The *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans set up a blog for its readers. During the Katrina disaster in September 2005, the presses did not run for a few days. Instead, reporters and editors published only online and used blogging software to “report” the news. As in New York after September 11, 2001, local bloggers provided their own news of what was happening to New Orleans. Survivors told very poignant, graphic stories without having a reporter as an intermediary. It was a kind of participatory journalism; everyone can be a reporter in the blogosphere. (See also “Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans,” in chap. 6.)

CHAPTER THREE

Crisis Communications Theory

Academic researchers study the methods and procedures of professional communicators and develop theories of what is and what is not effective. Professionals rarely study theory but many have “tried and true” methods of practice that are, in effect, theory. Often, these practices of professionals are the same theories that academicians have studied and named.

A *theory* is used to explain what will work, what decisions should be made and how, what actions are likely to result and how, and how things relate. It is a prediction based on what has happened before. Theory-based practice is preferable because, in most aspects of life, we learn from our previous experiences and the experiences of others. Theorists have examined the actions of numerous practitioners and culled their findings into succinct theories.

Theories exist in various fields. Crisis communicators can benefit from many theories in the social sciences. The relatively new fields of crisis communications and public relations are developing their own theories, but theories applied to crisis communications often are theories in communications (including persuasion and rhetoric), sociology, and psychology.

Theories also tend to change, so it is necessary to regularly test them. Variables and relationships and conditions change and results are sometimes vastly different in subsequent tests. Also, theories build on previous theories. Often, in using a theory, the researcher recognizes a missing element that does not necessarily find fault with the original theory but is deemed worthy of a new or more multifaceted theory.

Some theories are described in this chapter. They are followed by the predominant public relations/crisis communication theory called the *excellence theory*, proposed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984.

APOLOGIA THEORY

When an organization has been accused of a misdeed, its reaction to publics is often called *apologia*. It is, as one would assume, an effort to defend reputation and protect image. But it is not necessarily an apology. The organization’s effort may deny, explain, or apologize for the action through communication discourse.

If a soft drink manufacturer, for example, is accused of using inferior ingredients in its products, the *apologia* might contradict the charges by explaining what ingredients were actually used. The attempt is to counteract a negative or damaging charge. Publics—the news media, consumers, employees, and key opinion leaders—may express disappointment with the company and expect some explanation, if not a full apology.

The organization may insist that the charges are false and totally deny them. Or the organization may express that it did not “intend” to commit the misdeed. This is called *redefinition*. Publics tend to forgive if the organization’s policies are above reproach and somehow, somehow, something unforeseen happened. One individual, who was

subsequently terminated, might be blamed. This is, however, not a guarantee. If the organization can show how it has taken steps to prevent the occurrence or the recurrence of the misdeed, all *may* be forgiven.

Apologia strategy also may include informing publics that the organization might *seem to have* committed a misdeed, but actually did not. This is called *dissociation*. Facts explaining would follow. For example, if the soft drink's color had changed slightly, the manufacturer might explain that the ingredients did not change but the food coloring was different; all ingredients are still pure and perfect. The organization, if faced with a large number of complaints, might also explain that it is returning to the former food coloring. That would be using dissociation and explanation.

A third strategy might be the actual apology: "We are guilty. We are sorry. Please forgive us." This is called *conciliation*.

IMAGE RESTORATION THEORY

This theory builds on the apologia theory. In this theory, the organization determines what is threatening reputation or image and also determines which publics must be addressed and persuaded to maintain and restore positive image.

Organizations sometimes take the attitude of "Don't bring me bad news!" They might refuse to read or watch negative news coverage in specific publications or close their eyes to consumers or other publics. In refusing to know what some people think of them, they cannot possibly know how to respond. Organizations should seek bad news as much as they keep positive news clippings and read them carefully.

When it comes to publics, the organization must know which publics have negative impressions and what is the extent of their knowledge. Does the public know all the facts, some of the facts, half-truths, lies? One must know where these publics stand before they can be targeted for communication. In most public relations campaigns, the first step is research. The same holds true for crisis communications.

On the other hand, one must determine if the publics know anything at all that might damage reputation. Sometimes, it is better to remain silent on the issue. At other times, it is best to tell your own bad news. This is a judgment call but a crucial judgment call determined by carefully researching one's publics continually.

DECISION THEORY

Decision theory is concerned with counseling management and other leaders to make the most effective decision. Decision theory may be applied to all areas of management but it is useful in public relations management and crisis communication. The theory is especially applicable to issues management and the effort to prevent crisis.

Decisions are made under various conditions. The outcome maybe certain, vague, ambiguous, or risky. The theory suggests that the decision maker consider the possible benefit of each alternative; this is called *maximizing*. How useful is one alternative compared to others?

The best decision possible garners the greatest benefit, the greatest utility for the organization. Often, decision theorists note that decision makers do not opt for the greatest benefit but settle for the decision that will satisfy minimum requirements, usually because they do not have adequate data with which to formulate decisions. This practice is called *satisficing*.

Obviously, when trying to build long-standing relationships, it is better to maximize than to satisfice. When satisficing, a public or publics may not be happy with the decision or the decision may be temporary, a band-aid solution to a cancer on the organization.

DIFFUSION THEORY

Also called *diffusion of innovations theory*, this theory examines how new procedures, practices, and objects are adopted and accepted by companies and individuals.

Diffusion theory has a five-step process: awareness (the body is exposed to the idea), interest (the body develops interest in the idea), evaluation (pros and cons are determined and considered), trial (idea is implemented, perhaps temporarily to determine its effectiveness), and adoption or failure to adopt (acceptance or rejection of the idea, change, or innovation).

Whether something is adopted or not depends on three variables:

1. *The Past*. What has happened previously? What are past problems and needs? Basically, you must know where you are before you make decisions to make changes, to go forward.

2. *The Decision Makers*. What are the characteristics of the decision-making body that make it open to or closed to change? Are there close-minded persons with great influence over others? How do experience, age, education, and other socioeconomic variables impact the decision-making process? Is the body made up of all leaders and no followers?

3. *The Innovation/Change*. Does the innovation show more obvious advantages and few disadvantages over present practice or procedure? Does the innovation call for drastic change or can it be easily assimilated into current practice?

The *change agents*, often communicators or public relations professionals, try to move the body forward toward adoption. They often use the mass media during the awareness and interest stages. During evaluation and trial, personal contacts are valuable.

An example of *diffusion theory* in crisis communications might be a theater with an aging clientele suffering from poor single ticket sales and declining subscriptions. The plays have, for years, been the classics. Theater management wants to offer more contemporary plays to attract a younger audience, but they also want to keep the faithful clientele. Communicators might make announcements through the news media of this effort showing reasons in the *awareness stage*. In the *interest stage*, they might have focus groups of persons from Generation X and seniors.

In the *evaluation stage*, the focus groups are studied and comments are offered by members of the executive and community boards. In the *trial stage*, one contemporary cutting-edge play is produced with careful publicity, interaction, and communications with leaders in both groups attending and helping them understand. Follow-up interviews are conducted. The same effort is made to get the younger group to understand and appreciate a chosen classic.

The *adoption stage* results if most efforts succeed; during the following season, perhaps two contemporary plays may be offered.

EXCELLENCE THEORY

Most recent public relations research builds on the *Excellence Theory* developed by J.Grunig and Hunt (1984) and later expanded by J.Grunig and L.Grunig (1992). The Excellence Theory is based on types of public relations practices called “models.” The four models defined by J.Grunig and Hunt provide a way of classifying the types of public relations that individuals and organizations may practice.

In a spectrum of excellence of public relations programs, Model 1 would be the least desirable. Model 4 would be the most desirable, or could be said to be the “most excellent.” Models 2 and 3 fall between these two extremes.

Model 1—Press Agency/Publicity Model

In this model, public relations practitioners are interested in making their organizations or products known. They may or may not use truthful statements. Falsehoods, half-truths, and incomplete facts are all permissible. The practitioners’ abiding slogan, “All publicity is good publicity,” indicates a one-way transfer of information from the organization to the publics. Little or no research is required. There is no feedback.

J.Grunig and Hunt (1984) revealed that this model was used by 15% of public relations practitioners. Later, J.Grunig and L.Grunig (1992) found the earlier data to be inaccurate and reported that most public relations practitioners, unfortunately, still fall into this category.

As practitioners become more knowledgeable and as the profession of public relations grows in respect, the number of practitioners using this model is expected to decrease.

Model 2—Public Information Model

This model is characterized by the desire to report information journalistically. It is different from Model 1 in that truth is essential. Most public relations practice in government agencies today falls into this category. Companies that simply distribute news releases are examples of this model. The practitioner is often called a flack.

This model also involves a one-way transfer of information from the organization to the publics. Little or no research is required. There may be some type of evaluation, such as readership surveys or the counting of news clips. Model 2 is most common in corporations.

Model 3—Two-Way Asymmetric Model

In this model, also called the *scientific persuasion model*, the public relations practitioner uses social science theory and research, such as surveys and polls, to help persuade publics to accept the organization’s point of view. There is some feedback, but the

organization does not change as a result of communications management. In asymmetric public relations programs of this type, the organization rules. It always knows best. Its attitude is that publics should adhere to the organization's viewpoints. An example of asymmetric action is a letter informing a public of a new policy or a recorded telephone message with no technology available for returning messages.

Model 4—Two-Way Symmetric Model

The public relations practitioner in this model, also called the *mutual understanding model*, is an intermediary between the organization and its publics. The practitioner tries to achieve a dialogue, not a monologue as in the other models. Either management or the publics may make changes in behavior as a result of the communications program.

Research and social science theory are used not to persuade but to communicate. Effective public relations programs based on this model are said to be "excellent" programs.

Symmetrical public relations programs negotiate, compromise, bargain, listen, and engage in dialogue. The organization knows what the publics want and need; the publics, in turn, understand the organization's needs and desires. An example is talking to consumers by telephone or at a public meeting in which the consumers can talk back and changes result.

In crises, organizations are frequently forced, by circumstances, to practice symmetrical communications with adversarial publics. Although most organizations practice Models 1 and 2, research by J.Grunig and L.Grunig (1992) revealed that PR practitioners would prefer to practice Model 4 if they had the expertise to do so and if their organizations were receptive to that practice.

The preceding classifications are not precise. An organization, for example, may practice Model 2 and Model 4. If the organization practices Model 2 more than Model 4, it is considered a Model 2 public relations operation.

GRUNIG AND REPPER ON THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

J.Grunig and Repper (1992) identified theories on strategic management, publics, and issues as having two primary propositions. Both are conducive to a study of crisis communications programs:

1. Public relations is most likely to be excellent (contribute to organizational effectiveness) when it is an integral part of an organization's strategic management process and when public relations is managed strategically.
2. Public relations is managed strategically when it identifies stakeholders (separates active publics from stakeholder categories) and resolves issues created by the interaction of organization and publics through symmetrical communications programs early in the development of issues.

These propositions mean that excellent public relations programs, as well as excellent crisis communications programs, have the following characteristics:

1. The public relations head is an important part of the top management of the organization.

2. Programs are designed to build relationships with all key stakeholders of an organization or company.

3. Public relations, through research, identifies who the organization's key stakeholders are and ranks them in order of importance. They may be customers, the media, employees, competitors, unions, special interest groups, vendors, suppliers, environmental groups, consumer advocates, and critics, to name a few.

4. An ongoing public relations plan is developed for each key stakeholder. This necessarily goes beyond media relations into a Model 4 program (two-way symmetrical program). These programs can sometimes prevent crises. At other times, they can help lessen the severity of crises.

5. In segmentation, public relations breaks down large publics into smaller subpublics with which it can communicate more effectively about issues or problems. These publics are usually, but not always, active rather than passive. Active publics seek out information and are more likely than passive publics to act on an issue. For example, if an organization wants to gear a program to all public schoolchildren, it might direct its program to the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers, organizations consisting of members who are educators and who can reach all public schoolchildren. Organizations that do not segment their stakeholders might send a news release to metropolitan newspapers hoping that teachers will read the article and communicate with children.

6. Issues management is part of a two-way symmetrical program that is best handled by the public relations department. (Although issues management is many times handled by public affairs or corporate communications departments, which are separate and apart from public relations departments that only handle media relations, Grunig and Repper's theory does not advise this separation.) A public makes an issue when it perceives that a problem is brewing or already exists. In issues management, the public relations department anticipates the issues that are potential crises and ranks them in order of possible damage to the organization. Then strategies and tactics are developed and implemented to lessen the likelihood of crises. The crucial element here is early identification of potential crises, like treating a sniffle before it becomes the flu. The treatment might involve making allies with potential adversaries or meeting with community activists to explain a procedure that might be construed as damaging to consumers. Consequently, the odds are enhanced that an issue can benefit the organization rather than hamper it.

MARRA AND THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

Marra (1992), in an attempt to build on and validate a model of excellent crisis public relations, suggested that organizations develop a theoretically based crisis public relations model that would allow practitioners to identify which variables could be adjusted to make a crisis communication plan (CCP) work and which variables, if not adjusted, would cause it to fail. Marra argued that this knowledge can allow public relations practitioners to know before a crisis what will or will not work. He identified strategies and techniques common to excellent responses to crises with the following hypotheses:

1. An organization having strong and well-developed relationships with its key publics prior to a crisis will suffer less financial, emotional, or perceptual damage than organizations with weak and poorly developed relationships with its key publics prior to a crisis. Key publics would not only be the media, but also employees, customers, community members, and so forth.

2. Marra believed, as the Grunigs and Repper did, that organizations with weak precrisis relationships are those with asymmetrical practices; that is, Model 1, 2, or 3. Therefore, an organization that uses two-way symmetrical crisis communications

Crisis Communications Vocabulary

Strategy—An approach on how one handles a problem.

Stakeholders—People who are linked to an organization or who have an interest in an organization and are affected by the decisions made by that organization. Examples of company stakeholders are employees, stockholders, communities, and government officials.

Strategic publics—Stakeholders who are crucial to an organization. The organization cannot function without them. Examples are boards of directors, investors, and unions.

Strategically managed public relations—Communications programs designed to build relationships with strategic publics, the crucial stakeholders of an organization.

Segmentation—The division of a market, population, or a large public into groups whose members are bound by mutual interests, concerns, and characteristics.

Risk communications—An ongoing program of informing and educating various publics (usually external publics) about issues that can affect, negatively or positively, an organization's success. The program builds solid relationships between an organization and its key publics, the publics on which an organization's survival depends. These relationships must be established prior to a crisis. It is too late after a crisis erupts.

Organizational ideology—An organization's philosophy, its working climate, its corporate culture. Each person's experience with the organization—no matter how small or large—puts him or her in contact with that organization's ideology, or corporate culture. The elements of that culture (such as norms of dress, formal rules, informal codes of conduct, taboos, jokes, language, etc.) make up an invisible, internalized whip that cracks and tells people what they can do, what they cannot do, what they can say, and what they cannot say in their dealings with the organization. It is inescapable that the culture determines to some degree how people within the organization behave. Popular examples of organizational ideology include "Look busy whether you are or not" and "The boss is always right." Johnson & Johnson (see chap. 4) relied on its organizational

ideology in 1982 when, without a crisis management or communications plan, it followed its credo after several people died from poisoned Tylenol capsules.

Communications ideology—The organization’s philosophy and attitudes of behavior in communicating with publics. Again, Johnson & Johnson’s public relations program during the tampering case is an example. The company’s basic rule in coping with the media, and thereby with the consuming public, was “open and honest information.” It is difficult for a public relations department of a major corporation to have a communications ideology different from the organizational ideology. A productive public relations operation necessarily suffers from an unproductive organizational ideology and vice versa. (This is further examined in chap. 4, “Exxon and the *Valdez* Oil Spill.”)

Figure 3.1. To comprehend crisis communication theory, certain terms must first be understood.

procedures will suffer less financial, emotional, or perceptual damage than the Model, 1, 2, or 3 organization or the organization that uses silence as a crisis response.

3. An organization that establishes and puts into effect continuing risk communications activities and prepares CCPs prior to crises will have stronger relationships with key publics, use two-way symmetrical crisis public relations practices, and as a result suffer less financial, emotional, and perceptual damage than the organization that does not.

4. An organization with communication ideologies that encourage, support, and champion crisis management preparations, crisis communications plans and actions, and two-way symmetrical communications practices will suffer less financial, emotional, and perceptual damage than the organization that does not.

FEARN-BANKS AND THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

Two additional characteristics are suggested (Fearn-Banks, 1996):

1. An organization that anticipates, through crisis inventory (see chap. 10), the precise type of crisis will suffer less financial, emotional, and perceptual damage than the organization that does not.

2. An organization that maintains the reputation of having an overall “open and honest” policy with stakeholders and the news media will suffer less financial, emotional, and perceptual damage than the organization that does not (This is a specific area covered broadly in Marra’s fourth characteristic.)

SUMMARY

Various theories suggest attributes and characteristics of programs that are likely either to prevent crises or enable organizations to recover from crises more swiftly than organizations without those characteristics. Strong among all the theories is the necessity for planning ahead. Also prominent is maintaining strong relationships with publics (including the news media).

Persons with public relations savvy are likely to say, "This is obvious. People who are prepared should withstand a crisis better." Nevertheless, the likelihood of a crisis is not seen as obvious by many organizational heads. Most companies still do not plan for crises and take the attitude that "it hasn't happened, so it probably won't happen." However, it does happen, more often than not. After an organization without a plan or a program suffers a crisis, then it sees the need for crisis planning and proactive public relations programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Textbook” Crisis Communications Cases

The Johnson & Johnson Tylenol case and the Exxon *Valdez* oil spills case, both in the 1980s, set the stage for the development of the field of crisis communications. Up to and including these landmark cases, organizations and companies, for the most part, handled their crises as best they could, without crisis management or crisis communications plans.

These crises made the organizations realize that there should be plans, and were the key examples of what to do and what not to do. Johnson & Johnson was reputed to be the stellar company and Exxon to be the prime example of what is bad in communications and public relations. Actually, the case studies reveal that Johnson & Johnson made a mistake in its handling of the crisis, though it was honest about the mistake. And Exxon, though still blamed for the tragic, widespread oil spill, was not solely responsible and made some positive moves to help the state of Alaska recover.

CASE: JOHNSON & JOHNSON AND THE TYLENOL MURDERS

Before September 30, 1982, manufacturers felt that if they made a good product and dealt fairly with consumers, retailers, employees, and other publics, they could maintain a positive image and be considered consumer-friendly, a good company with which to do business.

Johnson & Johnson was one of those companies. It was an old and trusted company. With 165 companies in 53 countries throughout the world, it made baby products, baby powder, lotions, shampoos, cotton swabs, adhesive bandages, surgical instruments, Reach toothbrushes, Ortho-Novum birth control pills, and pharmaceuticals in the World Health Organization list of essential drugs. Johnson & Johnson was a household name.

The corporation also had a positive image among its employees. It was listed as one of the 100 best places to work. The company credo was written by the son of the company's founder in the 1940s (see Fig. 4.1). The credo said that the company had four responsibilities in the following order of priority: to the consumer, to the employees, to the communities, and to the stockholders.

The company also had continually good relationships with the media. Little did it realize just how crucial those relationships would become.

September 30 began like any other workday at the headquarters in New Brunswick, NJ. Then a fateful telephone call came in.

A reporter from the *Chicago Sun-Times* telephoned a public relations staff member asking such questions as “How long has Tylenol been on the market?” and “What is Tylenol's share of the market?”

The reporter did not know why he was asked to prepare background information on Tylenol. Someone else was writing the story. An editor had merely assigned him to do background research to use in the main story. The Johnson & Johnson staffer, who then alerted most of the department, thought the call was a bit strange and reported it to Public Relations Director Robert Kniffin. Kniffin called Arthur Quilty, an executive committee

member who had responsibility for McNeil Consumer Products Corporation, a subsidiary. Quilty alerted James Burke, CEO. The reporter later called back and explained there had been reported deaths from the intake of Extra Strength Tylenol.

Corporate Vice President Lawrence Foster, who was on vacation, called in, as was his daily practice, and when he learned what had happened, he immediately returned to the office and took charge of the public relations activities.

The corporation had no specific crisis communications plan—few companies did at the time. It did have an emergency plan and call list for such incidents as plant fires. The first step was to notify the chain of command.

There was an immediate meeting in Burke’s office with top executives, including Lawrence Foster, head of public relations; David Clare, president and chairman of Johnson & Johnson’s executive committee; Joseph Chiesea, president of McNeil Consumer Products Company; and David Collins, chairman of McNeil.

Our Credo

We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses and patients,
to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services.

In meeting their needs everything we do must be of high quality.
We must constantly strive to reduce our costs
in order to maintain reasonable prices.

Customers' orders must be serviced promptly and accurately.
Our suppliers and distributors must have an opportunity
to make a fair profit.

We are responsible to our employees,
the men and women who work with us throughout the world.
Everyone must be considered as an individual.

We must respect their dignity and recognize their merit.
They must have a sense of security in their jobs.
Compensation must be fair and adequate,
and working conditions clean, orderly and safe.

We must be mindful of ways to help our employees fulfill
their family responsibilities.

Employees must feel free to make suggestions and complaints.
There must be equal opportunity for employment, development
and advancement for those qualified.

We must provide competent management,
and their actions must be just and ethical.

We are responsible to the communities in which we live and work
and to the world community as well.

We must be good citizens — support good works and charities
and bear our fair share of taxes.

We must encourage civic improvements and better health and education.
We must maintain in good order
the property we are privileged to use,
protecting the environment and natural resources.

Our final responsibility is to our stockholders.

Business must make a sound profit.

We must experiment with new ideas.

Research must be carried on, innovative programs developed
and mistakes paid for.

New equipment must be purchased, new facilities provided
and new products launched.

Reserves must be created to provide for adverse times.

When we operate according to these principles,
the stockholders should realize a fair return.

Johnson & Johnson

Figure 4.1. The Johnson & Johnson credo that guided the company's crisis team through the ordeal of saving the company's image, even as news accounts reported that the company's Tylenol product was killing consumers. Reprinted by permission of Johnson & Johnson.

At that meeting, Foster dispatched Kniffin to McNeil's headquarters nearby. Collins, who had been president of McNeil Pharmaceuticals and knew the subsidiary well, was sent to

McNeil by Burke. This would actually have been the next step in a crisis communications plan—had there been such a plan.

The executives all said that it was a period of great fear. There were no warnings, no prodromes. Nothing like this had ever happened to them or any other company that provides products for human consumption. What was going on? Was there a psychopathic murderer in the plant?

When the story ran in the media, the public also was afraid. The very idea that a person could take a capsule for a headache and die was terrorizing. People were saying, “I have a terrible headache, but I’m alive.” Even consumers outside the Chicago area were afraid of Tylenol capsules, if not also afraid of all over-the-counter pain medications.

Collins immediately set up a seven-member crisis team. The team’s first task was to find out what sickness it was actually facing. Then it would determine how to go about the healing process. The crisis team handled decisions in the area of communications and was in charge of all strategies and tactics. With Burke’s approval, the team decided to recall all Tylenol capsules from stores in the Chicago area.

The recalled batch was tested and two additional cyanide-laced capsules were discovered. Still, the team and company were uncertain of how the cyanide got into the capsules. It indeed hoped that the criminality was not in the company, but there was no certainty.

Johnson & Johnson had one overriding priority: Warn the public. The company did just that by being completely open and cooperative with the media in getting the news out.

Foster said he believed that three points marked the reason Johnson & Johnson was successful in coping with the crisis:

1. The company was open to the media.
2. It was willing to recall the product no matter what that meant to the company.
3. It appealed to the American sense of fair play and asked for the public’s trust.

Foster was responsible for the communications aspect of the crisis team’s work. The team was concerned with aiding police and the FBI in finding the responsible party and in dealing with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

First, the crisis team identified its key publics:

1. Consumers (through the media).
2. The medical profession.
3. Employees and other internal groups.
4. The FDA.

All publics were notified initially, and the team kept in touch with them throughout the crisis.

The first story appeared in the morning edition of the *Chicago SunTimes* on October 1. The *Chicago Tribune* ran a story that same afternoon under a banner headline:

5 Deaths Tied to Pills

Fear Killer Put Cyanide in Tylenol

A study of the *Tribune’s* coverage revealed that the newspaper was as supportive of Johnson & Johnson as it could have been in the telling of the bad news, especially considering the usual “in-your-face” coverage of crises in the 1990s. The opening pages

of two *Tribune* stories are shown in Figs. 4.2 and 4.3. The company's executives, the police, the FBI, and the newspapers knew from the start that the tampering could possibly have happened at the plant. Nevertheless, there was no insinuation of this in the *Tribune's* coverage.

The name Johnson & Johnson was not mentioned on page 1. In the continuation of the story on page 2, nearly buried in the middle of 12 column-inches of copy, was the following statement:

A spokesperson for Johnson & Johnson, parent firm of the company that makes Tylenol, said Thursday evening his firm "launched an investigation this morning to track down the capsules."

The spokesman, Robert Andrews, and two other Johnson & Johnson officials met for an hour and a half with Elk Grove Village detectives and evidence technicians.

He said his firm is "collectively shocked." (Houston & Griffin, 1982, p. 2)

There were four *Tribune* stories about the Tylenol crisis in that one issue. Other than in the preceding quoted passage, all other mentions of the company were of McNeil Consumer Products Company, not as familiar a name to consumers as Johnson & Johnson.

The captions for the related photographs on pages 1 and 2 of the *Tribune* also did not mention the company. The caption on page 2 indicated that medical examiners believed "the capsules were tampered with after leaving the manufacturer's plant in Pennsylvania" (Shanker & Grady, 1982, p. 2).

Other remedy may be safe, but customers don't buy it

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Dust is collecting on some drugstore shelves in the Chicago area, and people apparently are learning to live with headaches in the wake of last week's tragedy involving Extra Strength Tylenol laced with cyanide.

An informal survey of drugstores throughout the Chicago area showed that sales of most acetaminophen products have dropped while sales of aspirin have increased slightly. Acetaminophen is the nonaspirin substance used in Tylenol and other pain relievers.

"In general acetaminophen products are not selling. Point blank. Done in. Dead. Aspirin products are picking up a bit, but the scare seems to have spread through the shelves," said pharmacist Paul Bablak of the Hinsdale Medical Center Pharmacy. "We're collecting a lot of dust on our shelves. People are scared, and you really can't blame them."

If the fear of cyanide poisoning can be measured by the still-packed medication shelves at drugstores, then the fever is spreading through the metropolitan area, several other pharmacists said.

"I think everybody's walking around with headaches," said Jerry Denny, a pharmacist at Family Pharmacy in west suburban La

Grange. "All the acetaminophen products are just sitting on the shelves. Even generic acetaminophen is moving slowly."

The slow sales were found not only in smaller, private drugstores but also in chain stores. Jane Armstrong, director of consumer affairs for the Jewel Foods Co., which operates almost 200 Jewel grocery stores and Osco drugstores in the Chicago area, said, "It's too early to tell what's happening to other acetaminophen products. We have noticed an increase in aspirin sales, although it's not a groundswell at this point."

The results have been the same for major drug wholesalers in the area. Drug buyers from several large wholesalers said they expect orders to increase for aspirin and the substitute acetaminophen products once fear subsides, but they added that it is too soon to accurately measure the effect of the tragedy on drug sales.

Figure 4.2. One of four news stories appearing in the *Chicago Tribune* on October 1, 1982, the first day of news coverage of the Tylenol crisis. Note that the story did not mention Johnson & Johnson. Chicago Tribune Company. Reprinted by permission.

On Saturday, October 2, the headline in the *Chicago Tribune* was "Stewardess is 7th Capsule Poison Victim." The page-1 headline was not the dominant headline on the page. A bomb explosion that had killed hundreds of people in Tehran, Iran, took that honor. There were two other

Stores around nation pull Tylenol capsules

BY BARBARA MAHANEY
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Stores nationwide quickly ordered personnel Thursday to strip their shelves of Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules and hospital spokesmen reported rashes of phone calls after cyanide-tainted capsules were linked in three deaths and possibly two others in suburban Chicago.

The nation's largest grocery chain, Safeway, in Oakland, Calif., ordered all stores to remove bottles of the over-the-counter pain killer in the 96,000-bottle lot-MC 3000-which was recalled by McNeil Consumer Products Co., of Fort Washington, PA.

All 1,000 Revco Discount Drug Centers and 400 CVS pharmacies in New England pulled every bottle of Extra-Strength Tylenol. "We have pulled it off our shelves completely," said Bernie Thomas of Perry Drug Stores, Inc., which operated 124 stores in five states, including 98 in Michigan.

Meanwhile, poison centers and hospitals were reported swamped with thousands of calls from worried consumers, many of whom said they took Tylenol capsules from the recalled lot, but apparently suffered no ill effects.

“We’ve had questions ranging from ‘Do you know anything about Tylenol being contaminated’ to ‘Oh my God, I just took Extra-Strength Tylenol, am I going to die?’” said Cathy Piccillo of the Indiana Poison Center, which received 50 phone calls.

Figure 4.3. Another of the four stories appearing in the *Chicago Tribune* on the first day of coverage of the Tylenol crisis. Again, there was no mention of Johnson & Johnson. Chicago Tribune Company. Reprinted by permission.

stories about the Tylenol crisis: one about the efforts to track the source of the poison, and another about funeral services for the victims.

On Sunday, October 3, the *Tribune’s* front-page banner headline, “Shoplifter Is Sought in Poisoning Probe,” referred to a story about a man who had been arrested a couple of months before for stealing Tylenol. The story continued on page 4 with excerpts referring to the Johnson & Johnson plants. The first excerpt read as follows:

Consumers nationwide were urged to stop using Extra Strength Tylenol capsules. Johnson & Johnson, parent company of the painkiller’s manufacturer, announced it is recalling all Extra Strength Tylenol in the Chicago area.... (Shanker & Grady, 1982, p. 4)

The second excerpt took the following form:

Investigators have been unable to determine how and where the cyanide capsules were placed in any of the suspect containers—whether the killer infiltrated the drug company’s sophisticated manufacturing and distribution system at some point between plants in Pennsylvania and Texas and warehouses elsewhere or whether the killer removed and replaced containers once they had been placed on the shelves of local stores.

Stein said he could not rule out “factory error” because of the reported disclosure by Lawrence Foster, a spokesman for Johnson & Johnson.

Foster said potassium cyanide is used in chemical tests at some of McNeil’s laboratories, but not in the manufacturing process. The labs are remote from the manufacturing areas and cyanide would be detected even if someone tried to introduce it during manufacturing, he said.... (Shanker & Grady, 1982, p. 4)

There was another front-page story in the October 3 *Tribune*, this one about a 12-year-old who had died from the poison 4 days before.

Johnson & Johnson installed 33 telephones to communicate with publics during the crisis. Pretaped statements were placed on special toll-free telephone lines to expedite news gathering. The messages were regularly updated. A full-page advertisement was

placed in major Chicago newspapers offering consumers an exchange of Tylenol capsules for Tylenol tablets.

During the first week of the crisis, Kniffin handled the media from McNeil, whereas Foster was in charge at headquarters. Approximately 180,000 news stories ran in newspapers nationally. The story was at the top of television and radio newscasts.

Two thousand telephone calls were taken from the media. Thirty thousand calls from consumers came in during the first months following the deaths.

Still there were glitches.

During the first 3 days, as the *Chicago Tribune* articles showed, Foster issued a statement to reporters that there was no cyanide in the manufacturing plants. A few days later, the Associated Press heard that there was cyanide in the plants and called Foster to confirm the report. After checking again, Foster discovered that indeed a small amount of cyanide was used in the manufacturing plant for quality-assurance testing of some kind. However, the cyanide was kept in a completely separate facility from the production line. Also, none of it was missing. There was no way that it could have gotten into the capsules accidentally. Even if it had, it would have been so dispersed as to be harmless.

Foster called the Associated Press and told it the truth. He has a reputation for being honest, fair, and ethical. He could not afford a cover-up. When he told the wire service that there was no way the cyanide could have gotten into the capsules, the reporters believed him and agreed not to run the story—unless some other news outlet got the information, too.

Sure enough, the *Newark Star-Ledger* got word of the information, called Johnson & Johnson for confirmation, and again Foster said, “Trust me.” The reporter agreed.

Keeping his promise to the Associated Press, Foster called and told the wire service that the *Newark Star-Ledger* had the information but had also agreed not to run it. The Associated Press agreed once more not to run the story unless still another newspaper or TV station got the information. After all, the *Star-Ledger* was basically a neighbor to the company.

However, when the *New York Times* got the information, Foster decided to give up. He called both the Associated Press and the *Star-Ledger* and asked them to use discretion in running the story. The resulting stories had very little impact. They were run in insignificant places in the Sunday newspapers, and the facts were not blown out of proportion (as had happened with other crises). The newspapers merely reported the information as Foster had revealed it.

With this, Foster realized that his positive dealings with the media over the years had paid off. The story could have made front-page headlines everywhere, but it did not because the media trusted the public relations professional from their past dealings with him.

The FBI and the FDA never found any evidence of tampering at the two Johnson & Johnson plants. They found that the contaminated capsules had come from both plants—one in Texas, the other in Pennsylvania—but for the first time, there was basic proof that the tampering was not an inside job. The finger now pointed to some external, malicious psychopath who bought the Tylenol, laced it with cyanide, and placed it back in the containers and on the shelves of stores.

After the crisis team discovered what had transpired, its members were relieved to be assured that the contamination could not have occurred in the plants. The task of the team now turned to saving Tylenol and restoring sales. The team was not worried that Johnson

& Johnson would go under because of the company's diversified product line. Sales were not down for other Johnson & Johnson products. There was no boycott against the company. However, there was a fear of Tylenol capsules. The future of Tylenol was at stake.

To reach the employees who had been on pins and needles while the company battled the crisis, CEO Burke spoke to an assembly at McNeil and promised that Extra Strength Tylenol was coming back. Employees wore "We're Coming Back" buttons. Those employees who had been manufacturing Tylenol were given other temporary jobs. Videotaped reports of activities were shown to employees explaining what was going on with the crisis.

Information packages were sent electronically—fax, telegram, other methods—to major distributors who, in a short time, notified half a million retailers and medical professionals.

Up to this point, there was a debate over whether to recall the product. The FBI and the FDA advised against a recall because it would mean giving in to the terrorists.

The decision not to recall would have worked if it had not been for a copycat crime that took place in northern California on October 5. The company decided then that removing the product from all stores was the only way to show the public that it was concerned about the welfare of its customers. On October 5, all Tylenol products were removed from stores nationwide.

Later, there were approximately 250 copycat reports, all of which were found to be groundless.

During the recovery period, a decision was made to repackage the product. A 60-second television commercial featuring the medical director at McNeil notifying consumers of the upcoming return of Tylenol aired in October and November to an estimated 85% of U.S. television households.

The triple-seal safety package devised for the product was announced at a November 11 news conference transmitted by satellite to 29 different sites where reporters were gathered. Burke also announced the availability of coupons that could be used toward the purchase of any Tylenol product and a special toll-free telephone number through which consumers could learn about the special promotion. More than 200,000 calls came in to the toll-free information number. Coverage of the press conference in the *Kansas City Times* applauded Burke and the company for their efforts and described the new Tylenol safety package as having "glued flaps...that must be forcibly opened. Inside, a tight plastic seal surrounds the cap and an inner foil seal wraps over the mouth of the bottle" (Goodman, 1982, p. A3). Johnson & Johnson could not have paid for better news coverage.

Johnson & Johnson executives did interviews with network television shows, such as *Donahue*, *60 Minutes*, and *Nightline*, as well as with major newspapers and magazines, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune*.

As a result of the crisis, all Tylenol capsules were discontinued, as were capsules of other brand names. Tamper-proof, triple-sealed safety containers were swiftly placed on the shelves of retailers 10 weeks after the withdrawal. Other manufacturers followed suit.

The crisis cost the company more than \$100 million. Tylenol regained 100% of the market share it had before the crisis. Seven people died. Other lives were saved by the company's decision to recall all the capsules in the Chicago area. The Tylenol murderer was never found. A \$100,000 reward offered by Johnson & Johnson still remains unclaimed.

An October 11 *Washington Post* front-page article praised Johnson & Johnson’s crisis response: “Johnson & Johnson has effectively demonstrated how a major business ought to handle a disaster...what executives have done is communicate the message that the company is candid, contrite and compassionate, committed to solving the murders and protecting the public” (Knight, 1982, p. 1).

Johnson & Johnson has expanded and also acquired numerous other companies in the United States and abroad since the tampering incident. Fifty-eight mergers and acquisitions were made in the decade spanning 1994 to 2004. This added more than 50 companies and product lines to the Johnson & Johnson name. International affiliates of the company were founded in China (in Xian, 1985), Shanghai (1990), Hungary (1990), Poland (1990), Russia (1990), and the Czech Republic (1991).

In 2004, the company had more than 110,000 employees worldwide. *When Fortune* ranked its 10 Most Admired Companies in 2002, Johnson & Johnson was number 7. Harris Interactive ranks companies according to its National Corporate Reputation Survey and Johnson & Johnson ranked first for 6 consecutive years (1998–2004).

In 2005, Johnson & Johnson was named the most admired pharmaceutical company of the Fortune 500 of *Fortune* magazine. *Black Collegian Magazine*, also in 2005, ranked the company as the second most “ideal employer” in the publication’s annual “Top 100 Diversity Employers Survey.”

CASE: EXXON AND THE VALDEZ OIL SPILL

In the late 1980s, Exxon was one of the five largest companies in the United States, with sales of \$80 billion. Exxon CEO Lawrence G. Rawl had been employed at Exxon for 37 years before getting the top job in 1986. He was considered a strong leader who disliked publicity and the media.

The *Valdez oil* spill crisis started shortly after midnight on Friday, March 24, 1989. The Exxon *Valdez*, a 987-foot oil tanker, was headed for Long Beach, California, from Prince William Sound off the coast of Alaska. A reporter later described the ship as “longer than three football fields, [and] loaded to the top with enough oil to fill the Rose Bowl almost halfway to the top” (Turning Point, 1994).

The weather was calm. The water was beautiful. During daylight hours, an abundance of sea life could be seen. It was the time of the migration that brings to the area the largest concentration of migratory fowl in the entire world. Sea otters, seals, whales, salmon, herring, and halibut inhabited the Sound.

Just before midnight, the local pilot, who had guided the tanker out of the harbor, went off duty. Captain Joseph Hazelwood, in command, put the supertanker on autopilot and headed straight for Bligh Reef, one of several well-known hazardous areas in Prince William Sound. Hazelwood had sailed the route more than 100 times. Some said he could do it nearly blindfolded. He had been with Exxon for 21 years, 10 of them as captain.

On this night, Hazelwood left his post at the bridge and put Third Mate Gregory Cousins in charge, telling him to keep the tanker on course for 3 minutes, then turn right, thus avoiding the reef. Although Cousins was qualified to take command during normal times, government investigators later said that he was not qualified to take command at that critical period when the ship had to be steered in a very precise maneuver.

Cousins waited too long before ordering the turn, and the Exxon *Valdez* headed for the submerged rocks. He told Captain Hazelwood, "I think we're in serious trouble." Hazelwood radioed the Coast Guard with the message, "We've fetched up hard aground.... Evidently, we're leaking some oil" (Smith, 1992, p. 84). Cousins and Hazelwood had just made the two understatements of 1989.

The tanker had run aground on the rocks of Bligh Reef, ripping open a hole in the hull nearly as long as the ship itself. Over the next hours and days, 11 million gallons of crude oil poured out into Prince William Sound. The oil spread relentlessly. Some said the oil slick was 10 feet wide and 4 miles long—the worst oil spill ever in American waters.

Obviously, the beautiful waters were no longer beautiful, but more importantly, sea life perished. It was estimated that 1 million migratory fowl and one third of the sea otter population, about 2,500, died. Also, seals and sea lions fell victim to the slick. Some sources revealed that 2 million animals died as a result of the oil, although this did not include halibut, pink salmon, herring, clams, and worms that remained uncounted. Some scientists claimed that wildlife may still remain poisoned by the oil years later. Others later said Prince William Sound totally recovered from the spill.

The weekend news reports came from local media and through the three major television networks. By Monday, media people from all over the world began to pour into Valdez. The media frenzy had begun. (Examples of the news coverage are shown in Fig. 4.4.) In addition, hundreds of environmentalists arrived in Valdez to help save the animals, the beaches, and the water. Concern was rampant.

Don Cornet, who later became Exxon's public relations manager, was Alaska coordinator for Exxon at that time; he reported to the head of public affairs and rushed to

Excerpts from front page news story in *Anchorage Daily News*,
March 25, 1989

Crude oil fouls Sound Oil officials react slowly to disaster

BY LARRY CAMPBELL
DAILY NEWS REPORTER

VALDEZ—As the largest oil spill in the history of the United States entered its second day, only a feeble containment effort has been mounted and a crowd of state, federal and oil company officials remained undecided about how to clean up the mess.

A 32-square-mile, multi-hued sheen continued to float and spread atop the waters of Prince William Sound. The Sound is surrounded by land on three sides. Two large islands, Hinchinbrook and Montague, lie across its open, southern end. That means that unless the spilled oil can be dealt with, it is a near-certainty that it will wash ashore somewhere in the Sound.

Valdez residents grew increasingly critical Friday of what seemed to be sluggish movement by Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., which operates the oil terminal here, and Exxon Shipping Co. in dealing with the spill.

Nearly 24 hours after the Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef about 25 miles southwest of here, officials had done little to contain the spill or clean up what was beyond containment.

Oil keeps spreading in Sound State says Alyeska’s cleanup effort inadequate, slow

**BY LARRY CAMPBELL
DAILY NEWS REPORTER**

VALDEZ—State, federal and oil company officials ended Saturday as they had begun it, no closer to a solution to the problems posed by more than 11 million gallons of North Slope crude oil washing around the fish-and-wildlife-rich, enclosed waters of Prince William Sound.

But while the oil of the nation’s largest spill was left mostly unmolested, the chief of the state Department of Environmental Conservation assailed the Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. for its failure to respond quickly to the disaster.

Figure 4.4. Excerpts from front-page news stories appearing in the *Anchorage Daily News* on March 25, 1989, the day after the oil spill from the Exxon *Valdez*.

the scene as soon as he got word of the accident. The company’s immediate strategy was to focus on the clean-up effort. Exxon’s theory was that the initial spill was regrettable, but that at this point the most crucial task was to clean it up as swiftly as possible and restore normalcy to the area.

Frank Iarossi, then-president of Exxon Shipping (the grounded tanker came from its shipyards), was Exxon’s main representative at the Valdez site. CEO Rawl was nowhere to be found. Iarossi dealt with the logistics of the spill response. Early on, he pointed a finger at Captain Hazelwood. Years later, there was still some confusion over whether Hazelwood had been drinking that night, but it was a fact that his driver’s license had been revoked for drunken driving and that he had once been hospitalized for alcohol treatment. He denies he was drunk and no court has ever proven he was. At any rate, Hazelwood was fired. Third Mate Cousins blamed the crisis on “poor seamanship” (“The Big Spill,” 1990).

Some Exxon employees placed the blame on Exxon’s corporate culture. They said that to save money the company had cut crews, and that the short-staffed crews worked long hours and got little sleep. They felt that human fatigue was responsible for the accident. Moving the oil was a cardinal rule, they said, and employees who did not work fast and long enough feared losing their jobs.

Smith (1992) said that in 1986, the Exxon *Valdez* was designed for a crew of 33. Yet on the fateful night of the spill, the crew numbered only 19.

According to requirements of the State of Alaska, the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, a consortium of several companies working on Alaska’s North Slope, was responsible for the initial response to the spill. Exxon, Atlantic Richfield (ARCO), British

Petroleum (BP), and five other companies initially participated in the response. Exxon soon after took over the clean-up efforts from the other companies.

At the start of the crisis, Cornet set up a media center in Valdez, a remote town with limited facilities, equipment, and accommodations. Critics charged that the media center should have been in New York or Chicago, a city that could better accommodate such a large gathering of reporters and photographers. Others insisted that it had to be at the site, regardless of the difficulties. The media said that photographs and videos of the spill, citizens of Alaska, and government officials were all necessary to the stories communicated to the public.

Contradictory statements about the seriousness of the crisis were issued from various news sources. One statement said the damage was minimal. Another said the damage was substantial.

Four days after the spill, local fishermen in the village of Cordova were angry because clean-up efforts had not worked. They and the media were not happy about the response. Iarossi held a press conference without first being briefed by public relations personnel; he was verbally slaughtered. Brian Dunphy, another spokesperson for Exxon Shipping, said that he would not verify the extent of the damage or what was being done about it, a statement that was not well received.

CEO Rawl still declined to go to the site. He said that he felt “technologically obsolete.” The media, the fishermen, the environmentalists, and the public were irate. Customers began to cancel their Exxon credit cards. The media continued to attack more vociferously. Exxon had not anticipated the intensity of the public’s concern about the environmental crisis. Neither had it anticipated such a large spill or the difficulties in clean-up and communications.

EXXON’S CONCERN FOR ALASKA

George Mason, APR, in 1989, was vice president of Bradley/McAfee Public Relations, Alaska’s largest public relations firm. The firm was part of Bradley Advertising, the state’s largest advertising agency. (The company’s name was later changed to Bradley/Reid Communications.)

“Alyeska Pipeline Service Company was our largest account, and we’d held it for 14 years,” said Mason, who was not personally responsible for the account but had, on occasion, handled crisis communications for the client.

When the Exxon *Valdez* ran aground on the night of March 24, 1989, Mason contacted Alyeska’s public relations director, John Rattermann to offer assistance. “What is often forgotten in the news stories,” he said, “is that Alyeska was responsible for [the] initial response in the event of a spill.”

The day after the angry public meeting, Mason flew to Valdez to meet with Don Cornet, Alaska coordinator for Exxon. “In my opinion,” said Mason, “Mr. Cornet had already grasped the futility of the situation as far as the degree of damage Exxon’s image had suffered. He seemed to accept this and had begun to look ahead to the long-term future.”

Cornet asked Mason to develop and implement strategies for three areas that he expected would be of future concern: (a) The tourism industry, Alaska’s third-largest

industry (oil was the state's largest industry); (b) The animal rescue centers Exxon had already begun to set up on Valdez; (c) The seafood industry, Alaska's second-largest industry.

Mason agreed to handle the first two and referred the third to a public relations agency in Anchorage that handled the state's seafood account.

EXXON'S ANIMAL RESCUE CENTERS

Mason went to the Animal Rescue Center, where there was additional mayhem. Teams of wildlife professionals and their equipment had been flown into Valdez. They were trying to set up the center to help rescue some of the animals.

"Reporters and interested community people were given free access to the facility, again in an effort to cooperate," recalled Mason. "However, the result was impossible. On more than one occasion, eager reporters, mostly freelancers trying to make a buck, were in the way, and in some instances had stepped on injured birds being treated."

Again, Mason, in agreement with the head of the animal rescue center, put security guards to work. This time, it was the media and others not connected with the rescue effort who were kept out. The facility was roped off. Then media tours were arranged and guidelines were constructed to guarantee the protection of the animals.

Mason subcontracted a staff member to do the same work with a second animal rescue center in Seward, Alaska. He subcontracted others to act as community liaisons in other communities. "The purpose here," said Mason, "was to ensure credible connection between Exxon and the community."

EXXON'S SUCCESS AT RESTORING TOURISM

Mason headed the tourism campaign himself. He already knew, from previous research, that the greatest concern was that the spill had occurred in spring, the peak time of year when tourists make plans for vacations.

"We suspected," he said, "that the televised reports of thick oil and dead animals would seriously impact decisions of tourists contemplating travel in Alaska. An early survey of vendors statewide confirmed our fears."

Mason said that the tourism industry telephoned from all over Alaska. The fear was that American tourists would think that the spill had marred all of Alaska. Cancellations were also rampant. Some callers asked, "How deep is the oil in Fairbanks?" Fairbanks is a city nowhere near the oil spill.

Mason designed a crisis plan that was further developed and fine-tuned by a team of experts, including public relations heads of Westours and Princess cruise lines. The plan was quickly funded by Exxon and approved by the Alaska Tourism Marketing Council, a combined state and industry group.

The crisis plan involved bringing travel writers to Alaska to witness the conditions and encouraging them to travel within the state to report what destinations were and were not affected by the spill. A telephone hotline was also instituted for travel editors to get information swiftly.

News conferences were held in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle with feeds to major television network programs. The news conferences in San Francisco and Los Angeles were organized by Ketchum Public Relations offices in those cities. Erik V. Peterson, APR, who was formerly Mason's boss in Alaska, did the groundwork for the Seattle news conference. The agency Padilla, Speer, Beardsley set up the New York press conference. Alaska Governor Cooper participated in the news conferences in Seattle and San Francisco and was a very credible participant because he had been so publicly critical of the spill. When he said, "Alaska is beautiful," people believed him.

At the same time, Exxon funded an advertising campaign developed jointly by Mason's agency and McCann-Erickson of Seattle. The public relations campaign reached an estimated 50 million Americans. The advertising campaign reached even more. Both were successful in diffusing negative travel publicity.

That season, Alaska's tourism set a new record. It was 5% higher than it had been the year before the spill. The public relations campaign won a Silver Anvil Commendation from the Public Relations Society of America, as well as numerous other national and regional awards.

"None of it [the tourism and the animal rescue efforts] would have been possible were it not for the cooperation and support of Exxon," said Mason, "The lesson I learned from that crisis and have since applied to other crises is that once the crisis begins and the public hysteria begins, it is too late to worry about your PR. All you can really do is hang on, get on with the work, and continue to do what you think is best and most honest."

AFTER THE CRISIS

Rawl eventually issued a statement via television telling the public what chemicals would be used to clean up the spill. He made no apologies to the fishermen whose livelihoods had been affected. He showed no emotion over the impact of the disaster.

Ten days after the spill, Exxon released full-page ads expressing concern and vowing to clean up the spill. Still, the company did not accept responsibility for the damage. Three weeks after the spill, the CEO went to Alaska, apparently no longer feeling "technologically obsolete."

All oil companies operating in Alaskan waters now have crisis plans approved by the state. In 1989, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company's plan anticipated a much smaller oil spill and allotted only 5 hours for containment. A primary response in these plans was the use of dispersants as well as in situ burning for clean-up. The Coast Guard and the Alaska state government could not decide on the use of dispersants for the Exxon *Valdez* spill, and this debate prolonged the clean-up. A dispersant test was attempted on Monday following the Friday night spill, but harsh weather prevented its completion. In addition, the spill was so massive that there were not enough dispersants in Alaska to deal with the problem.

A month after the spill, Exxon finally had the equipment for a full-scale clean-up, which was not completed until 1992. Some Alaskans said there was still evidence of the oil in the Sound. In 1994, Exxon issued information to the media showing that predictions of long-term damage resulting from the spill were exaggerated, and that there was oil from other sources in Prince William Sound. Independent scientific studies

seemed to confirm this, but oil from these sources was minuscule compared to that from the Exxon *Valdez*.

Although various controversies about the Exxon spill remained, one thing was certain: The Exxon *Valdez* was a warning sign, a prodrome for other oil companies. Later, British Petroleum (BP) suffered an oil spill in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Huntington Beach, south of Los Angeles. BP reacted with haste, even getting underwater photographers to capture images of the hole in the ship for the media.

In a few days, the BP accident was no longer news. This spill, however, was in no way as massive or as difficult as the Exxon spill. It should also be noted that Exxon sent personnel and equipment to help work on the clean-up of this BP spill.

Rawl resigned in 1993 and Lee Raymond became Exxon’s chairman. In 1989, the position of public relations manager did not exist at the company. In organizational restructuring under Raymond, Cornet took this position. In this new organizational hierarchy, there were fewer layers between the CEO and the public relations department. Cornet reported to the head of public affairs, who reported directly to Raymond.

Although Hazelwood was acquitted of operating the tanker while intoxicated, he was convicted of negligent discharge of oil (a misdemeanor), fined \$50,000, and ordered to perform community service. After 8 years of appeals, in 1998 the Alaska Court of Appeals upheld Hazelwood’s sentence of 1,000 hours of community work (“Sentence Upheld Over Oil Spill,” 1998). After being fired from Exxon and sued, he was unable to find work as a ship’s captain, though his credentials and skills were highly praised. He worked for a time in New York as a claims adjuster for his lawyers. In 1999, at 52, he began to do his community service and was scheduled to complete 200 hours a year for 5 years (“Exxon Valdez Captain Finally Will Do Community Service,” 1999). Also, in 1999, Hazelwood worked at an Anchorage soup kitchen. Although he resents being fired by Exxon and sees himself as a victim, Hazelwood said, “I felt terrible about my involvement...as any normal human being” (“Serving Time,” 1999).

Cousins, the third mate who was left responsible by Hazelwood to steer the ship away from Bligh Reef, continued on his ladder of success to become a second mate on a U.S.-flagged bulk ship (Nalder, 1999).

Ten years after the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill, the largest marine disaster in U.S. history, scientists announced that Alaska’s Prince William Sound was recovering, although full ecological recovery had not been achieved. According to scientists, humans could not do much more to hurry the recovery. Only two of the 28 kinds of herring were declared recovered. Although sea otters were recovering, it could take decades to make a full comeback in some of the area’s most heavily oiled bays (Watson, 1999).

Exxon was ordered by a federal court to pay \$5 billion to fishermen and others damaged by the oil spill. Although saying it “deeply regrets” the spill, Exxon argued that there were limits to its deep pockets. It cited the \$2.1 billion in clean-up expenses and another \$1 billion in fines, criminal restitutions, and civil settlements to state and federal governments as sufficient punishment for the damage, saying that a greater amount would send a “perverse message” after all the company had done to mitigate the accident’s effects (Connelly, 1999). As of late 2005, it was still appealing the court’s decision.

Environmental organizations, particularly Greenpeace, MoveOn.org, the Alaska Coalition, and the Sierra Club still demonstrate against Exxon because of the spill and also with regards to issues like global warming. John Passacatando, director of Greenpeace, said while demonstrating in 90-degree weather at a Washington, DC gas

station, "It's going to get hotter thanks to Exxon-Mobil, thanks to them more than any other company on the planet." The manager of the gas station said he had noticed no impact in business at the pumps. Exxon says it is investing in new technologies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and produce cleaner fuels (Ruskin, 2005).

Exxon remains fiscally sound. In 1998, it was still the nation's biggest oil company, ranking fourth in profits ("The Fortune 500," 2000). In 1998, when Exxon agreed to buy Mobil Oil for \$77.2 billion, the merger created the world's largest oil company, Exxon-Mobil ("Richest Merger of All Time," 1998, p. A1B). Two years later, Exxon-Mobil was number 3 on the Fortune 500 list, after General Motors and Wal-Mart ("The Fortune 500," 2000).

Exxon reported a profit of \$9–9 billion for the third quarter of 2005 according to business writer Jerry Hirsch (2005) who said the gain amounted to "\$45 million an hour, almost \$340 for every living American" (p. D1) during the quarter. Some critics were outraged whereas others praised free enterprise. Fadel Ghiet, an industry analyst at Oppenheimer in New York, said that even though it seems extreme, one should consider that oil companies were losing money in the late 1990s when oil was just \$ 12 a barrel. "Every time they drill a hole in the ground, they spend tens of hundreds of millions of dollars, and there is no guarantee there will be a return" (Hirsch, 2005, p. D1).

CHAPTER FIVE

Rumors and Cybercrises

WORD-OF-MOUTH RUMORS, E-MAIL RUMORS, ROGUE WEB SITES, AND BLOGS

An unfounded rumor can be the most damaging attack an organization or company can experience. A rumor can put a company out of business; It can greatly affect the bottom line. In a mild form, it can be a nuisance that requires time and thought to determine whether to fight it and how to fight it. And because time is money, this too affects the bottom line.

There are three unique problems when coping with rumor:

1. You usually have no idea how the rumor started—was it an irate customer, a competitor, a person with nothing better to do or someone’s conversation that was merely misunderstood?
2. You usually have no idea how widespread the rumor is or how long it has been circulating.
3. You have to determine carefully whether it is best to ignore the rumor or fight it—will fighting the rumor spread it more than leaving it alone?

Rumor said that designer Liz Claiborne, during an appearance on *Oprah*, told viewers that 30% of her profits go to the Church of Satan. Then the video transmission blacked out and when it was restored, Claiborne was gone. Liz Claiborne never made that statement and Oprah never zapped her off the air.

There have been rumors that McDonald’s hamburgers are made of ground worms, not ground beef, a silly rumor because worms cost more by the pound than ground beef. Kentucky Fried Chicken, rumors say, does not fry chicken at all but “organisms” with no beaks and no feathers; that’s why the company started using the name “KFC” so it wouldn’t even say the word “chicken.” Actually, it was the word “fried” that seemed negative when considering the health-conscious consumer.

Chinese restaurants have been put out of business because of unfounded rumors that they cooked dogs and cats. Megastores have been labeled kidnapping centers; sometimes the rumors say Wal-Mart, sometimes Target or K-Mart.

Communications research often seeks to determine where people get their information, what sources are most trusted. Generally, more people get their news from television than from newspapers. Newspaper articles are more believable than advertising, but most people do not read newspapers. But, in recent years, we have discovered that the source of information most trusted by the American public is “other people.” *The New York Times* can print a fact. PBS’s *The Newshour with Jim Lehrer* may broadcast the same fact. However, “Bubba, my cousin’s next-door neighbor,” can say something contrary and Bubba will be more believed. This attitude fuels rumor and makes rumor all the more dangerous.

Compounding this urgency is our current environment in the Information Age. We are circulating more information but also more misinformation. We have given power and a

world stage to people who want to do us harm. Rumors on e-mail fly through cyberspace to thousands of people in the amount of time one person could deliver a rumor in conversation. Similarly Web blogs are expressing opinions and are often perceived as news. And each person who receives an e-mailed rumor can pass it on to all the people he or she knows online and those people to all the people they know and it may never end...especially if the rumor is juicy. In rogue Web sites, persons who wish to harm others use the Internet to set up sites to attack a product, company, person, event, or organization.

THE NATURE OF RUMORS

Crises can, and often do, begin with rumors. In fact, a crisis can actually be a negative rumor. “Deep-sixing” rumors is an important task in crisis control and crisis communications.

A rumor is information passed by word of mouth and electronic communications with no verification of fact and no credible source. Rumors can be positive or negative. They can be absolutely false or partly false, or they can be undeniably true or premature facts. “There’s a ring of truth in every rumor”—because people know and believe that expression, they tend to believe there is truth in rumors that are patently false and even ridiculous.

A rumor can begin as in the children’s game “Gossip” (or “Telephone”), in which Child 1 whispers something to Child 2, who repeats it to Child 3, and so on. By the time the message reaches Child 10, it is usually unrelated to the original message. This is rumor spread innocently, but rumor can also be spread maliciously and intentionally.

The victim of malicious rumor rarely knows how the rumor started or who has heard it. This makes it difficult to curtail its spreading, which happens quickly and often with disastrous consequences.

HOW RUMORS START

One of the difficulties in establishing the source of a rumor is the realization that each person who passes it on may change it and thus be a contributing part of its source. The sources usually cited for rumors are rarely the actual sources. The rumors themselves may cite a specific person or institution that sounds credible, but the source is not readily available for verification. For example, the teller of a rumor might say, “I read it in last week’s paper!” “What paper?” we ask. Not many people will go back and look for an article in last week’s newspaper, especially considering that “last week” is also a vague term. Or the rumor teller may insist, “My aunt in Chicago was there when it happened!” This sounds convincing. But who will call the aunt and get specific details? Is there really an aunt at all?

Rumors are often started innocently. This was the case when the late talk show host Johnny Carson on his late-night show told a joke about a shortage of bathroom tissue. People heard about the shortage but not that it was a joke. There was a run on bathroom tissue in grocery stores. Soon the shelves were empty; the stock was depleted. This rumor was merely annoying to grocery stores and customers who remained tissueless.

However, some rumors started innocently can cause real damage. For instance, consider the Cable News Network (CNN) story about the Individual Retirement Account (IRA) that cited McDonald's as an example of corporations contributing to employee IRAs. In Great Britain, that story circulated as a rumor that said that McDonald's supported the Irish Republican Army—also called the IRA. Members of Parliament received numerous letters attacking McDonald's for financing attacks on British soldiers and civilians.

The following sections discuss two case studies of how companies coped with word-of-mouth rumors.

MINI-CASE: PROCTER & GAMBLE AND THE SATANISM RUMOR

Procter & Gamble's original logo dates back to 1850; it depicted the man in the moon and 13 stars (representing the 13 original colonies) around the moon. The logo identified Crest toothpaste, Tide detergent, Pampers diapers—all the P&G products. Then in 1979, there was a rumor that the company had been purchased by the Unification Church headed by the Rev. Sun Moon (followers of the church are called "Moonies"). At first, calls came in to the Consumer Services Department's toll-free number. The company denied the rumor to consumers on the phone and also called news organizations in certain areas. Soon, the rumor changed to claim that P&G was involved in devil-worshipping, that the design of the man in the moon and 13 stars representing the original American colonies was a symbol of Satanism.

The Moonie rumor faded away and the Satanism rumor grew. A P&G executive, according to the rumor, went on a TV show and admitted a pact with the devil to gain success for the company. (The same rumor circulated about McDonald's and other companies.) Also, fliers were circulated, usually misspelling the company's name, claiming that 10% of the company's earnings go to the Church of Satan and advocating a boycott of P&G. Some church heads believed the rumors and advised their congregations to stop buying products from P&G.

The rumor went further and suggested that there was a 666 sign, the sign of the beast from the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Some saw 6's in the curls of the man in the moon when held up to a mirror. P&G was afraid to fight the rumor publicly because it would tell more people about it than already had heard about it. P&G sought the cooperation of religious leaders Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham who spoke up for the company and sent out letters to 48,000 churches.

Rumors subsided but sometimes recur. Some people were prosecuted and that helped the public realize the rumors were false. Usually, charges were dropped after apologies.

The company started to phase out the logo in the mid-1980s, except on company letterheads and publications. It wasn't worth the trouble, and it had already cost \$100,000 to fight the rumors associated with it.

MINI-CASE: TROPICAL FANTASY AND THE STERILITY RUMOR

Tropical Fantasy, a line of fruit-flavored soft drinks, went on the market in 1991 and made \$12 million in its first year. It gave the big guns, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, a real contest for the consumer dollar, because a 20-ounce bottle, at the time, cost only 49 cents.

Then someone started an outrageous rumor. Leaflets began appearing in low-income neighborhoods, where sales were the highest, claiming that the Brooklyn Bottling Corporation was linked to the Ku Klux Klan, and that it laced its soft drinks with a mysterious ingredient that caused sterility in black men. The rumor went further by claiming, falsely, that the television news show “20/20” had reported this as news.

The rumor is outrageous because if there were a substance that would cause sterility in black men, wouldn’t it also cause sterility in men who are not black? Why would a small, independent company making \$2 million every month take steps to wipe out its future customers?

The FDA considered the matter to be outlandish. Even the Ku Klux Klan’s Imperial Wizard, James Farrands, said, “The KKK is not in the bottling business” (“A Storm Over Tropical Fantasy,” 1991, p. 34). Customers, however, were buying the higher priced drinks instead.

Competitors were the suspected sources of the rumor. Coca-Cola and Pepsi management denied involvement. However, route drivers for Coca-Cola and Pepsi may have capitalized on the rumor and helped to spread it. One former route driver for Yoo Hoo said that when Pepsi produced a new drink in the 1960s, “All the (Yoo Hoo) drivers would get together in the bar after work every day and compare notes. We’d go out the next day to spread the best rumor anyone could come up with... Nothing’s changed. This is a cutthroat business.”

The effect was devastating to Tropical Fantasy. Sales dropped by 70%. Ironically, the employees who stood to be hurt the most by the rumors were African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians who worked for the bottling company and would lose their jobs if the company went under.

Eric Miller, the owner of the bottling company, went to battle. He sent employees back into the neighborhoods where the leaflets were distributed. They were armed with “truth flyers” designed to dispel the rumors. The New York City Health Department declared the drinks safe. Mayor David Dinkins, a black man, drank the drink in public.

Miller never found out who started the rumor. The counter-campaign was so successful that Tropical Fantasy earned \$3 million in 1992. Sales were broadened to the Midwest and California in 1992.

CASE: SNAPPS RESTAURANT AND THE AIDS RUMOR

Rarely does a company call a news conference to fight a rumor. There are several reasons for this. Companies would ideally prefer to reach only the people who have heard the rumor—and not one person more. This is a difficult-to-impossible task. Nevertheless, many times, the rumor is limited to a specific location. With a news conference, however, the media would wind up spreading the rumor to people who had never heard it. Also, some companies reason that if the rumor is not spread by the media, it is not likely to reach the crucial public by the media either. The people who spread and believe the rumor may not read newspapers or watch television news.

The Snapps fast-food chain departed from both of these tenets in 1991, when it held a history-making news conference to fight a rumor about one of its restaurants. In Fort Pierce, Florida, Snapps confronted a rumor that one of its managers had AIDS and had contaminated hamburger meat. The Ohio-based chain had opened its first Florida restaurant in Fort Pierce in 1990. About an hour's drive north of Palm Beach, Fort Pierce is a middle-class city of 40,000 residents.

The location of Fort Pierce was important: Nearby Jensen Beach, Florida, was where Kimberly Bergalis allegedly contracted the AIDS virus from her dentist. Because Bergalis was the first person known to have contracted AIDS from a health-care professional, the incident was widely publicized. Furthermore, because of their proximity to the case, the people of Fort Pierce were probably more concerned with this case than many other people. The incident also aroused other questions about how the virus might be spread.

The rumor spread by way of a crudely handwritten flyer (see Fig. 5.1). The flyer was circulated primarily among students in two public high schools, thereby targeting a large chunk of Snapps's clientele. The Fort Pierce Snapps restaurant saw its business drop by 50%. The Snapps corporate office in Columbus, Ohio, sent Regional Vice President Donald G. Gilbert to remedy the crisis.

Gilbert formed a damage-control task force that included a lawyer; a private investigator; and Richard M. Gruenwald, a public relations consultant for Dick Gruenwald Associates of nearby Palm Beach Gardens. The team worked closely with Rod Cardiff, a physician and director of the HRS St. Lucie County Health Unit. Gilbert, the Snapps home office, and Fort Pierce Snapps owners Jack and Jeff Roschman monitored and approved actions of the task force.

The team's first task was to find the source of the rumor. The private investigator felt certain that a student in one of the schools had written the flyer. Police procedure called for a complaint to be filed before the police could enter the case. The investigator and the lawyer were able to collect enough information to file the complaint.

The next step was to have the restaurant's managers tested for AIDS. This decision had legal implications. By law, the managers would have to volunteer to be tested; the company could not force them to do so. All seven managers volunteered, including one who had recently been transferred from the Fort Pierce restaurant to one in another city.

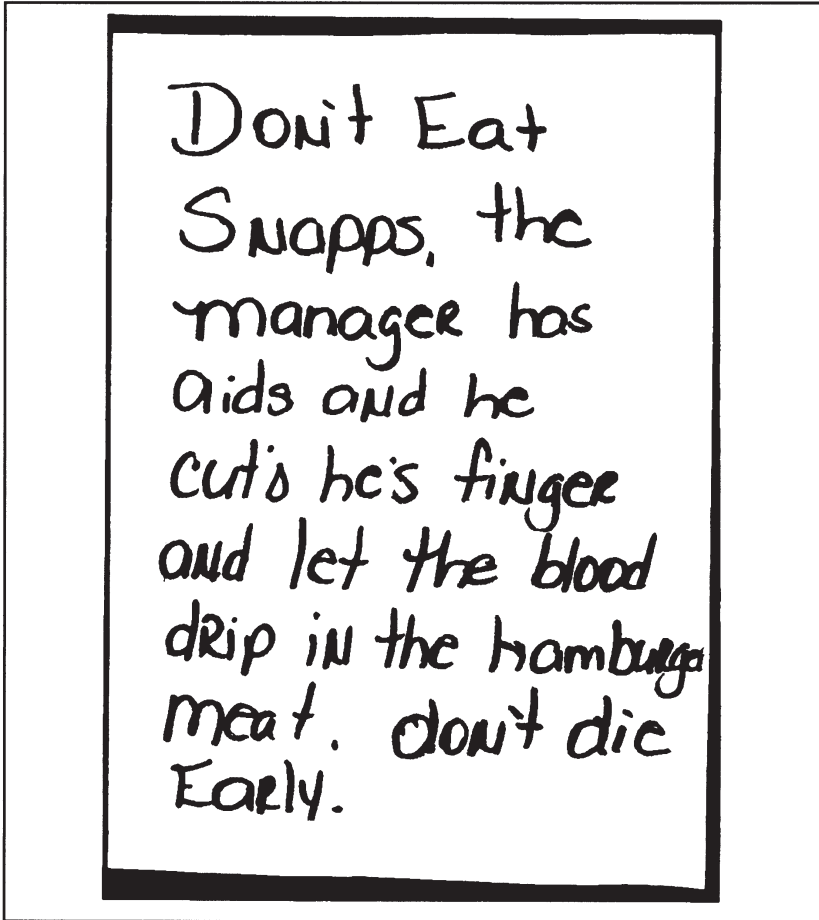


Figure 5.1. The handwritten flyer circulated at Fort Pierce high schools that helped spread the rumor that a manager at a popular restaurant was infected with the AIDS virus and that persons who dined at the restaurant might become contaminated. All managers were voluntarily tested and none tested positive for the virus. The health department cooperated with the restaurant's public relations efforts and, during a news conference, explained that the disease could not be spread in that manner. Reprinted by permission of Snapps Restaurant.

The law also required that the test results be sent to the people who took the tests, not to the employer. The procedure took a week. The results indicated that all seven managers, as expected, tested negative for the AIDS virus.

Meanwhile, the Fort Pierce restaurant continued to lose business. Layoffs were threatened if business did not improve. "This was a double-edged sword," said Gilbert. "We had to be sure of our facts, have everything in place for the complaint filing and act

quickly, as business was continuing to go downhill.” Gruenwald, the public relations counsel, and his associate, John Futch, suggested a press conference. “We all agreed that a press conference would bring everything out in the open,” said Gruenwald, “The problem was there. Why hide it?”

Snapps made public relations history when it became the first fast-food chain to address an AIDS rumor by going on the offensive and holding a news conference (see Fig. 5.2). “We were most impressed with the way that management accepted our recommendations,” said Gruenwald. To add credibility to the occasion, the press conference was held in the St. Lucie Health Unit’s office, and the unit’s director spoke on behalf of the franchise. At the conference, an announcement was made that the chain was offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person or persons who started the rumor. The news conference was attended by company executives as well as the county health director, who announced that all Snapps managers had tested negative for the virus. He further stated that AIDS could not be transmitted through food and that it was safe to eat at Snapps.

Two West Palm Beach television stations led their 6 p.m. newscasts with the Snapps news conference story, including interviews with customers. Employees talked about how their jobs were affected. Associated Press and Knight-Ridder News Service picked up the story and it was used in newspapers all over Florida as well as in many newspapers out of state.

“The press was most cooperative and news coverage was excellent,” Gilbert said. Gruenwald, looking back, said his philosophy was that “if you cooperate with the media, they—for the most part—will cooperate with you.”

Other newspapers picked up the *Miami Herald* story; its lead emphasized the unusual public relations tactic: “In a highly unusual move, an Ohio-based fast-food restaurant went public yesterday to confront a rumor that one of its managers had AIDS and had contaminated hamburger meat.” The article went on to comment on the restaurant’s denial, the offered reward, and the fact that AIDS could not be transmitted through food. It also pointed out that other fast-food restaurants had been plagued by AIDS rumors, but Snapps was the first to fight the rumor through a news conference (see Fig. 5.2).

The private investigator discovered that a 16-year-old female high school student had written and distributed the flyer, apparently after a class discussion on AIDS. “The girl admitted to writing the flyer,” said Gilbert, “but we determined that the student’s action came after the AIDS rumor had been circulating in the community and she didn’t start the rumor.”

“The student, through her parents and attorney, agreed to issue an apology,” said Gilbert. “We used the apology in a press release and a full-page ad in the local newspaper.”

Store’s business cut 50 percent by AIDS rumor

BY PHIL LONG

HERALD STAFF WRITER

PORT PIERCE—In a highly unusual move, an Ohio-based fast food

restaurant went public Wednesday to confront a rumor that one of its managers had AIDS and had contaminated hamburger meat.

"The rumor is totally false," said Don Gilbert, regional vice president at Snapps, a company with 44 stores, mostly in Ohio.

"All of our managers have been tested and none has AIDS," he said.

But in a little over a month since the rumor started, business in Florida's only Snapps store has dropped almost 50 percent, Gilbert said. Five of the store's 40 positions remain unfilled, and employee hours have been cut. Layoffs are possible, he said.

The firm is promising a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person who photocopied or circulated a crude, hand-drawn flier that accuses the manager of having AIDS and contaminating hamburger meat with his blood.

In what may have been the first press conference of its kind involving a national food chain, Gilbert met reporters in the lobby of the health department. He was flanked by the county's health director, Snapps employees, a company attorney and a police detective.

Snapps managers have been tested and they don't have any trace of the virus, said Dr. Rod Cardiff, director of the St. Lucie Public Health Unit.

"There is nothing unsafe about Snapps," he said. "AIDS is not transmitted through food. There is no danger with going to Snapps and eating there."

Fort Pierce police Lt Irving Hamrick, who suspects that a teenager is responsible because the fliers have been circulated at the county's two public high schools, said his department is investigating.

Prosecutor Linda Craft said the person responsible for the flier could face up to a year in jail on the misdemeanor charge of criminal defamation, it is illegal to publish anything that causes "hatred, contempt, ridicule or obloquy," to an individual, Craft said.

"They are not only affecting my job, but the jobs of many other people employed by Snapps," said Anita Farley, a Snapps worker who has been with the restaurant since it opened in July.

AIDS rumors are not new. McDonald's and Burger King have faced them before. Neither have gone quite so public...

Figure 5.2. An excerpt of a news story about the Snapps crisis appearing in the *Miami Herald*, May 9, 1991. Note the reporter recognized that the news conference was not a common method of fighting such rumors. Reprinted by permission of the *Miami Herald*.

The minor, who said she wrote the flyer because she was concerned about her friends and wanted to do them a favor, wrote the following apology:

I apologize to the community in helping to spread a rumor about Snapps, a local fast food restaurant. As a young person who has taken a course concerning AIDS and having great concern for the people in the community, I took it upon myself to prepare a flyer concerning Snapps without knowing whether the information I received as a rumor was true. I now realize that I was wrong and I apologize to Snapps, its managers and employees. It was not my intent to harm their business and I am sorry that Snapps' business has suffered as a result of the rumor. I have since returned to eat at Snapps and I encourage others to do so as well.

Sincerely,
C.J., a minor

Because the student was a minor, her identity was never made public. State Attorney Bruce Colton said a rumor could violate state laws that made libel a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail. Prosecutor Linda Craft said the person responsible for the flyer could face up to a year in jail on the misdemeanor charge of criminal defamation (Knight-Ridder, 1991).

Gruenwald advised the company not to press charges against the girl. "It was never felt that the girl acted maliciously," he said. "Also, she did not start the rumor. It had been circulating before she wrote the flyer. If we had filed charges, we could win the battle, but not the war of public opinion. The public apology would bring her sympathy and perhaps a boycott to the restaurant. Then, the case might drag out, thus hurting the chances for a return to normalcy."

The media carried the story of the apology with headlines as follows:

Palm Beach Post—"Student Apologizes for Restaurant Rumor" (Reeder, 1991).

Stuart News (Stuart, Florida)—"Student Apologizes for AIDS Rumor About Eatery" (Cheek, 1991).

Miami Herald—"Student Apologizes for Spreading Rumor About Restaurant" (Long, 1991b).

As in most crises cases, recovery stories are not featured as prominently, nor are they as long, as the original stories.

Snapps management continued an aggressive effort to win back customers. Its advertising agency, Haunty & Welter of Columbus, Ohio, launched a strong radio and newspaper, and later, television campaign with a free hamburger weekend on June 1 and 2, 1991. "This was a tremendous success," said Gruenwald. "The girl who wrote the flyer, who we called 'C J.,' attended the event." More than 15,000 free hamburgers were served. The event was promoted in a news release and resulting stories using C.J.'s apology (see Fig. 5.3 and Fig 5.4).

"If we had to do it all over, we would have followed the same crisis management and damage control program. In retrospect, this was an excellent example of crisis teamwork, everyone working together for the common good," concluded Gruenwald.

Gruenwald said the source of the rumor was never found. The restaurant changed names and managed to stay in business, although it never fully recovered its popularity.

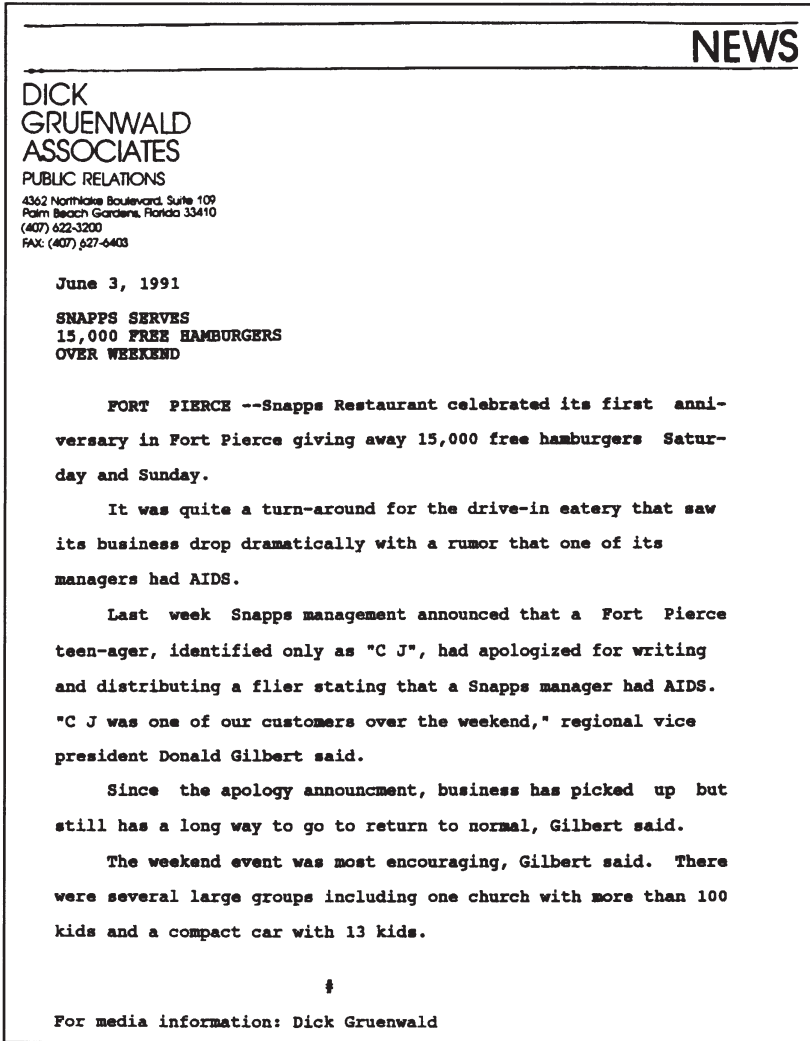


Figure 5.3. One of several news releases distributed by the public relations firm hired by an Ohio-based restaurant to manage the crisis in Fort Pierce. Reprinted by permission of Snapps Restaurant.

TYPES OF RUMOR

There are six various types of rumor. The *intentional rumor* is started to achieve a purpose. The financial community thrives on intentional rumor. There are rumors to make stocks rise and rumors to make them decline. People might start rumors to help their own businesses. For example, a young, aggressive manager of a new restaurant getting off

Eatery plagued by rumor fights back

STUART NEWS

FORT PIERCE- A Fort Pierce eatery gave away 15,000 hamburgers last weekend, battling recent rumors that an employee at Snapps restaurant tainted food with the AIDS virus.

Among the many people eating at the restaurant at 25th Street and Orange Avenue was a teenager known only as "C.J." The Fort Pierce Westwood High School student apologized recently for distributing a flier warning fellow students not to eat at Snapps.

Snapps Regional Vice President Donald Gilbert said the weekend promotion was a dramatic turnaround for the eatery, which saw business plummet because of the untrue rumor.

County health officials said food cannot be tainted by the AIDS virus. All the Snapps managers tested negative for the fatal virus.

Figure 5.4. A news story in the nearby *Stuart News*, June 5, 1991, about the restaurant's crisis recovery process. Copyright © 1991 *Stuart News*. Reprinted by permission.

to a slow start in a campus community started a rumor at the college—that a famous rock star was related to the owner and that the rock star might drop in that night. Needless to say, business boomed that evening, with patrons hoping to see the celebrity who never showed up. When patrons asked if the rock star would show up, the manager responded, "You never know." He offered each patron who asked a free drink. No one left angry. The manager said the ploy was a marketing technique to get people into the restaurant for the first time. He felt the food, the ambiance, and the service would get them back in the future.

The *premature-fact rumor* is an early version of what will eventually become the truth. In the workplace, for example, employees might hear and pass on rumors about layoffs that eventually turn out to be fact. Denying this type of rumor can be more damaging than being silent.

The *malicious rumor* is often started to damage competitors' businesses. For example, someone says, "The stew in the restaurant across the street is made up of last week's leftovers." This rumor may or may not be true. It may be true of half of the restaurants in town. Yet when told to the right people at the right time, the rumor spreads and causes a decline in patronage.

The *outrageous rumor* is so unbelievable that people react by saying, "It has to be true! Who would create such a story?" The Snapple Beverage Company was the target in 1993 of an outrageous rumor that claimed the "k" on its product labels, which stood for "kosher," actually stood for Ku Klux Klan.

The *nearly true rumor* is so named because it is partly true. People hear it, attach credibility to a part of the story, and then draw a conclusion that the entire rumor must be true. This could have been the case when in the early 1990s a rumor circulated nationally that Reebok, during apartheid, was manufacturing and selling its products in South Africa.

This was a crisis for Reebok because the company featured African American athletes in its commercials and marketed to African American consumers. It was true that Reebok once had manufacturing plants in South Africa, but the plants had been closed in 1986.

The *birthday rumor* is one that continues to emerge over and over again. It is as regular as birthdays.

The six primary categories of rumors can overlap. The outrageous rumor may also be malicious. The premature-fact rumor may be intentional, and so forth. One rumor that fits both the nearly true and the birthday categories is the ancient rumor that Chinese restaurants cook dogs. It is true that in China dogs are a delicacy, but that does not mean that owners of Chinese restaurants in the United States are out hunting your pets. This rumor can be traced to the 1850s in the United States and even earlier in Great Britain. The same rumor has now been told of Vietnamese cuisine in Texas, Mexican cuisine in Southern California, and Native American cuisine in Wisconsin.

HOW RUMORS SPREAD

Rumors can spread throughout the United States, turn stomachs, perpetuate negative images, and cost millions of dollars in lost revenue. Corporations have to fight in the press, in the courts, and, in the case of Procter & Gamble, in the churches to stop the rumors.

A rumor spreads because people believe it is news and because the “news” has some emotional relationship to their lives. The rumor somehow seems plausible. Often the rumor refers to something causing distress or fear, and the rumor tellers who spread it are hoping to relieve their fear or distress by giving a reasonable explanation or denial.

Dr. Allan J. Kimmel (2004), of Fitchburg State College, in Massachusetts, studied 229 college students. The students passed on rumors about AIDS because they were personally relevant and upsetting. “The more frightened people were by a rumor, the more likely they were to repeat it,” Kimmel said. “In repeating something that makes you nervous, you may learn some contrary fact that will calm you. On the other hand, it can escalate your fears if the person you tell believes it” (p. 51)

Rumors are also spread because people distrust the “establishment”—organizations, governments, and big corporations—or because the rumor tellers want to be thought of as people “in the know.” Information is power. Telling rumors may give people who feel they lack power a sense that they are powerful. Therefore, people who have trouble making a success of their lives and careers are most likely to believe and spread rumors.

DETECTING A RUMOR AND PREVENTING ITS SPREAD

Step-by-step instructions on what to do in the case of rumors are difficult, if not impossible, to provide. Variables such as potential damage, geographic location, type of organization affected, the nature of the rumor, and what crucial publics are affected require each organization’s response to be tailored to the situation.

However, some general suggestions can be given for avoiding a crisis brought on by rumors as well as for fighting rumors that are already circulating. Be mindful, nevertheless, that this is not an exact science. Some of the suggestions are conflicting because there are various schools of thought on how to handle the problem.

The following suggestions are general steps organizations may take to minimize the chances of a crisis caused by rumor:

1. Because the victim of a rumor is often the last to hear it, a rumor center or rumor hotline could be established to report a rumor circulating. Employees and customers/consumers would report a negative rumor as soon as it is heard. Periodic focus groups of 10 to 12 people—employees, consumers, retailers, distributors, other related publics—might be held. Historically, hotlines have been special telephones. Telephones, though still often useful and immediate, are joined in their usefulness by e-mail and the use of Blackberries. If necessary, a system of anonymous reporting might make a person more inclined to make a report.

2. Representatives of the organization or company must be trained periodically in rumor control. These would be the people who would process and initiate investigation of rumors; they might be hired for this purpose in a large company or rumor control might be part of the job description for carefully chosen employees or organizational volunteers. These persons must be rumor-sensitive and well aware of the company's position with all publics. They would keep record of details of rumors and inform and advise management of tactics and responses to make. Communications here might be secret until communications action plans are made.

3. Conduct rumor workshops prior to the circulation of rumors to advise personnel on what actions should be taken in the event of a damaging rumor. Develop a rumor communications plan not unlike a crisis communications plan. Consider what rumors might be most damaging to your organization or company. Study rumors that have caused problems for companies similar to your own. Important to the plan is anticipating the role of the news media. Is this the type of story that will be appealing? Will TV news use it in a sensational way? Anticipate trick questions like, "Isn't it true where there's smoke there's fire?" Many people might believe that a rumor is so unbelievable that it must be true. What would be the response? Can you prove the rumor is not true? If so, how?

4. Make sure the company or organization has such strong positive relationships with its key publics that the publics would at least doubt a negative rumor, if not totally disbelieve it.

5. Keep employees informed; remember that all employees and internal members are spokespersons. Employees left in the dark are fertile ground for the growth of rumors commonly spread by "the grapevine." Even if events that are bad news, such as lay-offs, are a possibility in the near future, give employees real information and promise to keep them up to date. This is more advantageous than letting rumors circulate, because the rumors take on imagined and more negative characteristics than the truth. Informed employees can be a company's strongest supporters and loudest defenders.

McDonald's followed this advice when a rumor circulated that there were worms in its hamburgers. It was a well-known rumor that had plagued Wendy's earlier. McDonald's personnel, on a one-to-one basis with patrons who asked, denied the presence

of worms. In addition, the employees recorded the names and phone numbers of those patrons. The strategy was intended to make customers knowledgeable about the company and, therefore, less likely to spread the rumor.

7. Evaluate the extent of a rumor. How damaging can it possibly become? Think negatively imagining the worst case scenario. Determine the best action, if any.

FIGHTING THE RUMOR

The following suggestions are general steps organizations may take to fight a negative rumor that is already circulating:

1. When a rumor seems to be developing or circulating, disseminate to publics complete, accurate information that is contradictory to the message of the rumor. Do not mention the rumor itself. You do not want to advance its circulation. Your information should imply strongly that the rumor is untrue. This may reduce exposure to the rumor. Be advised, however, that fewer people are likely to see the positive news than the negative news.

2. After a rumor has circulated, analyze it. What is its probable origin? Why was it started? What is its possible impact? What are people saying? Are the rumor-mongers fired employees, irate customers, competitors or what? How many varieties of the same rumor are circulating. How does it circulate—word-of-mouth, e-mail, or Internet? Has the news media carried the rumor? Does the rumor pose a threat to the success or existence of the organization? Those that do not pose a threat may be handled in a low-key manner without publicity. What are the geographical limitations of the rumor? Will it go away, either temporarily or permanently? Will it mushroom?

3. Do nothing. Sometimes denial draws more attention than silence. Some rumors do go away. When choosing this strategy, be careful that, if the rumor persists, it will not be damaging.

Gerber Products chose to hang tough and be silent in 1986 when a grocery store charged that a customer had found a fragment of glass in a baby food jar. Gerber's test lab found no traces of glass in the jar, and the store had lost the fragment supposedly found in it. The FDA tested 40,000 unopened jars of Gerber baby food and concluded that no glass existed. Gerber relied on its state-of-the-art equipment designed to filter out any foreign objects larger than 4 thousandths of an inch. It also X-rayed for possible breakage in the production line. There was no proof that there was glass in the jar. Gerber felt it had proved the rumor false. Although the rumor continued to spread all over the United States, Gerber stood tough on refusing a recall. The rumor eventually died, and Gerber recovered sales, something the company felt it could not have done had there been a recall.

4. Deny the rumor publicly and vehemently, and prove it has no basis in truth. Once the rumor is shown to be unsubstantiated, a person who passes it on might be challenged with, "That is absolutely untrue. I know because..." However, if the rumor is already widespread and potentially serious, a news conference is in order. The purpose is to show how erroneous the rumor is. However, in this news conference, do not repeat the rumor itself unnecessarily.

Effective public relations is less expensive and the resulting articles usually more believable than advertisements. However, Allan J. Kimmel (2004), in his guide to

understanding and combating rumor, *Rumors and Rumor Control*, warned against easy use of urging the news media to fight the battle, when saying that once the news media has the story, the organization loses control of the message and it may not be delivered to the publics in the intended way. Crucial data may be omitted or not stressed.

Remember that a simple denial is not as interesting or as juicy as the original rumor. Just “saying” it’s not so is boring. Rumor-mongers expect you to deny it. Why would you admit something so negative? Your denial must be persuasive and convincing.

5. To be convincing, get an outside expert on the subject to discredit the rumor. The expert should be a person with strong credentials who speaks with authority—a university professor, a leading physician, or some other professional.

6. Place ads in high-circulation publications. This is a powerful tool for reaching great numbers of people—if your message is convincing. If the message is not convincing, the ad may promote the rumor. Before placing an ad, be sure the rumor is totally untrue, not premature. In the latter case, ads can cause more harm than good.

A successful use of ads to fight a negative, unfounded rumor happened when the Life Saver Company encountered a rumor that spider eggs were found in Bubble Yum, a brand of bubble gum that was breaking sales records at the time. After conducting surveys that showed more than half of the children in New York had heard the rumor, the company placed an ad in newspapers with this headline: “Somebody is telling very bad lies about a very good product.” The rumors faded. Bubble Yum remained a best-seller.

Some companies use a combination of tactics to fight damaging rumors. Reebok, in its battle against the rumor of doing business in South Africa, purchased ads in more than 200 African American publications, publicized liaisons with major human rights and anti-apartheid organizations, and distributed a brochure to college students containing statements of support from African American leaders. Its chairman wrote op-ed articles and cohosted the Boston visit of Nelson Mandela.

E-MAIL RUMORS

Where word-of-mouth rumors have put companies in crises for years, electronic rumors have given rumors wings. E-mail rumors can spread to thousands of people in seconds and, just like spoken rumor, they can change elements of the story with each transmission. The culture of cyberspace includes many individuals who apparently believe what they read on the Internet even when just the opposite seems to be the case. Although rules and laws will eventually be put into effect, at the beginning of the 21st century, anybody can write about almost anything on the Internet and even to a greater degree via e-mail. Some people, such as competitors, use e-mail rumor with vicious intent; others use it merely to warn their friends. The transmission of e-mail rumors can be extremely damaging to businesses, organizations, and people in public life.

The age-old rumors (see earlier discussion) about Proctor & Gamble being a Satanworshipping advocate and about Tommy Hilfiger going on *Oprah* and making inappropriate racial remarks continue to circulate on e-mail. When newspapers saw the

Hilfiger rumor, they repeated it along with a denial by the company. The company posted denial messages in newsgroups, saying the producer of *Oprah* confirmed that Hilfiger had never been a guest. All this seemed to help. Such rumors seem to rise from the dead periodically and circulate again. The same rumor as the Hilfiger rumor circulated by word of mouth about designer Donna Karan some years ago and about Liz Claiborne and Satanism (see earlier discussion).

An e-mail rumor circulated in the late 1990s claiming that a customer ate chocolate-chip cookies from a café in a Neiman Marcus store. As the rumor goes, she asked the waitress for the cookie recipe and was told it would cost “two-fifty.” Thinking that meant \$2.50, she agreed, but found later that \$250 had been charged to her credit card. According to the rumor, she said the store would not correct the discrepancy because she could have copied the recipe, so she was stuck with the charge. In revenge, she decided to tell everyone she could about the recipe and thereby circulated it by e-mail to people she knew and asked them to circulate it to everyone they knew. In a short time, the recipe and story were everywhere. However, the story is false. The Neiman Marcus store mentioned does not even have a café. Yet the e-mail rumor was widely transmitted and believed.

Another widely circulated e-mail rumor, similar to the word-of-mouth rumor mentioned earlier, claimed that Kentucky Fried Chicken sells “genetically manipulated organisms.” The rumor asserts that “the so-called chickens are kept alive by tubes inserted in their bodies to pump blood and nutrients throughout their structure. They have no beaks, no feathers, no feet.”

As in most e-mail rumors, the writer of the KFC e-mail cited a believable source: “Listen to their [sic] commercials, I guarantee you will not see or hear the word chicken. I find this disturbing.” The word *chicken* is used repeatedly in the commercials—but the word *fried* is not. Apparently, *fried* is a no-no because health-conscious consumers would be negatively affected and the KFC restaurants do sell products not fried.

KFC officials released the following statement to the news media: “The hoax is intended to destroy the trust that you have placed in KFC to provide high-quality chicken meals at all of our restaurants. Although we hope that readers of the hoax will recognize it as obviously false, we take this or any other attack on the quality of KFC’s product seriously” (Noack, 2000).

What Does One Do About E-Mail Rumors?

Like word-of-mouth rumors, e-mail rumors are difficult for companies to fight. However, it is sometimes less difficult to determine the source of an e-mail rumor.

MINI-CASE: UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS FIGHTS WITH A WEB SITE

In 1999, the Public Affairs Office at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston set up a Web page to fight rumors. Faced with a fiscal problem and a projected deficit, several hundred jobs had already been eliminated and other jobs would be eliminated in the future. The campus rumor mill was abuzz with gossip about which programs would be cut. The Public Affairs Office realized the rumors were sapping morale and

threatening productivity. “Our biweekly employee newsletter, with its slower response time, didn’t seem like the proper vehicle,” said Chris Comer, UTMB’s director of communications (Lukey, 1999, p. 6).

The university webmaster and art director worked together to create a Web site called “Rumors and Trumors.” Accessed through a flying saucer button on the university’s homepage, the site permitted employees to ask about the rumors they heard. The Public Affairs Office then tracked down and posted the answers. The site became a trusted and effective source for employees. Hundreds of rumors were explained or zapped, and morale was improved.

Fighting back with a proactive Web site is one tactic. If the company has a Web site and does not address a circulated rumor on it, it may make the company appear guilty. This happened in July 1996 when TWA Flight 800 went down off the coast of Long Island. The TWA Web site did not address the rumor circulating widely that the plane was shot down by a missile during a nearby U.S. military exercise. Alaska Airlines, on the other hand, put details of its 2000 crash online within an hour of the accident. (See that mini-case, p. 105.)

Janal (1998) advised three tactics for fighting all cybercrises, including e-mail rumors: pay attention, read the rumor and think about it, and put up a fight. Companies and organizations should be ever-vigilant, watching for e-mail rumors. Encourage employees to notify the public relations department, or another designated department, when they notice e-mail or word-of-mouth rumors. If the complaint is legitimate, an appropriate solution to the complaint, and perhaps publicity about the correction, should be posted on the company’s Web site, through the news media, or through some more appropriate outlet. If the rumor is unfounded and the source of the rumor is known, respond to the rumor. If the source is not known, respond to the listserv or Internet service provider (ISP) associated with the e-mail message that distributed the rumor. Fight in the news media and on Web sites. But do not wait for the rumor to go away. “To many people,” said Janal, “silence equals assent.”

At times, a decision must be made between fighting a rumor with public relations or with lawyers. Public relations is the first step. If that does not work or is not feasible, call the lawyers.

Many companies establish a policy forbidding employees from making statements about the company while they are employed or after they depart. Employee comments on an attack site violate that agreement and expose the employees to punitive measures. This may work well in some environments, but it seems difficult to enforce, particularly with fired or other former employees who are frequently the culprits behind e-mail rumors.

Another tactic is to ignore the problem. Most Internet experts do not embrace this as a tactic and say it would be like a duck sitting in the water hoping the hunter’s shot will miss. However, companies have been successful with it—watching and waiting and riding the problem out. If this tactic is taken, ongoing monitoring of the situation is crucial.

Kotcher (1999) advised the following:

1. Your company must respond to the e-mail rumor. If you remain silent, the only side of the story revealed is your enemy’s.
2. Think strategically. Devise the best plan for the problem.
3. Speak with one voice. A clear, consistent message is mandatory.

4. Communicate your concern. Even if you are not guilty of the charges, be concerned.
5. Adopt an appropriate tone. Choose formal or informal language depending on the nature of the crisis.
6. Seize the opportunity. This is a chance not only to diffuse the crisis but also to build new alliances and reach goals.

MINI-CASE: MICROSOFT FIGHTS FAKE E-MAILED NEWS RELEASE

The fake e-mailed news release began like this:

MICROSOFT BIDS TO ACQUIRE CATHOLIC CHURCH

VATICAN CITY (AP)—In a joint press conference in St. Peter’s Square this morning, Microsoft Corporation and the Vatican announced that the Redmond software giant will acquire the Roman Catholic Church in ex-change for an unspecified number of shares of Microsoft common stock. If the deal goes through, it will be the first time a computer software company has acquired a major world religion. (Janal, 1998, pp. 270–273)

The fake news release went on to say that Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer would be invested in the College of Cardinals and Gates was quoted as saying, “The combined resources of Microsoft and the Catholic Church will allow us to make religion easier and more fun for a broader range of people.” The release also claimed that there would be a new software application called “Microsoft Church”; that the deal would give Microsoft online rights to the Bible; and that comedian Don Novello, playing his *Saturday Night Live* character, Father Guido Sarducci, hosted the announcement that was broadcast by satellite to 700 sites worldwide.

If anything remotely like this were true, which is ludicrous, it would have been a front-page, top of the newscast story. So how could anyone believe it on an e-mail transmission? So many people believed it, or, at least, thought it might be true, that they contacted Microsoft for confirmation. The company had to issue a news release denying the rumor. The fake news release also made the news.

MINI-CASE: THE KILLER BANANA RUMOR

A rumor circulated both on the Internet and via e-mail claimed that bananas from Costa Rica were infected with “necrotizing fasciitis,” or flesh-eating bacteria, and that the entire Costa Rica monkey population had been wiped out because of the bananas. It warned the public to stop eating bananas and to seek medical attention if they had eaten a banana and had come down with a fever. The bacteria, it said, could “eat” 2 to 3 centimeters of flesh per hour, making amputation likely and death possible.

The message, like most e-mail rumors involving food, said the message could be confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Rumors tend to carry an expert’s name to make the outrageous rumor seem believable. When contacted, a spokesperson for the CDC said, “This is a false report.”

APBNews.com reported on the incident, saying a trade group was trying to squelch the rumor. Tim Debus of the International Banana Association (IBA), an organization directly affected by the rumor, called it “Just another case of Internet terrorism like the recent hacker attacks on popular Web sites.” The National Necrotizing Foundation, which researches such diseases and offers support and education services, said it was not possible for the disease to spread in the way the hoax claimed” (Noack, 2000).

Debus indicated that the IBA, concerned that the prank could disrupt the economy, made efforts to get the word out that the allegations were false.

ROGUE WEB SITES

Rogue Web sites are normally created by disgruntled individuals with the intention of bringing attention to an issue or several issues concerning a corporation or organization. The company attacked in the rogue site must consider whether to respond and if it responds, how. Sometimes no response seems appropriate because the site appears to be simply vicious, but the company must determine, as best it can, whether readers will actually believe the claims made. Are Internet users sophisticated enough to realize that information on any Web site, especially a rogue Web site, is not necessarily factual?

Dr. Louis K.Falk, in his research on rogue Web sites, classifies such sites into five categories. The five categories are the following:

1. Sites in which consumers are unhappy with the performance of the company: Examples include a rogue Web site that targeted Wal-Mart featured complaints and comments from customers and employees and claimed that “a considerable amount of content on this site is from other sites around the world.” Also, an irate couple expressed disappointment with Norwegian Cruise Line on a rogue Web site.

2. Sites in which consumers are unhappy with the policies of the company: Examples include a rogue site, aimed at Pepsi-Cola, that featured complaints that the company supported animal cruelty because it placed ads at bullfights. Also, a site protested Home Depot for being “the largest retailer of old growth wood,” thereby depleting the rainforests.

3. Sites in which consumers or former employees hate the company: Examples include a disgruntled former employee of Burger King who set up a Web site to complain about creatures in the salad, low wages, and office politics. The information was so rambling that the discerning reader got the impression, “Somebody got fired and has a vendetta against Burger King.” Burger King would probably be advised to ignore the site. Also, a rogue site complained that McDonald’s was not environmentally concerned because it killed animals, damaged the planet, harmed the health of consumers, and paid employees low salaries. Few McDonald’s customers likely cared, as anyone concerned about killing animals for food doesn’t order Big Macs.

4. Sites in which consumers create humor pages, also called “spooof sites”: Examples include a site aimed at making fun of Taco Bell that clearly states its intentions. The webmaster says, at the top of the homepage, “I am not Taco Bell. I’m just a freak that likes to eat their food. If you want to write to Taco Bell, please go to tacobell.com. This page is meant to be a fun page.” The site’s criticism is so minimal, the reader may

wonder if Taco Bell might have masterminded the site itself. In one central spot, the hot sauce is criticized for not being hot and the quality of the meat in Taco Bell Lunchables is questioned. But the webmaster admits that the humor comes from his or her marijuana use as well as his or her relationship with Taco Bell.

5. Sites in which an index is created for complaints of multiple businesses: Examples include www.consumerama.org, which is an index of companies with links to consumer protest sites, class actions, and government investigations; www.complainusa.com/index.html, which is a searchable database of companies where the user can read or post complaints about companies; and www.sprawl-busters.com, which battles large-scale retail stores and megastores such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, K-Mart, and Target.

Another type of Internet crisis can develop when a company's own Web site is invaded. This occurred when a medical products company in Michigan discovered that hackers had posted on their own Web site a false news release saying the company was merging with a pharmaceutical firm. Stocks for both companies rose on the NASDAQ index after the fake posting. The medical products company indicated it would pursue the hackers and reassess its security.

The rogue sites that seem designed to destroy a company are often called attack sites or antisites. Many times, the Web address is made up of the company name followed by the word sucks—as in yourcompanysucks.com.

HOW DO COMPANIES PREVENT ROGUE WEB SITES?

Cyberexperts advise companies to purchase several domain names, including buying up the “suck sites.” This is only a temporary remedy because the clever webmaster can merely set up a rogue site using “stinks” instead of “sucks,” making Xcompanystinks.com. Then there are numerous other synonyms that can be used. The irate webmaster can also purchase Xcompanyreallysucks.com and Xcompanystillsucks.com.

The suffixes of the domain names are also important. Whereas each domain name identifies one or more Internet provider (IP) addresses, every domain name has a suffix that indicates to which top-level domain it belongs. The number of possible domains is limited, however. The most popular domains include the following:

- .gov—government agencies.
- .edu—educational institutions.
- .org—organizations.
- .mil—military.
- .com—commercial businesses.
- .net—network organizations.

These suffixes were a problem in that whitehouse.gov was the real White House site in Washington, DC. A spoof site was whitehouse.org, and a pornography site was whitehouse.com. It would seem that government Internet and Web experts could have prevented that occurrence.

Another Internet address problem occurred when Sno-Isle Regional Library in Snohomish County, Washington, set up a Web site for bibliophiles to reserve books. There is

a hyphen in the address. If the hyphen is not typed in the address, the computer user will get a pornography site. The address of the pornography site is not sexy and seems to have no relevance to its site. The library suspected that the pornography site webmaster wanted the library to purchase the address or merely wanted to play a trick on the library. So the library's legal representative entered the picture.

In November 1999, the Federal Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act was signed into law. It allows the holder of a copyright or trademark to sue cybersquatters who have registered copyrighted domain names, and it forces them to relinquish those Internet addresses.

The most important prevention is acquiring a federal trademark registration for the company name. The first company or the first person to register the name holds the rights. It is also advisable to register the company trademark and product name under all possible domain name variations (.com, .org, .net, etc.). Companies are advised to register their names with and without hyphens. For example, 1-800-dentists.com and 1800dentists.com are two Web sites owned by two different companies. Confusion is apparent.

If your company has a federal registration for its name, and if another company or webmaster has taken the name as its domain name, write to the domain name holder and tell him or her that he or she is infringing on your trademark. If he or she fails to transfer the domain name, go to Network Solutions, Inc. (NSI), the organization responsible for the administration of domain names in the United States and Canada. Present NSI with a certified copy of the federal registration and ask to place the domain on hold. Neither party will be able to conduct business at that Web site until the dispute is settled. If the problem continues, a suit in federal court is the next step.

Use a monitoring service. These services help companies track online problems and manage their reputations through online resources and interactions. A Phoenix-based division of WavePhore, called "eWatch," prowls Web sites and assists companies with damage control when criticism hits the Internet.

WHAT TO DO AFTER AN ATTACK SITE IS UP

If a company is the victim of an attack site, Falk suggests the following tactics:

1. Do not overreact; the problem may not be as bad as it seems.
2. Assess the problem. Consider whether the information is true or false, whether many key stakeholders have seen the site, and whether the persons making the claim are credible.
3. Analyze the attack site.
 - (a) Do not pretend you are a consumer; webmasters of rogue sites recognize misleading communications.
 - (b) Get a picture of how damaging the site is. How are you affected? Learn all you can about the attitudes of your publics and the issues most important to them.
 - (c) Contact the webmaster of the attack site by telephone, face to face, or through e-mail. This gives you someone to hold accountable and helps develop a relationship

with him or her if that is helpful. It also tends to force people to observe a higher standard.

(d) If the issue is big enough, contact your key stakeholders. This allows you to build a personal relationship with them and educate them about the attack site.

4. Drive the discussion by allowing your employees to be interviewed on your Web site. Make your company the expert on information about your company. Even if there is a negative aspect, admit to it and tell what your company is doing about it.

Kim Bayne (as cited in Janal, 1998, p. 240) suggests the following steps if there is no doubt that the site is an attempt to damage the company's reputation:

1. Make a complete mirror of the attacking Web site for reference purposes.
2. Find out the webmaster's point of view. Is the webmaster a disgruntled customer, an ex-employee, a competitor, or a prankster?
3. Create rebuttal pages at the company's Web site to address all accusations and implications. However, don't post the rebuttal pages at the company's site until you have gauged the public's reaction, or you may unwittingly stimulate interest in the attack site.
4. Prepare written statements for your crisis communications team, and make sure all team members agree on how to route inquiries about this particular Web site, should it become an issue.
5. Telephone the webmaster and explain your concerns about the misinformation. Do not be accusatory, angry, or threatening. Ask him or her to remove the site. Explain that you would like the opportunity to present your company's view in an unbiased manner at the attack site. Use your communications skills first to try to resolve the problem.
6. If for any reason you are unable to communicate with the webmaster, it's time for your company to draft a nice letter spelling out the situation and asking for resolution by a specific date.
7. Still not getting results? I'd apply the "three strikes" rule here. If after the third attempt to "play nice," you still don't get results, then it's time to get your company lawyer involved (Janal, 1998, p. 240).

The mini-cases discussed in the following section involve rogue Web sites.

MINI-CASE: ALASKA AIRLINES AND THE GOOD AND BAD NEWS WEB SITES

After the 2000 crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261, Alaska Airlines was one of the first major companies to put its own bad news on its Web site within an hour of the crash. The story was placed on the employee site because several persons on the flight were non-revenue passengers, primarily employees. However, Alaska had to battle fraudulent sites also.

Two fraudulent Web sites were created to solicit donations for the families of passengers and crew. The webmaster of the first rogue site used the Alaska Airlines logo to masquerade his or her site as an official Alaska Airlines page. Visitors who downloaded the fake contribution form unleashed a computer virus that allowed outsiders access to information on their computers.

Company executives were tipped off to the rogue site by an e-mail message. Needless to say, the company, still in shock over the tragedy, was doubly shocked. Company spokesperson Brian Petro said, "We just couldn't understand. It was unimaginable someone would do something like that" (Stiffler, 2000, p. A10). Alaska Airlines contacted the rogue site's Internet provider and asked that the site be removed. The ISP, Costa Rica-based Freehomepages.com, complied.

A second rogue site asked for Social Security numbers of Alaska Airlines employees under the guise of donating to coworkers. The site was also purged. It is not known how many Internet users fell prey to the fraud. Alaska Airlines also issued two news releases about the fraudulent sites. The releases warned the public that the sites were fraudulent and vicious and revealed information about the official site, www.alaskaair.com, and fund-raising efforts.

MINI-CASE: DUNKIN' DONUTS ADOPTS A ROGUE WEB SITE

The webmaster of a rogue site aimed at Dunkin' Donuts said he or she had "way too much time on [his] hands" and posted some thoughts about Dunkin' Donuts on a personal Web site. Within a few weeks, the site had "an unusual [but welcome] influx of visitors." The webmaster learned through the referrer log at Yahoo! that all of these visitors went through Yahoo! to access the site. The webmaster also learned that Dunkin' Donuts did not have its own Web site, so Yahoo! indexed the rogue site as a "consumer opinion" Web site about Dunkin' Donuts.

The site started getting, it said, "500 hits and a dozen e-mails a week." Then the webmaster requested and was granted the use of the domain name "dunkindonuts.org" and moved the content previously posted on his personal Web site to the new official Web site. The site made news (Segal & Mayer, 1999, p. A01).

It must be said here that 500 hits are not necessarily 500 complaints. People stumble onto sites. Curiosity leads them to sites. Also, one person may "hit" a site more than once, so it doesn't even mean that 500 people visited the site. And the webmaster himself admits on the page that some of the hits come from people who "are from Dunkin' Donuts headquarters doing 'damage control,' 'lurking,' or eavesdropping."

Dunkin' Donuts started to respond to the comments on the rogue site. Jennifer Rosenberg, a Dunkin' Donuts spokesperson, on the top line of the rogue site is quoted as saying, "If this was where customers were going to post their comments, we thought it was important for us to go ahead and address them." Soon after, Dunkin' Donuts made arrangements to acquire the site for its own use.

MINI-CASE: AMERICA ONLINE AND A "SUCK" SITE

This "sucks site" against the largest U.S. ISP charged America Online (AOL) with being "the MTV of the Internet...competitive on prices, but disastrously poor in service." The site contained several pages of detailed and focused text. James M.Egelhof was identified as the rogue site's webmaster.

An AOL webmaster wrote a letter to Cloud 9, the IP of Egelhof's site, saying the site violated the ISP's rules: "Both as an Internet user and as an AOL employee, I find his Web page to be offensive and disturbing. Because Mr. Egelhof has chosen to use a noninteractive medium to express his opinions, he is not providing an avenue for an AOL response to these allegations, and thus his communication can be considered harassment [a violation of the ISP's rules]."

Another violation was of the ISP's rule that users may not use the system to distribute and/or store illegal copies of commercial software. The AOL webmaster's letter to Cloud 9 continued: "The use of AOL online art in this site is extensive. Please remove the graphics on these pages to avoid possible legal action. I am currently contacting our legal department to determine if they (sic) would consider Mr. Egelhof's opinions to be libelous and to discover precedents for legal action in this medium."

Egelhof maintained that AOL's threats were groundless and that he had broken no law. He said he checked with his attorney about the harassment and libel threats and was told they were "garbage." He said he was also advised "that when a large corporation uses lawsuits (or the threat of them) to try to silence critics, that there are grounds for a harassment suit against the corporation."

At this point, there was much talk about the incident in several newsgroups, and the number of visits to the rogue site increased, Egelhof said, from 20 to 360 daily. As the talk continued, AOL Vice President Lyn Chitow posted an apology and mailed it to those who complained about the company. The main points of the apology were the following:

1. "We are not in the business of censorship and believe strongly in individual freedom of speech."
2. "We know we are not perfect and welcome feedback about how to make it better."
3. "The author of the [rogue] Web pages was expressing his view of America Online, and I personally found it insightful and helpful as we strive to make it the best service it can be."

Interestingly, the AOL webmaster who took Egelhof to task offered him a job, saying "We are looking for folks who know (the) Web."

MINI-CASE: WALTER CRONKITE AND THE NOT-SO-FUNNY SITE

Walter Cronkite, probably the most respected newsman who ever lived, and deemed by a poll in recent years as the most trusted man in America, was the victim of a spoof site. Tim Hughes wrote what he believed to be a humorous spoof in which he claimed that Cronkite was seen in a restaurant spitting in his food. This was a completely fabricated incident and a fictitious essay designed for laughs. Cronkite saw the essay on the Web and contacted his lawyers who convinced Hughes to remove the essay and apologize (Janal, 1998, p. 244).

BLOGS

Web logs or Blogs can be positive or negative. A blog used to be a personal online diary but they have grown to be expressions of opinion on any subject. Beginning with the

September 11 attacks of 2001, and continuing with all great disasters, including the Asian tsunami in late 2004 and Hurricane Ka-trina in 2005, bloggers, persons who write blogs, brought to the Internet numerous revealing personal stories that helped us get the big, broader picture of the tragedies. However, the basic nature of blogging can be dangerous.

Why are they dangerous?

1. A 2005 study by the Carnegie Corporation revealed that 44% of 18to 34-year-olds get their news from online sources, including an increasing number of sites in the blogosphere. By early 2005, 32 million Internet users had accessed blogs.
2. Even though most bloggers and most Internet users who read blogs are well educated, it is different to differentiate a blog site set up by a news medium and one set up by an irate person or organization.
3. A blogger is not necessarily employed by a news medium or trained or experienced in the basic tenets of journalism—balanced and objective coverage. A blog is closer to a letter-to-the-editor than a news story. Yet, there is no editor to assure checks and balances as in traditional newspapers, television, and radio news. Bloggers can and do write whatever they wish and it may be full of errors, flaws, and innuendo.

This means that organizations and companies must monitor blog sites in order to know what publics are saying about them, just as they monitor phone calls, letters, rumors, and complaints.

One blog crisis occurred when a Google employee posted a complaint about his salary on his Google blog. He was subsequently fired for divulging proprietary information to a vast external public. This caused companies to develop rules governing what can and cannot be said on a blog site.

CONCLUSION

As the Internet's many possibilities emerge, there will be more and more opportunities for attacks. Hopefully, laws will be established to protect while still providing freedom of speech and expression. The basic lesson to be learned in word-of mouth, to word-of-electronics, is "Watch, Listen, Learn."

The reader may also wish to revisit the blogging portion of chapter 2 "Managing the Crisis," in "Communicating Directly With the Masses."

CHAPTER SIX

Natural Disasters

In a study of crisis communications, natural disasters are a key component because even though organizations cannot be blamed for starting them, organizations are blamed if a state of normalcy is not achieved swiftly.

No matter where people live on planet earth, no matter how ideal the setting, how depressed the surroundings, natural disasters may strike. In the United States, the southeastern states, Gulf Coast, and the East Coast are subject to hurricanes. The West Coast (as well as numerous other places) is earthquake-prone. Tornadoes, floods, and severe snowstorms do their damage on most of the rest of the country.

When lives, homes, and means of livelihood are lost, Good Samaritans often are generous in making donations and offering other assistance. However, this creates additional crises. When donor dollars go to victims of natural disasters, other nonprofit charitable organizations suffer. Many donors have X amount of funds for giving and they choose which causes are more worthy. Some organizations with very crucial services have difficulty staying afloat. Nonprofits that may contribute to the quality of life, like arts organizations, are the first to be ignored when disasters, natural or man-made, strike.

In 2005, after the Asian tsunami; devastating Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma; and the killer earthquake in Pakistan, arts organizations scrambled to find ways of raising funds. In one city, the symphony orchestra allied with a retail store planning a grand opening event. The symphony provided the store with its patron list for invitations to the opening and the store promised the symphony 10% of sales for the weekend event. The arrangement was revealed on the invitation that, hopefully, would encourage consumers to attend and make purchases. It was a kind of creative plan that nonprofits that do not save lives directly must seek to survive in difficult times.

CASE: HURRICANE KATRINA AND NEW ORLEANS

After hitting Florida first, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29 and caused death and destruction in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The stories are tragic in all the states, but in a study of crisis communications and crisis management, New Orleans stands out. The crisis touched everyone in the state in some way and specifically every person and every business and organization in New Orleans.

There was death and suffering in Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama, but it was more visible in New Orleans. There were bodies floating in the flooded streets, people screaming to be rescued from their rooftops, thousands of people trapped in unlivable shelters, and it was hot, sizzling hot—exciting news, especially for television and newspaper photography. In addition to the excitement, there was miscommunication and controversy, elements that were not so apparent in the other cities and states where nature did its damage and exited.

There were evacuation plans, but the plans obviously did not consider certain segments of the New Orleans public: (a) people who were too ill to evacuate, even with help from

neighbors (some were mute or blind); (b) people with pets who could not bear to leave them; some would volunteer to die rather than leave their pets (pets were not admitted to the primary shelters); (c) people who did not have cars or money for gas to evacuate, or places to go if they had gas (U.S. Census statistics reveal that 112,000 residents did not own cars); and (d) a great number of people who decided to sit out the storm because they had heard warnings to evacuate so many times before and each time it was unnecessary. The plans did not include what would be done with these publics, probably because the actual crisis was worse than the worst case scenario imagined by the person or persons who devised the plan.

We know from chapter 2 that the first stage of a crisis is the prodromal stage, a point before a crisis when warning signs are analyzed and heeded. Crisis management and crisis communications plans are developed based on these warn-ings and an effort is made to avoid the worst case scenario. That does not mean we ever ignore the worst case scenario. The worst case scenario is the absolute worst tragedy that *can* occur. We make crisis communications and crisis management plans based on likelihood and degree of devastation but we should always consider what will be done if the worst happens.

Let's begin with this narrative:

It was a broiling August afternoon in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Big Easy, the City That Care Forgot. Those who ventured outside moved as if they were swimming in tupelo honey. Those inside paid silent homage to the man who invented air-conditioning as they watched TV "storm teams" warn of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. Nothing surprising there...

But the next day, the storm gathered steam and drew a bead on the city. As the whirling maelstrom approached the coast, more than a million people evacuated to higher ground. Some 200,000 remained, however—the carless, the homeless, the aged and infirm, and those die-hard New Orleanians who look for any excuse to throw a party.

The storm hit Breton Sound with the fury of a nuclear warhead. Pushing a deadly storm surge into Lake Pontchartrain, the water crept to the top of the massive berm that holds back the lake and then spilled over.

Nearly 80 % of New Orleans lies below sea level...so the water poured in. Thousands drowned in the murky brew that was soon contaminated with sewage and industrial waste. Thousands more who survived the flood later perished from dehydration and disease as they waited to be rescued. It took two months to pump the city dry, and by then the Big Easy was buried under a blanket of putrid sediment, a million people were homeless, and 50,000 were dead. It was the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States.

The narrative continues with "When did this calamity happen? It hasn't—yet." This piece was written by Joel K. Bourne, Jr. and published by *National Geographic Magazine* in October 2004, nearly a year before most of his predictions actually happened. Bourne, not a psychic or a seer, merely predicted the mass destruction.

This mass destruction had been predicted by geologists for years. The state has lost more than a million acres of coastal wetlands in the past 70 years or so. The soil has destabilized for various reasons, including industrial plants, offshore gas and oil particularly (which actually makes the disaster at least partly man-made and not a natural

disaster at all). With the eroding ecosystem, the Gulf of Mexico becomes closer to New Orleans all the time. In the Gulf, hurricanes are nursed until they make landfall. They grow stronger over water and weaker once they hit land, so the land closer to the coastline stands to suffer stronger hits.

In addition, many experts say global warming had helped the likelihood of a devastating hurricane in New Orleans. Some disbelieve global warming is of any great significance, but those who do say the deep extensive pool of warmer water in the Gulf charged the hurricane.

Levees and floodwalls were built to protect the city from floodwaters from the Mississippi. The levees would work against 95% of all hurricanes. The levees would withstand up to, perhaps, a Category 3 hurricane. If that rare 5% of storms, those Category 4 or 5 hurricanes were to hit New Orleans, engineers warned, the strong storm surge would either pour over the levees or destroy them.

Protecting the city from those strong hurricanes would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The state could not afford it and apparently it was not a priority for the federal government.

So the crisis planning went awry in the first stage. Planners just assumed, hoped, that what had never happened would not happen. This is not an unusual occurrence in developing plans. People on the San Andreas Fault in California are not prepared for the earthquake called The Big One. There were no detection or warning devices in the Asian countries hit by the tsunami, even though it was always possible. People build homes and communities under Mt. Rainier, a sleeping volcano in Washington state that could erupt anytime.

However, organizations and individuals should learn a lesson from Katrina and make plans. If one plans for the worst and a lesser catastrophe occurs, it is easier to adjust down than to adjust up.

This case study deals primarily with the first week of the expectation of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. It is concerned primarily with the people of New Orleans and secondarily with observers of the unfolding crisis. We might call it the prodromal and containment stages, but this is a difficult label because the crisis and the crises it spawned will perhaps last for years. When the Asian tsunami hit on December 26, 2004, and when terrorists attacked on September 11, 2001, the attacks were swift and immediately afterward there was the containment stage. This was also true in the other states struck by Katrina. However, in New Orleans, the discovery of the extent of the tragedy seemed endless.

THE GOVERNOR CONTACTS PRESIDENT BUSH

Governor Kathleen Blanco, on August 27 before Katrina made landfall, wrote a letter to President George W. Bush. The letter was sent through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The opening, in part, read: "... I request that you declare an emergency for the State of Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina for the time period beginning August 26, 2005, and continuing. The affected areas are all the southeastern parishes including the New Orleans Metropolitan area and the midstate Interstate 1-49 corridor and northern parishes along the 1-20 corridor that are accepting the thousands of

citizens evacuating areas expecting to be flooded as a result of Hurricane Katrina” (“Blanco’s State of Emergency Letter,” 2005).

A section read, “I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments, and that supplementary assistance is necessary to save lives” (“Blanco’s State of Emergency Letter,” 2005).

The letter went on to various specifics and estimates and what the state could and would do. (See Fig. 6.1 for the Katrina timeline and other actions of the governor.)

THE MAYOR’S COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Also on Saturday, August 27, Mayor Ray Nagin and his team set up a command center in the Hyatt Hotel because it was only a block from City Hall and it had a backup generator for power and food. Much of his staff was evacuated safely out of town. Only a skeletal team remained in New Orleans.

On that team was Sally Forman, the mayor’s Director of Communications. Forman said there was a crisis communications/management plan. However, she said,

We had never considered there would not be a way to communicate. All of our resources were wiped out. We could occasionally call out on a land line in the power company’s command center. I got a few SOS messages to someone on my staff and those messages were released to the news media.

Another call was to a local AM radio station. I was only able to form a Joint Information Bureau (JIB) once the military arrived and provided support. (The military apparently had the only satellite phone in the city.)

On that same day, Nagin, in a joint news conference with Governor Blanco, told his constituents who hadn’t left town already to evacuate, saying, “This is not a test. This is the real deal. Things could change, but as of right now, New Orleans is definitely the target for this hurricane.”

As winds began to grow in strength, he said, “We want you to take this a little more seriously and start moving—right now as a matter of fact.” He told them the Superdome would be a shelter of last resort for evacuees with special needs and advised people seeking refuge there to bring their own food and drinks for 3 to 4 days to be safe and comforts such as folding chairs, as if going camping.

He said “Looters will be dealt with severely and harshly and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.” This was necessary to ease the minds of evacuees that their homes would be safe if they left.

On Sunday, August 28, according to a New Orleanian who evacuated and later wrote a blog, “It was 8 o’clock in the morning and Mayor Nagin’s concerned face looked directly into the television camera as he pleaded with the citizens to please leave as soon as they could.” That blogger did as the mayor asked, but many felt as some of her family members: “They were certain that this was another Ivan” (a previous hurricane that bypassed the city). A writer for the *Times-Picayune* said, “I don’t always defend the mayor, but considering the number of hurricane threats we’ve had, he might have had to put people on buses 3 times each year. How can a city do that? How many times will

people cooperate after so many false alarms? Also, how many times can you ask people on high ground to keep 10 extra people in their houses. The concern on the mayor's face was real because maybe this storm was the big one, but maybe it was not. People are using hindsight when they say what he should have done."

Also on Sunday, Nagin ordered a 6 p.m. curfew and said that emergency services would be provided until winds exceeded 45 mph. He dispatched firefighters and police to use sirens and bullhorns to urge people to leave.

Meanwhile, both landline telephones and cell phone towers were out and there was no way the mayor's team could communicate to the outside world. Mayor Nagin said, "All communications broke down. I got cell phones as high up as the White House that did not work. My Blackberry pin-to-pin was the only thing that worked. I saw the military struggle with this, too. No one had communications worth a damn."

Greg Meffert, the mayor's right-hand man and chief technology officer, said the emergency communications plan basically depended on phone service, at least cell phone service, being functional. They were able to learn what was going on from police radios. Looters were raiding the hotel while they occupied it.

On Monday, August 29, Katrina made landfall. Winds had already taken away one side of the hotel. Both the Superdome and the Ernest M. Morial Convention Center were filled beyond capacity with those who couldn't or didn't evacuate. Thousands of others were still in their homes. After the hurricane passed, they thought everything would return to normal and power would be restored. That was not to be the case.

On Tuesday, August 30, the levees broke and water began to flood the city, even around the Hyatt.

On August 31, the mayor's team was finally able to make a call outside from an Internet phone account set up recently by technology team member Scott Domke and linked to his laptop. They used an Internet connection at the Hyatt and eventually linked eight lines through a single Vonage Internet phone account. Meffert, realizing he needed more lines and more phones, went out with others to a nearby Office Depot where, with the aid of Chief of Police Eddie Compass, they "officially looted" the store for the supplies.

New Orleans Katrina: Timeline

Friday August 26:

- Gov. Kathleen Blanco declares a state of emergency in Louisiana.

Saturday, August 27:

- In a letter, Gov. Blanco asks President Bush to declare a federal state of emergency.
- The White House announces a federal emergency is declared and DHS and FEMA are given authority to respond.

Sunday, August 28:

- Mayor Ray Nagin orders mandatory evacuation.
- The *St. Petersburg Times* says Bush, Brown, and Chertoff were warned of levee failure by the National Hurricane Center.
- The *Times-Picayune* reports that water has toppled over a levee.
- The *Times-Picayune* says about 30,000 are in the Superdome with 36 hours worth of food.
- The *Boston Globe* reports that the Louisiana National Guard has requested 700 buses for evacuations.

Monday, August 29:

- Katrina makes landfall as a Category 4 hurricane.
- On NBC's *Today* Mayor Nagin announces that water is flowing over the levee and that a pumping station is not operating in the lower Ninth Ward.
- FEMA Director Michael Brown requests that DHS dispatch 1,000 employees to Katrina-torn areas. AP says the request lacked urgent language, the employees had 2 days to arrive.
- The *Times-Picayune* reports a Bucktown levee is breached.
- Gov. Blanco again requests assistance from President Bush. *Newsweek* reports she said "We need everything you've got."
- 5,700 National Guard members are called up.

Tuesday, August 30:

- Water continues to rise; eventually 80 % of New Orleans is underwater.
- TV's *Meet The Press* later interviewed Michael Chertoff who said this was the day he became aware that the levee had failed.
- WWL-TV reports that the Pentagon claimed there were enough National Guard in the region to handle hurricane needs.
- The Associated Press says President Bush was playing guitar with country singer Mark Willis.

Wednesday, August 31:

- The *Boston Globe* reports that National Guard troops had arrived. WWL-TV showed a local emergency director advising that the food and water supply was nearly gone.
- Reuters reports that former mayor Sidney Barthelmy estimated that 80,000 people were trapped in the flooded city.

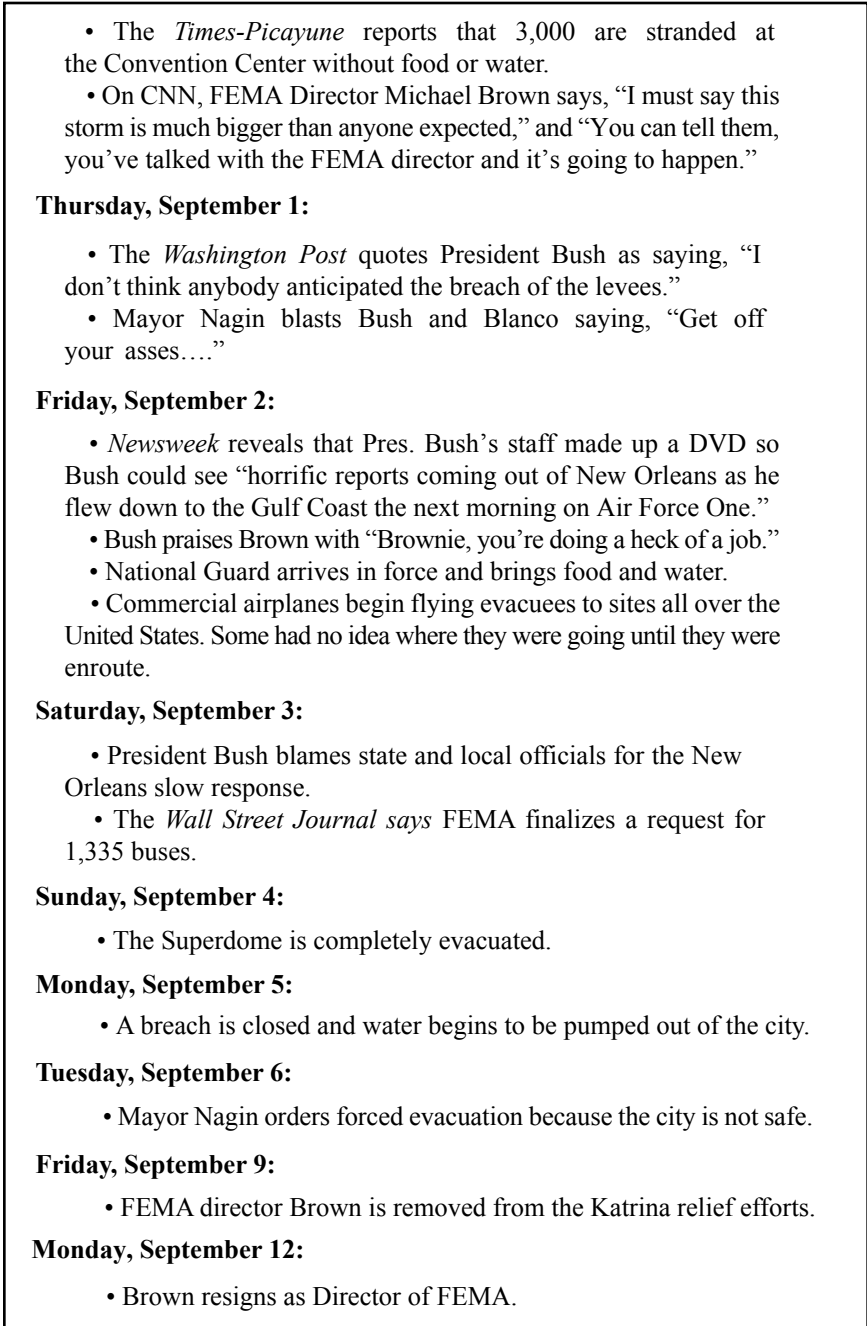


Figure 6.1. This is a timeline of major events and actions during the first 2 weeks of the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

President Bush had flown over the New Orleans scene and saw some of the disaster. The president telephoned that night and Nagin said he told him that “flying over New Orleans in Air Force One did not do the crisis justice.”

In an interview with radio station WWL on September 1, the mayor lost his patience and said of President Bush and Governor Blanco, “Don’t tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They’re not here. It’s too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do something, and let’s fix the biggest goddam crisis in the history of our country.” Forman said CNN picked up the local piece and broadcast it all over the world.

Also, on September 1, the team moved to a higher floor to evade some 200 gang members they heard were en route. They took with them some cordless phones that had a range of only 300 feet, sometimes they had to lean over a balcony toward the inside of the building to use the phones. Meffert said, “It felt like the Alamo—we were surrounded and had only short bursts of communication.”

Meffert told the *Wall Street Journal* that the city was unable to spend more on emergency communications because of its budget crisis and also because of cuts in federal assistance. Still, improvements had been made since Nagin took office 2 years before. Crime, though still high, was down. The city’s Web site reportedly ranked first out of 70 major cities. The site stayed up throughout the hurricane and its aftermath because Domke shifted it to a Dallas server.

Forman said if she could do it over, she would have had bullhorns and satellite phones. Forman said she is developing a new plan. She says the office should have its own generator to power up a copy machine and explore some type of alert system during evacuations.

“Cities are not prepared for great disaster,” she said. “If you are hit in more than one place, you are up a creek. Plans must include alternate locations outside of the city that may be in crisis. A lot of people compared our situation with Mayor (Rudy) Giuliani in New York. This is an unfair comparison; as tragic as the September 11 attack was, Mayor Giuliani could go to his office and work.”

WARNINGS BY THE NEWS MEDIA

The *Times-Picayune* is the metropolitan newspaper in the Big Easy. People who actually read the newspaper in the days leading up to the hurricane were aware of just how big the threat was. Those who merely glanced at the newspaper may not have been persuaded because the headlines and frontpage stories were not alarming. It must be emphasized that even though it was possible that the destruction would be as bad as it was, it was by no means certain that the levees would be breached and the city would flood. It also was not known, at first, how many people had remained in their homes. It is possible, even likely, that persons who chose not to evacuate had not read the newspaper.

On Saturday, August, 27, Katrina had hit Florida and was headed toward Louisiana and, if it continued in the same direction, the eye of the storm would hit New Orleans. The headline on page A1, occupying two thirds of the page above the fold, read:

**KATRINA
PUTS END
TO LULL
STORM’S WESTERN PATH PUTS N.O. ON EDGE**
Hurricane lashes south Florida, leaves six people dead

There was a map showing the storm’s path but nothing alarming on page A1. However, in the jump story on page A10, there was a map showing evacuation routes to Interstate 10 to Baton Rouge, and halfway through the story that occupied nearly half of the 6-column page lengthwise, there was a paragraph that said that “if the storm hit the city, it would be a Category 4 with a storm surge of 18 to 22 feet, several feet more of waves, and winds greater than 131 mph.

In the story, Mayor Nagin was paraphrased as saying he was alarmed about the potential path and the lack of time to fully prepare. “This storm really scares me,” he said. The story added that city officials would make a decision about mandatory evacuations later that day. Because the city had escaped hurricanes earlier in the season and some people had evacuated without cause, Nagin wanted to be sure that it was necessary.

The newspaper, that day, had a story about the five people killed by Katrina in South Florida. There was a story saying Governor Blanco, expected to be named chair of the Southern Governors Association in Atlanta, might not be able to make the trip for the swearing-in ceremony because of the coming storm. Interestingly, the front page of the local section had a story about Mayor Nagin indicating he would not seek a race for a possible open seat in Congress despite suggestion by political handicappers that he would be a contender due to his “pro-business stance.”

The newspaper also printed its Sunday, August 28 edition. The banner headline (in 1½-inch bold letters) and subheads on page A1 were the following:

KATRINA TAKES AIM		
AN EXTREME STORM	GET ON THE ROAD	WALL OF WATER
Monday landfall likely to be as strong Category 4	Officials strongly urging residents to leave area	Levees could be topped in the entire metro area

These were the three foremost warnings: (a) The storm is huge, (b) Evacuate, (c) There may be great flooding. The lead indicated the storm would make landfall on Monday. The hurricane was, at the time, a Category 4 that “could build to a top of the chart Category 5 with winds of 155 mph or higher.” Below the fold was a second story with the headline:

**Katrina bulks up
to become
a perfect storm**

The lead indicated the storm surge could “flood much of eastern N.O.” The National Hurricane Center Director said, “I don’t remember seeing conditions as favorable as this for a strengthening hurricane for a long time.” A color photo occupying much of the front page showed cars evacuating to the west in normally eastbound lanes of 1–10, a

contraflow. Page A15 had a full-page ad from Entergy, the power company, urging residents to be prepared for long power outages and advising them of how to be safe when lines and poles are down.

The jump stories from page A1 had a banner headline 1½-inch bold letters reading:

PREPARING FOR THE WORST

It included the mayor's warning, "This is the real deal," made the evening before. The coming hurricane was called "a threat of first magnitude." The mayor's spokeswoman Tami Frazier was quoted as saying that people should not plan to retreat to the Superdome, but should evacuate the city. The Superdome was to be "a special-needs shelter of last resort," for persons who absolutely could not evacuate the city. Ten buses with lifts for disabled people in wheelchairs were sent to take prequalified people to the Dome. The regular city bus system would pick up people at 12 locations and take them to the Dome. Another story on the same page revealed that oil rigs in the Gulf would be closed because the storm is "coming right on top of us."

A half-page color map on page A21 showed a projected aerial view of what might happen if the wall of water surged against the levees and the city flooded. On page A23, next to the final page of the section, there was a warning from hurricane researcher Ivor van Heerden: "The bottom line is this is a worst-case scenario and everybody needs to recognize it. You can always rebuild your house, but you can never regain your life" ("Katrina Takes Aim," p. A23).

In the sports section, the headline story was that the New Orleans Saints would evacuate that day and head to Oakland, California, where they had a game the following weekend. Tulane University's football team was to evacuate to Jackson, Mississippi.

The Sunday paper also urged readers to e-mail their hurricane experiences to the newspaper at talkback@timespicayune.com. Many people, when safely evacuated, did that and NOLA.com, the online paper, carried their poignant blogs later. On Monday, August 29, the day Katrina made landfall, the newspaper was out. The large banner headline, in 2-inch bold uppercase letters read:

GROUND ZERO SUPERDOME BECOMES LAST RESORT FOR THOUSANDS UNABLE TO LEAVE NEW ORLEANS BRACES FOR NIGHTMARE OF THE BIG ONE

A large photo taken the day before showed lines of New Orleanians filing into the Superdome—people carrying plastic bags, cases of bottled water, and hand luggage. The estimate then was 10,000 people; eventually 25,000 people took refuge there. A smaller photo showed an empty highway after evacuees had left. The city was awaiting the storm. Most people expected to be in the Dome a few hours, not days. Even on that first day, some complained to reporters that no food or water was being provided. One person brought food only because she expected the lines to the concession stands would be long; but warnings from the mayor by television and newspaper urged people to bring food, water, and clothing, that none would be provided.

Page A3's major headline spanned four fifths of the page and dominated the middle of the page under a photo of a mother and baby who had found safety in a Red Cross shelter:

**Surge likely to top
N.O. levee system**

The story, a jump from page A1, made it clear that the worst case scenario that was about to occur was no surprise. A story occupying the entire left column indicated that the utilities already knew there would be no electricity or landline phone service “for weeks, or even months” if flooding and damage hampered repair crews. The Convention Center, where thousands more were gathered, was not mentioned as a shelter, but the mayor had said that additional buildings and boats would be commandeered for shelter.

The other stories on pages A4 and A5 were about the success of the contraflow of traffic out of the city, the downtown hotels housing only stranded tourists, and that a Carnival Cruise ship was diverted to Galveston.

The flooding began that day, and the newspaper’s circulation was immediately and perhaps permanently changed. The staff was forced out of its building that was taking on water. There could be no home delivery, no hawking at newsstands.

Instead, the newspaper communicated in a way it could not have if the disaster had occurred just a few years ago. It also set a precedent for other cities that may suffer similar tragedies. The newspaper already had an online version, NOLA.com. However, after Katrina, it only had the online paper until Thursday, September 1. The Web-published paper provided regular updates of news events, much more regularly than a printed newspaper could do. Fortunately, NOLA.com’s headquarters is in New Jersey so it was not affected by the flooding when other Web sites were down; it had more bandwidth.

In addition, not only did the regular displaced readers who had evacuated have access to information, but hundreds of thousands of people all over the world who wanted to know what was going on in New Orleans from New Orleanians who understand the culture and the makeup of the city to total foreigners, all were informed.

In addition to news, NOLA.com had photographs, housing available, and forums on topics like tracing missing persons titled, “Tell Them You’re OK.”

Frances Spencer was an external Web producer for NOLA.com during the disaster. She and others were taking urgent phone calls saying things like “Help my grandmother in the Ninth Ward,” or “An insulin-dependent man is still in his house.” Spencer said, “We would get word through to emergency response teams to find these people.”

Then, she saw an e-mail from a woman in Illinois whose 6-year-old daughter had died after a trauma-filled life. She had been shaken by her father as a 9-week-old infant and was thereafter blind, brain-damaged, and bed-ridden. The father was given a 25-year prison sentence. Then, just a few days before Katrina hit, the child died, according to the mother, due to an injury caused by a careless health-care worker.

The mother sent the child’s body to a New Orleans’ funeral home/cemetery for burial in a family crypt. The family was to gather for a funeral and burial in a few days. Then, Katrina and the flooding occurred and the mother could not reach the funeral home. She did not know if it was underwater and her child’s coffin was floating in the New Orleans muck.

Spencer wanted to put the message on the NOLA.com blog page, but a temporary editor thought the story was so outrageous it had to be an urban legend. So, Spencer researched the incidents of the child’s life and found news stories in Illinois and Missouri

when the child was injured 6 years earlier, then found stories about the child's death a few days earlier, and the missing coffin more recently.

Armed with these stories, she brought them to the attention of NOLA.com editor John Donley who permitted the blog to run the piece. Bloggers began to respond and offer assistance. Soon, the funeral home responded to the mother, saying the coffin had been sent to Litcher, Louisiana before the hurricane and that it was intact.

Publisher Ashton Phelps, Jr. said some of the journalists on the staff lost their homes and only had the clothes on their backs to deliver information to the public. They evacuated the building and some set up shop at the *Houma Courier's* offices and others worked from Baton Rouge on the campus of Louisiana State University.

From their temporary digs, the staff members wrote a newspaper circulated in areas where persons gradually returned home after the flood water was pumped out. The paper also was distributed to displaced New Orleanians in Baton Rouge.

The September 2 edition declared, in red letters over the name of the newspaper, "Katrina: The Storm We've Always Feared." This tribute of sorts ran for weeks, at least, because the city would not soon recover from the crisis, if ever. The headline taking up nearly a third of page A1, quoted a desperate woman pictured, in another third of the page, on her knees at the Convention Center, praying:

**'HELP US,
PLEASE'**

The emphasis of articles was the need for assistance for efforts to rescue people from the Superdome, the Convention Center, and homes all over the city. Buses and planes had begun to transport people to Houston and other cities but the move was slow. National Guard troops were needed to assist Louisiana Guardsmen and local police to combat looting and violence. Prominent in the paper were full-page ads from insurance companies promising to be there to help.

On September 3, the newspaper concentrated on President Bush finally recognizing the conditions and promising support and relief. Photos of troops were seen arriving. Numerous ads ran from companies seeking employees and offering assistance.

The September 4 and 5 newspapers centered on more evacuations and the uncertainty of recovery. There was no healthy running water, no power; the streets were still flooded with a gumbo of sewage, vermin, dead bodies, gasoline, and oil. The mayor was calling for total evacuation, which was not to be as some began to return to their homes even when there was nothing for them to retrieve.

The disaster was not a surprise to the staff of the *Times-Picayune*. It had a story warning city, state, and federal government of the likelihood of the tragedy 3 years before in an award-winning series of articles. The articles read, "Eventually a major hurricane will hit New Orleans head on... It's a matter of when, not if." The *Times-Picayune*, in a crippled advertising economy with a diminished subscriber base, as of early 2006, kept most of its staff members on salary, and continued to put out the newspaper, an online edition, and a blog page.

TV NEWS WARNINGS

Dave Walker, a TV columnist for the *Times-Picayune*, on the evening of Friday, August 26, was attending a taping of the syndicated game show *Wheel of Fortune* in the Ernest

M. Morial Convention Center. When he arrived home, he learned Katrina was headed toward New Orleans.

He would evacuate later but his immediate action was to monitor TV news broadcasts of three local stations—WWL Channel 4 (CBS), WDSU Channel 6 (NBC), and WGNO Channel 26 (ABC). Walker has high praise for the newscasters who, despite having to cope with the disaster as it impacted their own families, struggled to serve their viewers. WVUE was off the air for about 2 weeks but its meteorologist, Bob Breck, broadcast from Dallas. Throughout the critical period of the crisis, the other stations were able to broadcast by moving their operations to other sites.

On Saturday morning, Margaret Orr, from WDSU, told viewers, “Dallas is looking good at this time”; Walter Maestri, a local disaster specialist, talking about the hurricane, said, “This is a bad lady”; WWL anchor Eric Paulsen interrupted meteorologist John Gumm and said to the viewers, “Would you go ahead and leave now?”

Later that day, Breck at WVUE suggested the viewers take their kids’ cell phones to free up airspace for crucial calls. By Saturday evening, Walker said, “CNN was airing a prepared piece spelling out the well-known worst case scenario for poor New Orleans and its even poorer below-sea-level citizens.” At the end of the piece, the CNN anchor said, “That’ll make you sit up and take notice, won’t it?” Walker replied, “If you’re in charge of FEMA, evidently not.”

As the cable networks were coming in, Walker’s family evacuated and he stayed as long as he could to monitor coverage.

On Sunday morning, WDSU’s Ed Reams warned, “What you love about New Orleans may not exist 24 hours from now.” Reams then covered the Superdome where Walker said everything was already “coming apart at the seams.” By late Sunday, Walker evacuated himself to Baton Rouge. He said his notes changed from “New Orleans pounded” to “New Orleans dodges bullet” to “New Orleans swamped.”

He saw the first of many boat rescues that day on WWL. WBRZ’s helicopter toured the flooded city at dusk. Meteorologist Bruce Katz, narrating the live tour, realized on air that his own home was flooded. Katz also narrated the sight of early looting and expressed outrage.

Walker found the debate over the word *refugee* trivial in describing people like himself. He said he was, “more concerned with words like ‘dewatering’ meaning removing the water from my street and ‘civil unrest’ meaning civilians pillaging a defenseless city.”

Walker’s house had some flooding and he and his family lived on the second floor of the house for months while the ground floor was being restored. He said, “It’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to us, but we’re the luckiest people we know.”

Wheel of Fortune cast and crew, Pat Sajak, and Vanna White, along with the big wheel and letter board escaped the convention center just in time. The show planned to do 10 episodes but cut it short and made 9. About 100 staff stayed over Saturday night and their Sunday flights were cancelled, so they were bused to Texas, then flown back to Los Angeles. The week of shows aired in November showing New Orleans landmarks before flood damage.

Radio station WWL managed to stay on the air throughout the crucial periods of the disaster. Many New Orleanians had battery-powered radios and those who did not evacuate found this their only source of news. This was also true of people in nearby cities and towns, like Baton Rouge, which also lost power. The wind caused some damage there, but many people talk of visiting neighbors with generators to watch newscasts.

THE NEW ORLEANS CULTURE

The culture of the residents of New Orleans is not the French Quarter. New Orleanians like jazz and Creole music but rarely do they go to the Quarter unless they are entertainers. They like their “second-line dancing” but they only do it in the Quarter if they are entertaining for events like Mardi Gras. They do not eat at Emeril’s. This is partly because many cannot afford French Quarter prices, but they also like to prepare their own gumbo and shrimp Creole and pralines. They have their own recipes, their own combination of ingredients and spices, and when they do venture out to eat, it would be neighborhood spots like Barrow’s Catfish Restaurant, a New Orleans eatery for generations.

The French Quarter is for tourists who come in and out of New Orleans and never see where the people in the city live; the only New Orleanians they see are maids in the hotels, employees in the restaurants, taxi drivers, and musicians in the clubs and on the streets. Many people who visited New Orleans never heard of the Lower Ninth Ward, the poorest neighborhood, until it was flooded and its people were homeless or dead.

Louisiana has the largest percentage of native-born residents of any other state in the union. Many family lines, black and white, date back to French settlers who founded the city in 1718. New Orleans was 67% African American and their culture is different from African American culture in other U.S. states. They not only have roots in West Africa, but also in France, Spain, and Italy. They have names like Thibodeaux, Rousseau, and Etienne. For many years, they clung to their European heritage. They were mulato (half-black), quadroons (a quarter black), octaroons (an eighth black) and the children and grandchildren of mulattoes, quadroons and octaroons. They understood and cherished this heritage and would explain their ancestry to anyone who would listen. Then they developed more black American pride during the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Lolis Elie, a columnist for the *Times Picayune* and a lifelong New Orleanian, there has been a resurgence in Creole culture to embrace both the European and African heritages. This cultural difference separates black New Orleanians from white residents, though the two groups share some love for music and cuisine.

The Lower Ninth Ward was once swampland and houses were built usually with stilt-like foundations and high porches in case of moderate flooding. According to Elie, 30 years ago, the working poor—longshoremen, teachers, factory workers—were able to purchase homes in the ward. This is how 45% of the homes in the ward were owned. In the poorest neighborhoods of most U.S. cities, nearly all of the residents are renters. However, the children and grandchildren of N.O. homeowners have not had the skills or employment to keep up the houses. They also did not have the financial ability to purchase hurricane insurance, not to mention flood insurance. Property taxes are nonexistent or very low. New Orleans has one of the highest unemployment rates in the United States. When unemployment is high, crime rates are usually high.

All these statistics and facts explain why a number of residents did not want to leave their precious homes, the homes they or their families have owned for years. They wanted to protect them from looters; looters were thought to be more likely to take over a house than a flood. There were problems with getting police protection, even in the best of times. The New Orleans Police Department had been suspected of corruption for years and that suspicion continued through the Katrina aftermath when police officers did not show up for work to protect and serve the people.

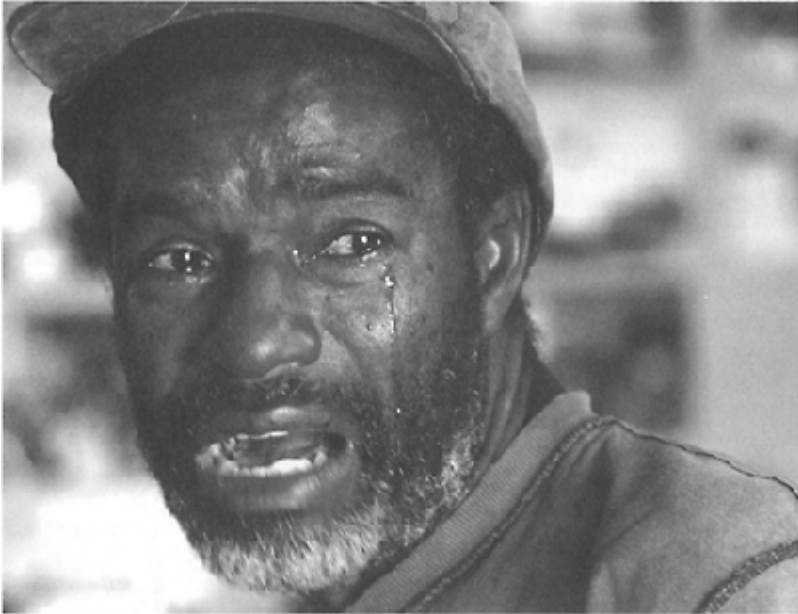


Figure 6.2. George Stewart, 57, is a former Marine who served in Vietnam and an alumnus of Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When his wife and sister evacuated their home in New Orleans, Stewart elected to ride out the storm. He had done that during previous storms, but, he said, “You couldn’t ride this boy out. My instinct kicked in from military experience. It told me when you’re in enemy territory, you keep moving until you feel safe.” So, Stewart put a change of clothing, three bottles of orange juice, and \$15 in a backpack and walked 85 miles to Baton Rouge where he knew someone at Southern University would help him. The trip, in smothering heat, took 2 days (he got rides for about 20 of the miles). He said he put his left foot in front of his right and prayed 12 times a day until he made it. One of his professors from years ago did help find him shelter. “This has shook me more than Vietnam,” he said, “because my family’s close to this thing. In Nam, it was just me.” (Excerpted from an article by Brandi Worley in *The Southern Digest*, September 9, 2005.) Photo by Douglas Toussaint, *The Southern Digest*, Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA. Reprinted by permission.

Also, New Orleanians were evacuation-weary. They had been warned numerous times to evacuate and each time, the storm blew in another direction. Some recalled Hurricane Betsy in 1965 that caused some flooding and said, "I lived through Betsy so I'm not leaving" (see Fig. 6.2).

STRANDED NEW ORLEANIANS COMMUNICATE

Approximately 50,000 New Orleanians who, for various reasons, stayed in their homes rather than evacuate, realized the flood waters were not going away soon and later wanted to be rescued. Many had battery-powered radios, a staple in a city prone to storms and power outages, and were told the water level would not soon subside and would probably increase. Some called 911 as the water seeped or poured into their homes and were told it was too dangerous for emergency workers to attempt the rescue. One blogger wrote "The 911 operator told me, 'You should have listened when you were told to evacuate.'"

The 911 operators working downtown had a dilemma they will never forget. Realizing it was impossible to rescue people as the hurricane-force winds roared and the water rose, they took calls from frantic, desperate, doomed people. They tried to calmly give good advice like, "Go to your attic," and the caller would say, "I'm already on the roof and the water is rising." One caller said she had a handicapped girl and a baby on a pump machine and said, "We're on the bed and the water is coming up." They promised to help as soon as possible knowing there was no one to send. The 120 operators said they could only handle calls for 15-minute increments, then they had to take a break to recover composure. Eventually, they had to evacuate as their center flooded and as they left, the phones were still ringing (see Fig. 6.3).

As flood levels grew, landline phones were mostly impossible but a few continued to work, especially those that did not require electricity. In some areas, pay phones nearby worked longer than home phones. Cell phones worked for a while but cell towers were soon down and cell



Figure 6.3. After the flooding devastated the city of New Orleans, a sign warns the news media at the entrance of the morgue installed in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. The death toll was over 1,000 but fortunately much less than the predicted 10,000. Photo by Omar Torres/Special Collection/Getty Images. Reprinted by permission of Getty Images.

phones went dead. In other areas, especially the Lower Ninth Ward, the houses were nearly submerged except for roofs. Sadly, more than 1,000 people died. Some swam to safety on a highway overpass or the Convention Center or Superdome.

Survivors retreated to their attics and, in many cases, broke through to their roofs. News helicopters captured shots of stranded people with signs large enough to be seen by pilots. Many later said they wondered why the news helicopters did not attempt to save them, but the choppers are not equipped for rescues. Many news cameramen in the helicopters did say they told rescue people where to find people. It is interesting that people would have supplies for signs in their homes, even more surprising in their attics. These were people who did not expect a great flood, so it seems they would not have anticipated rescue by helicopter. After the flooding that was swift, there was no time to search for paintbrushes, posterboard or cardboard, and paint, so these supplies had to be readily available. Some people painted signs directly on their roofs.

COMMUNICATING WITH PERSONS IN NEW ORLEANS

People who fled from New Orleans knew from the news media that the city was flooding. But they were as frantic about finding news of relatives and friends as they had been to find safe shelter and food. Many wondered if they would have been less stressed out if they had stayed home and weathered the storm with loved ones who couldn't or didn't evacuate.

At the same time, families and friends who lived in other parts of the United States and the world were feeling the same stress of no communications. For a while they managed to get through on cell phones, but service was intermittent. They might connect but the phones would go dead, then sometime later, they would try again and again, and the phone would die.

Ham radio operators revealed that people dialed random numbers on their cell phones hoping to reach anyone who could send word to help trapped people. A man in Oklahoma got word by cell phone that his New Orleans relatives were trapped on the second floor of their home and their cell phone had died. The man called the Red Cross; it was instrumental in contacting an organization of ham operators who specialize in emergencies. The organization was unable to reach ham operators in New Orleans. However, one of them was able to connect with another operator in Utah who was able to reach operators in Louisiana. Subsequently, emergency personnel rescued the Oklahoma man's aunt and about a dozen others.

Mobile phone providers urged consumers to use text messages instead of voice calls because they are sent in packets of data that use less bandwidth to get through overloaded lines. However, text messaging is so im-personal when lives are being lost. It was necessary to actually hear a person's voice, to not only know the words that were being said but to ascertain frame of mind, mood, and fear from voice tone. One man in Washington, DC said he was comforted to hear the voice of his stubborn aunt who refused to leave her apartment until the levees broke and his calls could not go through. He tried postings on the Internet, which did work for some people, but no one responded to him.

Many people outside the hurricane-stricken area were irritated with the news media for its concentration on looting and the blame game when there were still people camping out on highway overpasses and on their roofs, not to mention the thousands of people in the nightmare that was the Superdome and the Convention Center.

LACK OF COMMUNICATIONS IN THE SUPERDOME AND THE CONVENTION CENTER

The Superdome and the Convention Center are the two places in New Orleans that will hold the most people. Many locals who could not afford to evacuate went there before the storm. Others retreated there after the floods began to overtake the city. Estimates are that 25,000 were in the Superdome and the Convention Center.

Even though Mayor Nagin asked people to bring food, water, and comforts for 3 to 4 days, many people felt that they would be there for a few hours; the storm would pass and they would return home. So there was no food, no water. There was great shock when they found out that most of the city was underwater. Apparently there was no official announcement of what would happen to them. No one was in charge.

With no air conditioning, the heat was unbearable. There were no bathing facilities. The toilets, which often backed up during sports events, were useless. Sickly people died and were just covered in sheets and blankets, but their deteriorating bodies remained among the living. There was crime—stealing for sure and some reported murders and rapes.

There were no television monitors giving people information. A few—too few—members of the Louisiana National Guard, patrolling the buildings, told the persons they encountered that buses would “soon” come and take them away. They didn’t know when “soon” would be.

Evacuees housed in the Dome and Convention Center were eventually taken to Baton Rouge and Houston by buses. Many were taken by plane and bus to cities all over the United States where many still reside. Courtney Scott, a mass communications student at Louisiana’s Southern University who had family members housed in the Convention Center, said some buses left passengers standing on I-10 to wait for other buses to rescue them, buses that never came.

Also Scott said, “National Guardsmen ‘protected’ the evacuees from harm but some also took bribes to provide food and other amenities and to load certain passengers on buses first.”

Cell phones were out. Pay phones did not work. The primary source of communications was rumor. They never knew they would be rescued until they actually were. It would seem that there might be someone in authority who could utilize low-technology tools, like a bullhorn, to inform the people.

One rumor was greatly exaggerated and this was the number of deaths in the Superdome and the Convention Center. Many people who took shelter in these places spoke about seeing murder and rape and one estimate was that there were as many as 200 bodies either from natural causes or murder or suicide.

When the buildings were emptied, the Louisiana National Guard brought in a refrigerated 18-wheel truck to transport the bodies. They reported finding only 10 at the Dome and 4 of those were found in the street near the Dome. Four persons died of natural causes, one overdosed, and there was one suicide. The number of atrocities reported by the news media and some evacuees turned out to be false. An officer who played a key role in the security at the Dome said that “99% of the people were very well-behaved.”

At the Convention Center, four bodies were discovered and one was apparently slain, according to law, military, and health officials. The crime rate in New Orleans was high before the disaster; in 2003, the murder rate was eight times the national average and 52 more per 100,000 citizens than New York. There were 5,000 murders in that year and all this happened in a city plagued by charges of police corruption. So, in a pressure-cooker situation like that in the Dome and the Convention Center, some crime would be expected.

WORLD NEWS COVERAGE

While the people of New Orleans were suffering in a kind of fishbowl, the whole world was watching round the clock, helplessly. All the world’s viewers knew more about the disaster than the people trapped in New Orleans. Viewership was up 371% on CNN, 165% on Fox News, and 191% on MSNBC. The networks broadcast news bulletins often and had preempted regular programming with special news broadcasts in the evening.

At first, the TV news reporters and anchors seemed to blame the people for not evacuating; then, apparently, they learned that some actually were incapable of evacuating. Reporters on the scene waded through the gumbo of flooded streets, taking some risks themselves to tell the stories. Word was that there were rats and snakes swimming

through the toxic muck along with bodies and sewage. One report said a shark was sighted. The stories were very poignant until it became apparent that the federal government had not taken steps to rescue the people in the Superdome or the Convention Center. Then, the coverage turned to the blame game and it was the main storyline until the people were transported to Houston and other cities and even afterward.

Looting and crime were reported widely and as mentioned in the previous section, much of the attack crime was overblown. There were reports of shooting and speculation was that this may have been why President Bush did not fly to the site immediately, but flew over. There were shots of looters taking items like television sets and reporters wondered aloud what they could do with them in a city with no power, no people, and few homes.

Information also came from blogs and Web sites in New Orleans and later sprang up from all over. Again, this information was accessible to the world but not to the people struggling to fulfill their basic needs.

CRISES OF WORDS

Mini-crises within the crisis erupted over comments made and words used by both news reporters and newsmakers.

Bloggers on various sites, including Yahoo.com (August 31), Boingboing.net (August 30), and salon.com, complained that the news media, particularly the print media, were racist in photo captions. A black man hauling food through the flood waters was called a "looter." However, a white man and woman who were doing the exact same thing were "finding" food. There were no stores visible in the photos and all were carrying food products. The photo of the black man was an Associated Press photo and the other was shot by APF/Getty Images.

Rapper Kanye West was one of several celebrities who appeared on an NBC special fundraiser for Katrina victims on September 2. West was supposed to read a script prepared by the show's producers; the script was about the impact of Katrina on the Gulf states. Instead, he complained about black families being called "looters" by the news media. He did urge viewers to make donations. But, then he said, "George Bush doesn't care about black people." This also was not in the script and at this point, the director cut him off and went to another celebrity. The show was live so it was seen by East Coast viewers with a disclaimer from the network saying, "Kanye West departed from the scripted comments that were prepared for him, and his opinions in no way represent the views of the network." The rapper's comments were cut entirely from the West Coast broadcast. This made news nationwide. Some columnists and editorials, especially in African American newspapers, praised him, whereas others criticized him.



Figure 6.4. Knowing looters and robbers were having their way while the city was crippled, New Orleans rug store owner Bob Rue, like numerous other business-owners, put a warning sign on his boarded store windows. Photo by Nicholas Kamm courtesy of Getty Images. Reprinted by permission.

What some critics of the news media did not understand is that journalists are not one body working together to label people. If one reporter or one newspaper were to categorize blacks taking food as “looters” and whites as “surviving,” it would indeed be cause for concern and claims of racism would be understandable. However, if the two photos and captions on the sites are the only photos in question and they originated from different sources, the racist claim is unfounded.

Considering the situation in New Orleans with no stores being open, it is likely that all the people pictured did not purchase the food, so they are all technically looters. Eventually news media and TV viewers came to comprehend the dire circumstances and realized that stealing food was necessary for survival. So we have “understandable looters” (see Fig. 6.4).

Other comments were termed insensitive. President George W. Bush was caught by a television crew engaged in small talk. He mentioned that Senator Trent Lott had lost “one of his homes” but that it would be replaced with a “fantastic house—and I’m looking forward to sitting on the porch.” This made the President seem oblivious to the thousands of people who would never recover from the tragedy as easily as Lott.

The President’s mother, according to John Kass of the *Chicago Tribune*, put her “silver foot” in her mouth, too. Barbara Bush, after touring the Houston Astrodome where thousands of evacuees had to live, said to a TV news reporter, “And so many in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working well for them.”

Probably the most interesting faux pas in the spoken/written language of Hurricane Katrina was the word *refugee* used to describe the displaced persons. The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines refugee as “a person who flees for shelter or

protection from danger or trouble, like a storm.” Then it adds “especially to a foreign country.”

Critics argued that the word *refugee* was condescending and negative and that its connotation signals second-class citizens, not Americans who had lived in the United States all their lives and paid taxes. Most news organizations stopped using *refugee* and started using *evacuee* because arguing over the use of a word would be counterproductive to their purpose as news disseminators. It just was not worth it.

The furor over the word is reminiscent of the incident in 1999 when a staff member of Mayor Anthony Williams of Washington, DC used the word *niggardly* in a meeting with other staff members. The word means “miserly” and the staff member used it correctly, but the others were not familiar with it and felt it was a racial slur. It became a concern of which the news media became aware and it turned into an international incident when the staff member resigned under the pressure and the mayor accepted his resignation. People were furious that the man would lose his job when he used the word correctly. So the mayor urged him to return and he did. Nevertheless many who argued on behalf of the staff member agreed that *niggardly* is a word one can easily omit from conversation if there is a chance that it will be misunderstood.

IMAGES AND SOUNDBITES

The images of the disaster, seen over and over on television and the print media, were of rescues by helicopter and boat, people on their rooftops waving to news helicopters not knowing they could not make rescues, President Bush hugging two young black sisters, President Bush looking at the flooded city from a window on Air Force One, dead bodies floating in the toxic flooded water, a parking lot full of school buses that ostensibly could have been used to evacuate people, helicopters dropping MREs (meals ready to eat) and water and victims scrambling to catch them, a woman sitting on the ground next to the body of her husband wrapped in a sheet, a dead person in a wheelchair.

A memorable soundbite was President Bush congratulating FEMA head Michael Brown saying, “You’re doing a great job, Brownie,” when the whole world knew Brownie was not doing such a good job. He would later be demoted and then he resigned from FEMA altogether.

News anchor Ted Koppel on *Nightline* said to Brown, who didn’t know about the thousands of people seeking shelter at the Convention Center, “Don’t you guys watch television?” (see Fig. 6.5).

Mayor Nagin peppered some of his emotional comments with expletives like, “I don’t want to see anybody do any goddam press conferences. No press conferences until we get some supplies down here.” He later said, “The president told me he appreciated my frankness and bluntness and I told him I was sorry if anything I said had been disrespectful.”

LOCATING PEOPLE

As people were evacuated from the Superdome by bus, desperate parents eager to see their children saved passed them overhead to assure them places in the bus and did not

make the buses themselves. In other cases, helicopters and boats rescued children first from rooftops and homes and promised to come back for parents. But they did not. Some people did not know to what cities they were being transported until they were en route. So, in these cases, children sometimes ended up in different places, even different cities than their parents. The same was true for various other family members.

Mayor Nagin said, "I saw stuff that I never thought I would see in my lifetime. People wanting to die. People trying to give me their babies... It was a helpless, helpless feeling. There was a lady waiting in line for a bus who had a miscarriage. She was cleaning herself off so she wouldn't lose her place in line. There were old people saying, 'Just let me lie down and die.' It's unbelievable that this would happen in America."

The American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and organizations like Craig's List, the National Next of Kin Registry, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, as well as TV cable stations and networks helped connect families. All had Web sites, but some actually talked face-to-face with missing family members and used photos to help find loved ones. Many complained that the news media spent too much time with the blame game and looting rather than being instrumental in locating people.

A Web site, tattoo.about.com, catered to the tattoo community. One blog was about a man with a crown tattoo who apparently had a stroke and could not communicate. The site sought the artist who created the tattoo in hopes that he might know him and might be able to notify his family where he was. Other messages offered jobs to displaced tattoo artists.

News Around The World

Israel's news program: Channel 2 News: Footage of the destruction and uncovered corpses were shown with commentary saying no one was tending to the dead. The newscaster's narration suggested that the Bush Administration placed a higher priority on ensuring a steady flow of gasoline than on saving lives.

Michael Streck in Germany's *Die Welt*: Hurricane Katrina will bury itself into the American consciousness in the same way 9/11 or the fall of Saigon did. The storm did not just destroy America's image of itself, but also has the power to ring an end to the Republican era sooner than expected. America is ashamed.

Jean-Pierre Aussant in France's *Figaro*: This tragic incident reminds us that the United States has refused to ratify the Kyoto accords. Let's hope the US can from now on stop ignoring the rest of the world. If you want to run things, you must first lead by example. Arrogance is never a good adviser!

Robi Ronza in Italy's *II Giornale*: Everything can be used in Europe to bad-mouth Bush, so it may be worth clarifying a few key points: New Orleans was below sea level even before drilling for oil began. Second, there is no certain proof that the increase in mean global temperature is a consequence of the emission of so-called greenhouse gasses. Finally, the federal government has no specific responsibility for the post-hurricane chaos.

Yildirim Turker in Turkey's *Radikal*: The biggest power of the world is rising over poor black corpses. We are witnessing the collapse of the American myth. In term of the USA's relationship with itself and the world, Hurricane Katrina seems to leave its mark on our century as an extraordinary turning point.

Editorial in Iran's *Siyasat-e Ruz*: Hurricane Katrina has proved that America cannot solve its internal problems and is incapable effacing these kinds of natural disasters, so it cannot bring peace and democracy to other parts of the world. Americans now understand that their rulers are only seeking to fulfill their own hegemonic goals.

Shen Dingli in China's *Dongfang Zaobao*: Katrina is testing the US. Katrina is also creating an opportunity for world unity. Cuba and North Korea's offer of sympathy and aid to the US could also result in some profound thinking in the US, and the author hopes that I will not miss this opportunity.

Editorial in Malaysia's *Berita Harian*: What's more saddening is that there have been riots and looting in New Orleans. It turns out that in a developed country with the most powerful economy in the world, some of its citizens are not much different from the poor in the third world countries.

Editorial in *Media Indonesia*: The superpower United States has finally succumbed to nature's wrath. The US must eventually admit that it is unable to deal with the victims itself. Something has changed: Hurricane Katrina has destroyed some of the US's arrogance.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, quoted in *E Nacional*: The rich were able to leave, the poor stayed there, and it is now that they are evacuating them, four, five days later. That is the model they want to sell to us. Racial segregation—the mayor of New Orleans said it—is a question of social classes; the rich were able to leave, the poor were left, enduring the hurricane. It is capitalism, in its extreme individualist phase.

Editorial in Pakistan's *The Nation*: The U.S. government for three days sat smugly apathetic to the people's plight.

Editorial in London's *The Guardian*, Sept. 3: Such is the scale of this disaster that Mr. Bush would probably have been criticized however he had responded. ... Still, there is a widespread perception that the sheer scale of the problems reflects a shuffling of resources—to pay for tax cuts and the Iraq adventure—that has left the US far too vulnerable.

Melbourne's *The Age*, Sept. 3: How could it happen? Six days after hurricane Katrina swept in from the Gulf of Mexico, America is waking up to a reality as frightening in its force as the storm and flooding themselves. It is that America has been humiliated by its inability to prevent, or then deal effectively with, a natural disaster in its own back yard; and, worse and more important in the long term, that the world's richest nation has been exposed, in a most brutal way, as a society still divided by race and possessing an underclass.

Toronto's *Toronto Star*, Sept. 3: "A just anger is rising across America at the official incompetence that Katrina has exposed. A vacationing Bush made a tardy post-disaster appearance. The Federal Emergency Management Agency failed to speedily organize an effective command and control system. And the National Guard was deployed after Katrina hit, far too late. By then 100,000 people had flouted the evacuation orders and were in peril. Even then, troops, helicopters, buses and trucks were slow arriving. And the Army Corps of Engineers had no effective contingency plan to repair broken levees. Katrina is proving as much a man-made disaster, as a natural one."

Figure 6.5. These are comments of the Katrina aftermath from editorials and columnists in various foreign newspapers and a television news program. The undated excerpts were taken from Sullivan (2005).

A site, www.katrina.com, was the business site for a Web designer named Katrina who lent it to the cause because she was getting hits anyway. She provided links to various help organizations and agencies and a message board.

When evacuees settled in Houston, the newspapers there ran stories about what was going on in New Orleans. They helped locate people but they also told stories of rebuilding and recovery, stories that helped displaced persons know whether to return or not, whom to contact about jobs, insurance, housing, and so on.

FEMA E-MAILS

After much national and international criticism of the federal government's handling of the crisis in New Orleans, FEMA head Michael Brown was removed from the leadership position of the Katrina relief on September 9. Then on September 12, he resigned from his position as Director of FEMA.

In October, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee made public 19 pages of e-mail communications between a FEMA official on duty in New Orleans and Brown and his staff. Marty Bahamonde, a public affairs officer from Boston was the first FEMA official to survey the crisis developing in New Orleans. He sent the first message on August 28, the day before the hurricane hit. The messages support critics of the government and its failure to be concerned about the plight of the victims.

On August 28, Bahamonde wrote on his Blackberry, "Everyone is soaked. This is going to get ugly fast." On August 31, in a message directly to Brown, he wrote, "Sir, I know that you know the situation is past critical. Here are some things you might now

know. Hotels are kicking people out, thousands gathering the streets with no food or water, hundreds still being rescued from homes... Estimates are many will die within hours.”

Brown’s press secretary, on the same day, wrote to Bahamonde, “it is very important that time is allowed for Mr. Brown to eat dinner... He needs much more than 20–30 minutes” She went on to talk about the woes of dining in a busy restaurant. Indignant, Bahamonde’s response to other FEMA staff was the following: “I just ate a MRE (military type meals-ready-to-eat) and crapped in the hallway of the Superdome along with 30,000 other close friends so I understand his concern about busy restaurants.” Later news vindicated Brown to an extent showing he sought aid earlier.

COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS IN CRISES

It would be hard to even imagine a company, business, or organization in New Orleans that was not affected by the hurricane or its aftermath.

The following are some of these businesses and organizations, and what they did to communicate.

Charity Hospital

Charity Hospital was a Level I trauma center that treated people despite their inability to pay. After the hurricane blew through the city, the hospital was without electricity to operate monitors and ventilators and air conditioning. The temperature was 100 degrees. There were no working toilets, no elevators.

After the water began to rise, the medical personnel carried 50 patients up a flight of stairs. They tried to call FEMA and the Louisiana National Guard to no avail. One doctor said they were promised FEMA would rescue them but 2 days later, he said, “We’ve been forgotten...we’ve disappeared from the radar screen for five days. It’s unbelievable.”

They put a sign hanging outside a high window reading, “God of Abraham, Help Us O God.” In desperation, they went to the news media and the news media got help to get the medical personnel and patients evacuated.

AARP

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) was planning a convention in New Orleans beginning September 29. Actually it was more like a party for 20,000 people of retirement age. Most people had already paid for the 3-day bash, had airline tickets, and were beginning to pack their bags when Katrina changed their plans.

AARP staff members stopped the news releases promoting the event and its highlights: a concert, a lecture by Maya Angelou, a swamp tour, great meals in French Quarter restaurants, pigging out on beignets at Cafe du Monde. An announcement was posted on the AARP Web site telling members they could get refunds. The organization threw away some pamphlets and other promotional items that were relevant only to 2005 and New Orleans and saved other materials that could be adapted to future conventions. Trinkets

being trucked to Louisiana were halted. New Orleans tee shirts, beads, and hurricane glasses (a Louisiana souvenir for many years) had been loaded into souvenir packages. The shirts were retrieved and were sent to clothing drives in Louisiana. The enameled logo pins were sent to registrants with a letter of explanation.

On a positive note, hundreds of registrants sent e-mails refusing the refund and asking AARP to forward their fees to relief efforts instead.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELPED ALLEVIATE THE CRISIS

Numerous employers engaged in employee relations and/or community relations programs.

Wal-Mart, often under fire itself for employee problems, was the first major company to step forward and offer jobs to its displaced employees wherever they might have been. Also, Wal-Mart employees whose stores were closed due to the storm received their salaries for 3 days whether they were scheduled to work or not. After 3 days, they were offered temporary work at other Wal-Mart or Sam's Club stores. Financial assistance was offered for lodging and food; \$250 cash was available from store managers for food and clothing.

Harrah's Entertainment that operated casinos in New Orleans, Biloxi, and Gulfport (which were all closed after the hurricane) offered employees emergency supplies and money. Employees were paid for up to 90 days.

Prior to the hurricane, museums in New Orleans sent e-mail messages to institutions further inland requesting space to store valuable art objects. The pieces were transported to these places safely so that most museums could return to normalcy sooner than many city attractions could.

Mortgager Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae urged lenders to excuse late payments. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) offered extensions to taxpayers who requested more time to file returns or pay taxes. BellSouth set up mobile units in Louisiana and Mississippi so that affected employees could rest, do laundry, and their families could eat three meals a day.

In Houston, before evacuees arrived there in great numbers, an organization called NOAH (New Orleans And Houston) was formed to secure gigs for transplanted musicians. The organization's founder also developed a Web site (www.noahleans.com) with a database linking New Orleans musicians to professional Houston players. He also urged music store owners to offer free rentals of musical instruments because most musicians lost their instruments in the flood. The founder said, "Just think of the music of New Orleans on the streets of Houston."

Habitat for Humanity deployed teams to check and repair homes the organization had built. Many were lost and the organization hopes to build even more.

FUNDRAISING SCAMS

The list of organizations raising funds for Katrina victims ranged from single individuals to the American Red Cross, the agency that led the relief effort and raised nearly \$2 billion.

Most of the fund collections were run by concerned, honest citizens, but the news media urged people to donate to the American Red Cross or the Salvation Army because there were numerous scams. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) says 60% of the 2,000 sites it reviewed were registered to persons outside the United States and are expected to be fraudulent.

Scam artists were primarily persons or organizations purporting to be raising funds for Katrina victims; they reached people in person, by mail, and online. However, *PC World* also warned against the sale of flood-damaged cars from Louisiana being sold as if they were in pristine condition.

There were many Web sites with Katrina names like *katrinahelp.com*, *katrinadonations.com*, and *katrinarelief.com*. and many were scams. Florida's attorney general took action to shut down the sites and filed a civil action against the webmaster. There was a phishing scam in which donors divulged their credit card numbers or PayPal accounts not knowing the donation was made directly into the webmaster's private PayPal account.

Also, some sites looked like news reports until one clicked on "read more" that linked them to sites that secretly install Trojan horse software that gives hackers control over computers. Also, there was a scam promoted through faxes and e-mail urging investing in post-Katrina stocks. The fax states, "Any company that gets a tiny slice—even 1%—of this business could add a minimum of \$260 million to its bottom line."

When evacuees settled in Houston, the newspapers, particularly the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Houston Defender*, ran stories of what was going on in New Orleans. They helped locate people but they also told stories of rebuilding and recovery, stories that helped displaced persons know whether to return, or not, whom to contact about jobs, insurance, housing, and so on.

CRISIS BEGETS CRISES

At the end of 2005, the disaster that is New Orleans was still at crisis point and had spawned other numerous crises with no end in sight. There was uncertainty that all bodies had been recovered from once-flooded homes. There was great uncertainty over the reconstruction of the levees. Some members of the U.S. Congress felt rebuilding the city would be useless if the levees were not rebuilt to withstand Category 5 hurricanes...and there seemed not to be funds for such a restructuring.

The people of New Orleans were displaced and living, permanently or temporarily, in all 50 states. Some had not located their families and loved ones at the end of the year. An estimate was that about half of the evacuees would return. Some will miss the city, the culture, their friends, and want to return. Others, being treated well by others, will be grateful for jobs, housing, and better schools for their children, necessities they may not have had in New Orleans. The hotels and business in the French Quarter want to return to normalcy and that requires employees. But there is nowhere to live.

Out of 200,000 homes, 120,000 were damaged by flood waters. Approximately 80,000 homes had no insurance at all. Most with hurricane insurance were told by insurance companies they are not covered by floods.

FEMA's assistance to displaced New Orleanians changed often. The people were encouraged to find work and housing. Some did; some did not for various reasons. President Bush's approval rating dipped considerably because of his and the government's failure to respond adequately and swiftly and partly because of the public attitude toward the war in Iraq.

One Katrina Victim's Story

Gloria Juluke Scott was one of the New Orleans residents who did not evacuate. "I'm 60-years old. I've never evacuated and I've never had an inch of water in my house," she said, "but this time it was different."

In her two-story house in the Lake Bullard sub-division of New Orleans East, she had enough food for a week and all the hurricane preparation equipment. "I checked the attic and made sure I had the hatchet, the hammer, the crowbar, the white flag, all the stuff we've always been told to keep."

Two days after the hurricane hit, she needed the white flag. Water in her backyard pool had spilled over and was taking over the first floor of the house. Soon, she and her 80-year-old mother and two teenaged nieces made a pact that they would not be separated and were rescued by boat and taken to a dry highway where a bus was supposed to pick them up and take them to a shelter. They had only the clothes they were wearing and no food.

The bus never came so, with 200 other people, all African-Americans, left on the highway, they broke into a nearby church where they stayed a day and a half. "This was the nicest shelter we had. The people were very supportive of each other. There was no crime. I even slept," she said. "Some young men went to a Winn-Dixie and got us some food." New Orleans police later made them move because more flooding was expected. Before leaving, all the people put the church furniture back in place and swept the floors.

After another wait at another location, a Ryder truck took them to the Convention Center which, as most reports say, was fearful. "There was all kinds of disorder, fights, stealing, all in darkness and heat. I didn't sleep. I was afraid to blink. If they had told us there would be buses in 10 hours, it would have been OK, but we knew nothing."

She and her family went to Harrah's Casino nearby where someone told her there were tourists nearby and he was certain the buses would transport them first. So, she and her family joined the tourists and sure enough, boarded one of the early buses.

Eventually, she was on a plane heading somewhere. "We had no idea where we were going. They didn't tell us anything. No one in any of the lines at the Dome or the convention center knew anything either. When you've lost your whole world and then no one will respect you enough to tell you where you're going, it's inhumane."

Fortunately, she was flown to San Antonio where she called family member in Dallas and settled there. Her house in New Orleans, valued at \$210,000 was partly insured; as of January, 2006, she was not sure what she would do. However, she said, “I love Mayor Nagin. I love Gov. Blanco. I even love Pres. Bush. I count my blessings! I’m here; I survived! Every per-

Figure 6.6. Every New Orleanian had several stories to tell. This is merely one of them.

Hurricane Katrina’s 13

Crisis Communications Lessons

1. Heed prodromes.
2. Anticipate and plan for the worst case scenario. You can always adjust down to a lesser crisis but not to a greater crisis.
3. Always have alternatives. If plan A cannot work, there must be plan B and C.
4. Align the crisis communications with crisis management. What you say should be what you do and vice versa.
5. Have several places pre-selected for a crisis center or work site. All sites should not be in the same neighborhood or even the same city.
6. Have an e-mail address, phone number or voice-mail number (perhaps out of town), where employees may report their whereabouts.
7. If possible, monitor television, radio, and Internet, and print news. The news media may know something you don’t know.
8. Always, the most crucial action is protecting lives in jeopardy.
9. If the story is negative, it is best that the organizational spokesperson reveal it. Tell your own bad news.
10. Plan on not having electricity and other necessities like land-line telephones and cell phones. Be prepared to utilize low technology—bullhorns, walkie-talkies, manual typewriters, etc. But have effective hi-tech equipment available. Have power packs.
11. Do not guess statistics. In a great tragedy, the news media will want to know how many people lost their lives. Any guess made is bad. A large estimate gets headlines, but you look uninformed when it’s over. A low estimate attention also insults your knowledge of the situation.
12. If you will depend upon the resources of others (governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations), know what you can expect from each and how to seek those resources.

13. Just because a crisis has never occurred does not mean it never will.

Figure 6.7. Communications professionals should learn these lessons from the miscommunications of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath in New Orleans.

In December 2005, the president of the American Red Cross (ARC), Martha Evans, resigned after the organization drew criticism for its internal conflict, for moving too slow in response to the crisis, for having poorly trained volunteers, and for seeming to be disorganized. The ARC took in \$1.8 billion in donations after Katrina. Four presidents have resigned since 1991, citing conflicts with the perhaps overly large, 50-member board (see Fig. 6.7).

In conclusion, 25 to 30 square miles of Louisiana land is swallowed each year by the Gulf of Mexico; this makes New Orleans closer to being a beachfront city, and therefore more and more susceptible to hurricanes. Hurricane season runs from summer through fall every year.

CASE: CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE AND THE 1994 L.A. EARTHQUAKE

Rarely does a disaster cause a total lack of communications, but always communications is affected. This case tells the story of how a natural disaster affected one institution and its communicators.

At 4:31 a.m., on January 17, 1994, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake shook Southern California for 40 seconds. Fifty-seven people died (Coffey, 1994, p. 7). Thousands were injured and many more were left homeless. Unlike the wildfires a few months before and the 1992 riots, there was no one in Southern California who was not affected by this disaster.

The city of Northridge in the San Fernando Valley suffered the worst damage. About a third of the total deaths occurred when the Northridge Meadows apartment building collapsed into its underground parking area. Northridge Meadows is located just across the street from the 353-acre campus of California State University at Northridge (CSUN).

Kaine Thompson was campus manager of public relations at CSUN; Bruce Erickson was director of public relations. Thompson lived in Santa Clarita, 30 miles from campus and usually a 45-minute ride via Interstate 5 and the Highway 14 freeway. "Highway 14 had collapsed and no one could get in or out of the neighborhood for a couple of days," said Thompson. "There was no electricity, no water. Outgoing phone calls were impossible, but incoming calls did come through." Thompson used her car radio to find out what the general area damage was, but she had no idea what had happened at the university. Fortunately, it was Martin Luther King Day, a holiday for staff members, as well as winter break, the period beginning with the Christmas holidays and lasting through the month of January, when no classes are held.

Eventually, Erickson was able to get a phone call through to Thompson. He lived nearer to campus and was able to see the damage firsthand. Erickson was later quoted as saying, "In a word, it's bad. It's unprecedented. Never has a university been hit this hard by an earthquake" (Hayes & Heller, 1994, p. 22; see Fig. 6.8).

Students unsettled by quake
Northridge campus left damaged, in disarray

BY STEVEN KOSOY
STAFF WRITER

NORTHRIDGE—Passing classes and going to sporting events should have been Scott Gordon's biggest concerns during his senior year in college.

But one major earthquake later, Gordon, a 24-year-old from Glendora, had to deal with the added burden of not knowing where he would be able to finish his studies.

"Sixteen weeks away from graduating and we had to have a major earthquake," Gordon lamented. "And our campus had to be the epicenter."

When last month's 6.6 temblor rocked the Southland, one of the hardest hit victims was Cal State Northridge. Eleven on-campus structures suffered damage, as well as all 15 dorm buildings, CSUN spokesman Bruce Erickson said.

There were rumors spreading among students that the university might not re-open this year at all.

"The worst part's just not knowing," Gordon said.

Now university officials are making plans to start the spring semester on Feb. 14, about two weeks after the original date. Registration did resume on Feb. 1, Erickson said.

However, the college has not notified the students about all the changes.

"I've read it in newspapers," said Gabrielle Landau, 21, a junior. "They said they're going to send out new schedules, but I haven't got one yet"

Letters were sent out to students on Jan. 27 with registration and fee information, CSU Chancellor's office spokeswoman Colleen Bentley-Aduer said.

"I think there's enough coverage in the media that students were already aware," Bentley-Adler said.

Despite the concern that the damage to the campus buildings would eliminate precious classroom space, Erickson said there should be enough room to house all of the

Classes will be held in temporary buildings, Erickson said.

The university is also considering holding classes in such diverse locations as the Student Union, the Hillel house, the Satellite Student

Union, the residence halls, and the new education and business buildings to make up for the lost classroom space, Erickson said.

There is also talk of holding classes at nearby community colleges—Fierce and Los Angeles Valley.

If classes are held off campus, the university may supply transportation, Erickson said.

Figure 6.8. A news story published in the *Pasadena Star-News* on February 7, 1994, about the effects of the Los Angeles earthquake on CSUN students (Kosoy, 1994). Reprinted by permission of the *Pasadena Star-News*.

On that first day, the obvious damage included a completely collapsed parking structure (see Fig. 6.9), a science building burned extensively as a result of a chemical spill, and a lost roof over the majestic columns of Delmar T. Oviatt Library, with its support beams unstable. Later, it was discovered that of the 58 buildings on campus, every major one was damaged or affected.

The most unstable building was South Library, which housed the recently remodeled computer center with the computer data and mainframe. The floors of the building were shifted laterally.

The public relations' office was in a trailer that had fallen off its jacks; the ramp entrance had fallen and windows were broken. Like other campus buildings not actually damaged as far as structure is concerned, its furniture, computers, books, and papers were destroyed and disheveled.

On the day of the earthquake, the media were not concerned with the campus. The lead story in the *Los Angeles Daily News*, the major newspaper in the San Fernando Valley, had two paragraphs buried in the lead story of 57 column-inches that read:

Two miles northeast of the epicenter, several buildings on the California State University, Northridge campus—where students are still on winter break—suffered serious damage, including a science building that caught fire, spewing what firefighters believed was toxic smoke.

The temblor partially collapsed a year-old, four-level parking structure on Zelzah Avenue, damaged portions of the Oviatt Library, and froze the clock on the Sierra Tower at 4:31 a.m. (Tranguade, 1994, pp. 1, 12)

The hot stories were about deaths, fires, collapsed freeways, homelessness, and testimonials of “What I did and where I was when the earthquake hit.” The San Fernando Valley newspapers were themselves hampered by earthquake damage. The building housing the *Los Angeles Daily News*, a paper specifically for San Fernando residents, was trashed. Two Copley newspapers offered space. Editors and reporters worked from the *Santa Monica Outlook*, and printing was done at the *Daily Breeze* in Torrance. The offices of the Valley Edition of the *Los Angeles Times* were also damaged, and the staff operated from downtown Los Angeles offices.

On the day following the earthquake, the *Daily News*, in an entire first section about the earthquake, mentioned CSUN in only two paragraphs of a page-12 wrap-up story

about damage in the San Fernando Valley. It was, again, a sketch of the obvious damage—the damage to Oviatt Library, the collapsed parking structure, the science building that burned, and the clock in Sierra Tower that stopped at 4:31 a.m..

On the second day, press attention turned to the university. It was and is one of the largest institutions in the Valley, with a student body of approximately 27,000 and a faculty and staff numbering 3,000 in 1994.



Figure 6.9. A CSUN campus parking lot shown before and after the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake. Fortunately, the earthquake occurred during a semester break, on a holiday, and very early in the morning. Photos by K.Fearn. Reprinted by permission.

Erickson began the day by trying to confirm with the coroner's office whether there were any CSUN student deaths. Information was slow in coming. He relayed sketchy information about the status of campus buildings face-to-face with reporters who made their way through the city and campus rubble to find him. He was further occupied with the effort to get cellular phones to communicate with the media.

Orange County Search and Rescue set up tents to be used as the command center for the university president, Blenda Wilson, the primary spokesperson, and her executive staff.

Thompson packed as many belongings as she could in her car on the third day following the quake and drove 4 hours on an alternate route to the CSUN campus. Rather than spend 8 hours daily on freeways, she stayed weekday nights at the homes of university staff. "My office was the trunk of my car," Thompson said. "I went home on weekends and even then, it took 3 hours to go 30 miles."

In addition to the media, the CSUN public relations department was charged with communicating with the following publics, all segments of the university community: staff, faculty, visiting faculty (i.e., faculty who planned to arrive for spring semester), disabled students including hearing-impaired and deaf students, foreign students, students who lived in the San Fernando Valley, and students who lived outside the area.

University President Wilson communicated with enabling publics—the regents, heads of alumni organizations, the governor, the mayor, and other officials. Normally, she would have had fact sheets and backgrounders at her fingertips. None were accessible because of the earthquake damage. Erickson and Thompson had to create new documents from memory.

"This was especially difficult," said Thompson, "because the trauma had affected everyone's ability to recall such data. During the second week, I broke into the damaged and off-limits University Relations Building and retrieved valuable information on the campus and on media sources."

Dorena Knepper, the university's director of governmental relations, was later able to compile status reports that were then put on the Internet.

Erickson and Thompson continued to research destruction, damage, and, particularly, deaths. Many CSUN students lived in the Northridge Meadows apartments and could have been among the fatalities in the building that collapsed. It was eventually revealed that two CSUN undergraduates died in the apartment collapse, one of whom had just moved into the building the day before the earthquake.

Letters were sent to the families of the two students who died, and half-page ads in the form of a letter from CSUN President Wilson were placed in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Daily News* to express sympathy, not only for families and friends of the two students, but for all who lost loved ones in the Northridge earthquake.

Assessing damage was difficult because aftershocks continued for weeks after the quake. Following each aftershock of significant magnitude, damage to buildings had to be reassessed. Damage estimates ranged from \$200 million to \$350 million. Most of the damage was structural.

Telephone and electric lines were down. There was no running water. Propane heaters were brought in for warmth. Books in Matador Bookstore were in 3-foot mountains; bookcases were an awesome-looking mass of twisted metal.

“We also went in search of equipment,” said Thompson. “We had nothing. Not even my Rolodex, my fax numbers. We begged and borrowed whatever we could. ‘Who has a functional telephone?’ ‘Who has a computer?’ ‘Who has a fax machine?’ We had nothing. Then, we started working out of people’s homes. We had to travel from one home to another—through earthquake-torn Northridge—and back and forth to campus.”

Getting information out to CSUN students and staff members was the primary task during this period. Student questions included the following: “When will classes begin? Is the campus safe? Where will I park? Where will classes be held? Will commencement be postponed?” Many staff members did not know if they still had work. They were asking these questions: “Do I have a job? When do I report to work? Where do I report to work? Is it safe?” Many staff members were even more insecure. Some had been at CSUN for 20 to 30 years and, according to Thompson, were completely disoriented:

The students are used to new situations, like the first day of freshman registration, but some of the longtime faculty said they felt no personal emotion about the disaster until they saw what was left of their offices. Some lost their homes, but many of them had no serious problems at their residences. The experience of not being able to find even a pencil in their offices was traumatic.

Everyone was traumatized, including me. I couldn’t remember names, statistics that I use all the time—like how many people work here.

There was a real dearth of information within the community around the campus. Television cables were down, so there was little television service. Electricity was out in some places. People outside the “quake zone” knew more about what was going on than the people inside the zone. Most of CSUN’s publics lived inside the quake zone, in the blacked-out area.

TELEPHONES

Pacific Bell was instrumental in setting up six phone lines that first week. Publics were able to call in for information. Hotline operators—some of them volunteers—were given scripts that were updated daily with new information for students, faculty, and staff. There was information about available phone numbers and cancellation of campus events.

An additional line was set up with recorded information that was updated daily. Also, a TDD line for the hearing-impaired student population was set up. Students learned about the telephone lines after the CSUN Public Relations Department distributed news releases and public service announcements (PSAs) to the media (see Figs. 6.10 and 6.11).

For outgoing calls, cellular phones were used. The San Francisco earthquake of 1989 was a prodrome for CSUN in that San Francisco businesses, after the crisis, warned others of the importance of cellular phones.

TELEPHONE TREES

To reach various key internal publics—school deans, department heads, and others—phone trees were organized.

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
Contact: Bruce Erickson
Raine Thompson

PRESS RELEASE

**SPECIAL INFORMATION FOR
CAL STATE NORTHRIDGE COMMUNITY**

NORTHRIDGE- January 23, 1994 - Due to the Northridge Quake, the Cal State Northridge campus has been officially closed until all buildings can be evaluated and certified as structurally sound. Until this is accomplished, the Cal State Northridge community is advised of the following:

- Faculty and staff will be notified by phone or mail when to report to work.
- Registration (TTR) and classes have been postponed.
- Campus officials anticipate that Spring Semester will begin February 14.
- Intersession classes are postponed. Arrangements for completion will be announced when Spring Semester begins.
- Please do not come to campus until you have been notified.
- Call 818-885-3700, beginning Friday, January 28, for a pre-recorded message for the latest information.

Figure 6.10. A news release from CSUN's University News Bureau, written on a borrowed computer a few days after the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake. Reprinted by permission of California State University at Northridge.

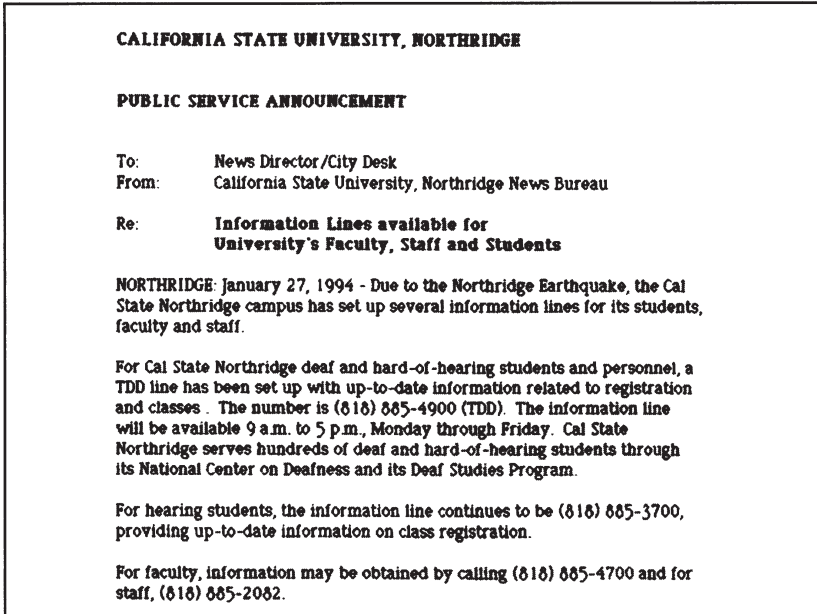


Figure 6.11. A PSA released by CSUN's University News Bureau containing pertinent information for students. Reprinted by permission of California State University at Northridge.

The president's executive staff, the vice presidents, contacted their various staffs. Provost Louanne Kennedy called the deans of the schools and, in turn, the deans contacted the department chairs, who called faculty and staff in the various departments.

"Nonessential personnel" (meaning they were not needed during the crisis, although they were quite valuable to the university otherwise) were put on administrative leave. This information was communicated through newspapers.

THE MEDIA

A backgrounder entitled "General Information Guide" was written. It included names of university officials, details and statistics of the earthquake's damage on campus, degree programs offered by the university, makeup of the student population, location and physical information about the campus, as well as the history and achievements of the university.

At first, one by one, reporters were given tours of the campus as they had requested. Two days after the earthquake, media coverage was intense and remained so until mid-February. Stories about the students who died in the apartment collapse, professors who lost years of research in the rubble, effects on students, aftershocks forcing new inspections of buildings, work crews laboring to repair buildings, rain soaking the already devastated campus, and estimates of damage were popular in numerous California newspapers, on local television and radio stations, and in the national media (e.g., television networks and news magazines).

The news media were basically cooperative. There had been no hostility up to this point. Thompson and Erickson wanted it to remain that way. As Thompson noted:

Sometimes the press seems to be out there to create sensation. Previously, we have had some civil unrest on campus and I was disappointed in the media's interpretation. But this time, when the sensation was created by Mother Nature, they were the public servants they are supposed to be. They did a good job of keeping the public informed. I understand the press because I was a reporter. They don't want you to stonewall them. Sometimes academics don't understand the needs or the power of the press, and I enjoy serving as a bridge between the two worlds.

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an extensive story on February 11, 1994, charging that the relatively new parking structure that collapsed was not designed to meet seismic strength standards in building codes. The fallen garage had become what one builder called "a photographic icon" for destruction wrought by the temblor.

A San Diego-based consulting firm hired by the university had claimed, even before the structure was completed, that the columns were not adequately connected to the concrete floors and beams. There was no media clamor resulting from the story. Thompson said that so many parking structures were damaged, there was no need to single out CSUN's.

Also, because of the unusual variables that caused the collapse, federal agencies reviewed the structure. Still, without a doubt, had there been deaths or injuries—as there probably would have been if the quake happened during a school day—the story would have been front-page, top-of-the-TV-newscast news. It is, therefore, a prodrome for CSUN should it experience another disastrous earthquake.

On the Thursday following the quake, CSUN President Wilson held a news conference (see Fig. 6.12). The media—TV, radio, print—were led en masse to the center of the campus and Oviatt Library. The site was selected because of its visual appeal for camerapersons and wordsmiths. It was the most dramatically damaged building.

On a platform erected in front of the building, President Wilson told the media the status of the buildings, that aftershocks prevented final assessment of the damage, that the necessity for reassessing buildings following aftershocks made it impossible to say, "This building is okay," and that the campus was closed.



Figure 6.12. Photograph of CSUN President Wilson at a January 20, 1994, news conference. Bruce Erickson, CSUN director of public relations, holds the microphone. Erickson said the photo was taken right after a serious aftershock. When the aftershock struck, two CSUN employees had gone to the badly damaged South Library by forklift to retrieve crucial backup computer files. Seconds before, Wilson had learned that they were not injured. The media never knew about it. Photo reproduced by permission of California State University at Northridge.

She promised, however, that classes, scheduled to begin in 2 weeks on January 31, would begin only 2 weeks later on February 14. “We were still experiencing heavy aftershocks,” said Thompson. “There were those who thought we would never open again, but somehow when President Wilson announced we would open on February 14, everyone believed her. Her leadership and strength of conviction infected many of us to make the impossible possible.”

President Wilson said:

“People ask me how I managed to stay calm and I just laugh.

I have a deep and abiding personal faith, and I believe that you can accomplish what you need to accomplish. We just worked step by step to get the campus ready for February 14. I knew my faculty and staff would support me.

If the community at large and the campus community were to recover, we had to open. We owed it to our students to continue their education. We owed it to 7,000 students who were to graduate in Spring 1994. We owed it to the

community organizations who helped us. We also owed it to our faculty and staff who needed to get back to work and find some normalcy.”

After the university president had promised to return to classes on February 14, Thompson knew there was a possibility that some hostility would develop if classes did not begin on schedule. She recalled, “I knew if our president wavered, the press would eat us alive. But she’s dynamic and she stuck to her position. One or two journalists were a bit nasty, but overall, coverage was balanced.”

The media not at the news conference were contacted by news releases or phone calls regarding the closing of campus and the reopening date. Full-page ads were taken out in local newspapers.

STUDENT NEWSPAPER

The *Daily Sundial*, the campus newspaper, normally published a special registration issue that was mailed to new students to tell them about the campus and where services and buildings were located, and to give a general introduction to the campus.

After the earthquake, the student-run paper was published from the facilities of its sister campus, California State University, Los Angeles, some 35 miles away. The editors pooled their energies and skills, and the issue was out by the second week after the earthquake. The edition featured articles about the damage, measures being taken to ensure safety, and plans to begin the semester with all courses previously scheduled.

The *Sundial* is credited with lessening the shock of what the students would see on campus and with helping them feel connected before they came to campus.

CAMPUS RADIO

Campus radio station KCSN normally operated from the theater arts building at CSUN. This building was declared unsafe, so the staff set up a temporary headquarters in a tent on the soccer field.

Other radio stations donated thousands of dollars in equipment. A listener loaned a microdish to receive the feed from National Public Radio.

The station’s operations were hampered further by rain and the noises of helicopters, of trucks transporting modular classrooms, and of horses whinnying. (In a nearby tent, there were horses being lodged by a search-and-rescue unit.) Nevertheless, the station broadcasted news up-dates to CSUN students. After a few weeks, the homeless station moved into a two-bedroom apartment in student housing.

The two PR practitioners set up two daily live broadcasts of interviews with various university officials, usually the president and one of the vice presidents. Sometimes they spoke themselves in the broadcasts. Radio talent also spoke from information disseminated from the public relations staff.

CAMPUS BULLETIN

The University Information Bulletin, nicknamed the UIB, was normally disseminated weekly. With minimal phone service and subsequently little intercampus communication,

CAMPUS BULLETIN

The University Information Bulletin, nicknamed the UIB, was normally disseminated weekly. With minimal phone service and subsequently little intercampus communication, it was crucial to distribute the UIB on a daily basis. "We kept the same format we had previous to the quake, but aesthetics went out the window. Printing was very limited," said Thompson.

The first issue after the crisis was distributed on February 25. It contained information about the library, mail, counseling, transportation services, cancellation of spring break, dates of final exams for spring semester, and a detailed map of the newly configured campus with shuttle routes, public transit stops, and parking.

LETTERS

A letter was mailed to CSUN faculty and staff from President Wilson. The letter reported damage sustained as well as progress and plans for restoring the campus and getting back to school.

MAKING THE DEADLINE

A detailed plan to build a temporary campus was put into effect. The success of this plan was crucial to the PR staffs desire to meet the deadline President Wilson had promised the media and thereby avoid media stories charging that "CSUN failed to open as scheduled." Meeting the deadline would also avoid calls and complaints from students and faculty displaced by the earthquake.

A sign went up at the campus entrance stating the goal of the plan and expressing the determination and spirit of the campus family: "Not Just Back, But Better."

President Wilson's plan included bringing in 400 trailers and tents for classrooms and offices as well as 29 portable bathroom trailers. The tents and trailers occupied open spaces on the campus and in parking lots.

Two weeks prior to the scheduled opening date, 22 information stations were set up in tents at every major entrance point to the campus. Each tent had two to three volunteers. Of the 350 total volunteers, many were faculty and displaced staff workers on administrative leave until they were called back to work. They just wanted to work, and to help. The volunteers arrived on Sunday, February 13, for a tour of the newly configured campus and for training to be experts in the information link.

Inside each tent was a table and two folding chairs. All the tents were supplied with schedules of classes and maps of the new campus. There were also maps of sites such as libraries, computer centers, chemistry labs, music practice rooms, and so on.

Eighty percent of the university parking space was lost because of the trailers and tents, so there was information about shuttle service to and from off-campus parking, classrooms, and resources.

A cherry picker went into the top floor of the seriously damaged computer center to retrieve computer files. The deed was heroic because, as feared, a major aftershock occurred during the rescue. There were no injuries, and the data were successfully retrieved and shipped to California State University, Fresno's computer system for registration.

During the fourth week after the quake, mail service was restored on campus. Prior to that, all mail had been put in storage. One by one, deans and heads of departments sent staff volunteers to retrieve the boxes of mail.

The PR staff worked with the *Los Angeles Daily News* to help produce a special edition informing students and campus personnel as well as the general public about the new campus and how it would operate. The edition was delivered to subscribers on Sunday, February 13. In it there were maps of the new campus and the schedule of classes. Copies of the section on the university were available in the information tents on Monday for students who did not get the Sunday edition.

President Wilson delivered on her promise. Classes began, as announced to the media, on Monday, February 14, some 4 weeks after the earthquake, 2 weeks later than originally scheduled. "There were minor glitches, but for the most part, things proceeded amazingly well," said Thompson. "Most students returned willing to take on the hardships in order to continue their education."

A highlight of that opening day was a phone call from then-President Clinton. As preparations were being made for the opening day, Melkane Benton, a community relations specialist for KABC radio talk show host Michael Jackson, telephoned Erickson asking if the popular Jackson could broadcast from the campus on that day. On Jackson's talk show, listeners call in to the program. Erickson said his first thought was that having the broadcast on campus would present extra chaos to a naturally chaotic day: "But we always say 'Yes,' and never say 'No,' so it was approved."

It was then suggested that arrangements be made to have President Clinton telephone Jackson during the broadcast. CSUN government relations staff members made the arrangements through California Assemblyman Richard Katz.

When the White House call came in, President Clinton talked about the damage to the campus and the rebuilding process and said, "You can count on us. The federal government will do its share."

"We got that on tape," said Erickson. "The federal government is going to help us. The President said so. It was documented. We documented everything. You can't have too many photographers, too many slides, too many tapes, too many photographs. We also let anybody who wanted to photograph our damage do it. We wanted people to know we were hurt badly, so when federal funds came in, no one would question our need."

Then President Clinton dropped a bombshell. He said that Vice President Gore would be on campus in 2 days. Everybody looked at somebody else. No one heard that before. Then, later that evening, "These guys in jeans showed up at our president's RV and said they were Gore's advance team," recalled Erickson. "I said to myself, 'Sure they are!' But they were; I guess that's the new White House attire."

Vice President Gore arrived on campus as scheduled. CSUN students and President Wilson greeted him. "He basically said, 'Good job!'" said Erickson, "and we got excellent media coverage from the visit" (see Fig. 6.13).

All classes originally scheduled were arranged. Even new courses were offered to take advantage of the disaster. There was a geology class that enabled students to get firsthand information about earthquakes and a social science course that dealt with counseling after a crisis. Thanks to Southern California's climate, some classes were held outside until trailers arrived.

Spring break was canceled, so classes ended only 1 week later than previously planned. Enrollment was 24,813, down about 2,000 students or 7%. Thompson said that a somewhat lower enrollment was expected anyway due to California's budget problems.

A month after classes started, CSUN was still in an emergency mode with limited access to telephones. There were about 100 workable telephones; one telephone serviced several departments housed in the same trailer. Where there once was a phonebook, there was a phone list. Thompson said the campus had an earthquake plan:

We even had an earthquake simulation with the press invited. It was done as if school was in session and a large part of it was evacuation and treating wounds. Fortunately, that was unnecessary. If the earthquake had happened when classes were in session, there might have been significant numbers of lives lost and injuries.

Storm soaks CSUN in additional misery

BY CARMEN RAMOS CHANDLER
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

NORTHRIDGE—To begin to understand the kind of day students and faculty had at CSUN Thursday, take a university campus, shake violently—and then add water.

The intense morning storm that triggered mudslides and knotted commuter traffic in the Southland forced course cancellations, turned dirt parking lots to mud and produced showers inside some portable classrooms on a campus hard hit by the Northridge Earthquake.

“What’s a little rain after an earthquake?” said Bruce Erickson, a spokesman for California State University, Northridge, which opened its spring semester Monday—four weeks after sustaining as much as \$350 million in quake-related damage.

Coping with disruptions has become academic at CSUN in the last month, but the rain Thursday delayed efforts by workers to finish retooling the campus for its 24,500 students.

More rain is forecast through the weekend, potentially pushing back the installation of the last 80 of 400 portable classrooms set up on the 353-acre campus.

“If the sun continues to shine Thursday and (today), then well be back in business and ready by Monday,” Erickson said. “If it rains, then there will be more delays.”

Figure 6.13. A news story published in the *Los Angeles Daily News*, February 18, 1994. Reprinted by permission of the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

Wilson hailed as force behind recovery

BY CARMEN RAMOS CHANDLER
AND JIM TRANQUADA
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

NORTHRIDGE—CSUN president Blenda Wilson said her goodbyes to Vice President Al Gore on Wednesday and was dashing in her golf can to another meeting when she spotted the two FEMA officials accompanying Gore boarding a van.

She ran to them, shook their hands and thanked them for the federal agency's help since the Jan. 17 Northridge Earthquake—the nation's costliest natural disaster—crippled her 353-acre university campus.

The men smiled and exchanged business cards with Wilson.

"We're going to need their help again, and I want them to remember us," Wilson said as she climbed back into the golf cart she uses to traverse the campus's patchwork of damaged buildings, portable classrooms and tents.

"CSUN needs to be personalized in the minds of the people who have the overwhelming bureaucratic task of helping Southern California recover with thousands of needs.

"They can't forget us," she said, flashing the cards. "They won't now."

Ultimately, what they may best remember is what some people liken to the Northridge miracle: CSUN's phoenix-like rise from the devastation wrought by the magnitude 6.8 earthquake that damaged nearly all of the major buildings on campus.

The quake-delayed spring semester at California State University, Northridge, opened Feb. 14, with the campus's 24,500 students returning to attend classes at more than 400 portable trailers or at satellite locations from Thousand Oaks to Westwood.

Government and university officials credit Wilson for her ability to pull together staff and tap into an extensive network of private and public agencies—from a local church to the White House—to get the campus up and running.

"What they have done at CSUN is absolutely incredible, and from what I hear, president Wilson had a large part to do with it," said U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer after a tour of the campus last week.

"You can see that she has this magnificent can-do spirit, and she has been able to transmit that can-do spirit to her staff and make them believe they can reach for the stars. And they've done it."

Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Santa Clarita, said the makeshift campus is a tribute to Wilson's leadership.

"She did something I don't think anyone thought she could do—she created an entire university campus the size of a small city within the matter of weeks," McKeon said.

For her part, Wilson credits CSUN staff and faculty, many of whom worked 12- or 16-hour days, seven days a week—sometimes using their homes as temporary offices—to get the university operating.

She also cites the assistance offered by the California State University system and local colleges, as well as offers of help that ranged from donated computer equipment from IBM to classroom space at a Northridge church.

“I didn’t pull off any miracles,” Wilson said. “If anyone pulled off any miracles, it was our faculty, staff and students. They are the ones who did it... Especially our physical plant staff, who gave their souls to this campus.”

Figure 6.14. A news story published in the *Los Angeles Daily News*, February 20, 1994 praising CSUN’s president for leading recovery efforts. Reprinted by permission of the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

What was worse was that no one anticipated having no access to any buildings, no phones, no power, no supplies, no access to any tools of communication and information gathering.

Erickson and Thompson agreed that the relationships they had established with the media helped carry them through the crisis. Erickson said,

Absolutely, positively, the positive working relationships we had established with the local media helped us through the aftermath of the earthquake.

There was a core group of local reporters we had dealt with before, plus many more we had never seen—some specializing in technical subjects, like seismology, even international reporters from Japan, France. All of them just fell in and took their lead from the regular crews.

It helped, the PR professionals said, that in 1992, there was extensive media coverage of a crisis on campus in which black students charged the university’s athletic department with failure to adequately advise black athletes. “I believe our effective handling of that crisis put us in good standing with the local media,” said Erickson.

Asked about a crisis communications plan, Thompson responded:

There is a section in the university’s Emergency Operations Center Manual on handling the media. It deals with phone trees, setting up a media center—all things we could not do. The phones didn’t work. We had no furniture or equipment for the media center. We couldn’t even get to our media guides. We’re in earthquake country, so we expected an earthquake, but we never thought it would leave us without access to any materials. However, we found a way!

Kaine Thompson resigned from CSUN in June 1994 and accepted a position in Boston. She said the Southern California earthquake of 1994 had nothing to do with her decision to move.

Since the 1994 earthquake, there has been a complete turnover in the university's Public Relations Department. Richard Tyler, named assistant vice president of the Public Relations Department in 2000, said the university in mid-2000 was still recovering from the earthquake. Trailers, inflatable domes, and other temporary structures still dotted the campus then. The campus was eventually rebuilt.

Staff members of the Public Relations Department moved from their wrecked quarters to temporary offices in the Education Building and then into the new Administration Building near the offices of the president.

Tyler said the university has "a crisis program," a crisis management manual that has been in existence for many years and was not, apparently, updated after the earthquake.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cultures: Foreign and Domestic

Communicators must understand and heed cultural beliefs and practices before developing plans, programs, and messages. There are organizational cultures, cultures within one's own country (e.g., the crisis faced when the girls in a Pennsylvania Amish school were killed by an intruder in October 2006), and foreign cultures. All demand attention.

CASE: AIDS IN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa is populated by a little more than 10% of the population of the world, but this percentage is dwindling rapidly. Sixty percent of all people with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) live in this region. If not treated, they will definitely die.

The very first case of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which leads to AIDS, in a human was from a blood sample collected from a man in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1959. It hit the United States in the mid-1970s and increased silently in most of Africa.

An estimated 25.4 million have the HIV infection. Just in 2004, the pandemic claimed the lives of 2.3 million in this geographic region. Unlike in the United States, in Africa, most people with HIV are female; 13 women to every 10 men are infected. That's 2.9 million women in 2003.

Approximately 2 million children have the infection. About 12 million have lost one or both parents. By the year 2010, experts say there will be 40 million orphans who will have grown up with little, if any, social structure.

HIV prevalence rates (the percentage of the adult population living with HIV) vary by country; West Africa is relatively less affected but is not out of danger. The prevalence rate in Nigeria was low at one time but has increased in recent years. In Eastern Africa, Uganda lowered its prevalence rate through well-planned campaigns including communications.

The United Nations estimates that the next two decades could see 89 million new cases of the disease on the African continent or up to 10% of the population.

The UN recommends a campaign costing \$200 billion. However, funding and donations are not the only requirements; there must be very effective communications programs to persuade people to change their lifestyles.

This case study looks at crisis communications aimed broadly at Africans in various countries, people who have the HIV virus and need to accept treatment and those who are not yet infected and need to accept prevention techniques.

Considering that abstinence and safe sex are determined to be the methods of preventing AIDS and that medical treatments can help infected persons to live with HIV, communications to persuade people to take these actions is necessary. As in all crises, to be effective, the communicators, whether organizational leaders or communications

experts, must choose the best message targeting the precise segmented publics, by the best possible method of communications.

Compounding this is the urgency of considering the culture of the publics to be reached and served. Cultural backgrounds and traditions, including sexual practices, have remained constant for generations. Even educated Africans say, “We cannot ignore our elders.” So, although medical science searches for cures and treatments for HIV and AIDS, social scientists must research this previously rarely studied subject of African cultures. Sexual myths, taboos, and traditions cannot be easily combated.

A *disconnect* is sure to occur if well-meaning persons from other countries are sent to African countries to basically change a way of life. This communications process is called *parachuting*. To avoid parachuting, it is necessary for foreign professionals to partner with local organizations, agencies, or officials who understand the culture and the people and are trusted by the people. Too often, “do-gooders” sympathize with the African plight when they should empathize. Sympathy is feeling compassion and concern for others, whereas empathy is more intellectual; it involves understanding of thoughts and feelings and sensitivity. Even in one’s own country, it is important to empathize when communicating with people of other races, religions, social status, and walks of life. Often people say to others suffering some loss, “I know how you feel.” Actually, they don’t know; they can’t know. They can imagine how one feels. They can have concern, compassion, or sympathy. But empathy is not that easily achieved. It requires carefully studying a culture, a plight. It’s more than a simple feeling.

Some of the practices and taboos of African countries will seem strange to outsiders. Some practices in your culture are strange to people in other countries. A person who feels superior with an attitude of “I-shall-help-these-unfortunate-souls-because-I-am-so-above-this-problem,” is likely to fail in the communicating process.

One must accept the fact that people, for generations—more generations than there has been a United States of America—have followed tribal traditions that are precious to them because of their longevity. Their lives are built on love for ancestors, elders, traditions, and history. True, some practices must change for them to survive, but getting them to make these changes requires a careful plan sensitively executed.

Some of the taboos, cultural practices, and traditions follow. They are not specific to one country and are not manifested exactly the same way in each country. These practices, identified by various organizations and individuals researching the HIV/AIDS crisis (see the Sources for this volume) are not characteristic of all persons in any country or region, but have been determined to be problematic in the fight against HIV/AIDS when they do occur. The challenge of the communicator is to help eliminate a specific practice while respecting and sustaining the culture.

1. A man who is HIV-positive can be cured if he has sex with a virgin; most virgins are obviously little girls.
2. There is great sexual inequality. Women feel powerless to reject or disagree with their husbands about sexual acts. “Women’s lib” is a concept they do not know.
3. A person known to have AIDS is often stigmatized or physically abused by others. Wives are often terrified to tell their husbands they are HIV-positive even when their husbands infected them. A woman in South Africa admitted on television that she had AIDS. When she returned home, she was beaten to death by people in her village.
4. Men say, “Having sex with a condom is like eating a banana with the peel.”

5. A man buys a bride from her family, making her his property. If a wife dies, the man can demand to marry (and sleep with) her sister because he has paid to have a wife.

6. In some countries, when a man dies, his wife is automatically the property of his brothers, just like his house, land, and cattle. Many wives are infected in these inherited marriages when their brothers-in-law are HIV-positive.

7. Sugar daddies are appealing to young girls who want material possessions; the girls who are very poor, often see no possibility of ever having a simple change of clothing unless they perform sexual favors. These sugar daddies often carry the HIV virus.

8. If a person is well dressed and clean looking, he or she could not possibly have the HIV virus.

9. If someone dies of AIDS, relatives blame the death on witchcraft from an enemy.

10. Nursing mothers who are HIV-positive continue to breast-feed their babies, exposing them to the virus, because the stigma of being known to have the virus is unbearable.

11. In six countries, approximately 15 million people are at risk of starvation. These countries are Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, and Mozambique. The convergence of hunger and HIV increases the vulnerability to infection and disease. Malnutrition and HIV weaken the immune system. Also, hunger is immediately felt and women will do anything, including prostitution, to feed themselves and their families.

The rest of the chapter addresses some of these countries—Uganda, Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland. The culture including facts about geography, government, and languages are mentioned as well as the tactics used to fight HIV/AIDS. Crisis communicators supposedly considered these facts before planning the tactics. For example, if 75% of HIV-infected people had no access to television, it would be senseless to make television the primary method of communications. If people do not trust outsiders, it would be senseless for strangers to try to change their practices.

UGANDA

Uganda has done more than most countries in the world to slow the spread of HIV.

AIDS, commonly called “slim disease,” emerged in Uganda in 1982. Great human suffering resulted as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 2 million people died; the government estimated that 1.5 million children were orphaned.

Yoweri Museveni seized power from dictator Milton Obote in 1986 and became president of Uganda. He learned of the dreadful HIV/AIDS statistics and was appalled. He established the country’s first AIDS Control Program. He also asked for help from researchers and public health organizations worldwide announcing that Uganda would participate in African vaccine trials. He involved religious and traditional leaders, community groups, and nongovernmental agencies, in a unified effort to slow the spread of the disease and provide care and support for the victims.

The program had some success. In 1994, the president’s efforts resulted in survey results showing that there were fewer cases of casual sex, more frequent condom use, and youth who waited until an older age to be sexually active. More important, the HIV infection rate dropped.

Since 1993, HIV infection rates have been halved for pregnant women, a prime indicator of the spread of the disease, and decreased by a third among men seeking treatment

for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In Kampala, the capital, the HIV rate of pregnant women seeking prenatal treatment went from 31% in 1993 to 14% by 1998. The rate for men studied went from 46% in 1992 to 30% in 1998.

Nevertheless, there is and has been a high risk of infection due to cultural practices and factors. Consider these cultural practices:

1. It is acceptable that the groom's father have sex with the bride. Sometimes other members of the groom's clan may also have sex with the bride and nothing is said. It is possible that these men may have the HIV virus.

2. A widow can be inherited by any of a man's surviving brothers. Wife inheritance, along with polygamy, however, has begun to fade due to HIV/AIDS and exposure to Western culture.

3. A 16-year-old girl said she was "heir" to her aunt. This meant that when her aunt died, she had to marry her uncle (her aunt's husband) and care for his children. Both the aunt and the uncle were HIV-positive and the girl also became infected by her husband-uncle (who also died) and she subsequently infected one of the two sons she bore. She was not promiscuous; it was her duty; it was tradition.

4. Truck drivers stop regularly for sex from women who need the money to feed their families. This, too, is tradition. The women infect their husbands and boyfriends who then infect other women.

5. In rural areas (88% of the population), people value appearing wealthy. This includes owning livestock, bicycles, and still to a degree, multiple wives.

6. As for religion, most Ugandans are Christian—Catholics and Protestants primarily, but also some Pentecostals. Sudanic people in the West Nile region (one of four main linguistic lines) are primarily Muslim.

7. Soccer is the most popular sport but basketball and netball (basketball for girls) are also played. Omweso is a popular strategy board game played with seeds and stones.

So, strategies and tactics had to be developed to change traditions and alter tribal culture.

Strategy

Some say Uganda used the "ABC" strategy to prevent the sexual transmission of the HIV virus. "A" stands for Abstain; "B" stands for Be Faithful; and "C" stands for Condomize, but the use of ABC as a slogan seems to originate in Botswana. However, Uganda did use the elements of the ABC approach in its successful program.

There are various definitions of the ABC approach. UNAIDS, the United Nations AIDS agency, defines "A" as abstinence or delaying first sex, "B" as being safer by being faithful to one partner or by reducing the number of partners, and "C" as correct and consistent use of condoms for sexually active young people, couples in which one partner is HIV-positive, prostitutes and their clients, and anyone engaged in sexual activity with partners who may have been exposed to HIV. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) defines "A" as abstinence for youth until marriage, "B" as being tested and being faithful in marriage and monogamous relationships, and "C" as correct and consistent use of condoms for those with high-risk behaviors. The latter includes prostitutes, substance abusers, couples in which one partner has HIV, and does not include youth in general.

The government of Uganda launched a media campaign aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at youth. They were encouraged to abstain from sex if they were virgins and to return to abstinence if they were sexually active. Persons who were sexually active, whether married or not, were encouraged to adopt a policy of “zero grazing,” which means staying with one partner and not having casual sex. Those who would not or felt they could not abstain were encouraged to use condoms. All the population—not just youth—were encouraged to use condoms (see Fig. 7.1).

Tactics

An aggressive media campaign was launched. Radio broadcast the message and the urgency. Rallies were held; posters were put up in key spots. Teachers were trained to educate students on HIV and AIDS. Community leaders and faith-based organizations, especially churches, were encouraged to work with the government in getting citizens to reduce the increase of HIV cases and eliminate the tradition of death.

Messages were drafted differently to impress different groups depending on their cultures and needs and their ability to comply. Discussion groups were organized to answer questions and to hear challenges. Questions regarding fear and stigma of having the disease were anticipated and addressed so that people would not hesitate to be checked and treated.



Figure 7.1. In Kampala, Ugandans stand next to a street advertisement promoting AIDS awareness, in December 2005. In an effort to curtail the numbers of victims, the Church of Uganda has been very active in promoting abstinence especially among teenagers and faithfulness among married people. Photo by Marco Di Lauro. Reprinted by permission of Getty Images.

A television medical drama, *Centre 4*, was produced and aired in 13 episodes. Aimed at men and women, ages 18 to 36, the production aired in 2002. An audience of 110 million in Uganda and 20 other African countries could see the drama. HIV/AIDS and other crucial health issues like malaria immunization and safe childbirth were explored in the storylines. The initial design began with a workshop for representatives of the Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH) and other health organizations. Mediae and Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs collaborated on the production.

In 2001, flyers publicizing the TV drama were distributed in Uganda seeking persons to apply for training positions as scriptwriters, directors, sound technicians, camera operators, editors, and other production staff members. Also in the same year, profiles of the main characters and storylines were developed for each of the episodes. Three Ugandan scriptwriters participated as well as health specialists from MOH.

Communication through personal and social networks of friends and family was dominant as far back as 1989. Aunts and other figures were instrumental in talking to young girls and in creating a dialog about sexual behaviors and HIV.

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations served as educators and developed prevention activities early in the fight.

Population Services International (PSI), based in Washington, DC, launched clubs for Uganda university women called Go Getters, in 2004. The clubs worked with 669 women in their first year at three universities and used 60 peers to encourage the women to gain confidence in themselves and to set long-term goals. There were presentations by women who were role models. Employment opportunities were revealed as well as information on how to get the skills for those jobs. Internships were offered. More than 40 girls found employment as a result of the Go Getter clubs.

Numerous workshops and Web sites were organized for key publics. One was an AIDS Web site competition between 60 Ugandan schools. Teachers participated in workshops in Capetown, South Africa, and Washington, DC AIDS orphans were offered a workshop to help them learn to generate income and entrepreneurship skills. There were many other workshops.

Uganda used between 8 and 100 million condoms annually. Safe sex and the use of free condoms was widely considered the reason for the success of the prevention program that helped reduce rates from as high as 30% of the population in the early 1990s to about 6% in 2005. However, a 1995 study showed that 48% of men and women in Uganda reported that they stuck to one partner; 11% of women and 14% of men said they stopped all sex; and 2.9% of men and 12.5% of women started using condoms. If this study is accurate and if it covers the entire country, it means that the success of the campaign was not based on condoms, but on abstinence or being faithful. Hopefully, that is true because the government shifted its position.

Under President George W. Bush's Presidential Emergency plans for AIDS Relief, Uganda is funded about \$31.8 million. The cornerstone of the Bush prevention strategy is the promotion of sexual abstinence, not safe sex. The Ugandan First Lady Janet Museveni, said to be "an extremely conservative evangelical Christian," has also attacked the use of condoms and those who distribute them. After years of success, there was a fear that condom use would become "restigmatized," according to the Center for Health and Gender Equity.

In October 2005, there was a condom shortage reported in Uganda. Apparently both the U.S. government and the Uganda government have allowed the condom supplies to

decrease. A reported 32 million quality-approved condoms remained impounded in government warehouses. AIDS activists in Uganda wrote a letter to the MOH claiming that for more than a year, access to condoms has decreased dramatically and that programs should embrace a full range of HIV prevention (condoms) instead of focusing only on abstinence.

Virgin Scholarships

In 2005, a Ugandan lawmaker, Sulaiman Madada, proposed a plan to promote a new morality among young girls in the Kayunga district of Uganda. This district has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the country. Girls who can prove they are virgins would have their university fees paid by him.

Madada said his purpose is to counteract the attraction of young girls who see sex as a way out of poverty. One 13-year-old girl said that an older man offered to take care of her in return for sex. Because she owned only “one dress and one knickers,” she said she was “thinking about it. I want to take a sugar daddy and just go. I need someone to take care of me.” Her mother, who had been forced into marriage at 15, wants her daughter to stay in school and said, “Don’t go to the old men.”

Said Madada, “Our area has high incidences of early marriage and defilement and sugar daddies.” He said he hoped the program would grow and help steer young women away from sexual arrangements that can ruin their lives and often cause their deaths.

Government billboards went up reading, “Saving yourself for marriage is the right thing to do.” Posters in schools read, “Beware of sugar daddies.” The United States gives Uganda grants to promote abstinence.

The scholarship offer might affect about 15 girls if they could prove their virginity through gynecological exams. This stipulation caused some concern among Ugandans who say the virginity tests are not always accurate and that if girls fail them, they may be ostracized. Other critics say the testing is traumatizing and could stigmatize girls who have been raped.

BOTSWANA

Botswana is one of the countries hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic largely because the disease was ignored for so many years. UNAIDS estimated in 2003 that there were 350,000 HIV-infected Botswana (people of Botswana) out of a population of 1.6 million, or 36.5%. Only Swaziland has a higher rate in the entire world.

HIV/AIDS lowered the life expectancy in Botswana from 72 to 39 years of age. Forty percent of the population is under 15.

Cultural Challenges

1. Women feel they do not have the power over their husbands to control decisions about sexuality. They also feel pressured to conform to tradition by their parents, in-laws, and elders in their tribes.
2. Traditional healers use herbal medicines and charms and provide widely respected alternatives to modern medicine.

3. Many skilled health professionals in Botswana took jobs elsewhere, many in the United States where there was a shortage of nurses and considerably higher salaries and benefits. Consequently 90% of the physicians are from other countries and do not speak Setswana, the primary local language. English is the official language of government and education, but more people speak Setswana. The foreign physicians also do not understand the culture of the country.

Positive Conditions

1. Independent newspapers have freedom of the press and wide circulation, an opportunity for communications. Also, schools receive copies of the *Daily News* from the government.
2. School fees were eliminated in 1987 for primary and secondary schools so education is offered to most children, making the schools a good source of AIDS education.

AIDS Strikes Silently

The first case in Botswana was reported in 1985 and considered essentially a male homosexual disease affecting people elsewhere. In the late 1980s, screening of blood through blood transfusion was instituted. From 1989 through 1997, information about how the disease is spread was circulated but the target public was still not focused. President Festus Mogae and his government developed the Botswana National Policy on AIDS.

The government adopted the ABC approach (see “Uganda” in this chapter) and had billboards reading “Avoiding AIDS is as easy as Abstain, Be Faithful, Condomize.” Posters and billboards were plentiful all over Botswana. One health official said, “The country has been bombarded with HIV messages, but there hasn’t been a change in behavior.” The problem was the publics who needed to be targeted by the slogan did not understand what it meant and it was not clear what publics were targeted. The disease became known as the “radio disease” because people heard about it on the radio but paid no attention. HIV and AIDS were spreading while Botswana was not looking.

Then between 1997 and 2002, there was an effort to identify key publics after realizing the disease affected all levels of society. Botswana was the first African country to provide antiretroviral therapy to its citizens. The support of the government of Botswana is credited with lessening the stigma because it supports free antiretroviral therapy (ARV) and the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) program. In the latter, mothers go into ARV and their infants are provided with formula so that the women will not breast-feed and thereby pass the virus to the babies.



Figure 7.2. In Nigeria, Rose Olutu (right), a single parent with the HIV virus said “I don’t mind telling people about my status. It goes a long way when you put a human face on your problem.” Oluto contracted the virus while working as a laboratory attendant. In this photo, she and an infected colleague participate along with hundreds of delegates from all over Africa in the 14th International Conference on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections held in Abuja, Nigeria, in December 2005. Photo by Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images. Reprinted by permission of Getty Images.

By the end of 2004, more than 35,000 Batswana were receiving antiretroviral drugs thanks to organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Merck Company; each committed to \$50 million through the Africa Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership (ACHAP). ACHAP is a collaboration between the Gates Foundation, Merck, and the Government of Botswana.

Tactics

Botswana has had at least two television shows with AIDS prevention themes. One is the show, *Talk Back*, a product of the Botswana Ministry of Education and its Teacher Capacity Building (TCB). It is a 1-hour weekly program broadcast live; it features interactivity between teachers and viewers through phone-ins, e-mail, and letters. The show includes a documentary or video clip on HIV/AIDS shot in different areas of Botswana in Setswana and in English. This makes the show a country-wide participation show. Then, there is further interaction and feedback through workshops and seminars at various education sites around the country.

Another weekly television show is *Re Mmogo* (meaning “We are together in this”) which is an educational HIV/AIDS awareness program. It reveals and examines new approaches to win the war against the disease and tackles issues that might contribute towards positive behavior change. The show hopes to further destigmatize the disease.

There is also a radio drama, *Makgabaneg*. Similar to a soap opera in the United States, the characters were developed to draw the listener into wanting to know what happened to them next. These characters lived in a small town where a third of the inhabitants are HIV-positive. The HIV storyline was introduced gradually so listeners would be so engrossed in the stories that they would not dismiss the seriousness of the plot as they had the posters, billboards, and radio announcements. The 100 episodes of the drama were therefore a combination of entertainment and education.

Stellar among the programs in Botswana is a beauty pageant called “Ms. HIV Stigma Free.” All the contestants are women who are HIV-positive and of a variety of sizes, shapes, and ages. The winners are seen as spokespersons and a symbol that a full life is possible even with AIDS. The pageant is featured on CNN and the BBC each year, and is a model for other African countries.

The Youth Health Organisation (YOHO) is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides sex education through school plays and other Botswana-specific AIDS-related materials.

Discussions about prevention, living with AIDS, and caring for AIDS patients were encouraged by improving the knowledge of teachers who could thereby help to take the mystery and stigma out of the fight against AIDS. This meant challenging cultural beliefs and traditions.

Peer education was a strategy in getting males and females to buy condoms. These sessions were set up at shopping malls, night spots, fairs, festivals, as well as schools.

“Know Your Status” was a campaign to get Botswana between 18 and 49 to be counseled and/or tested voluntarily. Many centers in convenient places were provided for this service; results were immediate and confidential. The target public learned about the centers from bus stop signs, print ads, billboards, banners, and radio programs. Between 2000 and 2003, 65,000 citizens used the centers. Botswana was therefore the first country in Africa to have national voluntary routine HIV tests.

Educational videos were released to educate citizens about the impact of ARV drug therapy. They were shown to patients in waiting rooms and in presentations at hospitals and clinics, thereby reaching HIV-positive patients and families of HIV patients. Approximately 90% of patients in the drug regimen adhered to it. So, the videos did their job.

The “Get-Involved” campaign, also sponsored by ACHAP and NACA, uses mass media to facilitate behavior change. It calls for ads at bus shelters; the ads show photographs of persons engaged in high-risk behavior with Botswana proverbs and a hotline number giving the target audience an opportunity to call and get help or to volunteer to help themselves. Volunteers receive training in how to be grassroots counselors. They distribute condoms and informational materials.

ZAMBIA

Zambia, in the heart of subequatorial Africa, has one of the world’s most devastating statistics of HIV/AIDS. Out of its population of 11 million, one in every six adults has the infection.

The country's first reported AIDS case was in 1984. The rate went up and by the end of 2003, 89,000 had died; 820,000 were living with the disease or the infection. Women made up 57% of the total. The life expectancy at birth is less than 40 years. The deceased left 630,000 orphaned children. Half the population is under 15 and 85,000 children also are infected.

Unlike many countries in Africa, Europe, and the West, most Zambians with the disease are not the underprivileged and uneducated. Numerous teachers and other educated professionals have the virus. Nevertheless, there are great numbers of poor, uneducated Zambians who are in need of information and training on how to manage their lives with HIV.

Like other African countries, most HIV infections in Zambia result from unprotected sex. There are numerous cultural practices that compound the prevention problem; these are some of them:

1. Gender inequity prevails. Women and girls are expected to be submissive. Older women teach young girls, sometimes through song and dance, how to please their husbands. The bride learns to obey and cannot refuse her husband sex, even if she knows he is HIV-positive. If women are infected, they can and do infect their unborn children and are stigmatized by the community for promiscuity even if their husbands had the disease first.

2. Extended families exist in which a father's brothers are also considered fathers and a mother's sisters are also considered mothers. All of the children of these extended fathers and mothers are considered as sisters and brothers, not cousins as U.S. culture dictates. The father is the traditional head of the family but if the father must work out of town, it is not unusual for women to head the household. Sometimes, if AIDS has taken adults in the family, the older children head the household.

3. Many Zambians mix indigenous beliefs with a practice of Christianity or Islam. Approximately 80% of Zambians are Christians; about 10% are Muslim. A smaller number practice only indigenous beliefs; among them witchcraft remains strong especially in villages.

4. Sex for sale is prominent in Zambia. Nearly a third of the male population has had sex with prostitutes. Nearly a fifth of the female population has sold sexual favors as a regular way of living or for occasional needs of money. Truck drivers, a popular occupation, are away from home for long periods. Some are HIV-positive and engage in temporary relationships and spread the disease (see Fig. 7.3.)

5. Soccer is the most important sport. Zambians play *mankala*, a strategy game with marbles and stones. Church activities are important in rural areas (60% of the population).

6. Zambians value education but often cannot afford to send children to school. The government pays teachers' salaries but parents must buy uniforms and books.

7. Television is available in cities and large towns. Rural areas get radio and much news is passed by word of mouth. Newspapers are not distributed in rural areas, but if someone gets one, it is passed around.



Figure 7.3. Sex workers in Africa are a key to lowering the rates of AIDS/HIV infections. Most of them depend on the trade for the necessities of life, not to mention occasional frills like make-up and dresses. Here, several sex workers are educated on the dangers of HIV and how to avoid infection. Photo reprinted by permission of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In the late 1980s, Zambia began an aggressive educational campaign. The slogan, “Sex thrills, but AIDS kills,” was circulated on posters and pamphlets. The warnings were out there, but many misconceptions remained:

1. HIV/AIDS cannot be avoided.
2. Mosquitoes carry the virus.
3. The virus and disease come from witchcraft or sorcery and it is imperative to find out who is responsible.
4. Sharing a meal with an HIV-positive person will put one at risk.
5. People who get HIV have “weak blood.”

The challenge is to change attitudes and behaviors to curtail the spread of the infection and to teach Zambians how to have responsible sexual relationships. Because much of the population is under 15, these children are a primary public. The Ministry of Education was slow to get started with the campaign, but in recent years, there has been an effort for more support. There are problems involved. One is that 72 languages are spoken in Zambia and AIDS-related materials must be translated into the languages and into Braille. Another problem is that if parents cannot afford school uniforms and books, only the oldest boy goes to school, so often girls, the main victims of HIV/AIDS, are not in school to see and hear the warnings and advice.

The third problem is that many teachers and school officials have the virus or the disease. Teachers once threatened a strike because they did not get their paychecks. Of

the two government officials responsible for payroll, one was ill from an AIDS-related illness, and the other was attending the funeral of a colleague who died from the disease. These problems create a crisis within the crisis because schools are often the best way to reach uninfected youth and to persuade them to reject old ways of life and accept new attitudes.

A study of how Zambians acquired information about sexual warnings, HIV, and AIDS reveals that most found out from friends, family, overheard conversations, gossip, and word of mouth, not from schools anyway. So AIDS activists in Zambia determined that they must reach the youth through means beyond the school chalkboard.

There is a stigma attached to those who are known to have the virus, so many people were afraid to take the tests. Some had the virus and were unknowingly exposing others to it. Then, two well-known politicians—Former President Kenneth Kaunda and Vice President Nevers Muma—consented to take the HIV test publicly. Both tested negative. This inspired others to take the test, learn their status, and if necessary, seek confidential counseling and treatment.

Television, radio, and the press were used for people in cities and large towns, but only radio is available in rural areas. In those areas, interactive sessions using music and drama or role-playing or group discussions were organized.

Anti-AIDS clubs were used with 25,000 students organized by both schools and outside organizations. In these clubs, games, dramas and role-playing were used to get the points across. The organizations also used trained peer educators to work with street children, commercial sex workers, and the military.

The Washington, DC-based organization Population Services Inc. (PSI) implemented a prevention program called Corridors of Hope in 35 African nations, including Zambia. The intention was AIDS prevention by the social marketing of condoms. Activities centered on prostitutes, truckers, informal traders, uniformed officials, and adolescent girls. Zambia's Society for Family Health promoted the program and made efforts to remove the stigma attached to the use of condoms. The condoms were promoted as part of a very successful safe-sex awareness campaign through radio, television, print, and outdoor advertising. Large musical events such as "Chirundu Live" delivered the message about prevention and the use of condoms. The show was so successful that it expanded to other cities in Zambia.

SOUTH AFRICA

The first two official deaths from AIDS in South Africa were recorded in 1982. Since then, 5.3 million have been infected with the HIV virus, 370,000 have died, and 1.1 million children have been orphaned. South Africa is regarded as having the most severe epidemic in the world because the disease there has not yet peaked in terms of the numbers of projected AIDS-related deaths. As many as 1,800 new HIV infections are reported daily.

The country is the worst affected because of several factors. Among them are the following: poverty and unemployment; low status of women; high mobility (mostly migrant labor); what persons in the West would call sexual promiscuity; the legacy of apartheid; stigma and discrimination; misconceptions about HIV/AIDS; cultural beliefs and practices; and lack of leadership.

President Thabo Mbeki, unlike presidents of most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has not led the fight against the disease. He is reported to have said that widely used anti-AIDS drugs are “poison,” that prevention and treatment programs are plots by the West to eliminate Black Africans, and that AIDS might not be caused by the HIV virus.

Making the fight more confusing for the people of South Africa, Roman Catholic bishops from South Africa, Botswana, and Swaziland, all hit hard by AIDS, held a semiannual meeting in South Africa in 2001. Realizing that the Pope disapproved of condoms, the bishops’ purpose for meeting was to determine whether they would approve the use of condoms for AIDS prevention. After 5 days of closed-door meetings, they emerged and announced that promotion of condoms was immoral, that condoms undermined abstinence and marital fidelity and even that “condoms may even be one of the main reasons for the spread of HIV-AIDS.” Most South Africans are Christians so this was shattering. This was doubly shattering and shocking to AIDS prevention activists because the Catholic Church provides more direct care for AIDS patients and their loved ones than any other institution. Paul Delay of USAID said, “What we’ve asked of the churches, particularly the Catholic Church is that if you can’t say anything nice about condoms, don’t say anything at all. Concentrate on abstinence and fidelity but don’t say that condoms don’t work...”

In 2002, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter and Bill Gates, Sr. (the father of Microsoft’s Gates) went to South Africa, and offered Mbeki what Carter called “a chance to be a hero instead of a villain” through introducing antiretrovirals for treatment and adopting a prevention plan. Carter and Gates expressed disappointment with their



Figure 7.4. In Johannesburg, South Africa, schoolgirls play “The Magical AIDS Journey,” a board game created by a South African social worker to help children with HIV or AIDS-infected parents learn to process their feelings about the disease. Photo by Naashon Zalik/Getty Images News/Getty Images. Reprinted with permission of Getty Images.

meeting. Mbeki said the ARV drugs were too expensive, difficult to take, and dangerous, that South Africa was and should be more concerned about poverty that still remained after white rule ended.

In August 2003, activists at the opening of a national AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, jeered the country's health minister, Tshabalala-Msimang, yelling, "Shame on you!" They displayed signs and placards reading "Save Our Youth, Save Our Future, Treat AIDS Now." Tshabalala-Msimang said that she advocated a diet of beetroot, olive oil, African potato and garlic for HIV victims. Mbeki told the *Washington Post* that he didn't know anybody who had died of AIDS. In late 2003, the Mbeki government made a decision to initiate a HIV/AIDS program that included the distribution of free ARV drugs, yet critics say it was late, too late.

Even with the plan to use the ARV drugs, the challenges, most cultural, remained. Among them were the following:

1. Men are socialized to believe that women are inferior and women are socialized to be submissive, meaning they have no power to insist on condoms or to refuse sex at all.
2. Abstinence and monogamy are often considered unmanly. Violence against women is manly.
3. A South African woman has a one in three chance of being raped; so the country has the highest sexual violence statistics in the world. Genital injuries resulting from forced sex increase the likelihood of HIV infection.
4. Women who have no male partners are the lowest in the class system. This encourages women with abusive husbands to keep them at any cost. Also, women who have "too much knowledge" about sex are considered immoral. So, if a woman insists on the use of condom, she is either too informed or is suspected of having an extramarital affair.
5. The early fight against HIV/AIDS was lost while South Africans fought against apartheid that was a longtime issue, a passion for most black South Africans. Blacks comprise 77% of the population. When Mandela was freed and the country erupted in celebration as he became president, the HIV virus was growing rapidly.
6. Millions of men work as miners in a migrant workers program left over from apartheid during which the government relied on cheap black labor. Away from home for long periods of time, the men live in hostels and are given easy access to commercial sex workers and little access to condoms. They are infected by the virus and then go home and pass it to their wives.
7. Homosexuals are subject to violent attacks, so few admit their sexual preference or identity and are fearful of seeking protection or treatment.
8. About 80% of South Africans consult traditional healers and use traditional health remedies. These healers treat symptoms successfully, though temporarily, and claim to have cured their patient.

Tactics

Various organizations, both external and internal, are engaged in crisis communications tactics. Some of the communications are through the mass media, but in many cases, the publics targeted do not have access to the broadcast media or newspapers, especially in

countries with high rates of poverty. So, organizations must strive to find the best method to deliver their messages to the segments of the broad public that will benefit.

Some of the tactics follow:

1. The government made efforts to integrate traditional healers into the national health care system. This was necessarily a one-on-one communication as well as getting community organizations to work with the healers in counseling, testing, and promoting good nutrition. Later some of the healers even recommend patients to clinic workers and vice versa. This effort shows signs of sustained success though the battle is not won.

2. The Medical Research Council set up free HIV testing and free condoms for miners. Couple counseling was offered as well as education awareness and ARV treatment. Mining companies are being urged to make family-friendly housing so that families may remain close.

3. Former South African President Nelson Mandela, in 2005, went public and announced that his 54-year-old son had died of AIDS. This was considered a brave move because use of the term *AIDS* was taboo. Associates of Mandela, 86 at the time, said he knew of his estranged son's illness but refrained from discussing it openly, though he visited his son in the hospital. It is hoped that Mandela's act will remove some of the stigma. He said, "We must not hide." Later in 2005, Mandela began a "46664" (his number during his 27 years in prison) anti-AIDS campaign. He was MC of a pop concert in Norway attended by more than 15,000 and benefiting the AIDS fight. Musical celebrities from around the world entertained.

4. To reach persons worried about stigma, the International Cricket Council and its players in South Africa, in 2004, embarked on a series of activities designed to help reduce the stigma attached to the epidemic. They wore red ribbons as a sign of solidarity and were joined by cricket players from Australia, West Indies, England, and Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan. On their HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, the players visited an AIDS center and garnered attention from the news media.

5. Another program utilized the mass media. An estimated 99% of South Africans have access to radio, 75% have access to television, and 7% read newspapers. As many as 69% of young people (40% of the population is under 20) watch television 5 or more days per week. Consequently, a national campaign using television, billboards, newspapers, and magazines was launched. Knowing South African youth are attracted to American culture, sexy ads and branding techniques were used to advocate LoveLife, a lifestyle that is cool and hip and safe. The images were like those on a rap album and were designed to compete for attention with products like Coca-Cola or Levis. Slogans that encouraged teens to discuss sex with their families were included also. Nelson Mandela endorsed the campaign; critics say the ads are too sophisticated or too subtle. Research determined that young South Africans recognize the effort and of those, two thirds said they have delayed or abstained from sex as a result.

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe has the third highest adult AIDS prevalence rate, 25%, in the world. Only Botswana and Swaziland have higher rates. Almost every family in the country has been

affected by the disease. Life expectancy has been reduced to 39 years of age. An estimated 124,000 die each year and 2,000 infections are reported daily.

Children orphaned by AIDS number more than 980,000 and 120,000 children are living with the HIV infection. Seventy percent of hospital admissions are HIV related. Infection rates are highest for people 25 or under, especially teenagers and women who are most vulnerable.

HIV/AIDS activists, attempting to be as optimistic as possible, say that although 25% of the population is infected, it means that 75% are HIV negative and those are the people they need to reach with safe sex and abstinence programs.

There are sociological findings that contribute to the challenges. Among them are the following:

1. The population is largely Christian and more Roman Catholic than any other denomination. The Vatican is opposed to condoms and therefore many of the people are confused as to whom to believe.

2. English is the official language of the educated population but people in rural areas speak in their native languages—usually Shona and Ndebele. Many health care workers cannot speak those languages and are, by law, forbidden from providing reproductive health services to individuals younger than 16 years old.

3. The country is also crippled by drought, a shortage of food, unemployment, and poverty. Concern about a confusing and mysterious disease is not as urgent as having food to eat.

4. The meaning of the term “Be faithful” is difficult to comprehend. Being faithful to one person is only effective if one’s partner is also faithful and uninfected. The culture in Zimbabwe has long permitted men, but not women, to have multiple sexual partners. Also, young people consider faithfulness to include dating one person at a time—no matter how frequent one relationship may follow another. Actually, this is a source of confusion in the United States also. When advice is that people with multiple sex partners are more likely to be infected, many do not realize that they only need have sex with one partner in their entire lives and if that partner is HIV-positive, they might be infected too.

5. The school system is a major center of fighting the virus in Zimbabwe and a major center of the crisis. Teachers are the career group with the highest infection rate so they are not effective role models. They have not been adequately trained in coping with HIV/AIDS themselves. Also, sick teachers lose their jobs after excessive absences. Some, therefore, force themselves to meet their classes even when they are chronically ill. So, the quality of education also suffers.

6. Long distances between home and school result in some students, especially girls, seeking temporary housing closer to schools. This is called “bush boarding” and it often results in prostitution and that increases the risk of HIV infection. When girls have sex with older men in return for shelter or money, it is called “food for work” or “survival sex.”

7. Enrollment levels are also affected because girls, who are more susceptible to the disease, often drop out to care for the sick in their families or they are often unable to pay school fees because of sicknesses in their family, or unemployment or abject poverty.

8. Research shows that persons not in school are five times more likely to have sex than those in school, so children are urged to stay in school not only to get an education that will make them more upwardly mobile but also to learn the lessons of HIV/AIDS.

9. The schools in 80% of Zimbabwe, in rural areas, do not have televisions or access to any electricity, so training programs that require electronic equipment are not useful. Urban schools and homes may have television. Most people even in rural areas have radio at home and can comprehend if programs are broadcast in their native languages.

Tactics

The Zimbabwe Family Planning Council (ZNFPC) with technical assistance from Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services launched a program aimed at getting young people to adopt behaviors of abstinence for those with no sexual experience and condoms and less promiscuity to those who were already sexually active. The campaign was based on the Steps to Behavior Change framework that has five stages: knowledge, approval, intention, practice, and advocacy. Effective communications campaigns determined at which stage the segmented publics would be addressed. Once a public had the "knowledge" of the problem, it could be targets from "approval" campaigns. Each step lead to the next. The youth campaign (10–24 years old), for example, was at the knowledge stage and its slogans mentioned in all the activities and printed matter were "Have self-control," "Value your body," and "Respect yourself."

More than 10,000 posters were distributed with slogans like "You may think you are ready for sex, but are you ready for the consequences." Leaflets were produced on abstinence, say no to sex and postponing sex; 19,000 were distributed. Most youth in Zimbabwe had access to radio so a 1-hour radio variety series, *Youth for Real*, was produced and broadcast nationwide weekly. The episodes mix entertainment like music and drama with advice. There was also a segment in which listeners could call in and ask questions of counselors or physicians. Two community theater troupes performed interactive dramas daily at schools, churches, and shopping centers. Peer educators were trained to advise people in their own age group, mostly in schools.

Other organizations also joined in with the knowledge and approval stages. The Grassroot Soccer Foundation (GRSF) trained 14 well-known soccer players to educate at-risk youth about HIV/Aids in nine schools in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. GRSF targeted seventh-graders to improve their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of HIV-AIDS. Students reported that they intend to use their knowledge. Three thousand children completed the program.

In an exchange program funded by the American Federation of Teachers, "Teachers Helping Teachers, Combat HIV-AIDS in Africa," teachers from Zimbabwe and Kenya came to the United States for intensive 2-week sessions of learning about HIV/AIDS and how it spreads. The teachers from Zimbabwe and Kenya also shared their various experiences with the disease though Kenya's statistics (13.5 prevalence rate) was less troubling. They were all encouraged to return home, teach other teachers and students. The same program produced a Zimbabwe publication, *Teacher's Voice*, which also aims to educate teachers about the disease. Each edition explores a basic fact.

To reach the HIV-positive in Zimbabwe, PSI received funding from USAID to do an antistigma media program titled, "Don't Be Negative About Being Positive." It was featured on television, radio, newspapers, and posters beginning in 2005. Persons who are

HIV-positive are provided with a platform to frankly discuss their situation and to challenge discrimination.

SWAZILAND

The Kingdom of Swaziland, in 2005, had the highest rate of HIV infection in the world. The first case of AIDS there was reported in 1987. Since then the disease has spread rapidly.

About one third of adult Swazis (or 480,000) are HIV-positive out of a total population of 1 million. The age group from 20 to 30 is the most affected. Out of young people, aged 15 to 19, 29% are HIV-positive. Forty percent of adults between 30 and 39 tested positive. As many as 42.6% of pregnant women tested were HIV-positive.

Situations and Challenges

1. Unlike some African countries (like Uganda), it is still taboo to admit HIV-positive status. Polygamy is still practiced and supported by the royal family and people think they could still avoid the infection and practice polygamy. In the old tradition, boys are expected to seek sex and girls are expected to comply, but the new environment is beginning to shun that tradition.

2. Research reveals that poverty and culture are the biggest issues in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Swazis are warm people but they have some lack of trust for foreigners and persons in the political arena.

3. Extended families, headed by the eldest male (usually a grandfather if there is one) make decisions involving the entire family. Adult unmarried children and some married sons remain in the extended family. Women have little voice but they are beginning to take jobs out of necessity. HIV/AIDS has affected the family structure.

4. The groom's family must pay the bride's family a *lobola* (bride-price) for rearing the bride. The price is usually 12 head of cattle and sometimes the groom continues to pay after the marriage.

5. Churches and other faith-based organizations are coming forward to help the fight against HIV. Swazis are primarily Christians who mix religious principles and indigenous practices. A minister in rural Mliba said, "A heavy mantle of shame cloaks AIDS in Swaziland. It is the duty of churches to bring about moral guidance to the issue. AIDS isn't about sin, it's about a virus."

6. ARV drugs have been introduced but many health workers fear that HIV prevention is being ignored while treatment is emphasized.

7. Swaziland's National Emergency Response Council on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA) determined through research that when targeting people between the ages of 20 to 30 who had already had sexual experiences, the anti-AIDS effort should be to encourage self-protection and not to concentrate on abstinence.

8. The epidemic affects Swazi children in two ways. They are orphaned, then they often contract the disease through child abuse. There was a 50% rise in reported cases of incest between 2003 and 2005. This does not mean a drastic increase in cases, but reporting became more acceptable.

9. Protectors were put in place in some urban areas. These were people whom children would trust and would tell them about abusive incidents. The protectors would tell them how to recognize dangers, what to do, and that they do not have to accept abuse. But, in villages in urban areas it was not possible for outsiders to come in and be accepted.

10. The people of this country are very mobile traveling across the country and outside for work. This would include migrant miners who may be away from home as long as a year. Many travel to South Africa to work in mines. Most of these men encounter commercial sex workers.

11. In 2005, Swazi King Mswati III abandoned a campaign to urge girls to remain virgins. The campaign began in 2001 and urged young girls to avoid marriage and remain virginal for 5 years. It was a modern version of the tradition of “umcasha, the badge of the virgin.” No reason was given for the king’s action but it is believed the program was not popular among youth. In a jubilant ceremony, thousands of young girls removed the “virgin tassels” they wore to signify chastity.

Tactics

Billboards and posters were installed by NERCHA in schools, clinics, libraries, at bus stops, and as full-page ads in newspapers. They showed a confident, smartly dressed professional woman. The message was, “I am not going to share my partner with anybody.” The organization’s communications director explained, “The woman cannot control what her partner does, but she is warning him that if he does take another girlfriend, he will lose her.” It’s a message of independence; that a girl can stand up to cultural pressures and say, “No” to men despite the cultural pressures. Gcebile, a 22-year-old office worker commented, “I am like the woman in the billboard. I took charge of my life in order to save it when I found my boyfriend was cheating on me; it became a case of self-preservation triumphing over the love I held for that boy.” NERCHA’s program is built on the hope that many women will respond as Gcebile.

A UNICEF representative, Alan Brody used folklore traditions to communicate with Swazi children from 12 and older. A story titled, “How the Children of Chakijane Put an End to Brother Snake’s Abuse” was first performed by professional actors in churches. Later, children played the roles themselves. The characters in the play are animals; a deceitful snake convinces a rabbit that bedding his 12-year-old daughter is acceptable. There is humor in the play but the overall effect is devastation. The daughter rabbit dies, the father is banished, and the villagers behead the snake. However, it leads to much more open discussion than real-life abuse can bring about. When done in a village, the discussion often leads to the audience electing a village protector who tells the story to other children from a book published by UNICEF. This way, bonds of trust and resulting communication develop. (A board game is depicted in Fig. 7.4.)

The play has been done for various adult groups also—unemployed, community elders, Christians, male groups, female groups. Each time, the audience can translate the allegory to their own lives.

Posters read, “Be faithful to your polygamous family.” If all the partners are faithful to each other then HIV is not a threat. However, if one partner strays and is infected, all the partners are at risk.

U.S. Global AIDS coordinator Randall Tobias and Dr. John Kunene, principal secretary of Swaziland's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, on a visit to Mataspha, Swaziland in July, 2005, underwent public AIDS testing from a PSI center to show the Swazis how easy the test is and how important it is. The local news media covered the testing.

CONCLUSION

Worldwide, the HIV/AIDS crisis has not ended; it just happens to be worse in African countries. The essential evaluation of the fight is a measurement of whether there are fewer cases of infections and fewer deaths. This will require years to determine. Earlier positive indications will be celebrated—an increase in the use of condoms, a decrease in the pregnancy rate of young girls, which is a signal of abstinence, and people verbalizing their concern of the crisis and their determination to do something about it.

CASE: THEY KEEP COMING—CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA

“The Canadian Coast Guard intercepted a listing cargo ship crammed with about 90 Asians off the coast of Vancouver Island, yesterday...” began a page-one story in Canada's national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, on July 21, 1999 (Armstrong, 1999).

On the following day, the *New York Times* wrote, “A ship with no name carrying more than 100 Chinese immigrants without identification papers has been taken into custody by Canadian authorities off the coast of Vancouver Island in what is believed to be the largest interception of immigrants smuggling on Canada's West Coast.”

This was the beginning of a crisis for Canadian immigration authorities and a serious problem and perhaps a prodrome of an impending crisis for U.S. immigration authorities. It was expected that most of the Chinese immigrants were ultimately headed for the United States. They entered through Canada because its immigration rules were thought to be less rigorous than those of the United States.

U.S. agents are known for occasionally intercepting immigrants' ships in international waters. Once on board, the agents determine whether the immigrants have credible claims; if they do not, the agents order the ship to turn around. If a ship arrived on a U.S. shore, the immigrants are treated according to the United Nations (UN) Status of Refugees and given the opportunity to file claims (as is also done in Canada).

However, many Canadians complain that Canada interprets the UN convention too broadly. Furthermore, under Canada's refugee policy—the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—an individual without Canadian citizenship or permanent residence status may ask for refugee status on his or her arrival in Canada. A person can claim refugee status if he or she fears persecution in the home country because of his or her race, religion, political opinion, social group, or nationality. Smugglers teach their clients how to file a claim, what to say, what not to say, and so forth. For example, Chinese women refugee-claimants can claim gender persecution because of China's one-child rule, and homosexuals can claim persecution due to sexual orientation. Once the claim is made, the refugee-claimant can receive free medical care and apply for work or social assistance

while awaiting a process that can take months or years to complete. “Nearly half of the 1,494 claims made [in 1998] by Chinese nationals were abandoned after they disappeared, likely into the United States. They go out the front door and into the U.S.,” said Don Gracey, a Toronto immigration consultant (as cited in Fennell, 1999, p. 16).

Why do the immigrant smugglers target North America? In 1979, when emigration laws were relaxed by Beijing, an estimated 1 million Chinese fled to seek their fortunes in North America, Europe, and Australia. Today, some do flee the one-child rule in China and homosexual and religious persecution. However, most take legal routes; many refugees (an estimated 100,000 per year) who do not meet the immigration requirements pay smugglers, called snakeheads, about \$57,000 (U.S) for each passage.

The passengers on that ship on July 20 told Canadian authorities they had each paid up to \$38,000 (U.S) for the passage. All 123 passengers (both the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail* estimated the number of passengers on the first day of coverage) paid a total of about \$4.5 million (U.S).

Although the cargo ship was equipped with state-of-the-art radar and navigation equipment, the passengers suffered their way through the 38-day journey. Their lodging was in the fish hold of the vessel, where there was no ventilation, no light, and no privacy for the passengers, who included 18 women. The hold was covered in human excrement when the boat arrived in Canada because there were no toilets. The drinking water was contaminated; many passengers were dehydrated. They caught and cooked fish and ate it in shifts on the deck laden with garbage.

Later, other boats arrived after 56 days at sea. Within a few months, four other boats from China had arrived off Vancouver Island. After the required immigration health examinations, including medical and identity processes, the migrants were held in detention centers, some in a small community that was a 7- or 8-hour drive from Vancouver. Canada’s detention policy states that persons may be detained for three reasons: insufficient identity, danger to the public, and unlikely to appear for an immigration process.

After 2 weeks, about 90 of the original 123 passengers were released with reporting terms and conditions attached to their release or, in the case of children, were handed over to the provincial government’s Ministry for Children and Families. Some of these migrants who had been released later failed to meet the terms and conditions of their release and arrest warrants were issued for them. The remaining 33 passengers were kept in detention based on one or more of the three criteria. Some of the detainees were suspected of participating in the human smuggling operation. Persons may remain in detention for an indefinite period. An adjudicator (a type of judge), who hears arguments for and against, regularly makes the decision regarding detention or release.

Lois Reimer, manager of regional communications at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), was part of the chain of command reporting to the minister of the CIC. Between Reimer and the minister were the following positions: CIC regional director general for British Columbia and the Yukon region (one of five regions in the country); CIC assistant deputy minister of operations (responsible for all five regions); and CIC deputy minister.

Reimer noted that the arrival of the boat people in 1999 was not a surprise. There had been prodromes: Boats carrying migrants had previously arrived off the coast of California, and in Australia they had been arriving for at least 7 years. “Because of our international partners, the United States and Australia,” Reimer said, “we were very

much aware of human smuggling and that it was entirely possible that Canada could receive arrivals of this nature. We knew we had to plan.”

The crisis management plan, entitled *Communications Strategy: Boat Arrivals of Migrants to British Columbia* (1999), involved the CIC as well as “partner” agencies (according to Reimer) that shared responsibility in responding to boat arrivals of migrants in Canada. These partner agencies included the Department of National Defence Coast Guard (DNDcg), Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA); and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Reimer also considered the United States and Australia part of the partnership because the smuggling of people across borders is a global crisis affecting many countries.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS IN THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The CIC was the lead organization in the crisis planning strategy. According to the crisis management plan, its mission was to ensure a sound immigration and refugee system that was not subject to abuse. At the same time, CIC worked to ensure that persons seeking entry into Canada were dealt with under the provisions of the country’s Immigration Act, respecting Canadian laws. According to the plan, the CIC also took on the role of media spokesperson and was responsible for ensuring that the partner departments and agencies responded to issues within their jurisdiction.

The crisis management plan mandated that the DND (also known as the Canadian Forces) was to “protect Canada, contribute to world peace, and protect Canadian interests abroad. The Canadian Forces defined Canada by protecting its territory and areas of jurisdiction, helping civil authorities protect and sustain national interests, and assisting in national emergencies” (*Communications Strategy*, 1999, p. 3). The DND thus played a leading role in the event of a marine arrival of migrants because it was responsible for detecting and then reporting to the CIC any suspicious vessels meeting the profile of a migrant smuggling vessel in or near Canadian waters.

Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada was mandated to “ensure the safe and environmentally responsible use of Canada’s waters, support understanding and management of the ocean’s resources, facilitate the use of our waters for shipping, recreation and fishing, and provide marine expertise in support of Canada’s domestic and international interests” (*Communications Strategy*, 1999, p. 3). In the event of a marine arrival of migrants, the Coast Guard, like the DND, had the responsibility of identifying suspicious vessels. But the Coast Guard had the additional responsibility of leading the search-and-rescue operations at sea.

The CCRA was responsible for ensuring that Canadians were provided with the highest possible degree of protection from the smuggling of drugs and other dangerous goods. In the event of a vessel carrying illegal migrants, the CCRA had a variety of tasks designed to target and identify vessels and containers of drugs (*Communications Strategy*, 1999, p. 4).

“Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)/Immigration & Passport (I & P) was mandated to combat human smuggling and other criminal viola-tions of the Immigration Act by working with CIC and other organizations in investigating and identifying

criminal organizations involved in smuggling illegal migrants into Canada” (Communications Strategy, 1999, p. 4). In the event of a boat arrival of illegal migrants, the RCMP played a leading role in the initial response once a vessel or container had been secured and was in the control of Canadian authorities. The RCMP was also responsible for leading the criminal investigation of the smuggling operation (e.g., determining how the migrants got to Canada, identifying the smugglers and whether Canadians were involved, etc.).

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

All partner agencies took responsibility for media relations when their respective agency or service was at issue. The following were fundamental questions for which the public and the media wanted answers:

1. How did these people get to Canadian shores?
2. Why didn't the government stop the ship before it got into Canadian territory?
3. Why wasn't Canada ready for the arrival of this ship—are there not early warning systems in place?
4. Why didn't Canada just push the ship away from Canadian shores? Why not just let the container go on to the United States where it is destined?
5. What rights do these migrants have once they are in Canada?
6. What responsibility is there on the part of the shipping company bringing containers of stowaways to Canada?
7. Is there enough vigilance of commercial vessels at Canadian ports?
8. How many containers of migrants are you not finding?
9. How much is this all costing Canadian taxpayers?
10. Is Canada being compassionate enough? Is Canada being too compassionate?

There were these additional communications considerations:

1. The need to keep a multitude of stakeholders appropriately informed with a view toward making them communications allies or at least preventing them from becoming critics and possibly using erroneous information.
2. The media's demands for extensive background information on issues related to the crisis.
3. The media's demands for visuals regardless of the operational circumstances.
4. The difficulty of communicating regular updates.
5. Commentary by critics who themselves may be poles apart on the issue and who may create a tension in which operational communications must be carried out—keeping a balanced message on enforcement and facilitation is difficult.
6. Limited CIC communications resources to provide support on site and to ensure that the necessarily limited number of spokespersons throughout the department have consistent messaging.

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

The communications objectives of the partner agencies were as follows:

1. To ensure the public knows that the government has the situation under control and is managing it effectively within the scope of Canadian law and the changing circumstances.
2. To ensure the public knows that Canada is working in partnership with other governments and, internally, that its own departments and agencies (CIC, RCMP, DND, Coast Guard, Canada Customs) are working together to combat human smuggling.
3. To respect the privacy of individuals as per Canada's Privacy Act and to respect the confidentiality of ongoing police investigations, while at the same time honoring the communications principles of open and transparent government.
4. To provide the public with information about the challenges faced by the governments of other countries with respect to maintaining open borders, on the one hand, and controlling illegal migration and human smuggling, on the other.
5. To ensure that government communications are carried out in an effective, coordinated manner.

KEY PUBLICS

Internal Publics

Concerned federal ministers
Members of Parliament
The CIC and partner agencies
Affected provincial government ministries

External Publics

Other levels of government, including the Province of British Columbia and affected municipalities
The legal community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
The news media
The public at large
Foreign governments and international partner agencies

Regarding key publics, Reimer noted that "Canadian officials regularly discuss the challenges that this activity (the smuggling of people) presents with officials from other concerned countries. To this end, Canada participated in the 20th International Asian Organized Crime Conference that was held in Toronto."

"We were part of the overall plan," said Reimer. "Security was a major part of the crisis plan because no one knew whether we would be dealing with people who were armed and dangerous." In the crisis communications section of the CMP, Reimer, the lead spokesperson, advised, "You should know, in advance, what your key messages are."

What should we say about the health and safety of these people? What should be our first priority as a government agency? This we planned before the first boat arrived, although it was revised several times as more boats arrived.”

Reimer remembers the arrival of the first boat: “We had an operational plan that we would activate once a suspicious boat was confirmed. I was planning my usual one-month vacation with my kids. I was thinking, ‘I’ll just finish this and this and then I’ll be on my way.’ Then, the alert came in over my e-mail. My first reaction was, This is a joke.’ But, it was not a joke. There was a boat arrival. We saw the plan become real.”

She said the arrival of the Chinese immigrants was big news. Parliament was not “sitting” (not in session) so there were no other major government issues to keep the news media occupied. “We saw unprecedented media interest of this issue. We are used to a fair amount of attention—drug trafficking and other high-profile cases, but the reaction to this issue was unprecedented.”

The public reaction was mixed, according to Reimer. Some Canadians responded with humanitarian support saying, “This is a tragic situation and these people should be allowed to stay and more of them should be allowed to come. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees urged Canada to keep its doors open. Anybody who sets foot on Canadian soil has the right to be defended by counsel, has the right to Canadian processes.” Others objected, arguing that “Canada doesn’t need this. It’s time to toughen the law.” People who lived near the area where the migrants were detained complained as well: “Not In My Back Yard [NIMBY] because traditionally immigrants and refugees were not kept there.”

Reimer said, “We saw the positioning of special Web sites. We saw surveys come about. There were town hall meetings. Public opinion polls were everywhere. We saw media editorials, forums, and debates of this one issue. Everyone was asking, ‘What do you think? Should they come? Should they go? Should we send the boat back? Should we allow them in?’”

The public demand for information was also extensive. Canadian citizens were looking for statistics and background data. They wanted to know how the refugee program worked; how many refugee claims were made across the country; how many were made at the airport, in Quebec, and in Ontario. They asked, “Why do we detain?” and “When do we detain?” They wanted backgrounders.

Reimer was part of a 2-person communications branch, although she had the additional assistance of a co-op student during the summer (see Fig. 7.5). The branch was required to research and come up with answers to questions and develop a wide range of communication tools, including media advisories, backgrounders, and letters to the various publics, and information to the media.

Reimer commented on the in-depth media coverage:

We saw media go to other countries to compare the situation in Canada with the situation in these other countries. Our radio and television stations sent staff members to Beijing, Australia, New York. From July to October, less than 3 months, British Columbia television news had 980 minutes devoted to this issue. A news story is usually 1.5 minutes long, so you can see this was quite phenomenal. The two of us took 1,200 media calls at our regional headquarters alone and each required some significant work and organizing interviews and press conferences. We had 100 front-page stories during that period and 50 editorial cartoons [see Figs. 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8].

Then we had calls from the public and the majority of those went to one of three centralized call centers across the country. About 96% of the public was against us allowing the boats in. They were against our processing the migrants. So, we got nasty calls like, “Why am I paying your pension? You can’t manage the program!” Many others went to the Regional Director General’s office or the minister’s office [Minister of Citizenship and Immigration] and there were letters.

Like many other optimistic crisis communicators, Reimer viewed the crisis as an opportunity—in this case to explain the government’s immigration/refugee program and services. However, the crisis communicator must be careful to respond accurately and appropriately to questions. For example, if the crisis involved people who got sick after eating E. colitainted food and a reporter asked the restaurant owner, “How could the disease have been contracted?” the crisis communicator would not talk about the restaurant’s use of low-fat oil for cooking french fries. Reimer, however, was in a situation in which the responses the media wanted were actual descriptions of the work of the CIC.

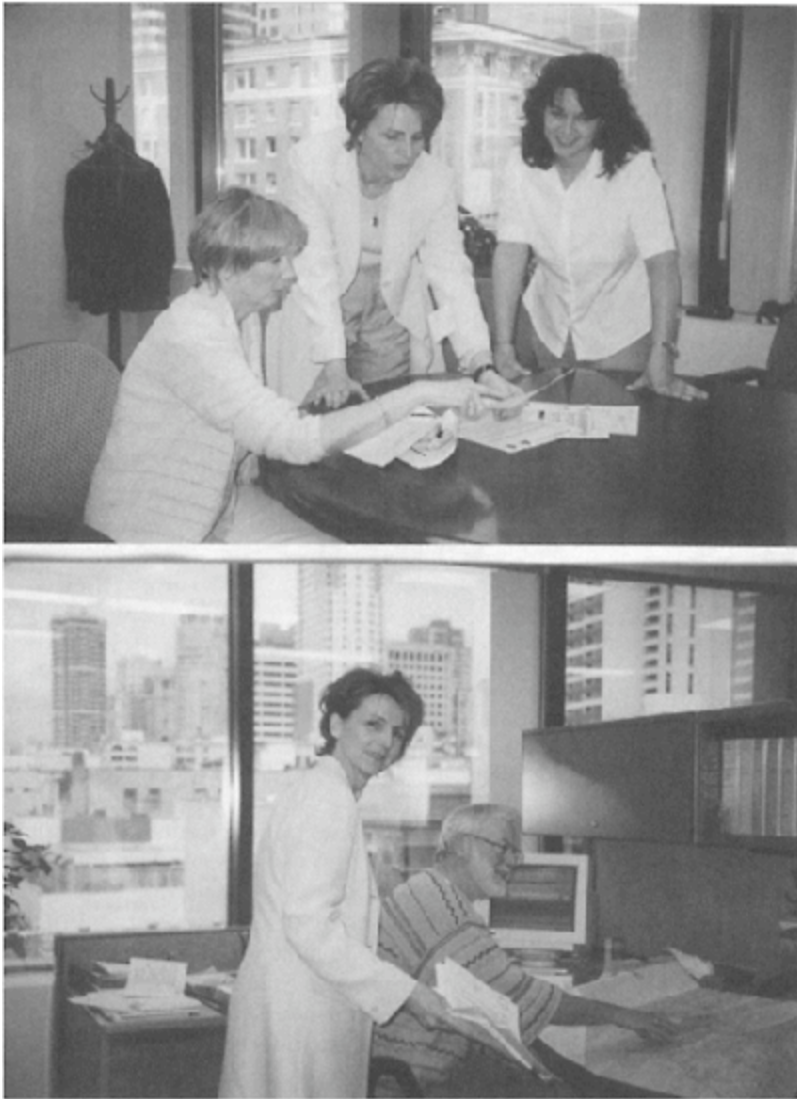


Figure 7.5. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). In the top photograph, Lois Reimer (center), manager of communications, discusses strategies with Janis Fergusson (left), communications adviser, and Denny Falls, executive assistant to regional director general. In the bottom photograph, Reimer consults with Dan Grant, planning section chief, Incident Command. CIC offices are located in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.



Figure 7.6. Fifty political cartoons published in Canadian newspapers in 1999–2000 reflected the attitudes of Canadians about the arrival of boatloads of Chinese immigrants. The cartoons also reflected questions spokespersons from Citizenship and Immigration Canada had to answer. This cartoon, published in the *Globe and Mail* on September 14, 1999, commented on the complaint that immigrants found it easier to enter North America through Canada than through the United States. Reprinted with permission from the *Globe and Mail*.

Reimer said, “A quarter-page ad costs \$7,000 in the *Vancouver Sun*. This was an opportunity for free advertising. It came down to getting a better understanding of the government program. And our immigration act is very, very technical, very difficult to understand.” She had to explain the act in detail to reporters and they had to listen because they had to understand it to write their stories.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

In addition to the Canadian news media, there was interest from the international news media—CNN, the *New York Times*, and the *Seattle Times*, among others. The proximity of Canada played a great part in this media interest. Even though Australia had been receiving migrant boats for 7 years when the first Chinese boat reached Canada’s shores in 1999, the Australian stories went largely unreported because the issue did not affect life in North America.

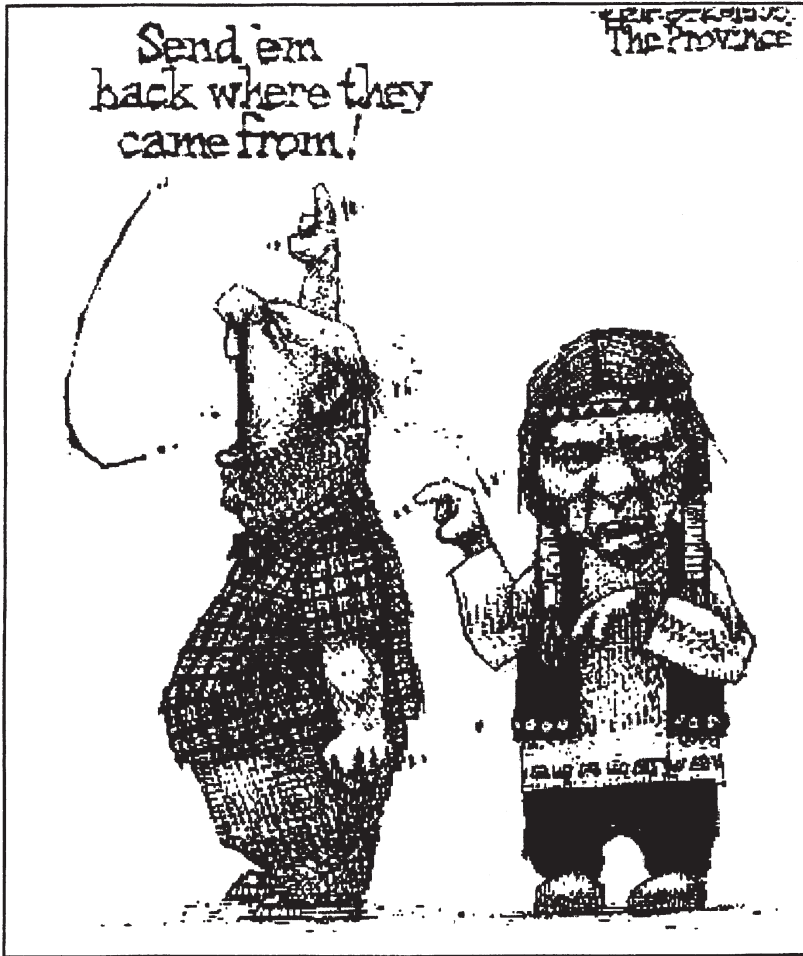


Figure 7.7. This political cartoon in the *Vancouver Province* on July 26, 1999, like many others in Canadian newspapers during 1999, expressed the views of Canadian citizens. Many Canadians opposed the arrival of the boatloads of Chinese immigrants, but many others approved. Reprinted with permission from the *Vancouver Province*.

In January 2000, when some containers of Chinese immigrants arrived in Seattle and two arrived in Canada, it came to light that the two latter boats were destined for Seattle but had run off course. The primary question asked of Reimer was, "If they were destined for the United

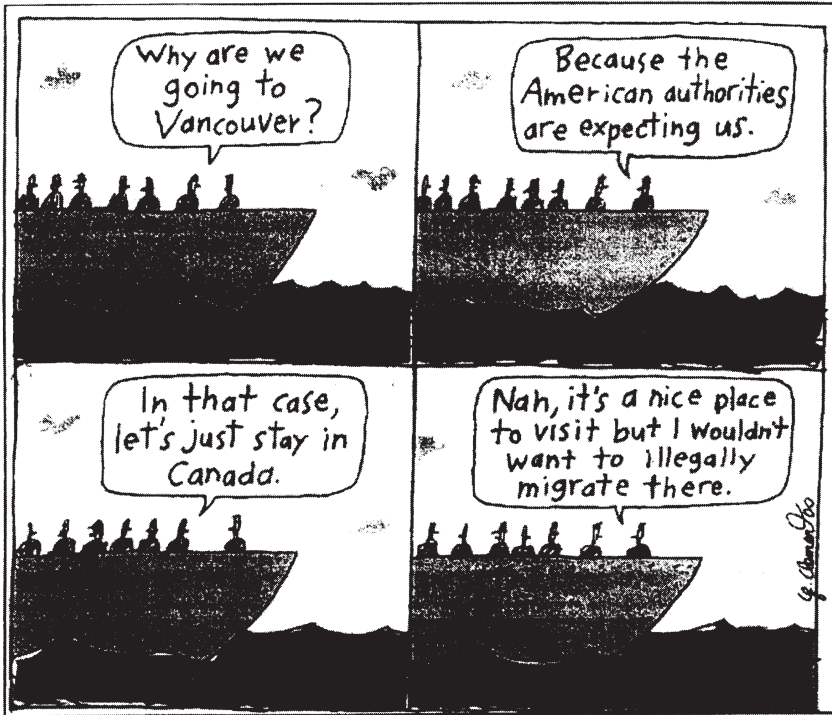


Figure 7.8. This cartoon appeared in the *National Post* on January 5, 2000. Reprinted with permission of G.Clement and the *National Post*.

States, why did you even open the containers? Why not just let them go there?" Reimer's response was, "First of all, Canada is a humanitarian nation. If we are aware of people inside a closed container, our first concern is the well-being of those people. Secondly, why would we just push the problem to the United States?"

"We saw a lot of comparisons to the United States and Australia," said Reimer, "because we have like systems. One reporter did an in-depth article in which he compared both the American and Canadian systems and what was reported was that, unlike a lot of myth out there, the American system has a 50% acceptance rate of refugees and the Canadian system accepts 54%. A lot of Canadians, including the media, were saying that Americans are a lot tougher; they do things a lot quicker. This was a real myth-buster."

China claimed that if Canada didn't have such a generous refugee determination program, its people would not try to make the trip. "This was not an issue we want to debate in the news media," said Reimer. "It's a very complex issue, and senior officials from both countries meet regularly to discuss concerns such as human smuggling and returning Chinese citizens who are found not to be refugees."

Politics

Political debates developed between the current Canadian government and the opposition party. Reimer's position as representative of a government agency was to support current

Canadian law, not to debate its merits. Furthermore, the government's Communications Policy required that public servants so restrict themselves.

"We must be very cognizant of the politics around an issue," said Reimer, "but my job as departmental communications manager is to speak to the laws of the land and not to get into conjecture around whether the laws are good or bad; it's not my position to do that. My job is one of explaining how Canada's immigration and refugee legislation works."

Integrity Issues

Reimer said the challenge to the integrity of her program was dealing with a discretionary program that at times appeared to be interpreted inconsistently: "While the perception might have been that [the] CIC was treating this group of clients differently from others, the reality is that no two cases are alike and there were significant differences in case facts."

Risk Issues

A risk communications strategy was necessary to cope with the Chinese migrant crisis. Canadians were concerned that the refugee-claimants might be carrying such diseases as tuberculosis and hepatitis B. They wanted to know, "Will my kids get sick? Will I get a disease? Are these people criminals? How do I know I'm safe from them?"

One of the important components of the communications strategy was informing the various audiences of the medical and criminal screening that took place immediately after the migrants were brought to Canadian shores.

Costs to Taxpayers

Like U.S. citizens, Canadians are concerned about where their tax dollars are going and often complain about supporting people they perceive as taking advantage of the government's generosity. The arrival of the boat people added fuel to that argument: "Why don't we pay for Canadians first? If the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are guarding these migrants, then who is guarding my community? I'm paying taxes to guard them and I am unguarded. I don't have a lawyer, yet these people get lawyers." Canadians also questioned whether Canada could afford to be so generous. The provincial government expressed to the federal government the pressures it had to deal with on the refugee issue.

Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees that "anyone who steps foot on Canadian territory" automatically has basic human rights, such as the right to legal representation and the right to have due process under Canadian laws. During the crisis, it was important that Canadians understood that such rights extended to the Chinese migrants.

Reimer agreed that the detention of the migrants was costly: "We spent about \$2.8 million each month to detain about 420 migrants. Citizens want to know what if we get 2,000 or 3,000 immigrants?"

There was an effort made to feed the detained Chinese migrants a diet that was sensitive to their culture. Rumor was that the migrants said their food wasn't hot enough.

Reimer noted:

There was a negative public reaction when it turned out that the restaurant providing the food was reported to be one of the best in Victoria. We didn't seek the best in town but it turned out that way. An editorial cartoon illustrating the issue of the day was published showing the migrants as demanding and ordering officials around.

Short of a crystal ball, we don't know if more people are coming from China like in 1999- People seem to think that the government knows and ask, "How many are we going to get?" People don't announce their arrivals to us. We may know about twelve hours before they touch down on our shore, but people think we were expecting the boat all along. We are planning for more because we see what's going on in Australia and the United States. I would think that we will get more in the spring, but may get none.

LESSONS LEARNED

Listing her own lessons, Reimer said the following:

We [Office of Immigration] own the crisis. The RCMP and the Coast Guard are involved, but it's our department's job to communicate. Maybe because the word "immigration" is in our name. We must live with that.

We must anticipate and plan accordingly. For example, we're going to have removals of individuals who are found not to be refugees, so we should plan our communications in advance.

We must consult and compromise with partners. We have no line of authority with the RCMP, for example. There was criticism that the RCMP used police dogs in [its] security work. Was that appropriate for the migrants? So, the RCMP planned to introduce the community to the dogs. There was also a day in which community members could walk through the detention center to see how the migrants are treated.

SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

Reimer felt that what made the communications work well was that she was "inside the room where the decisions were made, part of the decision making, not an add-on. We were part of the decision from start to finish. That may mean working at 2 a.m. when they're reopening those containers, so you have a real accurate feeling of what's going on. You need to understand the environment. You can't speak from your ivory tower; people won't believe you know or are part of what's going on."

Another successful outcome was feeding the needs of the media and the public. This included preparing tools and strategies, information, and flowcharts.

A third success factor was thinking ahead to be prepared for what might come up. Also, Reimer was able to hire another person so that they could plan for what had not yet happened and develop tools. They planned to prepare communications tools for migrants in their language. They also realized they were fortunate that the first four boats did not have tragic outcomes, such as dead bodies, as the containers arriving in Seattle had. No Canadian personnel, boat passengers, or boat crew members were harmed. These possibilities must be a part of crisis planning.

Finally, Reimer said that “keeping a sense of humor [was a] key.” One night while waiting for a boat to come in, Reimer said the boat was expected to arrive “in the next hour,” but it didn’t come in until 8 hours later. She ended up leaving for home at 11:30 p.m., stopping along the way to get gas for her government vehicle. When the gas station attendant saw her Government of Canada Citizenship and Immigration gas card, he remarked, “You know there’s a radio contest going on right now. Anybody can guess how many migrants are on the current ship.” Reimer said she tried to keep her composure. Then the attendant said, “If I win, I get a T-shirt that says ‘Not tonight, Honey, I have a migrant.’” Reimer laughed to herself, asked for a receipt, and left.

Reimer won the Don Rennie Memorial Award for excellence in government communications for her work on the Chinese immigrants crisis. The award was presented by the Public Relations Society of Canada.

Reimer reported that no new cases became known to her through 2005. The events of 9/11 have heightened awareness of the presence of undocumented immigrants crossing the borders from Canada to the United States and surveillance has been so intensified that it is possible that the smuggling of people has probably ceased, at least temporarily.

CASE: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AND THE BONFIRE TRAGEDY

Eleven Texas A&M University students and one alumnus were killed and 27 others were injured when the traditional Aggie bonfire they were building collapsed at 2:42 a.m. on November 18, 1999. The burning of the bonfire and the celebration surrounding it were part of a detailed 2-day timeline of events leading to the November 26 football game with the University of Texas. The bonfire would represent the Aggies’ burning determination to defeat its archrival, commonly called (in lowercase letters) “t.u.”

The tragedy made big news in Texas but also made newspapers and broadcast news nationally and internationally. *USA Today* quoted the university’s president, Ray C. Bowen, as expressing “unspeakable grief.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer’s* headline read, “Collapse Kills 11 at Texas A&M.” (Jones, 1999). The 12th victim died the next day. And in France, *Le Matin* had the headline “Une pyramide meurtriere” (a pyramid of death).

The 32-page *Bonfire Briefing Book* detailed the history of the event as well as the precautions, maps, charts, and diagrams for erecting the 55-foot tall, 45-foot wide log monument. The erection of the bonfire pyramid had begun on October 3, 1999, with the cutting of trees from land that farmers needed cleared; an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 logs were to be used. On October 30, the center pole, made of two utility poles, arrived, and on November 6, the center pole was raised and anchored 10 feet in the ground, 55 feet

above. "Stacking" logs would take 2 to 3 weeks. There would be six stacks with the fifth and sixth stacks wired together on the day before the bonfire (see Fig. 7.9). The book included a detailed timeline of the festivities planned for November 25, down to the arrangement of the media vehicles, the football team's arrival, when the torches would be thrown and the bonfire lit, and which yells the cheerleaders would do. But in 1999, the day of festivities never came. The accident occurred during the stacking phase.

TRADITION AND CULTURE

The bonfire tradition at Texas A&M began in 1909, with the first bonfire made from a simple trash heap. Tradition is the operative word; it is capitalized in some Texas A&M publications. Many, especially non-Texans, wondered, "All these years of building the bonfire and there's no expertise?" "What's the big deal?" "What a wasteful reason to die!" "Students are a university's most precious resource. How can we risk them?" "Why waste

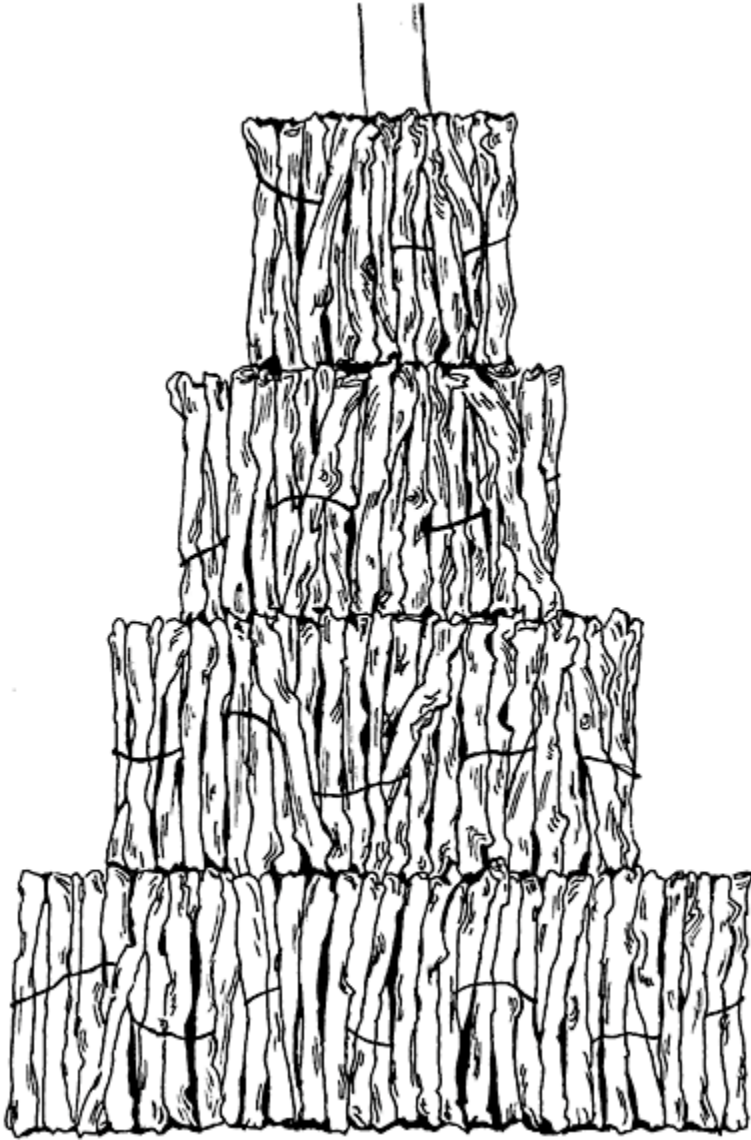


Figure 7.9. An artist's sketch of the bonfire built by students shows the telephone poles spliced together to make the center pole that supports the structure. The spliced poles are also embedded underground. The logs on each stack are held together in groups of 3 with baling wire. Drawing by Gina Arnold.

people and trees?" "Start a new tradition—build a house for Habitat for Humanity." "It's simple—People were killed; stop the tradition." But it was not so simple because the bonfire was part of the Texas A&M culture.

Five thousand students put in 125,000 work hours each year to build the bonfire. Aggies participated every year, and from 1935 on, the bonfire was a monument of logs, growing bigger every year until 1970, when a limit was placed on its size. University alumni and community members returned each year to see the bonfire blaze. In 1963, the bonfire was canceled because of the assassination of President John Kennedy, so in 1994 the class of 1964 was invited to participate in the lighting of the bonfire; the students came in large numbers, eager to have their moment.

Some students risk their grades to take time to build the bonfire. A&M student John Comstock, the last accident victim to be released (in April 2000) from the hospital, had been pinned under the rubble for 7 hours. His injuries left him partially paralyzed, and his left leg had to be amputated above the knee. Still, he said he wanted the bonfire tradition to continue. Some parents of students who were killed also wanted the tradition to continue. Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush, whose library is located on the Texas A&M campus, was asked if the tradition should continue. He replied, "Absolutely" (Kirsch, 1999b).

Aggies say "you have to be there" to understand the spirit and the tradition of the bonfire, that the experience is beyond words or description. They call it the "Spirit of Aggieland." They say it keeps Aggies of today and yesterday in a tight bond.

There had been prodromes to the 1999 bonfire tragedy. In 1955, an Aggie on all-night duty at the bonfire construction site was hit and killed by a truck. He is called the "first Bonfire hero," not its first victim. In 1957, a few days before the scheduled burning, the bonfire stack fell while the Aggies were lunching. No one was hurt. In 1981, an Aggie was killed after he rode a tractor to the cutting site; he hit a bump, was thrown off the tractor, and was crushed beneath its wheels. In 1994, following heavy rains, the stack of logs shifted and had to be rebuilt.

Proponents of the bonfire discount that the 1999 tragedy is a warning of what could happen again. They argue that the bonfire can be built more safely and that the tradition must continue. After all, in Texas in 1999, 11 students died in traffic accidents. University students die playing football, but there is no move to abolish the game. Accidents happen (Tang, 2000).

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

In 1999, it was not Cynthia Lawson's decision to continue or not to continue the bonfire tradition. As executive director of university relations at Texas A&M University, it was her job and her staff's job to head external and internal communications. Lawson reported directly to President Bowen, who reported to the chancellor of the Texas A&M system. The chancellor reported to the Board of Regents.

Lawson's staff consisted of 21 persons whose duties included national, international, state, and local news and information, institutional communications, strategic planning, photography, graphic design, video services, and other public relations and communications duties (see Fig. 7.10).

Texas A&M University, located in the small college town of Bryan/College Station, is among the top 20 U.S. universities and a major research university. The Office of University Relations disseminates to national outlets research findings in the Second Chance Cloning, news releases about genetically altered crops, NASA, the ocean drilling

program, and so on. News releases vary from local and state media to wire services and national media. Lawson said that before her arrival at Texas A&M, “There had been a few other national stories about hazing incidents or the relocation of a pig farm to make room for President Bush’s library and Presidential Conference Center.”



Figure 7.10. Cynthia Lawson, executive director of university relations at Texas A&M University, had been in her position only 5 months when the bonfire accident occurred. Reprinted with permission of Texas A&M Office of University Relations.

Having been in her position for only 5 months, Lawson had not been a part of the longtime bonfire tradition and had not seen the actual structure, although everyone on campus and in the College Station vicinity could watch the daily building of the bonfire on the Web. A digital camera was focused on the construction most of the time. Most residents of the state are aware of the bonfire after it is lit.

On November 18, 1999, around 2:50 a.m., Lawson got a call from the university’s Critical Incidence Response Team, telling her there had been an accident, the bonfire had fallen, and students were injured. She did not know, at that time, that there were deaths. “I had no idea of the magnitude of the project nor could I place any meaningful significance [symbolic or otherwise] as to what the collapse actually meant,” she said.

Lawson's first task was to telephone selected members of her staff; then she headed for the site of the tragedy. She did not have to call key administrators because the Critical Incidence Response Team had that responsibility. The university president told Lawson to make all the communications decisions, saying that she was "the expert" and that it was "her call." Lawson saw this as an act of faith on Bowen's part, because even though she had been highly recommended for the position, they did not know each other. She was appreciative.

A&M had only a skeletal crisis communications plan in place, a one-page document advising personnel of the critical nature of effective communications during a crisis and mentioning what it called "one-minute manager" admonitions, such as "Be honest. Be accurate. Do not speculate." As Lawson explained, what helped her to a greater degree was her prior experience with crisis planning:

I worked in Public Affairs at the Detroit Edison Company back in the 1970s and 1980s. During that time, Detroit Edison was constructing a nuclear power plant. Part of my responsibilities was being involved with and ultimately managing the Joint Public Information Team.

This team was created to handle a media crisis in the event of an accident at the nuclear power plant. As I recall, a "mock crisis" was created once or twice a year. County and state officials, as well as FEMA and Edison employees were involved in the effort. Even the news media participated in the effort by asking tough questions. The purpose was to coordinate the information released during a nuclear crisis. I recall that we used to be called in the middle of the night. We knew the week, but not the day or time.

The drill was gruesome—all day long. The circumstances of the accident were never the same. Sometimes [in the drill] no one was hurt; other times, people were killed. We never knew the direction of the nuclear plume and what the consequences of that particular scenario were. Mock press conferences were held; faxes were released. An entire Joint Public Information Center was set up with equipment, and so on. It was as real as one can get and yet not be real. I even remember vice presidents getting angry at me for pushing them to release "pretend information" that the press would want and need.

The skills I learned in these practices long ago were ingrained in me. I knew what I had to do. It was automatic.

However, as we see later, Lawson said she would make some changes if she had to do it again.

Another factor that helped Lawson with the crisis communications was that she had spent the first months of her position connecting with key community leaders. There was no organized advisory board, but there were these community leaders who she said "were invaluable during the crisis." One of them was Royce Hickman, president of the Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce. He came to the fallen bonfire and asked what he could do to help. Hickman helped arrange for food for student workers and the news media. He also arranged for a masseur/masseuse to treat workers who were becoming weary.

Home Depot contacted Hickman to offer its services. Houston Cellular offered cell phones and backup batteries to the Office of University Relations, and before the day was

over, these phones were being used by the fire department, police department, and rescue workers whose cell phone batteries had died.

Relationships with the news media also paid off. “There were many ‘media types’ on campus who had connections with media throughout the state. Lane Stephenson, Deputy Director for University Relations, and Sherylon Carroll, Associate Director for University Relations, had extensive contacts and relationships. I had developed relationships with the local media, but national and regional contacts were virtually nonexistent,” Lawson said.

As at most universities, a number of people at Texas A&M had public relations expertise. Lawson estimated that there were about 20 such people, and they deferred to her and her office for media response. “This cooperation was a first at the university,” she said. “This is important in a university setting. Unlike a corporation that may send forth an edict ordering that no one talk to the news media except the public relations officers, in a university, academic freedom seeks to prevail to its fullest extent. Everyone has something to say and a need to talk. With a few exceptions, this did not happen. And I am glad. Otherwise, we could not have controlled the message as well as we did.”

Lawson continued,

Most of the first day of the crisis was spent answering media questions and arranging interviews for reporters. There was a never-ending parade of news personnel. Since they did not arrive at the same time, it required repetition of information to bring them up to speed throughout the early morning hours of the crisis. Key members of my staff and I tried to do this one-on-one. So, to keep some control of the scene and to keep from having a “circus” atmosphere, I advised the media that I would come back every hour on the half hour to advise them of new developments. Also, I told them that if new information developed before the appointed time, I would immediately come and advise them. Then, I was careful to keep my promise.

VOLUNTEER HELP

Lawson held four or five news conferences throughout the first day and brought with her, at various times, President Bowen, Vice President of Student Affairs J.Malon Southerland, Bonfire Adviser Rusty Thompson, Student Body President Will Hurd, and Bart Humphreys, a public relations official representing the joint city-county rescue operations. Because there were students by the thousands around the site, the media had easy access to students. Hurd made himself available throughout the day of the crisis and during the aftermath. He was also helpful in identifying for reporters those students who were especially effective at being interviewed and could be counted on for helping to get the types of messages the university wanted conveyed.

The key messages were the following: (a) concern for the parents of the injured and dead students, (b) facts about the bonfire tradition, (c) facts about the bonfire accident, and (d) an understanding of and appreciation for the “Aggie Spirit” and the “specialness” of the Texas A&M family.

In addition to getting warm clothing for the workers, newspeople were helpful in numerous other ways. When university officials needed to urge students to telephone their parents to tell them they were not injured, the electronic media got the word out. They also urged the community to refrain from needless telephone calls to avoid jamming phone lines. When a hotline was installed for parents, the news media announced it. When night fell and the temperature dropped, the media put out a call for coats and sweatshirts for workers, and more than enough soon arrived. Then the call went out to stop. Lawson said, “the media was a tremendous asset in so many ways to the success of the rescue operation. We were truly indebted.”

Another asset was the cooperation of university legal representatives. “General counsel were on the site, and I spoke to them briefly,” Lawson explained. “They did not try to counsel me with respect to what I or others should or should not say. Texas A&M, fortunately, takes the position that we must do the right thing. We must be truthful regardless of the consequences. There was no attempt to cover up or be deceitful. If inaccurate information went out, we corrected it as soon as it was brought to our attention.”

OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

An instance of incorrect information being disseminated occurred when Rusty Thompson, the bonfire adviser, estimated the height of the stack at the time of the collapse. The truth was, according to Lawson, that no one had gone out and measured the stack, so the actual height was not known. As it turned out, Thompson’s guess was inaccurate. It was corrected.

The university has an ongoing communications vehicle called the “Aggie Hotline.” It began as a means of communicating with faculty and staff via the Web. On the first day of the crisis, the Office of University Relations immediately developed a Web page for the bonfire accident. The Association of Former Students also had a Web page that it used to communicate with its constituents. The hotline and the two Web pages were used to update information on a regular basis throughout the bonfire crisis and for months afterward. All internal publics with Internet access—students, faculty, staff, parents, community leaders, the Board of Regents, government officials—could and did access these electronic sources on a regular basis.

In addition, the Texas A&M University PBS television station, KAMU-TV, was at the site to provide coverage of the crisis. Students tuned into the university TV station as well as to other local stations. Informal systems of communications, such as residence hall councils, the student government, and student activity leaders, were used to inform students of a candlelight vigil, a Thursday night memorial service, and other events. The aftermath of the crisis was covered by the student newspaper, the *Battalion*, a morning daily. In its first edition following the start of the crisis, the *Battalion* reported the names of the deceased and injured students, but because the “why” and “how” of the crisis were not known, no other hard news was included. Other coverage included eyewitness testimony and feature material or “soft news.”

The chronic stage of the crisis, when the accident made front-page national news, lasted about 2 weeks. However, the story remained in the news until the Christmas break. There were inquiries almost daily for several months. Although the national and regional coverage soon subsided, coverage in Texas continued daily for many months more.

Texas A&M University made all documents, memos, and other pertinent information available to the press through the university library. "Initially," said Lawson, "general counsel was not comfortable with the decision to release the information to the public in the library. The reality was that the president made the decision that this was the right thing to do. General counsel was given the task of logging and disseminating all of the information. Everything was released except pictures from the morgue of the deceased students. The media can get those, too, on request."

The most important public, during the first days of the crisis, was the parents of the deceased and injured students. Once a deceased or injured student was identified, his or her parents were telephoned and informed. If the parents lived close enough to the university, a personal visit was made. It was only after parents were notified that student information was given to the news media and posted on the Web site. Parents of injured students were visited frequently in the hospital. Periodic visits were made months later to student John Comstock, who remained in rehabilitation, and to other students and parents as needed.

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE 1999 AGGIE BONFIRE

As days passed, information was provided to parents via phone calls, visits, or letters depending on the nature of the information and the urgency. The types of information the university needed to send included instructions for receiving special funds available for funeral arrangements, hospital bills, lodging, announcing the creation of the Bonfire Commission, meetings of the Bonfire Commission, and so on. The parents also were informed of negative or hurtful stories in the press (e.g., there were stories that some students were under the influence of alcohol). All of this communication to parents was disseminated by the vice president of the Office of Student Affairs.

Texas A&M at College Station is a member of a consortium of 12 universities that make up the Texas A&M University system. The system has its own public relations director who, according to Lawson, "came to the site, stayed by my side, and kept the regents informed, primarily by cell phone." Some of the regents came to the crisis site. They also were kept apprised by accessing the Web page and watching and listening to news reports. After the first day of the crisis, the president and chancellor kept the Board of Regents informed through phone calls and board meetings.

Both Texas A&M University and the university system have vice presidents of governmental affairs. Both officers came to the crisis site and stayed throughout most of the day. They communicated regularly to state legislative leaders by phone. After the crisis ended, the legislature was updated via memos from the two governmental affairs officers, personal visits, phone calls, and the Web site.

Within a few days of the start of the crisis, University President Bowen made a decision to appoint a person outside the university to head an independent commission to investigate the cause of the bonfire accident. There were discussions about who that person should be and what qualities the person should have. University officials felt this was the right thing to do no matter what the commission's report might reveal. The independent commission, later called the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie

Bonfire, would be more credible to the public, alumni, parents, community, and taxpayers than if the university conducted its own internal investigation.

Leo E. Linbeck, Jr., a trusted Houston businessman with a stellar reputation who was active in civic affairs, was asked to head the commission. Four other members were chosen by Linbeck; they were from El Paso, Dallas, Austin, and Fort Worth. Lawson's office sent out media advisories under commission letterhead announcing the meetings. The advisories told the press the agenda of each meeting and gave details as to how the press might cover it.

The media began to line up interviews for the commission report months before the report was due. Lawson's office prepared for the national media attention she knew the report would bring. She also geared up for the national media attention after the announcement was made about the future of the bonfire. Either way, it was expected to be good news-bad news-welcome news to some, disappointing news to others. Lawson's staff also realized it would again be sought after on the 1-year anniversary of the bonfire accident, November 18, 2000.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR STAFF MEMBERS

University President Bowen strongly urged psychological counseling for all university employees who were at the bonfire site at the time of the accident. Others within the university community were also urged to seek such help. "I had encouraged all of them to make personal appointments with a counselor. But none of them did; none of us did," said Lawson. "Then, about a month passed, and I asked a psychiatrist to come to one of our meetings to talk with us as a group. As it turned out, there were a lot of issues that needed to be addressed. Individuals had visual images, disturbing images they could not get out of their minds. Others had feelings of being left out of the loop."

One of the problems was that when the accident occurred, Lawson, not knowing the full extent of the tragedy, telephoned two members of her staff immediately. One of them picked up another en route to the site. Hence, there were four members of the Office of University Relations involved from the beginning. The rest of the staff arrived at the office at 8 a.m., as usual, to find that things were already in progress without them. "Some of them had difficulty finding tasks that were useful or helpful," said Lawson. "They felt left out. Somehow, getting lunch for everyone or doing what they called 'menial tasks' made them feel guilty because they were not pulling their weight."

Although no task is meaningless in a crisis, Lawson said almost 4 weeks passed before these staff members realized their value to the crisis communications. One of the most important functions of a crisis communications plan is often overlooked—that everyone has a valued role in the communications process. Before the crisis, each person on the crisis communications team should know what his or her role will be in the event of a crisis and how important that role is in the management of a crisis.

All of these issues had to be addressed by the psychologist. In addition, Lawson spoke about the sheer exhaustion they experienced: "I cannot begin to describe the pressure 'not to lose it' because you are in a managerial position, because you must appear before the news media, and because you are simply a professional. A time to cry is critical. A time to mourn is mandatory."

Lawson recognized her personal breaking point on the Sunday following the Thursday accident. She told the following story:

I was walking out of church when a young A&M student came up to me. Physically, he looked like a linebacker. He shook my hand and thanked me for representing the university and the students so well. As he said this, his voice trembled. Then, he wrapped me in his arms and sobbed from deep inside his soul. Then, I broke too. I buried my head in his chest and cried. There we were...two strangers brought together by an unbelievable tragedy, two people who felt the need to be so strong for others at the expense of our own personal needs. We cried together for 15 minutes. He had his release; I had mine. I was okay after that. People need to take time to cry. I feel I should have taken this release earlier, even if privately.

Another problem Lawson related was being in the middle, between grieving parents and the news media. The news media wanted all the information they could get. When you are in the position of providing or not providing information to the news media, providing it is usually the right thing to do. People have a right to know. It is our right under the First Amendment. But, it is not always the thing you want to do. Although most reporters are very responsible and do not speculate or resort to sensationalism, some others are not. Some documents can easily be taken out of context by irresponsible or unprofessional news personnel. This can cause additional pain to families of an accident's victims.

One example of misquoting occurred when University President Bowen was interviewed by Kelly Brown, a reporter for the *Eagle* in College Station. The reporter asked, "If the Commission's report were to find that the administration was at fault, and if the Board of Regents asked for your resignation, would you resign?" Lawson was present and heard the question and the answer. She said Bowen simply answered, "Yes." It was the only answer to the question. If the Board of Regents asks for a resignation, nearly anyone employed by the university would resign. But some newspapers did not print the first part of the question, "If the Board of Regents asked for your resignation." They ran the headline, "Bowen to Resign." That was not what he said. As Lawson explained:

Not wanting to bring undue attention to the whole issue, I did not attempt to correct the quote. However, my concern was that in the aftermath of the report, the misquote could create some problems for us. If the report were to cite any administrative oversight, the news media would attempt to pressure Bowen into resigning. They can be relentless about these things. President Bowen has provided exemplary leadership for this institution prior to the bonfire as well as during the crisis. His absence would be a great loss for Texas A&M.

Lawson added that phone calls and e-mail messages primarily supported Bowen.

Another media problem occurred when the *Arizona Republic* published an editorial cartoon that compared the Texas A&M bonfire accident with both the 1993 Branch Davidian inferno and the 1999 brutal murder of a black man in Jasper, labeling all three events "Texas Bonfire Traditions." The university community and Aggies everywhere were incensed. The newspaper pulled the cartoon from its Web site and apologized for

having published it. Then the editorial page editor apologized and sent Bowen a \$10,000 peace offering to be placed in two memorial funds. Bowen returned the checks, saying “it would do violence to our ethical standards to accept it from the *Arizona Republic*” (Kirsch, 1999a). It didn’t end there. A columnist for the *Arizona Republic*, whose column was published in other newspapers as well, charged that Bowen, “other grown-ups,” and the university could have prevented the bonfire tragedy, but “[Bowen] wants people to be upset about an editorial cartoon” (Montini, 1999).

NEGATIVE NEWS STORIES

As stories negative to the university or to the bonfire tradition emerged, the University Relations Office rarely responded other than simply stating that the university did not want any responses that could potentially influence the commission’s report (see Fig. 7.11).

On December 3, a headline, primarily in Texas newspapers, was “A&M Student’s Use of Crane May Have Violated Bonfire Rule.” There was an apparent rule that only professional operators could run the crane. University spokesperson Lane Stephenson, on Lawson’s staff, was quoted in the story as saying the student “had 200 hours of experience,

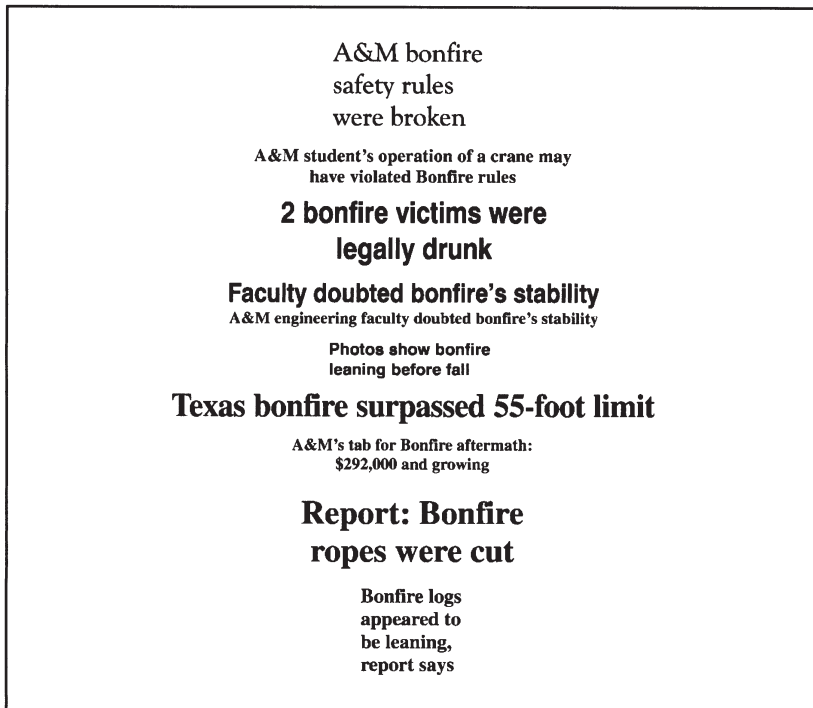


Figure 7.11. Headlines from several negative news stories that Cynthia Nixon and her staff had to contend with during the Texas A&M bonfire crisis.

sufficient to satisfy federal requirements for operating the equipment.” Because there was no information that the operation of the crane had anything to do with the collapse, Lawson told another reporter, “The commission will delve into each aspect of the incident” (Slover & Lee, 1999).

On December 5, when headlines read, “2 Bonfire Victims Were Legally Drunk,” Lawson told reporters, “There’s a real danger of getting off point. It isn’t that these things aren’t important or shouldn’t be looked at. But the major issue is, what caused this thing to fall?” (Ball, 1999).

On December 10, news stories, in Texas and nationally, related allegations made by e-mail from members of the engineering faculty at A&M to the president that the bonfire design was unstable. Certain faculty members admitted they kept quiet and ignored colleague T.J.Hirsch, a former member of the faculty, who had been complaining for years that the structure was “fatally flawed.” Stephenson did not comment on the e-mail messages and was quoted as saying, “Basically, we’re going to let the commission appointed to investigate the accident do its work” (Haurwitz & Copelin, 1999).

When the headline on December 15, was “Photos Show Bonfire Leaning Before Fall,” Stephenson was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, “Now that the commission is at work, everything having to do with the bonfire accident will be deferred to the commission” (Associated Press, 1999). After repeatedly referring reporters to the commission, the university noticed that news articles began to include sentences like the following one: “University officials have referred all questions to the commission, which will not speculate on a potential cause until the investigation is complete” (Brown, 2000).

Lawson took a stand on January 7, 2000, when reports circulated that the investigation of the collapse would cost more than \$292,000. She was quoted as saying, “We’re committed to do what needs to be done under the circumstances. I haven’t heard anyone asking, ‘How much will it cost?’ or ‘How are we going to pay for it?’ or ‘Who’s going to pay?’ We’re doing it because it’s the right thing to do” (Ward, 2000).

LESSONS LEARNED

When asked if she would do anything differently if she had to endure the crisis again, Lawson listed the following:

1. “I would have called all of my staff out immediately.”
2. “I would have called in a lot of other PR folks on campus to assist us with answering media calls.”
3. “I would have had one or two staff members dedicated to watching the media reports and providing me with any inaccurate information being disseminated.”
4. “I would have had one or two staff members developing ‘other’ stories for the media and lining up prospective interviewees for the immediate aftermath of the crisis. During a crisis, there is such a feeding frenzy of information. When the crisis is over, there is immediate famine. But the media still needs to continue the story. I would prefer to have provided a bunch of stories for them that I wanted to ‘get out,’ thereby not forcing them to ‘go get any story’ they could to keep the momentum going.”
5. “There will be a crisis communications plan. Once it is written, we will ‘exercise’ the plan, just like we did at Detroit Edison.”

In May 2000, the commission reported that the bonfire collapsed due to a combination of factors: Students cut corners; school officials failed to adequately supervise students; there were organizational failures; and there were structural problems. Student drinking and horseplay were not deemed direct causes. The commission's leader said a safe bonfire would have been possible had school officials taken necessary precautions. The latter pronouncement met with "whoops" from students who filled a basketball arena to hear it.

Lawson said that, now that she has been at the university through this crisis, she understands the "Traditions" (always capitalized in Texas A&M publications) at the core of Texas A&M University. The notion "Tradition" has its roots not only in the longevity of the university itself, but also in the fact that many of the opportunities for student involvement are major events or projects that involve a large percentage of the student body. These students thus have many "shared experiences"—Bonfire, Fish Camp, Muster, Elephant Walk—where lifelong bonds are created. Texas A&M probably offers more opportunities for shared experiences than most other higher education institutions. And the students probably do a better job perpetuating those Traditions than do their counterpart schools less rich in tradition.

President Bowen announced, in June 2000, that the traditional bonfire would continue but not before the year 2002 and only with greater school supervision and a professionally engineered design.

In November 2000, the university community observed the 1-year anniversary of the accident with a ceremony attended by 25,000 people in a pouring rain. All gathered on the muddy polo fields at 2:42 a.m., the exact time and place of the collapse. Family members of the students who died sat together in a circle. There were 6-foot pillars bearing the name of each victim and the year he or she was to graduate.

As the 40-minute ceremony began, the lights on the field were turned off and a memorial flame atop a platform in the center of the circle of family members was lit. A cannon was fired 12 times.

In 2005, Texas A&M had another president, Robert Gates, who said a decision on whether a campus bonfire will continue will not be made until litigation is settled between the university and the families of students killed or injured in the 1999 collapse.

Meanwhile, since 1999, students have built and burned bonfires off campus, bonfires not approved by the university. Sometimes, there are more than one, all on private ground. In 2003, more than 10,000 people turned out to see a "Student Bonfire." In 2004, students raised \$60,000 to fund the construction of the 42-foot stack supervised by Houston engineer Will Wilkenson, a former Aggie who worked on Bonfire in the 1990s. He said that all logs touch the ground and thereby eliminate the stress between tiers that contributed to the 1999 collapse. Student Bonfire leader Paul Harding said, "We're serious about this. This isn't some type of rebellion. We just don't want Bonfire to fade away."

In 2005, there were two problems with the off-campus bonfire. A district court judge initially issued an order to stop the lighting. And when the judge finally lifted the injunction, the bonfire was lit but the flames kept dying when heavy rains caused the stack to billow smoke. Eventually the logs were doused with diesel fluid and continued to burn. Some say about 10,000 Aggies watched the bonfire burn, but the number could not be verified.

Cynthia Lawson left A & M and was named Vice President of Communications and Strategy Development at the University of North Carolina.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Death and Injury

The following cases were prominently played in the news media because of the old saying in journalism circles, “If it bleeds, it leads.” This means that news in which persons are killed is usually first on television news and headlines in newspapers. Such stories require careful communications.

Public relations professionals are expected to handle crises of violence, death, and injury with sensitivity that must be learned; it does not come naturally. Public relations organizations, like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) as well as large companies should offer employees simulated training in handling such crises...just in case it is necessary. Most professionals who have had these experiences speak of sleepless nights, nightmares, nervousness, and other symptoms of trauma.

Communications professionals must also realize when their crises involve violence, death, and injury that reporters, though they may appear to just want the facts and to be indifferent to the incident, are often as emotional as the people about whom they write. Professor Roger Simpson, director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma said, “Violent events are not discriminating in how they affect the emotions of those directly involved. Journalists who have rushed to the scene will show some of the symptoms of shock and trauma. Some testify to ‘going robotic,’ not being able to read the notes scribbled at the scene, and being overwhelmed emotionally.”

In fact, sometimes it is the public relations person who is most controlled. Simpson told the story of one such person, “A public-relations director remembers talking to a seemingly controlled television reporter during the day, then handling a call late the same night from the same shaken, sobbing person. Trauma can disable the emotional system, changing the way a person notes her surroundings and responds to others. A calm, collected public relations person has helped uncountable journalists get through a trying day.”

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the University of Washington endorses training for emergencies, including sharing of information with all employees about trauma, its symptoms, and ways to respond. Knowing in advance of an incident that the emotions will be jangled, that responses may be affected, and that such effects are fairly typical can help.

Knowing that symptoms that last more than a few days may indicate serious traumatic effects also can be helpful. The Center advocates advance training for all personnel likely to have to react to a critical situation, attention to support for such personnel and their families while the event unfolds, and periodic conferences with all directly involved in an incident to see if there are lasting effects. The Dart Center Web site—www.dartcenter.org—offers extensive information for those who manage responses to violence and natural disasters.

CASE: COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL AND THE SHOOTING TRAGEDY

To Rick J.Kaufman, APR, Executive Director of Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado, April 20, 1999, began like many other work days. On this day there was a special

community event. He and most of the district's administrative team attended a county-wide celebration of individuals and community groups for their outstanding contributions to Jefferson County.

When he returned to the office around 11 a.m., there was a call from a radio station. The station had heard on a police scanner that there had been a shooting at a school in the south part of the school district. Media calls of this nature were not an everyday occurrence but it was not overly alarming either. Kids do have guns occasionally.

He and Barb Monseu, an assistant superintendent who oversaw the region of the county that included Columbine High School, immediately left for the school. Kaufman, who had been in his current position only 7 months, was not yet familiar with all 145 schools in the district. He only knew that Columbine was one of the high schools in the south area of the county and recalls, "We believed that a student had fired off a gun in the parking lot, or that there had been some sort of altercation. This was a school that, up to that time, we just did not believe something as tragic as the shooting would happen."

Columbine High School is one of the sprawling school district's top-performing schools, and has been rated among the top high schools in both academics and athletics in the state of Colorado. Its students come from upper middle-class families and it had a reputation as a "community-centered school" with a lot of parent involvement. It didn't fit the perception of an inner city or rural school where violence could occur.

"Columbine High School is a 30-minute drive from the district's educational services center (central office). We made it to the school in 15 to 20 minutes," said Kaufman. "We topped speeds of 100 miles per hour en route. All the way, we were trying to establish contact with the principal or someone at the school to determine what was taking place."

They had no idea why they couldn't reach anyone. They soon learned why. Columbine High School sits on a portion of Clement Park, a large community park and open space bordered by a residential area to the south, Pierce Street to the east, and Bowles Avenue, a six-lane highway, to the north. There were so many emergency responders—fire, police, paramedics, emergency helicopters to transport victims, and police helicopters trying to find the location of the shooters—that Kaufman and Monseu couldn't get close enough to the school. So they parked on Bowles Avenue and ran toward the school. "We heard what sounded like gun shots and explosions as we neared the building, though we didn't know if that was coming from police or someone from within the school," said Kaufman. "It was a very unsettling, and yet surreal experience."

Parents, who by now had heard media reports of shots fired at Columbine High School, were racing to the school as well, leaving parked vehicles on the two highways bordering the school and park. Students and school employees were fleeing out of the school in every direction throughout the park, having either witnessed or heard shooting and were fleeing with the help of school staff. At this point, police did not have a perimeter secured around the school as they were trying to locate where the shooter or shooters were and tending to wounded students who had escaped the building. So Kaufman, a former emergency medical technician who trained to be a paramedic, went to the aid of a student who had been shot multiple times, and remembers:

I checked his vitals, and when we couldn't get a pulse or response from this young man, with the help of two other first responders we basically dragged

him and put him in a rescue vehicle. The rescue guys asked me if I wanted to ride along to the hospital, but there was nothing more I could do, so I said, “No.” I did check his wallet for a student ID so I could write his name and address down, in case we would need to contact his parents. I truly thought he had perished but as it turns out, thankfully, he did survive after being shot seven times, including a shotgun blast to the face.

Eventually responding law enforcement personnel from multiple agencies established a safe perimeter around the building to keep parents, bystanders, and media out of harm’s way. Students and school staff continued to escape on their own, or were aided by police who had entered the building. Columbine High School principal Frank DeAngelis was able to escape, but not before encountering one of the shooters and then helping a number of students escape. Kaufman states:

With Mr. DeAngelis’ help, we were working with law enforcement drawing up a schematic layout of the school to be relayed to police who were inside of the building looking for the shooters and freeing students and staff who were trapped. We also started identifying potential students who might be responsible for the shooting, based on eyewitness accounts from those who had safely fled.

Kaufman also communicated information back to his office where a crisis command center had been established by the district’s communications team and superintendent. In the immediate hours after the shooting began, Kaufman served as the liaison between school personnel and law enforcement at the crisis site and the district’s command center.

Asked if he had a crisis communications plan or a crisis management plan, Kaufman replied, “The district certainly had a crisis plan in place and I had written a number of crisis plans for other school districts, but as the events unfolded, we didn’t take the opportunity to pull out the plan and follow it to the letter.” Kaufman did call on lessons learned from a mock crisis drill he developed while working for a school district in Wisconsin prior to moving to Colorado in 1998:

I had developed the first mock crisis drill of an attack on a school with the help of a local technical college and representatives from law enforcement, fire and hospital. We created a full-scale mock shooting on a school to determine the effectiveness of our newly written crisis plan. We wanted to make sure the plan was sound. I learned a tremendous amount from that drill, and I called on what I had learned throughout our work and response to the Columbine tragedy.

What was most problematic at the time was that I was not in the district long enough to have conversations with law enforcement and public information officers to determine, in advance, what would be done when multiple agencies needed to respond to a crisis or emergency at one of our schools. We did not have the opportunity to determine, who does what, where, and when before the shooting.

As the afternoon wore on, Kaufman said attempts to communicate with the district’s command center or other responders via cell phone was nearly futile because of the sheer volume of cell phone traffic in the area:

Whenever we were able to establish a connection, there were times when we would be cut off in midsentence. Often, it took repeated calls to give or receive information from the command center, or request assistance. That was one of the most frustrating aspects of our work that day—the lack of the ability to communicate information as well as access to things we needed.

Kaufman said he knew early on that the news media's focus would be on events as they unfolded and that the criminal aspect would require law enforcement personnel to respond initially. The news media, after such a violent incident, were interested in what was happening, who was killed, who was injured, and who was responsible. From the school district's perspective, media needed only the basics, like the size and layout of the school, the number of students attending, the staff who worked in the building, and names of students who may have been injured or killed.

Said Kaufman, "I knew early on that we would not be media's primary focus. It was really the police, the public information officers who would take the lead in disseminating the initial information because this was a major crime scene."

Kaufman, and later Marilyn Saltzman, a staff member of the district's communications department, were the initial district spokespersons. Saltzman, manager of communications, worked with the news media that had sent teams of reporters and photographers to the site, while Kaufman continued to assist law enforcement at the school: "We established a location near the school, but outside the police perimeter, for media to gather and receive updates from both law enforcement and district personnel" (see Fig. 8.1).

At the district's Educational Services Center, communications department staffers, with help from school public relations professionals from Denver metro-area school districts, established a volunteer phone bank to handle the hundreds of calls that were coming into the district for information and offers of help.

Superintendent of Schools Jane Hammond had also pulled together an emergency response team of school board members, principals, and central office administrators who worked to calm the fears of other school personnel and parents throughout the district. Early on, a rumor had circulated that the Columbine shooting was a coordinated attack and others may have planned similar attacks at multiple school sites throughout the district.

"Remember, this was before the 9/11 attacks so there was certainly no thoughts that this was a terrorist attack. But rumors were quick to be formed and shared because of the awful news coming out of what was happening at Columbine High School. Those rumors had to be refuted at the other schools as well as to the mass public," said Kaufman.



Figure 8.1. Rick Kaufman answers questions from the national media gathered at a news conference about the shooting at Columbine High School. Years later, Kaufman and his staff still get questions from publications and other school districts about the incident.

The attack on Columbine High School garnered national and international media attention, as well as round-the-clock coverage in Colorado. Kaufman said, “It was one of those seminal events that dominated media attention 24/7. It was crucial to dispel any erroneous information before it got out. We weren’t necessarily successful, but we worked very hard to ensure that whatever information the school district shared publicly was corroborated and not based on hearsay.”

Parent relocation sites were set up at a nearby elementary school and a public library. Students who were able to flee the school were reconnected with their parents at these two sites. At the same time, Kaufman and others were attempting to account for all students and staff. “It wasn’t until early evening, 5 or 6 p.m. [Mountain Standard Time], that we received word there were multiple fatalities. It wasn’t until much later in the evening that we were able to account for those who had made it out safely.” However, school district leaders still did not know the conditions of those hospitalized, or even how many had been transported to medical facilities. So, the information was still incomplete.

It was also that night that the district learned the names of the alleged shooters. There was still concern, however, that there may have been others involved, and that information was not easy to reveal. Kaufman said,

We had pretty good knowledge based on law enforcement sources that [Dylan] Klebold and [Eric] Harris [both seniors attending Columbine High School] were

the alleged shooters because they had committed suicide in the library. Law enforcement didn't feel comfortable confirming this information because this was still a very active crime scene and, after all the shooting had stopped, the investigation was just getting underway.

Later that evening, Kaufman returned to the district's command center where he briefed the superintendent and the assembled district emergency response team on the day's events from the school. He also coordinated the development of initial information that would be disseminated to parents, the community, and the news media the next day. The reporters and photographers who responded to the shooting were, for the most part, local media or national news bureaus based in Denver who fed other national affiliates with the stories and pictures. But on Day 2, the morning after the shootings, Kaufman said,

The nationals were already setting up in the park adjacent to the school when I arrived at 3 a.m. We were getting a lot of requests to do interviews or to arrange to have students and staff go on these national morning news shows. We refrained from doing that because we were still in the mode of collecting information and trying to determine what happened. We didn't have a complete account. We were not going to provide information that could have been perceived as speculative still at that point. It would not have served us well to do that, so we limited our access to interviews, and those we did, were very brief factual statements.

On Day 2, a joint press conference was held with the Jefferson County Sheriffs Office, the lead law enforcement agency; the Jefferson County District Attorney's office; and the school district. Kaufman said,

It was our first opportunity to express our condolences to the families of those murdered and our concern for those students and staff who were injured, to put a human face to the sadness we were feeling and experiencing. We used the opportunity to share some information about what we knew had happened, but more importantly how we were responding to students and staff needs. We wanted to be up front with as much information as we could as it became available, and when we could corroborate it and substantiate it, and that's what we shared.

On the third day after the shooting, the weather turned to dark skies and heavy snow. "The weather was a reflection of what we were feeling. Our hearts were very heavy for the victims and the community, and we knew we were entering into some very difficult days ahead with the funerals," said Kaufman. It was also at this time that Kaufman realized he didn't have enough staff trained in crisis response to adequately manage the crisis. He turned to his friend and colleague, Rich Bagin, the Executive Director of the National School Public Relations Association based in Rockville, Maryland, to help coordinate school public relations professionals from across the country who would commit their time and expertise to aiding Kaufman's crisis response team.

Superintendent Hammond created two emergency response teams. One, headed up by Kaufman, concentrated on all the media relations and communications and worked

directly with schools, parents, community, religious organizations, and others. The second response team, headed up by assistant superintendent Monseu, coordinated the mental health and grief counseling for students and staff, and worked to arrange for Columbine students to return to a neighboring school for the remainder of the school year.

The following is Kaufman's report of the campaign:

THE COLUMBINE TRAGEDY: MANAGING THE UNTHINKABLE PROJECT SUMMARY

ASSESSMENT

The tragic shooting of 12 students and a beloved teacher at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, created unforgettable experiences for the thousands of students, staff, and community residents of Jefferson County, Colorado. The tragic events of that day and subsequent weeks thrust the Jefferson County Public Schools' Communications Team into the spotlight as the core communicators for a community and organization in crisis. While managing speculation and rumor perpetuated by more than 750 media outlets from across the world, this team of public relations professionals helped to restore calm and confidence to their organization and healing to the community during what history may label as the defining tragedy of our time.

The Jefferson County Public Schools' Communications Services team developed a crisis communications structure that established key duties and protocols in a crisis. This plan was adapted as a result of the nature and magnitude of the Columbine High School tragedy and continues to be revised to reflect lessons learned from this tragedy and its aftermath.

Timeline of Columbine Tragedy and its Aftermath

The attack on Columbine High School on April 20, 1999 left 12 students and a teacher dead, and 23 others wounded. Some liken the attack to an "earthquake" because of its devastation on individuals, families, and a community. As the days, weeks, and months following the tragedy came and went, so too did the "aftershocks" that have impeded the students, staff and community's ability to heal and return to normal.

To follow is a timeline of highs and lows in the year after the tragedy.

April 20, 1999

Two students attack Columbine High School killing 12 fellow classmates, a teacher, and wounding 23 others in the worst school shooting in U.S. history.

April 25, 1999

Statewide memorial service paid tribute to the fallen students and teacher with then-Vice President Al Gore and other state and national dignitaries. Over 75,000 people attend the event.

May 2, 1999

Jeffco Public Schools holds special remembrance memorial for the victims of the Columbine tragedy at Red Rocks Amphitheater. Several hundred students, staff, and community members attend the solemn event.

May 3, 1999

Columbine High School students and staff return to classes at sister school Chatfield Senior High.

May 20, 1999

On the 1-month anniversary, President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton visit the Columbine victims' families in a private meeting, then pay tribute to the victims and survivors at a special memorial.

August 17, 1999

Columbine High School students and staff return to "Take Back Our School" for the start of the 1999–2000 school year.

September 24, 1999

CBS News airs portion of cafeteria surveillance videotape it obtained from an Albuquerque, NM television station that captured the chaotic scenes of students fleeing the school. The videotape was being used as part of a law enforcement training exercise.

October 20, 1999

Columbine High School marks the 6-month anniversary with news that a student who was a friend of the killers has been arrested for allegedly making a threat at the school.

October 22, 1999

The mother of critically injured student Anne Marie Hochhalter commits suicide at an area store.

December 4, 1999

Columbine High School captures 5A high school football championship, capping season dedicated to Matt Kechter, one of the slain students and a member of the football team.

December 13, 1999

Time Magazine cover story carries excerpts from videotapes made by murderers outlining attack on Columbine High School, including cover photo of perpetrators in the cafeteria. Article surprised community, and students and staff, who were caught off-guard by the release of the information. Neither Jeffco Public Schools nor Columbine High School had been given advance warning of the contents of the article.

December 15, 1999

Student receives Internet threat that claims to “finish the job begun” on April 20, 1999. District cancels classes at Columbine High School for next 2 days, sending students and staff to an earlier than expected holiday break.

February 14, 2000

Two Columbine students found murdered in Subway Sandwich Shop located near the high school. Students informed by teachers of identity of the murdered students during second period class, prompting many students to leave the school or seek counseling. No arrests made to date.

April 20, 2000

Columbine High School and community mark 1-year anniversary with private and public events. Many students choose to stay away from public events because of the intense media coverage.

April 27, 1999

Jefferson County district attorney makes available to public (for \$25) a videotape of Littleton Fire Department “training” video that depicts graphic scenes from the library and other parts of the school and video footage from a news helicopter. Columbine High School staff is shown the tape and a warning is issued to parents of the impending public release.

May 4, 2000

Popular student-athlete commits suicide at his home.

May 15, 2000

The Jefferson County Sheriffs Office releases its long-awaited report—by court order—on the tragic events of April 20,1999. The report is issued on a CD-ROM because of its extensive notes and information, including videotape footage, excerpts from 911 calls, and law enforcement traffic and audio recordings.

Figure 8.2. This was the timeline of the work of Rick Kaufman and his communications staff at the Jefferson County School District in Colorado for the first year after the tragedy that resulted in the deaths of several students and a teacher and the injuries of others.

The Jeffco Public Schools' Communications Team consisted of six professionals and support staff when the tragedy struck, but received volunteer assistance from members of the Colorado and National School Public Relations Associations.

Communication Objectives

• The overall public relations objective throughout the crisis was to quickly adjust the school district and community's position from one of response and reaction to one of proactive control, enabling the team to aid in school and community healing. To attain this objective, the Jeffco Public Schools' Communications Team:

- Provided onsite guidance and leadership to students and staff;
- Developed key communication vehicles to reassure parents and the community;
- Strengthened proven strategies to propel those affected beyond the crisis to learn and grow stronger;
- Communicated the school and district's point of view with professional grace and insight;
- Reinforced the healing process, while aiding in return-to-education objectives;
- Cultivated a semblance of triumph in the face of tragedy.

• While juggling demands from the news media at an unimaginable rate, the driving force behind every decision and event remained the motivation to help students and staff heal and return to the learning process as quickly as possible.

• Another objective was to demonstrate and emphasize the school district's commitment to the emotional and physical needs of affected faculty, staff, students, and the families of the murdered and injured students and teacher.

PLANNING

• Assisted, prior to the tragedy, in the development of a district crisis management plan, including an emergency response checklist of steps for the first 24- to 48-hour period after a crisis.

• Consulted with school administrative and PR officials from each of the prior school shooting sites, and with the National School Public Relations Association, the National Organization of Victims Assistance, and the Crisis Prevention Institute to identify strategies of crisis response and management.

• Organized briefing with district management team, school board officials, employee association representatives, and community leaders to review responsibilities outlined in the crisis management plan, including the establishment of two command centers—an on-site communications center (near Columbine) and a central operations center.

- Participated in daily briefings with law enforcement, state and federal emergency management agencies, and governmental groups to coordinate the ongoing crisis response and management.
- Created a database of media outlets that contacted the district for information and interviews, and used this list to distribute updates on the district's response to the tragedy and its efforts to help the community heal and return to normal. The media list was used frequently to distribute information on how the school's students and staff, and the community were healing and moving forward.
- Analyzed media coverage daily throughout the crisis to evaluate how Jeffco Public Schools' messages were received and to assess changes in media attitude and public perception.

Target Audiences: Parents, students, faculty and staff, media, state and federal legislators, the Jefferson County community, and the residents of Colorado.

COMMUNICATION

Strategies

- Implemented a Crisis Communications Command Structure. The structure designated primary functions for managing the crisis, including strategic communication counsel, internal and external communication, media management, research and media monitoring, event management, and coordinating volunteers.
- Created several methods for communicating with parents, students, employees, business and community leaders, political and governmental officials, and the public, and continually updated those methods for efficacy.
- Responded promptly and honestly to requests for information and interviews from the media, and anticipated changes in news cycles and demands.
- Apprised daily all staff throughout the 89,000-student district of the status of the investigation and recovery milestones. Spoke with "one clear voice" and "stayed on message" as determined by the district's management team and developed by the district's communications team.

Techniques/Activities

- Responded to more than 1,000 inquiries a day from local, national, and international media outlets for the first 4 weeks after the tragedy, and continued to maintain contacts to update media about recovery efforts. Coordinated the media efforts for the special first day back to school event in August 1999, and planned all events to mark the 1st-through 5th-year anniversaries.
- Managed all communications, including twice-daily press conferences and daily fact sheets and news releases, distributed throughout the state and nation. Drafted daily talking points for district spokespersons.
- Established one-on-one opportunities with local reporters to interview key district personnel involved in the recovery efforts, and to strengthen the relationships with local journalists who remained long after national and international media left.

- Created weekly talking points for administrative staff at 143 other district schools to share with staff and parents.
- Met daily with legal and administrative management teams to formulate key messages and address emerging issues.
- Created a community hotline designated to accept offers of monetary contributions, donations of materials, and services from around the world. In the first 3 weeks after the crisis, the crisis command center received over 1,000 phone calls a day.
- Assisted in the development of a Columbine Tribute Web Page, and created a videotape showing the positive images of recovery to replace the negative images that were repeatedly aired on local and national media.
- Coordinated special events, including two large memorial services, separate visits by then President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, tours of the reconstructed school, and the “Take Back Our School” first day of school assembly.
- Developed a presentation—*The Columbine Crisis: Managing the Unthinkable*—for school district officials, emergency responders, and law enforcement officers.

EVALUATION

The school district’s communications and management team personnel did their solemn, professional best in a difficult situation and emotional environment. In the ongoing efforts, the team focused on the district’s mission to help students, staff, and the community heal and recover, and share the story of our efforts with all key audiences. Further examples of how we achieved our objectives:

- We always kept the feelings of the victims’ families in the forefront. Today many of our district leaders have personal relationships with families of the murdered and injured students and teachers based on our work with them.
- Target audiences read or saw Jeffco Public Schools’ messages in more than 1,550 print stories (primarily local and large national publications) and 450 broadcast stories. A database of all the media coverage was created and exceeds 700 pages.
- Public perception both locally and nationally was positive and supportive of the district’s crisis response based on letters from former President Bill Clinton, private organizations, national media, and community sentiment.
- A strong working relationship was developed with the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, the Jefferson Center for Mental Health, the Jeffco and Federal Emergency Management agencies, and the FBI.
- Hundreds of requests have been received from organizations for crisis management training. Members of the district’s communications and management teams have presented nearly 100 seminars and training sessions since August 1999. Organizations requesting presentations/training include the FBI, Los Angeles County law enforcement agencies and school districts, state emergency and educational associations, and the U.S. Department of Education.
- A special “Welcome Back to School” event and picnic for all staff was developed to celebrate the accomplishments of recovery. Over 2,000 staff attended the event, which included the planting of a tree and placement of a commemorative plaque on a large boulder in memory of Dave Sanders, the only teacher killed in the April 1999 tragedy.

The tragedy was very emotional for everyone connected. No one on Kaufman's staff had family at Columbine, but that didn't eliminate the emotional impact. Kaufman said one of his staff members had to be put on a medical leave of absence for a brief time because of the heart-wrenching concern for others personally impacted. Grief counselors helped employees deal with their emotions throughout the response effort.

Kaufman, himself, said he ran on adrenaline, like most crisis communicators. He said,

I didn't sleep for the first 4 days. I mean, I literally did not lay my head down to sleep for 4 days. In hindsight, that was dumb, because when you start coming down off that adrenaline, you're going to crash and make mistakes in your work and decision making. I was responsible for so many people that we started to work in shifts. I forced people, including myself, to start rotating work on and off times. Often we would only get 3–4 hours of sleep, but it was enough to keep us going. We needed to take care of ourselves because it was apparent that this tragedy had legs far beyond anything we had ever experienced.

The media calls continued long after the students returned to school. Marilyn Saltzman had a friendly wager with a friend in the media: The day that the district's communications team did not receive a call or request for information about the Columbine shooting, would be the day she and her friend would go to lunch. It was June 2000, a year and 2 months after the incident that the communications team went a whole day without a single inquiry about the tragedy.

Today, the inquiries continue. "I receive, on average, at least one to two Columbine-related calls or e-mails each week," said Kaufman, who continued:

It might be a parent asking if we can help them because they learned a student in their school had a hit list, or a teacher or emergency responder that wants to know what we did, or what policies have we put in place to prevent another tragedy. I feel a sense of responsibility to never turn away a request for information. We aren't experts at crisis management and communication, but we learned enough about it to help others. If nothing else, callers have told me it is comforting to them to know that we endured and we survived.

And then every year, the news media does their anniversary stories.



Figure 8.3. In Littleton, Colorado, a memorial to a student killed in the Columbine High School massacre is adorned with flowers by loved ones. This photo was taken in 2000 on the first anniversary of the incident. (Photographer was Sisse Brimerger. Permission by Getty Images.)

CASE: U.S. POSTAL SERVICE AND WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Roy Betts, media relations representative for the U.S. Postal Service, stands in the little square-shaped cubicle that is his office and disseminates information about the new electricity-powered Postal Service trucks. If his cube had been situated just a bit differently, he could see a magnificent view of Washington, DC, from the office windows of the headquarters building nicknamed the Pink Palace, but he is not concerned with views just now.

In addition to the outgoing news on trucks, he is thinking about a story already in the local papers about a gunman on a rampage in San Francisco. "My first thought when I heard about it," he says, "was 'I hope he's not a postal employee.' But even though he's not, I guarantee you I will get at least one phone call from the news media about the incident."

Many Postal Service employees are experts on violence, particularly workplace violence. Between 1983 and 1993, there were 10 incidents of violence in which postal employees or former postal employees murdered 34 people, most at a work site.

The most notorious incident, staff members simply called "Edmond." Part-time letter carrier Patrick Sherrill, about to be terminated from the Edmond, Oklahoma, Post Office, brandished a gun and shot 14 people. When it was over, all of them were dead and Sherrill killed himself. It was August 20, 1986. "Edmond," said Betts, "seemed to be a bizarre, rare incident. I believe institutions, like individuals, go through a period of denial before reality sets in. The Postal Service was in denial after Edmond, but Royal Oak shocked us into reality."

The Royal Oak incident happened on November 14, 1991, when postal employee Thomas McIlvane killed four people in the Royal Oak, Michigan, Post Office, injured eight others, and killed himself (see Fig. 8.4).

“Once the trigger is pulled, you’ve lost; the battle is over,” Betts said. “You go through posttrauma and then do what you can to prevent another incident.” “You can’t erase the incident from people’s minds or delete words from the media. The media is very interested whenever there’s an incident of violence.” (Examples of U.S. Postal Service communications with employees and the media are shown in Figs. 8.5 and 8.6.)

Following the Royal Oak incident, the U.S. Postal Service issued its Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace to postal employees (see Fig. 8.7). It was a response, not only of Postal Service management, but also of the unions and the management associations—all working together to prevent further tragedy.

In the early 1990s, departments reported to then-Postmaster General Marvin Runyon. Each department somehow dealt with the issue of preventing workplace violence. Betts reported to Frank Brennan, the manager of media relations, who reported to Corporate

Violent tendencies targeted

Postal chief orders screening, replaces Royal Oak director

BY WYLIE GERDES AND MIKE BETZOLD
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

In the wake of a fired worker’s rampage that left four employees of the Royal Oak post office dead, federal officials on Friday ordered a sweeping review to pinpoint current and former employees with violent tendencies.

The toll from the Thursday shootings reached five Friday as postal supervisor Rose Marie Proos, 33, and the gunman, 31-year-old Thomas McIlvane of Oak Park, died at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Five other people remained hospitalized.

McIlvane’s shooting spree was the fifth such assault at a post office in the last six years. His attack, sparked by his firing for swearing at a supervisor, came just over a month after four people were killed in Ridgewood, N.J. by a fired postal employee.

At a news conference in Birmingham, U.S. Postmaster General Anthony Frank said the five shootings formed no pattern. Nevertheless, he said, records of nearly 750,000 current postal employees, along with those of former employees, will be examined.

In addition, the Postal Service will review its hiring process and begin contacting law enforcement and military agencies about potential employees.

Local police and postal inspectors had investigated allegations of threatening behavior by McIlvane, who had a history of aggressive behavior while a marine, officials said.

Frank also has asked for an examination of the circumstances that might lead up to such violence, and directed postal officials to contact private firms that have had similar tragedies.

“Together, we begin the long process of healing. And we are resolved to do all that we can to assure that senseless carnage never again strikes our postal family,” he said.

Figure 8.4. A news story in the *Detroit Free Press*, November 16, 1991, about a gunman’s shooting rampage at a U.S. Postal Service facility in Royal Oak, Michigan. Reprinted with permission of the Detroit Free Press.

Relations Vice President Larry Speakes (yes, the same Larry Speakes of the Reagan administration), who reported to Runyon (see Fig. 8.8). Among its other duties, the media relations department was faced with getting information to the media and to employees about violence prevention programs. It was also instrumental in keeping the media away from grieving employees, families, and eyewitnesses to incidents of violence.

May 6, 1993

Newsbreak

10 p.m. (EDT) postal shootings update

Three postal employees were killed and three others wounded today in two separate shooting incidents at facilities in Dearborn, Michigan, and Dana Point, California. Crisis response professionals are on the scene in both locations providing counseling and support for all employees and their families.

At approximately 9 a.m., employee Lawrence Jaison, 45, allegedly entered the main floor of the Dearborn, MI, Vehicle Maintenance Facility (VMF) and opened fire on fellow employees with two small-caliber handguns, killing automotive mechanic Gary Montes and wounding two others before taking his own life.

VMF employee Sandra Brandstatter was critically wounded with gunshot wounds to the head and back while VMF Manager Bruce Plumb is in serious condition after being shot in the back. Another VMF employee, Glen Gay, suffered an injured hip in a fall while fleeing the facility and also reported chest pains. All three were admitted to Oakwood Community Hospital.

Jaison, a 26-year postal veteran, had filed an EEO complaint alleging discrimination on the basis of sex in the selection of Brandstatter for a position he had applied for at the VMF. The final decision denying Jaison's EEO claim was issued on April 19, 1993.


Almost four hours after the first incident, former postal employee Mark Richard Hilbun entered a rear door of the Dana Point, CA, Post Office. He allegedly shot and killed letter carrier Charles Barbagallo and wounded a clerk, who was grazed in the head by a bullet. The clerk was treated and released.

Hilbun, who was fired last September and had been arrested previously for assault, then went to the postmaster's office and fired a shot through the door, failing to wound the postmaster. After shooting at, and missing, a private citizen outside the building, Hilbun escaped and still is being sought by Orange County Sheriffs. A search of Hilbun's mother's home following the shootings led to the discovery of his mother and her dog, both dead. The stabbing of Hilbun's mother occurred approximately one hour before the post office shootings.



UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Figure 8.5. U.S. Postal Service announcement informing employees of two workplace shooting incidents on May 6, 1993. Reprinted with permission of the U.S. Postal Service.



POSTAL NEWS
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE Washington DC 20260-3100

Media Advisory

Who: Postmaster General and CEO Marvin Runyon

What: The Postmaster General will discuss actions to be taken by the Postal Service in the aftermath of yesterday's tragedies at the Vehicle Maintenance Facility in Dearborn, Michigan and the Post Office at Dana Point, California.

WHEN: Friday, May 7, 1993

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

WHERE: Hyatt Regency Dearborn
Fairlane Towne Center
Franklin Suite, 2nd Floor
East Atrium
Dearborn, Michigan

BACKGROUND At the Press briefing also will be Ken Hunter, Chief Postal Inspector, Washington, D.C.; Joseph Mahon, Vice President of Labor Relations, Washington, D.C.; Ormer Rogers Jr., Area Manager, Customer Services, Chicago, Ill.; and Jim O'Beirne, Postmaster will be in attendance.

A press briefing on the investigative aspects of the Dearborn tragedy will be conducted at the Dearborn Police Headquarters at 11 a.m. In attendance will be local and federal law enforcement officers.

Figure 8.6. U.S. Postal Service urged the press to attend a briefing at which Postal Service officials would discuss the workplace violence in Dearborn, Michigan, and Dana Point, California, that occurred on the same day in May 1993. Reprinted with permission of the U.S. Postal Service.

Ann Wright, manager of employee health and services, collaborated with others to set up the national strategy for violence prevention.

Dave Cybulski, manager of management association relations, served as a liaison with four principal unions of postal workers and three management associations. Workplace violence became a point of unusual accord between the labor associations and the Postal Service. "We have very collegial relations with the unions on this issue," said Cybulski.

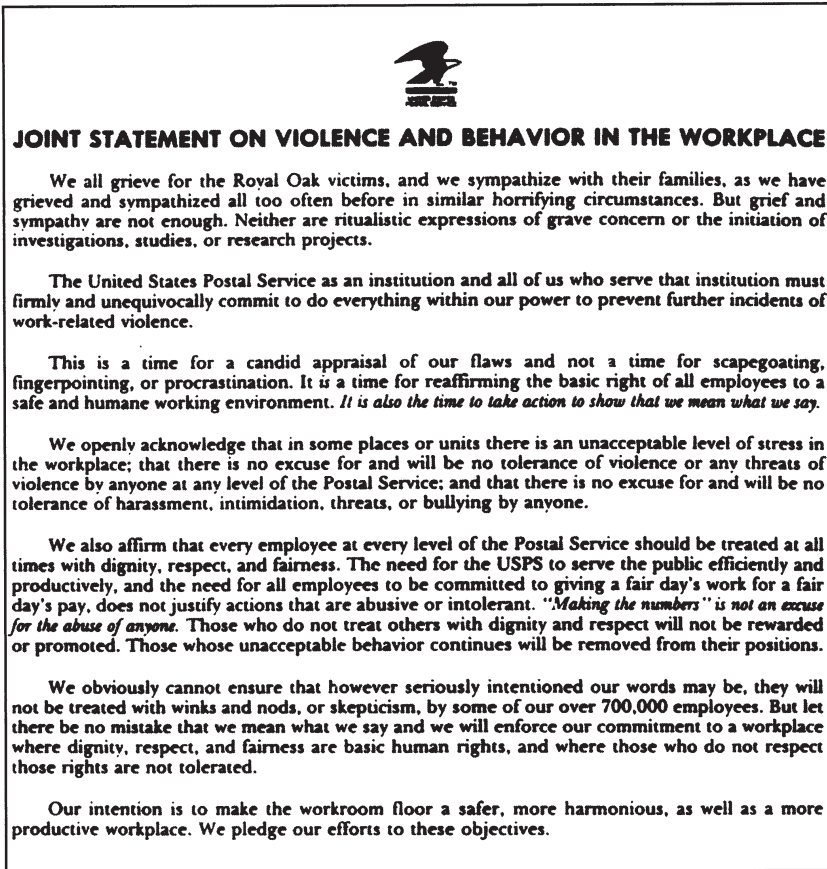


Figure 8.7. The U.S. Postal Service Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace, a document issued to postal employees after the Royal Oak, Michigan, incident in 1991. Reprinted with permission of the U.S. Postal Service.

Employee Relations Specialist Bradley Johnson was hired by Suzanne Henry, former vice president of employee relations, to coordinate all the various violence prevention efforts. He was responsible for the development and implementation of the Postal Service's corporate strategy on prevention programs for workplace violence. Johnson developed a leadership awareness program on workplace violence prevention for 40,000 supervisors, managers, postmasters, and local union officials. Regarding the program, Johnson said,



Figure 8.8. Roy Betts (left), media relations representative at U.S. Postal Service headquarters in Washington, DC, gets advice from Media Relations Vice President Larry Speakes.

“The issue is too massive and the credibility of the program too important for me to do it alone. So, I consulted with several of the nation’s leading clinical psychologists. These consultations provided me with the strategic direction and foundation for the development of this program.”

Ask any one of them about the violence and you will be told that the incidents, although tragic, are not as common as they seemed. The U.S. Postal Service is the largest civilian employer in the United States (at times, General Motors is larger), with 730,000 employees. With that many employees, problems develop, conflicts occur, and violence can happen.

The media, even today, still seems especially interested in incidents that take place in post offices. The crimes committed by postal workers make much greater food for the news-hungry reporter than crimes committed against postal workers. Mail carriers are mugged, shot, stabbed, and bitten by dogs, but rarely do these incidents make news.

At the same time, crimes committed at nonpostal work sites may be unreported, underreported, or reported as something other than workplace violence by the media. Cybulski noted one such tragedy in which an irate airlines employee walked onto a plane, shot his supervisor, and caused a fatal crash. The story was reported as a plane crash, but the incident was also an act of workplace violence.

Then-Postmaster Runyon maintained that, despite the news media’s concentration on postal issues, the U.S. Postal Service had a lower rate of violent worker death than industry in general (Fields, 1993). Betts said the staff thinks of the Postal Service as a family operation despite its large number of employees. He said:

At some point in time, somebody in every family works for the post office. Most of the postal workers are mail-handlers—sorters, clerks, carriers, truck

drivers—in all the various facilities around the country. As we talk, they are collecting and delivering the mail.

When we go home, the night shift is going to work. Mail approximating 650 million pieces a day [177 billion in 1993] is being dumped on conveyer belts, sorted, and sent to its destination the next day. These people are valuable to us. The purpose of this organization is to get the mail out, and they do it.

To protect these valuable employees, Runyon and other Postal Service officials first admitted that workplace violence was a problem. Violence in the workplace was increasing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that more than 1,000 U.S. workers were murdered at work in 1992, and these were not just postal workers. Most were victims of highway crashes and robberies, but the prevailing publicity centered on the U.S. Postal Service. The staff saw the Postal Service as a mirror of society; hence, the problems of American society were also the problems of the U.S. Postal Service. Cybulski said he input four keywords into the Nexus computer program: employee, violence, homicide, and workplace. “The printer kept going and going and going. It’s what’s going on in society,” he said.

“Violence is a part of everyday life,” said Betts. “Either you are victimized by violence or you recognize it for what it is and develop strategies to cope with it.” To prevent the growth of violence, the U.S. Postal Service developed a six-part national strategy for violence prevention.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

The prevention strategy was developed by a national committee consisting of postal management, union officials, and management associations. Rank-and-file employees were also consulted through focus groups to determine their ideas on the issue. The result is a violence prevention strategy with these six sections:

- Selection.
- Security.
- Policy.
- Climate.
- Employee support.
- Separation.

Selection

The U.S. Postal Service’s hiring procedure is designed to select the right person for the right job. To that end, one outside firm is contracted to do thorough background checks of all job applicants. The firm has access to national databases to investigate job applicants’ criminal and driving histories, credit records, and physical and mental health backgrounds.

Ann Wright, a Postal Service manager who has held several high-level managerial positions, said, “Because we have a unique population in that we’re across the entire country and we have mobile people, it’s been difficult for personnel to do thorough

checks on the local level.” Wright noted that the outside firm frees up Postal Service employees to do other screening processes, such as getting references from former employers (Anfuso, 1994, p. 70).

Competency examinations are also used in the new hiring procedure. However, the Postal Service has declined to use behavioral tests in the screening process. Management looked into the possibility and could not identify a test that was effective for its purposes. Critics of behavioral tests say they invade privacy and may not be a predictor of violent behavior.

Security

Wright said that “to protect people from homicide and other violence, a certain amount of security is necessary.”

Security procedures vary at U.S. Postal Service facilities, depending on their size. There are 38,000 such facilities nationwide. Some have a single employee; others have as many as 4,000 employees and operate on a 24-hour schedule. The Postal Inspection Service, the law enforcement department of the U.S. Postal Service, coordinated security measures with the management at each facility.

Some facilities have security guards. Some require employee badges for admittance to the premises. Some have surveillance cameras. There are also awareness programs in place with guidelines on how to report incidents of workplace violence.

Policy

A policy of “no incident of violence,” not even a minor incident, is promoted at Postal Service locations. All such incidents are to be reported. No weapons are permitted on Postal Service premises, including in parking lots. There are to be no threats of any kind and no pushing, cursing, yelling, or other aggressive behavior.

“We’re trying to promote a clear, direct, absolute, and well-known policy related to violence,” Wright said. She also said that seemingly small incidents are forbidden because they can escalate into something major.

“An employee’s chances of being terminated for bearing firearms are greater than ever before,” said Betts. “We cannot afford the risk.”

Climate

Positive changes in the culture of each Postal Service facility are aimed at ensuring an environment conducive to safe, productive work. Managers and supervisors participate in a series of training sessions designed to make them knowledgeable about conflict resolution, positive reinforcement, and employee empowerment.

The employee unions are also working with the Postal Service to improve the process of addressing workers’ grievances. Both union and Postal Service officials agree that alleviation of stress is the key factor in improving the relationship between employees and management.

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) represents 366,000 postal employees, who join voluntarily. In 1994, Tom Fahey, APWU communications director of the union,

noted that “the relationship between labor and management of the Postal Service has not been good at all, to put it mildly” (Browning, 1994, p. 24). Communications publications emanating from Fahey’s office were concerned with employees’ complaints about a militaristic management style that they felt contributed significantly to the violence.

Henry claimed progress had been made, although she admitted that the complaints and the stress had not been totally eliminated. “We’re doing a lot of things jointly with our unions that wouldn’t have been possible before,” she said (Browning, 1994, p. 24).

The Postal Service issues an annual employee-opinion survey to measure employee satisfaction and promote positive interaction between employees and managers. In the 1994 survey, half a million employees participated and expressed that they had better authority to do their jobs, that they were kept more informed on important matters, that union and management worked better together, and that the quality of service had improved. They were generally happy with their salaries and job security, and they were enjoying their work.

However, they were concerned that improvements be made in job safety, that the pace be quickened in changing the work culture and in preventing problems like sexual harassment. As an example of changes resulting from the survey, one third of performance compensation for managers is now based on employee satisfaction.

Employee Support

Founded in 1986, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) was originally for the recovery of alcoholics. Dr. John Kurutz is manager of the EAP, which is a short-term counseling and referral source that helps employees overcome any problem dealing with work or personal issues that can cause stress and physical, mental, or emotional duress.

The EAP has counseled more than 600 employees. Also, improvements have been made in teaching employees how to use the EAP. All Postal Service employees participate in some kind of orientation program that includes an explanation of the EAP.

Two 24-hour hotlines and toll-free numbers were installed for employee use in reporting threats or other concerns to headquarters. One line connects to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and is for the reporting of threats or other illegal activity. The second line takes calls reporting almost anything employees want to vent. Wright said all calls are taken seriously. According to Betts:

Employees know about the hotlines. A worker can talk too loud and another will call the hotline. This can be an early sign of a crucial problem. We try to do this without a witch-hunt atmosphere. But we use common sense in defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior. We do not ignore any calls.

Sometimes people just call with personal problems. And that’s okay. If a caller contacts us and needs some sort of counseling, then counseling is available on that phone line.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service investigates threats from both hotlines. During the first year of operation, the hotline logged 1,790 calls. Paul Griffo, national spokesperson for the Postal Inspection Service, said, “If you are threatening others or if you are exhibiting threatening behavior, it’s going to be followed up on right away” (Browning, 1994, p. 23).

In certain regions of the Postal Service, crisis intervention teams have been organized to address threats and behavior believed to be potentially violent. Jim Merrill, a human resources executive with the Pacific Area, heads such a team in California. Each district creates its own crisis intervention team made up of key employees as well as others from outside sources. "The teams provide an organized way of addressing potentially dangerous situations so that we can have control and respond appropriately," said Merrill (Anfuso, 1994, p. 76).

Merrill recalled an incident in which a former employee wrote a threatening letter and sent it via computer to the Antioch, California, Post Office. The letter read in part, "I have post-traumatic stress disorder. I haven't been properly treated; I'm enraged and I wake up at night thinking that I want to kill the postmaster" (Anfuso, 1994, p. 76). The crisis intervention team went into action. The former employee hired an attorney to deal with the issue, so the team met with the attorney. A physician on the team met with the former employee's therapist. A permanent restraining order was filed against the former employee. Additional security was added, and the postmaster was temporarily moved to a different site.

"You don't have control of that person [the former employee] because he's outside your work force," said Merrill, "but through these efforts we were able to put him on notice, determine that he wasn't dangerous, that he was just blowing off steam, and defuse the situation" (Anfuso, 1994, p. 76).

Also, in California, 5,000 postal managers were trained in how to report threats and how to recognize the warnings of violence.

Separation

"We're trying to make the point with our managers and supervisors that firing people doesn't necessarily solve the problem," said Wright. "Quite a few of our most violent incidents have been [committed by] terminated employees who come back and shoot people" (Anfuso, 1994, p. 69).

An employee who places all hope in his or her job is one type of worker at risk for violence. This employee, if terminated after many years on the job, suddenly realizes loyalty is a myth, or at best a one-way street.

Nevertheless, termination is sometimes necessary, so the Postal Service has created policies and procedures for terminating employees effectively and for making assessments of potentially violent consequences.

THE DEARBORN PREVENTION PROGRAM

In addition to the various programs emanating from the U.S. Postal Service headquarters, individual postal facilities may have their own programs. Following the May 1993 shooting at the Dearborn, Michigan, Post Office, the staff adopted the following violence prevention program:

1. A suggestion box was installed in each of four area post offices to promote employee feedback.
2. Two work teams were formed: a communications committee and a leadership committee. Each consists of 8 to 10 workers, a union representative, and

a manager. The work teams discuss suggestions made by employees and make recommendations to the joint labor-management committee.

3. An employee picnic helps raise funds for victims of the shooting incident. The city police and firefighters are invited to attend.
4. An employee-of-the-month program rewards employees with engraved plaques, gift certificates for movies and dinner, and special employee parking places.

COMMUNICATIONS

Without question, employees are the target public for the Postal Service's violence prevention program. How do policies and programs developed at headquarters in Washington, DC, get communicated to nearly three quarters of a million employees?

According to Betts, there is competition for the attention of employees on the issue of workplace violence. There are postal service communications along with communications from unions, the media, and peers. "Each may have a different slant but the messages are the same," Betts said. "It would be naïve to expect anything different. Our best bet is to communicate early, often, and accurately. Credibility is all we have."

Various newsletters and bulletins are circulated nationwide, including *Postal Life*, a national newspaper for postal employees. Newsbreaks are posted on bulletin boards in postal facilities nationwide. Video Focus is a video that is issued monthly describing new policy decisions. There are television monitors in rooms where employees take breaks and have meals. The supervisors ensure that everyone has the opportunity to view the videos.

Special "Town Hall" meetings are held once every 3 or 4 months at selected locations. Former Postmaster General Runyon headed a 2-hour session attended by about 250 employees. At these meetings, issues pertinent to employees are discussed and questions are answered by the postmaster general. Videotapes of each session are distributed to facilities throughout the country.

One-on-one meetings with supervisors are also considered important, as are group meetings with supervisors.

The unions have made it possible to segment the employee public further. Cybulski says all the unions and management associations have newsletters and bulletin board messages widely read by their particular workers. The APWU communicates with approximately 330,000 window clerks and mail processors. The National Association of Letter Carriers communicates with 300,000 people who deliver mail. The Mail Handlers Union communicates with 51,000 workers who do heavy lifting, loading, and unloading of mail. The National Rural Letter Carriers Association communicates with 60,000 workers in rural areas—carriers who deliver to street boxes.

According to Cybulski, management associations also are a source of communications with their members. The three associations are the National Association of Postal Supervisors, the National Association of Post-masters of the United States, and the National League of Postmasters of the United States. Cybulski said that the Postal Service formed a leadership team in April 1993:

Every officer of the Postal Service and the presidents of the unions and management associations meet for a full day, twice a month. There are no substitutes for the presidents because we need the person with authority to make commitments and decisions. Workplace violence is a subject all members of the team believe is crucial, and participants take information and decisions back to their members.

OTHER EFFORTS

In December 1993, the U.S. Postal Service sponsored a symposium on workplace violence in Washington, DC. It was attended by academic and professional experts on the subject, in addition to corporate and government executives.

There is also a National Committee on Workplace Behavior headed by Joseph Mahon, vice president of labor relations.

The Postal Service's communications program got a boost when the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in August 1994, published statistics that said despite extensive media coverage to the contrary, neither the Postal Service nor postal occupations are among the groups at increased risk for work-related homicide. The report further found that "the occupational fatality rate for U.S. Postal Service workers is approximately 2.5 times lower than that for all workers combined." The CDC report went on to say, "Although the occupational homicide rate for the Postal Service is similar to the national rate for all industries, co-workers appear to be disproportionately responsible for homicides that occur in the Postal Service" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994, p. 594).

The CDC statements were good news and no news, respectively, to Betts and the rest of the headquarters staff. "We were aware that people from employee relations had been working with the CDC on the study," said Betts. "The results confirmed what we were saying all along." When released to the media, the information was more credible to the public coming from the CDC than from the Postal Service. If the Postal Service had released the information, it could have been accused of attempting to improve its image with questionable data. The CDC, however, had nothing to gain from the release of the information.

The CDC information was reported on the Associated Press wire and appeared in positive stories by many newspapers, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (August 21, 1994), *Washington Times*, the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, *Commercial Appeal (Memphis)*, *Houston Post*, *Newsday* (New York), *Orange County Register*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Newark Star Ledger*, *Denver Post*, and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (see Fig. 8.9).

An employer does not cause violence. Circumstances on a job can, however, contribute to stress levels, which cause violence. The Postal Service is looking for solutions and, by these efforts, it is making significant contributions to corporate America. Betts says of the Postal Service, "We are coming of age. We are an organization which tries to define and

From the *Newark Star Ledger*, August 19, 1994

Postal workers' death risk found to be low

ATLANTA (AP) – The risk of death on the job for postal workers is far less than gory headlines about post office shootings would suggest, federal health officials said yesterday.

In fact, the risk of death for the U.S. Postal Service's 892,000 employees is 2.5 times less than that of all workers nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Taxicab drivers and dispatchers have the most risky occupation, with a death rate of 26.9 per 100,000 employees, said CDC epidemiologist Dawn Castillo. The Postal Service rate is 2.1 per 100,000.

The rate for all U.S. industries combined was 5.4 per 100,000 in the period studied by the CDC, 1983-89. The CDC has not yet compiled figures for the 1990s.

The CDC researchers found that motor vehicle-related accidents were the leading cause of death on the job both nationally and in the Postal Service.

From 1980-89, 43 percent of the postal workers killed on the job died in motor vehicle accidents. Nationally, the figure was 23 percent.

Murder was the second highest cause of death on the job for postal workers and the third leading cause for all workers, the CDC said. Machine-related injuries are the second leading cause of death on the job for all workers.

Firearms were the most common murder weapon, and postal employees were more likely to be killed by a co-worker than by people not employed by the Postal Service, the researchers found.

From the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 16, 1993

Postmaster ponders rash of violence

WASHINGTON (AP) – Postmaster General Marvin Runyon is trying to pin down the causes and solutions for workplace violence.

Recent killings by postal workers in Michigan and California are just the most recent of many such incidents that have affected the post office and other businesses around the nation.

"Images of grieving family members and shocked employees during my visits to the sites of both tragedies will remain with me forever," Runyon said in a commentary Monday in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Runyon said he is considering trying to organize a panel of corporate executives and researchers "to explore what the nation's businesses can do to curtail workplace violence."

In addition, he said, the Postal Inspection Service is launching a study to try and determine what connects workers who turn to violence.

Runyon said his agency has tightened screening procedures for job applicants, operates hotlines to report threats and is trying to improve communication.

"All kinds of jobs in our economy come with built-in stress. Yet the vast majority of managers don't push employees too hard. Moreover, 99.99 percent of postal employees don't do violent things to fellow employees when they face job disappointments and frustration," wrote Runyon.

As for the causes of specific incidents, Runyon concluded, "I don't have all the answers and probably never will. I wish I knew what causes irrational behavior by irrational individuals."

Figure 8.9. Excerpts from news stories with a positive slant about workplace violence at the U.S. Postal Service.

redefine our mission, our purpose. We are looking for new innovative ways of handling mail, but 80 cents of every dollar in our budget is spent for labor. Our operations remain labor-intensive."

In the middle of these words, Betts got a phone call from a California reporter asking about the possibility of doing a series of articles on violence and wanted suggestions and cooperation from Betts. "See what I told you," Betts responded after the call. "I knew that the incident in San Francisco would cause some media connection to us. I knew it!"

Two murders occurred at Postal Service locations in the late 1990s. In 1997, in a Milwaukee post office, a worker shot and wounded a supervisor and killed another employee before killing himself. In the Dallas area, in 1998, a postal clerk was fatally shot by a letter carrier. In January 2006, seven people were killed in a Postal Service office in Goleta, California.

In October 1998, Postmaster General William J. Henderson formed the U.S. Postal Service Commission on a Safe and Secure Workplace. Chaired by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., former secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the six-person independent commission investigated and analyzed workplace violence within the Postal Service. It gave special attention to several factors, including work-related stress, substance abuse, and the workplace environment.

At the same time the commission was formed in 1998, Suzanne Milton was hired in the newly created position of manager of workplace environment improvement (part of the Human Resources Department). Among her tasks were improving the employee awareness program and generally bringing a better focus to the Postal Service's many other programs. "We are also trying," she said, "to concentrate on the positive, ignoring the unfortunate slang slogan, 'going postal.' We know that people think positively of their letter carriers and the people they see at their local post offices, so we build on that positive feeling."

Betts said, "The whole idea of 'going postal' is a myth. To us, going postal means delivering billions of cards, letters, and packages on time. That's going postal."

CASE: METRO TRANSIT: DRIVER SHOT, BUS FLIES OFF A BRIDGE

It was November 26, the day after Thanksgiving, 1998. Dan Williams, media relations specialist for Metro Transit in Seattle (a division of the King County Department of Transportation) was preparing to take his children to an afternoon movie when the phone rang. It was a reporter from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* asking if Williams knew anything about an accident involving a bus on the Aurora Bridge (see Fig. 8.10).

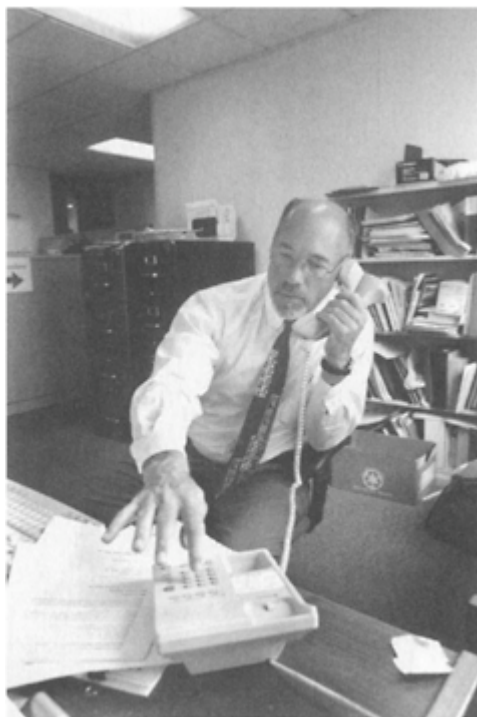


Figure 8.10. Dan Williams, media relations specialist for Metro Transit, served as primary spokesperson during the 1998 bus tragedy, in which a Metro bus driver was shot and the bus plunged off Aurora Bridge in Seattle. Reprinted with permission of Dan Williams.

Williams had been with the county agency for 15 years, 12 as media relations specialist in the office of the director of Metro Transit. He was one of only two media relations specialists who reported to Ron Posthuma, assistant deputy director of Metro Transit, who reported to Director Paul Toliver.

Williams's first thought was that the call was routine. In a city where buses are so crucial, accidents happen. Metro Transit had 1,600 full-time drivers and 750 part-time drivers. Also it was after 3 p.m., peak traffic hours. Approximately 1,000 buses are in operation during peak hours, most of them heading into or away from the downtown area. Because of the holiday weekend, traffic was somewhat less congested. Williams told the reporter he hadn't heard anything, but promised to get back to him. It also was not unusual to get calls about accidents from reporters because newsrooms regularly monitor (police) radio scanners.

"I called our control center not really expecting anything out of the ordinary," said Williams. "Our coordinators have a lot of people to notify in case of an accident, and they must also communicate by radio to personnel at the scene of the accident. Calmly, the coordinator told me that the driver of a bus southbound on Aurora Avenue had been shot, the bus veered off the bridge, the driver had been ejected and was receiving medical treatment on the roof of a building where he fell, and there were multiple injuries to passengers."

Aurora Bridge is one of the tallest bridges in Seattle, a city of bridges. It is commonly called Suicide Bridge because it is the bridge of choice for people who want to take their own lives. There were so many suicide jumps from the Aurora that the news media stopped covering them for fear that the victims, through jumping, were seeking a strange kind of publicity or fame. The bridge is also part of Aurora Avenue, a major thoroughfare connecting the northwest section of the city to the downtown area. On both ends, the bridge spans houses and other structures; in the center, it towers 175 feet above Lake Union (see Figs. 8.11 and 8.12).

After learning of the accident, Williams said,

My immediate reaction was to suppress whatever shock I was beginning to feel and do whatever was necessary to get to the scene as soon as possible. I made a quick call to neighbors and dropped my kids at their house. Television news helicopters were circling the accident scene, just a half mile from my house. I didn't call the reporter right away because I didn't have enough information.

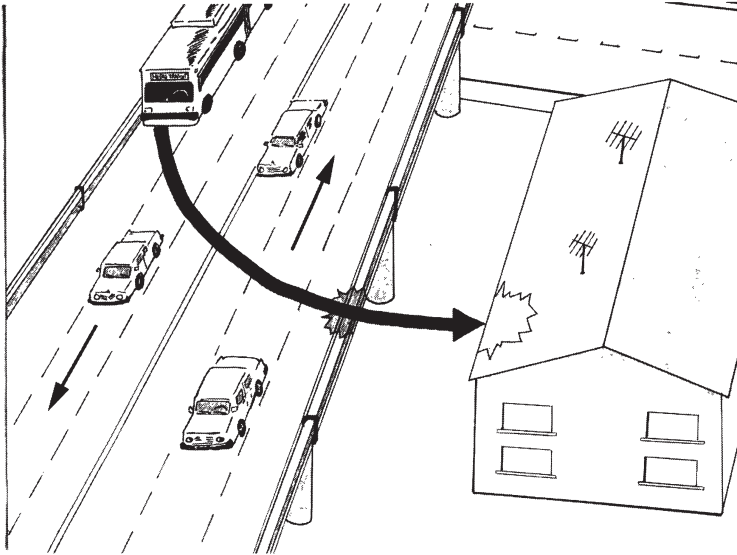


Figure 8.11. Sketch of route of bus headed over the bridge embankment. The 60-foot Metro Transit bus was traveling southbound toward downtown Seattle when a passenger in the front of the bus shot the driver. The bus then swerved into oncoming traffic on Aurora Bridge, crashed through a guardrail, and plunged about 45 feet, striking the roof of an apartment building before coming to rest on the front lawn of that building. The driver, the assailant, and another passenger died of injuries. Drawing by Gina Arnold. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 8.12. The 40,000- pound Metro Transit bus broke into two after it fell from Aurora Bridge in Seattle. Three people died and 29 passengers were injured, some seriously. Fortunately, no one on the ground was injured. Reprinted with permission from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

Williams arrived at the scene about 30 minutes after the time of the accident. He described the scene as follows:

The bus was resting upright in the front yard of a house. Emergency medical crews were removing victims from the bus and laying them on blankets and

stretchers under the bridge; two or three of the most severely injured had already been taken to hospitals. The rest were being evaluated and treated at the scene. The bus driver was still receiving treatment on the roof of the house [where he had landed]. The Seattle Police Department had taped off the area, keeping media and onlookers about a block away. Detectives were beginning their investigation.

Williams learned that an assailant had shot the bus driver, sending the southbound 60-foot-long (so long it bends in the middle), 40,000-pound bus across oncoming northbound traffic, traffic that would have been heavier at that time of the afternoon had it not been for the holiday. The bus crashed through two sections of iron and concrete guardrails and shot through the air, temporarily landing on top of a two-story apartment building near the bridge, where the driver was ejected. But then the bus bounced off the roof and broke in two: The front part of the bus landed on the steps of the apartment building, and the back part landed upright on a front lawn.

The driver, 44-year-old Mark McLaughlin, died of his injuries. The assailant apparently died of a self-inflicted bullet wound, but his identity was not known until the next day. The 33 passengers had various injuries; 1 later died of his injuries. Miraculously, no nonpassenger was injured.

The Friday following Thanksgiving is normally a “slow news day.” Very few events, press conferences, or speeches are scheduled because many people take the day off as part of a 4-day Thanksgiving weekend. Newscasts usually consist of soft news and features; it’s a good day for public relations professionals to get their video news releases aired. But this was not a typical holiday weekend. Soft news, features, and video news releases were bumped by this breaking news event. Because the combination of a shooting, an accident, a bus off a bridge, and relatively low loss of life was so unusual, the story was carried by news outlets all over the United States.

The accident occurred at 3:15 p.m., and shortly thereafter local television news operations began covering the accident with live breaking news reports. Some stations preempted regular broadcasting and were on the air continuously through their evening newscasts. After the network news programs (some of which also ran the story), the local stations returned to air more live coverage from the scene.

PRECRISIS CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Before the accident, Metro Transit had established a customer relations program that included three separate phone lines: (a) a 24-hour telephone service providing bus route information and trip planning called “Rider Information,” (b) an automated phone system that provided bus schedule information called “Bus Time,” and (c) a Customer Service Office that handles customer complaints and commendations.

Customers using the Rider Information service were routed to a recorded menu of options without talking to a real person, although it was also possible to talk to a real person. The system was designed to free operators to respond to more complex questions about the transit system. Customers could listen to the recorded information and then stay on the line to speak with a live operator.

Metro Transit received more than 2 million calls in 1998. Williams believed the system contributed to customer loyalty. He also said the drivers were considered an integral part of the customer relations program: "They are the agency's main connection to customers. They are the 'face' of Metro to the public. Metro's philosophy in hiring and training is that driving skills can pretty much be taught to anyone, but it is people skills that are of primary importance."

PRECRISIS EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Metro Transit bus drivers are members of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587. Metro's contract with the union stipulates processes for grievances, complaints, and so on. In addition, there are committees on which employees can serve to work with management on such issues as security and safety. From each of seven bus operations/maintenance bases, a driver and a maintenance employee of the month are selected. At the end of the year, those employees select the bus driver and maintenance employees of the year from among the monthly winners. The winners' photographs are posted on all the buses, along with a blurb citing their outstanding work.

PRECRISIS COMMUNITY RELATIONS

At the time of the accident, Metro Community Relations was in the midst of conducting a hands-on planning process in communities throughout King County. In addition, Metro Community Relations developed and staffed the Public Safety Partnership program, wherein volunteer bus drivers attended community meetings to discuss ways to make buses safer for customers and drivers, what people could do to protect themselves, and how they could help Metro Transit identify and prosecute people who committed crimes on the bus.

PRODROMES

Metro's history of assaults and robberies during the 1980s resulted in demands from the drivers for better security. Metro then developed its own security force for its buses, patrol cars, and bus stops. There were seven traffic-related fatalities involving buses in the 1990s, prior to the accident; none involved passengers. There were serious bus accidents causing injuries to passengers. In 1978, 5 people were hospitalized and 67 were injured in three buses involved in a sequence of rear-end collisions on a freeway. In 1981, a bus with defective brakes crashed into a collapsible barrier, slightly injuring 20 passengers. In 1979, two cars collided with a bus, hospitalizing six people. In 1967, a driver was shot and killed after an assailant had committed a robbery on a bus.

Williams said that Metro took security issues very seriously and was continually improving its programs: "Our system is relatively safe, compared to similar systems in other cities. Assaults are rather infrequent, considering the amount of service on the streets and the number of passengers carried. We consider crime a community problem, not just a transit problem." Following the 1998 crisis, Metro Transit distributed a chart to the media showing the relative safety records of public bus systems in Seattle and other cities (see Table 8.1).

MEDIA RELATIONS IDEOLOGY

Williams had established relationships with news media personnel and believed he and his office were known for their credibility. Many of these relationships developed over years of working for the same agency, whereas others Williams intentionally developed with key news media personnel. He described his media relations ideology as follows: “Honesty and responsiveness are key to good media relations. If you adhere to those two concepts, you develop trust and credibility with reporters and editors.”

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

In 1998, Metro Transit did not have a crisis communications plan. However, its emergency procedures included a plan for notifying top management and media relations personnel in the event of a crisis. The media relations personnel were to take appropriate action: notifying the news media, reporting to the scene of the emergency, contacting other staff members, identifying a spokesperson, and so on. The Media Relations Department followed its own guidelines, which stated that its personnel would be available to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day.

STEPS AFTER THE TRAGEDY

Williams said that at the accident scene, his first step was to find Metro personnel who could give him details of the accident:

After about 10 minutes, I learned that the driver was dead. After establishing some very basic facts—bus route number, direction of travel, circumstances of the accident—I went to look for the police department public information officer, Christie Lynn Bonner. Bonner told me that the fire department had established the initial command post, so together we went to look for the fire department public information officer, Sheila Strehle.

Williams, Bonner, and Strehle met briefly to share information about the cause of the accident, the crime involved, the number of injured passengers, and so forth. They knew that each of them would be approached by the media and that it was imperative that they all had the same information. It would have been disastrous if they had told different stories; the reporters would then not trust any one of them.

Together, the three PR people for Metro Transit, the police department, and the fire department faced the media. Each answered questions specific to his or her respective agency. This was an excellent professional move. No one was trying to be the star of the crisis; their shared goal was to get the story told accurately and to help ensure that each agency would be perceived well by the media and the public for effective communications. As Williams explained:

Our initial news conference was held around 4 p.m., about 45 minutes after the accident. The five local television stations—KING-5 (an NBC affiliate), KOMO-4 (an ABC affiliate), KIRO-7 (a CBS affiliate), KSTW-11, and KCPQ—each had at least two crews at the scene. The local papers—*Seattle Times*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and *Tacoma News Tribune*—were present, as was the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, the television news magazine *Dateline NBC*, and several radio stations.

After the initial news conference, I spent the rest of the evening gathering information as it became available, communicating with agency personnel at the scene and by cell phone, conferring with the other agency public information officers at the scene, doing interviews with reporters, and making plans for the next day. I communicated with Rochelle Ogershok, public affairs coordinator for [the] King County Department of Transportation, by phone. She worked with Elaine Kraft, communications director for King County Executive Ron Sims, to issue a statement from Sims expressing sorrow for the victims. Sims and Transit General Manager Rick Walsh visited victims at Harborview Medical Center and spoke to reporters there.

The primary demand for information was in three areas—the homicide, the rescue-medical operation, and transit security. After the initial news conference, Williams said, the three primary spokespeople—fire department, police department, and Metro Transit — responded to media questions about their own areas and issues in separate interviews. He said, “The three of us would get together throughout the evening to compare notes and exchange information. We had an agreement that we would stick to our own areas of expertise and refer reporters to each other rather than answer questions about each other’s areas.”

Most of the printed material that Williams distributed to the media in the days following the accident included statistics from the transit security database, in response to specific requests from reporters. The statistics covered things like bus routes with the most security incidents, the frequency of particular kinds of incidents, and the number and categories of incidents that occurred on Route 359 (the route of the bus in the accident). Williams said he turned over the entire security database to the *Seattle Times*.

Some of the written documents included the following: (a) a security program fact sheet, (b) security statistics from the National Transit Database (see Table 8.1), (c) a joint management-union statement on transit security, (d) incident reports by a Metro bus driver who identified the assailant as a person who had pulled a gun in a previous incident, (e) reports from Metro agents detailing follow-up surveillance work after that incident, and (f) an op-ed piece written by Metro Transit Manager Rick Walsh summarizing Metro’s security improvements over the past years.

Table 8.1 National Transit Database—1996 Security Statistics

<i>Transit Systems (Comparable Cities/Fleets)</i>	<i>Robbery</i>		<i>Aggravated Assault</i>	
	<i>Drivers</i>	<i>Passengers</i>	<i>Drivers</i>	<i>Passengers</i>
King County Metro (Seattle)	1	0	0	3
Phoenix	7	4	2	0
Oakland	8	11	1	35
Houston	3	2	3	17
Salt Lake City	5	0	0	0
San Diego	18	48	0	8
Boston	63	18	0	10
Minneapolis	45	11	2	26
Pittsburgh	16	3	0	6
Portland	1	7	0	7
Tacoma (Pierce Transit)	1	0	3	3

Note. This chart was effective in getting positive coverage of Metro Transit's security system after the 1998 bus tragedy. Reporters and editors were able to see how the city's bus system compared to other bus systems in cities of comparable size. Printed with permission of Dan Williams.

There were also impromptu briefings of the media at the accident site and at Harborview Medical Center, where most of the injured passengers were taken. There was a joint news conference on Saturday, the day after the accident, with Walsh and Barry Samet, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 578. On the following Monday, there was another news conference for the distribution of the joint statement on transit security.

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

On Saturday, November 27, the day following the shooting and accident, coverage in the city's two major daily newspapers, the *Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* was extensive.

The *Seattle Times'* front page, which was devoted primarily to the incident, featured this banner headline:

Rider Shoots Driver; Two Dead, Dozens Injured

Bus falls from bridge

Two related stories began on the *Times'* front page: One told what happened; the other told what happened from the point of view of the passengers who were on the bus. The front page also included a large 5-column color photo (roughly 10" by 6") of police and firefighters rescuing victims from the mangled bus, a 2-column color photo (4" by 3½") of the bridge site where the bus went through the guardrail, a half-column headshot of the

bus driver, and a series of three drawings showing the route of the bus from the point that it entered the bridge to where it landed after the fall.

At the bottom of the *Times*' front page were two unrelated stories: One on the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky situation (with a half-column color headshot), which probably would have been the major story had the accident not occurred, and another about an accountability system set up by the Washington legislature for judging how well the state's six public universities served students. Both of these stories were continued on other pages.

Inside the *Seattle Times*, on pages A19, A20, and A21, following world and national news, was a feature piece entitled "The Aurora Bus Tragedy." On these three pages were (a) seven black-and-white photos, which dominated the pages; (b) the jump stories continued from page A1; (c) a long story about security on the buses, quoting Barry Samet, president of Local 587, Amalgamated Transit Union (the bus drivers' union); and (d) a list of the passengers on the bus, including their names, ages, conditions, and which of six hospitals treated them. In addition, there was the expected article about the driver and what a wonderful person he was.

Also in the *Seattle Times*, TV critic Kay McFadden's column was on the "human touch" of KOMO-TV's coverage of the tragedy. She noted that KING-5 was first on the air with the news that the bus had plunged off the bridge, but that KOMO-TV was first to break the news that someone had been killed and, later, that the driver had been shot. Various KOMO-TV news personnel were praised by the columnist for their "dogged reporting, superior productions, and rock-of-Gibraltar-like narration by anchor Dan Lewis." One reporter was praised for "buttonholing officials as they arrived on the scene" and for seeming like an old friend of the police department spokesperson, Christie-Lynn Bonner. The columnist wrote that all the other stations' reporters seemed to get to people of interest only after the KOMO-TV reporter had already done so. McFadden praised Lewis and his staff at KOMO-TV for being armed with data, keeping the story going "even when there [was] nothing to report," and for maintaining a "human touch." Lewis apparently signed off the newscast with this comment: "A quick prayer for the people involved would probably not be a bad idea right now" (McFadden, 1998, p. 21).

In the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the front page was similar to the *Times*, with the Clinton-Lewinsky story at the bottom. The banner headline read as follows:

A Horror Scene in Fremont

Shooting triggers bus plunge off Aurora Bridge; 2 dead, 33 hurt

There were three stories about the accident beginning on page A1. One was about the bus driver and his family; another on the story from inside the bus. The lead story was the basic five Ws and H (who, what, where, when, why, and how). As in the *Seattle Times*, there was a color drawing showing what happened to the bus on the bridge, a 3½-column (7" by 8½"), color photograph showing the damaged bridge and the bus broken into two pieces, and a map of the accident site.

Inside the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, following the national and international news, on pages A4 and A5, was a spread entitled "Aurora Bridge Bus Plunge." This 2-page spread included (a) the jump stories continued from page A1; (b) an entire column listing quotes from witnesses; (c) an article on how disaster drills helped prepare the Harborview Medical Center staff to handle the disaster (a very positive story for Harborview); (d) a

story about how residents near where the bus fell described the accident; (e) a history of Metro Transit bus accidents, marking this one as the worst in Metro's 30-year history, but showing a relatively good accident record and few injuries to passengers; (f) a story on how traffic was affected by the accident; and (g) a list of victims' names, ages, and conditions, as well as the hospitals at which they were treated. There were also six black-and-white photographs.

Both newspapers included quotations from Dan Williams, Christie-Lynne Bonner, Sheila Strehle, spokesperson for the Seattle Fire Department; Elaine Kraft, spokesperson for King County Executive Ron Sims; Tina Mankowski, spokesperson for Harborview Medical Center; and L.G. Blanchard, spokesperson for the University of Washington Medical Center. Although they all had important jobs to do and they could all be criticized if the communications did not go smoothly, Williams was more in the hot seat than the others and was quoted most often. After all, it was his agency's bus that crashed and killed people, and it was one of his employees who was killed. In addition, all of the spokespersons scrambled to get representatives of their respective organizations—firefighters, police officers, bus employees and officials, witnesses, victims willing to talk with the media—to make sure the public knew they were all on their toes and doing the best possible job.

Saturday's news coverage also indicated that the bus driver had been shot but that the identity of the assailant was still unknown. On Sunday, November 28, the accident story had become second in importance to a story about the death of the charismatic public school superintendent, John Stanford, who had lost a long and well-publicized battle with leukemia. However, two new developments about the bus accident were reported: the name of the assailant—Silas Cool—and the bad news that another victim had died.

In both Seattle newspapers on Monday, November 29, the accident shared front-page prominence with the death of Stanford. The articles on the bus accident in both newspapers were concerned with painting a picture of Silas Cool: Who was he? What was his problem? Who knew about his problem(s)? A spokesperson for the Union Gospel Mission, Bill Whipple, came forward to provide some of the answers. Although not homeless, the unemployed and troubled Cool had frequented the mission for food. Security on buses was also an important story for several days.

As expected, on the 1-year anniversary of the tragedy, the Seattle newspapers revisited the crisis. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* front-page story ran the following headline:

Bus crash nightmare

Won't let itself be forgotten

One lengthy article included extensive interviews with survivors—who talked about their inability to sleep, nightmares, and recurring injuries—in its retelling of the story of the accident. Another article was about how the driver's family had worked to adjust to life without him. Both stories were predictable but nonetheless heart-wrenching. Neither article was critical of Metro. There were a few paragraphs that mentioned claims and suits and that noted the county had settled some claims and had "helped some victims financially." The two most critically injured passengers got lumpsum settlements and would receive monthly payments as long as they lived. One had his right arm and leg amputated; the other suffered a very serious brain injury. There were also claims from residents who had some simple complaints such as broken windows (Sunde, 1999, p. A1).

The article about the survivors mentioned that some of the victims argued that the State of Washington, not Metro Transit, was responsible for the bridge, that the guardrails had not been strong enough, and that the northbound and southbound traffic should have been divided by concrete barriers. Some victims filed suits against Cool's estate.

In January 1999, *Seattle Weekly* praised Metro Transit in an article entitled "King County—Too Nice to Sue" (Fefer, 1999).

COMMUNICATIONS WITH LAWYERS

Williams said he had no contact with legal counsel until several days after the accident. Metro Transit's legal counsel was provided by the King County prosecuting attorney's office. "At no time did legal staff try to prevent me from media contact," said Williams. "When they did get in touch with me, it was to brief me on the county's plans for providing financial assistance to the victims. Naturally, there was concern over liability issues, and they did suggest ways that the county could express regret and sorrow without admitting liability. But they were sensitive to the media's and public's need to know, and they agreed it was in the county's best interest to be as forthcoming as possible."

CHALLENGES

Williams described his primary challenges as follows:

Responding in a timely and effective manner to the overwhelming number of requests for information, getting the information quickly from internal sources and passing it along to the media with appropriate explanations and interpretations. I received an estimated 500 media inquiries in the 10 days following the accident.

Television reporters created problems by showing up on buses and at bus bases, wanting to interview employees. They were focused on getting their stories and didn't seem to understand that they might be causing disruptions for employees and customers. It was also difficult to be patient with reporters and editors who keep their ears glued to their police scanners and wanted to pursue every security-related incident on the transit system, no matter how routine or trivial. It was a challenge to make the media understand the routine nature of those incidents without coming across as trying to discount or minimize the importance of security.

Williams also said it was a challenge throughout the crisis to find the time to produce good written material that would shed light on Metro's security program, to convince the media to analyze rather than sensationalize, and to remain patient and unemotional. Even so, he said he never felt—or allowed himself to feel—traumatized at the scene:

It was in the week to 10 days following the accident, while media pressure was intense for an extended period of time, that I had periods where I couldn't think

clearly enough. I overlooked important details and had trouble controlling my emotions, post traumatic stress. I think I gained some insight, because I was very much in control at the scene of the accident. I have even felt very emotional at times since then while writing or talking or viewing television coverage about the accident.

EVALUATION

Customer Service

According to Williams, the Customer Service office's effort to respond to customers' inquiries contributed to customer support after the accident. Tom Randall, chief of customer service, reported that about 80% of the hundreds of callers to the office following the accident expressed sympathy with Metro and/or the driver and his family. About 10% of all callers expressed anxiety about bus security and safety, and another 10% said rude bus drivers were to blame for most altercations. Overall, however, Williams pointed out that "the rapport between drivers and customers contributed to public support for Metro after the accident. Some drivers complained that Metro management failed to protect drivers adequately, and I'm sure that influenced some people, but I think that generally people saw the whole agency as a victim of this crime."

Media Relations

Williams noted that Metro's pre-established relationships with the news media paid off, but he added that quick response to media requests was probably more crucial to the satisfying symbiotic pairing with the media during the crisis:

Most of the reporters sympathized with what Metro was going through. And I think, in the aftermath, it was important to have credibility with the media as I tried to make the case with reporters and editors for the effectiveness of our security program. For the most part, I believe reporters accepted the information I provided at face value. I can think of only one reporter who was suspicious and antagonistic, and it was a reporter I had never [before] worked with on a regular basis.

Williams feels certain that if the news media could not get the on-site information they needed on that first day, the negativity would have carried over and made it harder for Metro to deal with reporters and editors in the aftermath of the accident:

Getting the union and management together to face the media early on was good. It minimized finger-pointing. It avoided having reporters running back and forth between the various camps, repeating accusations and denials. I think that, while far from perfect, our general ability to respond to the media went well. There were no stories about Metro's unwillingness or inability to respond. I think that Rick Walsh and Ron Sims both were excellent at being available and willing to talk to reporters. Both came across well and established good rapport and credibility with the media and, through them, [with] the general public as well.

Community Relations

“I think the improvements we were in the process of setting up before the accident added to our already-strong community relations, public outreach program,” Williams said.

Government Relations

Williams noted:

Since we are a government agency, the contact between Metro management and County Executive Ron Sims was [a kind of] government relations as [was] the contact with...13 members of the County Council. The latter communication included members of the County Council’s Transportation Committee, primarily to chair Rob McKenna and Greg Nickels, who had been active for years in transit security matters. I worked directly with Sims and his staff and with staff from the prosecuting attorney’s office. I also had at least one conversation with an official from the Federal Transit Administration.

Employee Relations

Williams was not involved in activity with employees, but he knows that funds were established for the crash victims and the family of the slain bus driver. “There was quite a bit of communication about that through e-mail and the county’s intranet Web site,” recalled Williams. “I also know there were meetings at the seven bus bases with operations managers, security personnel, and drivers to discuss the incident and Metro’s security program. Each base already had a security committee and, within a week after the accident, these committees were assigned tasks to work toward some long-term security improvements.”

Williams went on to say that “Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587 was instrumental in establishing a fund for [the bus driver’s] family and organizing a memorial service for [him] that took place 10 days after the shooting. The union and management worked together on a plan for continued improvements to the transit security program.”

Williams said, “I think that communication and coordination among our department, the prosecuting attorney’s office, and the county executive’s office went very well. This was critical in dealing with sensitive questions about liability and victims’ claims.”

“IF I HAD TO DO IT OVER...”

Williams said, “If I had to relive the experience, I would be better prepared and have better knowledge of our security program, with up-to-date handout material readily available and better access to the security database. I would also take the time at the very beginning to assemble a team—probably four or five people at the most—that would devote itself to external and internal communication on the issue for as long as necessary.”

The team, he said, would be based on a kind of corporate communications model:

I would like at least one person for internal communications, probably two or three for external communications (media, public affairs, publications), and one person to develop and maintain a Web site. There would also be a supervisor or manager to oversee everything, and an...administrative assistant. This team would be centralized in the director's office. It seems like a good way for the same messages/information to get out simultaneously to multiple audiences.

CHAPTER NINE

Consumer-Caused Crises

The following crises are probably the most frequent to strike product manufacturers or retailers and restaurants. They are crises started by consumers with plans of extorting money from the companies. The hoaxes are built on the realization that many companies will pay large settlements to avoid costly litigation. In most of these cases, hoaxsters charge that there is something dangerous or harmful about a product, but rarely do they report it to law enforcement. More often than not, it is reported to the news media or to management directly. They would like to avoid law enforcement agencies, probably because they know they are the ones breaking the laws.

If the news media gives the claim a lot of print or TV news time, the hoaxsters know consumers will turn away from the product or business. They reason that companies do not want this, so they will pay to settle with the complainant, often to avoid an expensive court fight.

CASE: WENDY'S AND THE FINGER-IN-THE-CHILI HOAX

Denny Lynch, as Senior Vice-President of Communications for Wendy's International, faced a crisis that innocent food-based companies fear—a consumer commits a vicious act that causes other patrons to turn away from the restaurant or product.

In March 2005, Anna Ayala, then 39, a Las Vegas resident visiting San Jose, California, went to a Wendy's with relatives. She ordered a bowl of beef chili. She said she bit into a spoon of chili and "suddenly I chew something that's kind of hard, crunchy. I spit it out." She said that's when she realized the crunchy item was a 1½ inch human finger with a well-manicured nail. She hired a lawyer and sued.

Lynch received a phone call that night from Bob Bertini, Wendy's director of communications, explaining what happened. Lynch said he had no time to make a plan of action, he had to act immediately; the news media were calling. For the next 60 days, Lynch and Bertini spent many hours talking to the news media. Lynch said, "The pace was nonstop. Even when Pope John Paul II died, the incident still got coverage."

At first, sympathy was with Ms. Ayala. The Santa Clara County Health Department said she was ill and distraught. The spokesperson said, "She was so emotionally upset once she found out what it was. She was vomiting." It also hurt Wendy's efforts when the health department immediately released photos of the finger to the news media. This made the picture people imagined very real and national news coverage intensified. The health department did announce that there was no public health risk, but that was never the issue anyway.

Lynch was not new to crisis communications. In his 25 years at Wendy's, he was on the job when five workers were shot and killed in a Wendy's in Queens, New York.

So a Wendy's regional management team set up a makeshift control room in a franchise office in San Jose. The local police were involved as was the coroner. Wendy's cooperated fully with the police and health officials, and did everything possible to assist them with their investigation from the earliest stages of the crisis.

As the news spread, patrons fled. A human finger found in food was not life-threatening as was the Tylenol case when capsules had been laced with poison (see chap. 4), nor was it as frightening as a fear of AIDS as consumers feared in the Snapps case (see chap. 5) when restaurant patrons heard a rumor that a manager with AIDS had bled into the hamburger. However, it was still a picture that people could not get past. “It was the gross-out factor,” Lynch said. People could not eat chili without imagining there was a finger in it. Even people who knew it was extremely likely that it was a scam were still affected by the gross-out factor.

Based in Dublin, Ohio, with 6,600 locations in North America, all Wendy’s restaurants were affected but particularly those in the San Francisco Bay area. The company lost 20% to 50% of its business in the Bay area in the first month after the incident.

The *New York Times* called the crisis campaign “CSI: Wendy’s.” Wendy’s checked their own employees and employees of all the suppliers and quickly determined that no one in Wendy’s supply plants or the restaurants had a missing finger. Lynch announced to the press, “All of our employees have ten digits.” In addition there had been no reports made to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of injuries at any supplier of ingredients of Wendy’s chili. (Wendy’s chili is made from scratch in each restaurant.) The employee who prepared the chili had been with the same restaurant for 10 years and was respected for his dutiful work.

Wendy’s crisis management strategy centered on four areas:

1. Conducting due diligence to establish the brand was not at fault.
2. Ensuring that Wendy’s key company values drive all decisions and activities.
3. Briefing and mobilizing team members for quick action and response as events unfold.
4. Building a postincident campaign that enhances Wendy’s brand.

“Our position was that based on all the information we had, we strongly believed Wendy’s was not responsible,” Bertini said. “We cautioned the news media not to jump to conclusions, while deliberately avoiding fraud accusations against Ms. Ayala. We did not want to do anything that could jeopardize the police investigation.”

So, feeling confident about Wendy’s position, it became necessary to find out to whom the finger had belonged and vindicate the company publicly. In the spirit of a true TV mystery, talk went to “Where is the rest of the body?” Wendy’s offered \$50,000 and later a \$100,000 reward for information leading to positive identification of the finger and announced that to the news media. Wendy’s also contracted with an outside source to man a “tip line” operating 10 hours each day for reports.

Copypat cases sprang up with people claiming to have found other items in Wendy’s food—bones and fingernails were mentioned. The finger was fuel for jokes on late-night TV talk shows and conversation for daytime call-in radio shows. Jay Leno, on NBC’s *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*, said “I didn’t know Wendy’s sold finger food.”

Immediately following the alleged incident, Ms. Ayala scheduled an appearance on ABC’s *Good Morning America* to tell her story. This was the only such national program to have booked an interview with her. Wendy’s tried to dissuade ABC from airing the interview because the story, at that point, would make Ayala look credible and would give her a national forum. However, the show refused to curtail its plans and Wendy’s representatives opted not to appear on camera with Ayala.

Nothing good could come from a conversation about the incident especially because the police investigation was ongoing and the origin of the finger was still a mystery. Nevertheless, Lynch spent 3 hours on Easter Sunday night preparing a written statement that was read in its entirety on the show. The company's basic position was that the finger did not enter the food chain in its ingredients.

The employees at the San Jose restaurant had all their fingers, and no suppliers of Wendy's ingredients had any hand or finger injuries. If a Wendy's spokesperson had appeared, it could have left the viewing public with the attitude of, "Big company attacks poor innocent woman and won't admit it is wrong." Still, Ms. Ayala and her lawyer appeared and anyone who had never heard the story before now heard it, and she was still considered the victim in the case.

People began to claim the finger and the reward. In one of the many bizarre twists in the case, a woman claimed she lost a finger in a leopard attack at an animal compound near Las Vegas. The woman said she last saw her middle finger when it was packed with ice in a plastic bag in hopes of reattaching it. When doctors told her it could not be reattached, she said she had "no idea what happened to the finger." The hospital confirmed that she was there for a leopard attack and that it could not account for where the finger was. Her lawyer came forward saying, "She wants to participate in DNA testing and any final resolution of that matter." He stressed that his client had no connection with Ayala. This was investigated but the woman's finger was longer than the one supposedly found in the chili and the fingerprints did not match.

Then the story began to turn. The police continued to investigate and the coroner began an investigation. In considering the preparation of the chili, first, the raw meat is turned into ground beef at the meatpacking plant. Nothing as long as one inch survives the process. The ground beef used in the chili is chopped into small chunks with a spatula, not even a sharp knife. The beans, from cans, are added along with seasonings and tomatoes. Then, the chili is made in a 22-quart pot and cooked for 4 to 6 hours; it is stirred every 15 minutes. The coroner said (and the health department concurred) that the finger "was not consistent with an object that had been cooked in chili at 170 degrees for hours."

The police discovered that Ms. Ayala was experienced at filing lawsuits against companies. She had been involved in at least six such cases, some in the San Francisco Bay area. One involved a sexual harassment suit against an auto dealership. That case ended when she had a dispute with her lawyer.

In another suit, she won a settlement against an El Pollo Loco restaurant in Las Vegas. She charged that her daughter became ill after eating in the restaurant and she was paid for medical expenses. Police investigators said they found 13 civil actions involving Ayala and her children. She was involved in a criminal complaint charging that she sold a trailer she did not own to a woman in San Jose.

In early April, police went to Ayala's home to question her and, according to Ayala, she asserted that they were out to get her and were unnecessarily rough as they executed a search warrant at her home. The Associated Press reported that she said, "Lies, lies, lies—that's all I am hearing. They should look at Wendy's. What are they hiding? Why are we being victimized again?" A few days later, her lawyer said she had decided not to sue.

In mid-April, there was a press conference with Wendy's officials and the police. The police told the news media that they considered the claim a hoax. Ayala was arrested and

held without bail at Clark County jail in Las Vegas. She was charged with attempted grand theft stemming from the fact that Wendy's had lost millions of dollars in sales because of a hoax devised by her.

Police said they found in their investigations that two people who knew Ayala said she described putting the finger in the chili. The descriptions were similar and the two people did not know each other. Also, Ayala's family members who were with her at Wendy's said they did not see the finger in her mouth and noticed it only after she pointed to it in the cup. Two family members said they saw her spit it out and she vomited, but there was no evidence of that at the scene.

In May 2005, Wendy's was fully vindicated when police discovered the owner of the finger. A phone call to the hotline tipped police to a male friend and coworker of Ayala's husband, Jaime Plascencia, who lost a finger in an industrial accident the previous December. The finger was positively identified as belonging to Brian Rossiter who sold it to Plascencia for \$ 100. Rossiter cooperated with police and told them the couple had offered him \$250,000 to keep silent. The husband was arrested on identity theft charges unrelated to the Wendy's case, but was later also charged with conspiracy to file a false insurance claim and attempted grand theft with damages exceeding \$2.5 million.

San Jose Police Chief Rob Davis declared, "The jig is up! The puzzle pieces are beginning to fall into place, and the truth is being exposed."

During the month, Wendy's made a customer relations move, reaching out to customers in 50 Bay area restaurants and offering free Frosties and coupons. The approach was later expanded nationally with Wendy's giving away more than 15 to 18 million free Frostys during a weekend to thank customers for their loyalty. A column by Wendy's Chairman Jack Schuessler appeared that same week in the *Wall Street Journal* explaining how Wendy's defended its brand, at great cost, and would emerge stronger and better.



Figure 9.1. The Dublin, Ohio-based fast-food chain gave away as many as 18 million frozen desserts on the weekend after the sentencing. "The turnout for the promotion exceeded our expectations," said spokesman Bob Bertini. "Throughout the weekend, there were long lines in our restaurants across the country." The company gave the Frostys away to thank customers for their loyalty.

Both Ayala and Plascencia entered guilty pleas in September. At their sentencing hearing in January 2006, the Wendy's cashier, Jose Pacheco, said Ayala had asked whom he killed to get the finger and made him bear the brunt of her complaints. Hector Pineda, who made the chili, said "I felt so bad for the fear of what people would think of me. We are the ones who suffered."

Ayala was sentenced to 9 years in prison while her husband received a 12-year sentence. They also must pay \$170,000 in restitution for the San Jose Wendy's workers' lost wages and \$21.8 million to Wendy's International and JEM Management, which owns the restaurant. Both corporations agreed not to collect from the couple if they never benefit from the scam, including books and movies.

Lynch asked the judge to send a message that "consumer fraud is a serious crime that demands a severe penalty."

Looking back at the crisis, Lynch says that Wendy's "moved from a place where many people thought we were guilty to a point where they realized our employees and our brand had been victimized. Because of our actions, we hope people also now see us as a company that stood by its principles and endeavored to do the right thing when faced with enormous challenges."



Figure 9.2. The celebration at the Wendy's restaurant following the hoax proved to be fun and uplifting for employees as well as customers. After struggling through the crisis, employees enjoyed hearing all of the positive reaction from the customers.

In talking to *USA Today* about the crisis, Schuessler said, “We believe our reputation is the most important thing we have” He also said that during a crisis situation, companies have to have a set of core values because “there’s no playbook that’s been written.”

CASE: PEPSI AND THE SYRINGE-IN-THE-CAN SCARE

Steve Bryant as vice president and deputy general manager of EvansGroup Public Relations in Seattle, Washington had handled many crisis management problems for clients. The agency had handled more food-related crises than other types, but the 1993 crisis of hypodermic syringes reported in Diet Pepsi cans was, as Bryant reflects, “the most spectacular crisis in which we had been involved at the time.”

The Alpac Bottling Company, based in Seattle, was the principal Northwest bottler of Pepsi-Cola products. It was, at the time, a family-owned business, but it was later acquired by the Pepsi-Cola Company. Evans-Group (now called Publicis Dialog), had handled advertising for Alpac on an ongoing basis for many years and its public relations on a project basis.

Like many companies, Alpac had a recall manual that had elements of a crisis management plan but not an actual crisis management or crisis communications plan.

THE PROBLEM AND STRATEGIES

On Thursday, June 10, 1993, at about noon, the corporate attorney for Alpac telephoned EvansGroup, indicating that KSTW-TV News in Tacoma, Washington, had called about a report from another attorney charging that his clients found a syringe in a can of Diet Pepsi. The station wanted a spokesperson to be interviewed by reporter Steve Williams, on camera, in about 2 hours.

John Eastham, then-president of EvansGroup, and Bryant, as well as personnel from Alpac, assembled and prepared a response for Alpac spokespersons. The crisis communications team consisted of Bryant; Eastham; Susan Hebert, then-director of public affairs for Alpac; A1 Call, Alpac CEO; and Paul Elliot, director of operations, who directed production and was the initial spokesperson. Doug Hoffman, an attorney from a local firm representing Alpac’s insurance company, was also an integral part of the team. Carl Behnke, president of Alpac, was out of town but communicated by car telephone.

In the early stages of the crisis, Pepsi’s New York-based national public relations team, led by Rebecca Madeira, served in an advisory capacity. Anne Ward from that team kept in contact with the Alpac team. Pepsi-Cola eventually took over the helm.

The crisis communications team reviewed the situation, decided that Call would be the spokesperson for the first interview, and established principles that would be stressed in interviews. The team prepared Call by giving him a list of media interview tips, posing sample questions to him, and critiquing his responses.

Earl and Mary Triplett said they had found what appeared to be a used hypodermic syringe in a Diet Pepsi can after drinking its contents. They were afraid that the needle

might have been contaminated and believed that it was important to warn the public that “somebody” might be intentionally placing syringes into the soft-drink cans. The can that the Triplets possessed was bottled at Alpac on April 7, 1993.

“Visible top management is essential. This was a key part of our strategy,” said Bryant. “When something serious like this is reported, people don’t want to hear from the PR practitioner. They want to hear from the people who are ultimately responsible.”

Call, the Alpac spokesperson, indicated that his company was investigating the situation, that Alpac was concerned about consumer safety, and that it would take all the appropriate steps to clear the matter. It was primarily a question of showing concern and compassion for consumers in general, and for the Triplets in particular. This is an essential early position on the part of any company in a crisis resulting from product tampering or product failure.

There were two very serious aspects to this crisis:

1. The Triplets, who were in their 80s and said to be a very devout Christian couple, were especially credible. Neighbors, friends, and

Consumers shun companies in crisis

BY DENNIS CHASE
ADVERTISING AGE

PepsiCo appears to have escaped damage, but consumers say they are less likely to buy products from companies that have been involved in a public crisis over a breach in ethics or safety.

In a survey of more than 1,000 adult consumers conducted in June, just before the Pepsi scare, 80% said problems at Sears, Roebuck and Co. and 79% said problems at Food Lion made it likely they would shun those companies.

Last year, Sears was charged with making unnecessary repairs at some of its auto repair facilities, and earlier this year, Food Lion was hit with charges that it used unsanitary food safety procedures. Other companies such as Exxon Corp. and Dow Corning Corp. were also cited in the survey.

The survey, to be released by the end of the month by Omnicom Group’s Porter/Novelli public relations agency, found that even crises involving simple business decisions, like layoffs, affected attitudes. About 23% said General Motors Corp.’s layoffs and plant closings would affect their purchases, and 19% said the same thing about IBM Corp.

“Companies start out in the hole,” said Bob Druckenmiller, Porter/Novelli president. “People don’t believe companies tell the truth.”

However, PepsiCo, by responding quickly to questions about syringes allegedly found in soft-drink cans, helped itself.

“One lesson is you have to respond quickly, even if you don’t have all the facts,” Mr. Druckenmiller said.

The survey also found that 76% of consumers polled are most angry when companies refuse to accept blame for problems, 71% are most angry when they provide incomplete or inaccurate information, and 71% are upset when they put profits ahead of public interest

The mail survey was done by National Family Opinion using a random sample reflecting the U.S. population. Margin of error was 3 percentage points.

Figure 9.3. Portion of an article published in *Advertising Age* on how consumers feel about purchasing products from companies in crisis (Chase, 1993). Reprinted by permission of *Advertising Age*.

the media compared them with the Pledge of Allegiance, the Boy Scout Oath, and the Pope.

2. In his first televised interview, Earl Triplett said the presence of the syringe in the can made him worry about acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Although the charge was not made, the underlying fear among consumers was AIDS. Used hypodermic syringes can transmit this terminal disease. As consumers learned about the incident, the obvious question was, “Were the syringes contaminated with the AIDS virus?”

There was such widespread fear of the AIDS virus that the very remote possibility could plant doubts in the minds of consumers and seriously affect, if not virtually halt, the sales of Pepsi products. This kind of hysteria could be expected even though health officials maintained and made clear early on that the acid in soft drinks would kill the AIDS virus.

Alpac felt very strongly that the tampering did not take place at its plant. The company reviewed its quality control procedures and found no problems. It allowed television cameras to capture the canning process. Pepsi-Cola’s public relations department issued B-roll (video footage to be used with a newscaster’s voice-over) demonstrating the bottling procedure. As the video showed, the cans passed under a mirror where workers checked for foreign objects.

Next the cans went up a conveyer belt upside down; then were spun, washed, and placed directly into the machine that filled and capped them. Finally, they were set upside down and weighed precisely to check for leaks. An Alpac official indicated that the discovery of dust was the worst thing that had ever happened in the process. Even that was rare.

“The coverage of the canning process proved very helpful in the course of events,” said Bryant. “It showed how unlikely a contamination of this sort would be. It also, in a very real way, established what a high-quality manufacturing process was used to can soft drinks. And it bolstered consumer confidence in the long run.”

Bryant said that his team also shared messages with the consumer about Alpac’s excellent safety record and the limited number of consumer complaints previously received.

“We also knew very early on, through laboratory analysis, that the syringe was not contaminated,” said Bryant. “The risk was limited to a chance of being stuck in the lip with a syringe, admittedly not a pleasant possibility, but not a health risk. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) supported this position.”

Bryant said that other calls from the media came within an hour of their notification of the problem. “It was not a national issue at first,” he said. “We did our very best to contain it to the area, and we probably would have done so had it not been for the copycat cases. This eventually made it a national issue, but for about 4 days it was a local issue.”

The crisis became a regional one when the FDA issued its advisory to all Alpac distribution areas. Consumers had to be notified. Specific messages had to be tailored for certain states. For example, all Pepsi products distributed in Hawaii were also canned there, so even if there had been contamination in Seattle, Hawaii residents would not have been affected.

Handling the crisis meant being responsive not only to the needs of Alpac, but also to the FDA and to the legal counsel for Alpac’s insurance company. As mentioned earlier, Pepsi-Cola was the imminent owner of the bottling company and had an enormous stake in its future. Even though Alpac would be responsible, soft-drink consumers nationwide knew little about Alpac. Furthermore, the incident happened in June, when soft-drink sales began to soar for the summer months. If the scare succeeded in causing consumers to curtail the consumption of Pepsi products, Pepsi would suffer greatly. Bryant explained how the team responded to the needs of the FDA:

The FDA has a responsibility to investigate matters of this sort. We worked very closely with it from day one. It would have been a mistake on our part to take an adversarial stance with the government agency that, frankly, can be a mighty bear. We worked with [its people] in developing communications. We reviewed all news releases with them before they were issued. We established sort of a common point of view. The FDA maintained the weight of its authority in the matter and at the same time became our communications ally.

Because of the pending change of ownership, Alpac’s attorney was scheduled to go on vacation the day after the crisis presented itself and then leave the company. The crisis team coordinated its work with Doug Hoffman, the attorney for Alpac’s liability insurance company.

“He was great,” recalled Bryant. “He had a wonderful understanding of PR issues and public affairs and was very sensitive to the need to communicate. He understood that communicating effectively would help maintain the company’s value and limit its liability. You can run into lawyers who want to guide the entire process by solely focusing on limiting the company’s liability. That can be a disaster.”

The acute stage of the crisis lasted about 9 days, during which the Alpac team worked 15 to 20 hours each day. Susan Hebert and Bryant fielded as many as 200 media calls a day. Locally, it was the top news story for a week.

“Susan received calls even in the middle of the night,” said Bryant. “We were constantly making decisions whenever we received new information. Fatigue became a serious factor.” An intern from the University of Washington, Erica Stone, scanned the media and wire services with help from PR Newswire and BusinessWire. “She fed us stories constantly,” said Bryant. “Of course, we all tuned into broadcast news. That was easy to follow because it was always the first story.”

Bryant and his team handled the crisis for the first 4 days. The following sections detail the highlights of that time period.

Thursday, June 10

Alpac's crisis communications team was assembled. The FDA was informed. The team trained spokespersons, keeping certain guiding principles in mind:

1. Treat the crisis seriously.
2. Apprise and support the FDA.
3. Demonstrate concern for the customer.
4. Communicate quickly and openly with a limited number of spokespersons.
5. Share the company's quality assurance facts.



Figure 9.4. Editorial cartoon about the syringe-in-the-can scare by Chris Britt, published in the *News Tribune*, Tacoma, Washington, on June 19, 1993. From the *News Tribune*, 1993. Reprinted with the permission of Chris Britt.

6. Communicate the lack of health risk (this was established after it was determined there was no health risk).

Calls from the local news media began to come in; most were television news. As Bryant said, "Substantially, this was a TV news story; there was something about the visual image of a Pepsi can and a syringe that compelled news directors." Media tours of the plant were allowed that first day.

Friday, June 11

Alpac employees were advised by a bulletin board notice not to speak with the media. This was done to comply with the FDA's position of not revealing any information until the investigation was completed.

A second reported syringe-in-a-can came in to Alpac directly.

The charges came from an unidentified person who indicated that he or she did not want to involve an attorney or the media, but merely wanted to inform Alpac.

The Alpac team notified the FDA because of its determination to be cooperative with the FDA and honest, no matter what the consequences. Of course, if the person making the charge later decided to go public, Alpac would have been accused of a cover-up. The FDA conducted overnight tests that revealed no contamination of the needle.

The FDA started visits to the Alpac plant. Its representatives talked to nearly all of the employees involved in production. Employees rallied on behalf of the company. The plant was inspected thoroughly. Records of quality assurance and customer complaints were reviewed.

Alpac President Carl Behnke decided to issue an advisory to consumers, urging them to pour soft drinks into a second container before drinking and to inspect containers before opening them and consuming contents.

The FDA said a public advisory should be issued, and the crisis communications team asked that Alpac be allowed to make the announcement. It wanted to take a leadership position and offer its own precautions. The suggestion from the FDA did not imply guilt by Alpac but did show concern for the public should the complaints prove legitimate. The advisory also included a consumer hotline number for the answering of questions.

CNN picked up that evening's news report from a local station, bringing it to national attention. The Associated Press issued a story, placing the crisis in print nationally.

Advertising was pulled in the Seattle-Tacoma market for Pepsi products that day. Said Bryant, "We wanted to avoid having people see Diet Pepsi ads and thinking 'syringe.' Also, we wanted to avoid the appearance of being callous in continuing to promote a product that some people feared might be injurious."

Sunday, June 13

The FDA issued its own advisory, thereby broadening public awareness of the crisis to all areas served by Alpac. Local Alpac managers were coached to take calls. Advisories were customized for specific markets.

There was an explosion of media calls—local, national, and international. This was the day when the number of calls peaked at 200. Among the callers were network news operations and the *New York Times*.

Another "victim," the first of several copycats, turned up in New Orleans. These copycat cases caused a national media frenzy, although some of the claims were incredible and extreme.

There was talk about a possible recall. Two Seattle television stations polled consumers asking whether they felt the company should recall Diet Pepsi. Most participants in the poll felt that the company should not recall, although reactions were mixed.

Monday, June 14

A copycat case turned up in Alaska at Carr's Supermarket. A man bought a soft drink, took it to his car, ostensibly for his daughter, and returned it to the store, creating a big

emotional scene. "My daughter's been stabbed in the lip with a syringe!" the man shouted. It was later discovered that the man also bought insulin syringes at the same store.

He was eventually charged with fraud. Each day, there was more demand for news coverage. One of the crisis team members said reporters seemed to want this to be the story of the year.

As the media coverage intensified, so did the fake reports. There were more in Louisiana than any other state and the spokesman at the New Orleans plant there attributed the hoaxes to high unemployment and desperation to get money by any means.

The Pepsi-Cola Co., with headquarters in Somers, New York, took the lead in the national public relations effort as news of the crisis spread nationally. The FDA issued a warning against false reports of tampering and assured the public that there was no serious health risk.

On this day Craig Weatherup, president and CEO of Pepsi, had his first contact with David Kessler, commissioner of the FDA. It was important to Pepsi for the head of its company to communicate with the head of the FDA in a kind of merging of efforts to investigate the problem.

Weatherup also functioned as spokesperson and head of the crisis team. The team's members included the following:

1. The crisis coordinator, Rebecca Madeira, vice president of the Public Affairs Department, was instrumental in making sure the company spoke in one voice and directed the actions of the team.
2. The Public Affairs Department had three subteams: A press subteam managed media contact; the production subteam wrote, designed, and developed news releases (both print and video), audiotapes, charts, and photographs; and a government affairs subteam communicated information to 400 Pepsi bottlers.
3. Consumer relations specialists responded to many thousands of telephone calls, 24 hours a day.
4. Scientific and regulatory affairs worked with the FDA in following up on each charge of a syringe in a Diet Pepsi can.
5. Sales and marketing employees relayed information to the management of restaurants, stores, and other retailers to assist them in keeping their businesses operable.
6. Manufacturing experts worked with the FDA to prepare explanations of the production processes for dissemination to the media and consumers.
7. The Legal Department briefed other members of the crisis team on communications issues.

All information was disseminated both externally and internally through a communications clearinghouse.

The company's and crisis team's overall goal was to avert damage to Pepsi's good name and reputation. To do that, the team had to consider three publics:

1. Pepsi customers, who were reached by letters and telephone calls from the sales staff. The staff used talking points, as shown in Fig. 9.5.
2. Pepsi headquarters employees, who received daily news summaries.
3. Pepsi bottlers and field employees, who received twice-a-day advisories (Pepsi-Cola, 1993a).

PHASE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Before the crisis team could communicate with publics, it had to determine what the problem was. Could there be a malicious person or persons in a plant placing syringes in cans? As Madeira said, “We had to be absolutely sure that this could not possibly have happened in our plants. We needed to develop a responsible way of talking about the situation before going public” (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 5).

CONSUMER TALKING POINTS

Product Tampering Inquiries

(for Internal Use Only - 6/15/93)

- Yes, we've received other calls regarding alleged product tampering, and we are working with Federal authorities to verify those reports. The calls come on the heels of a much-publicized Incident of an alleged tampering incident In the Seattle-Tacoma and New Orleans areas, and already we are discovering that certain of the reported incidents are hoaxes, or people reacting to perceived rather than actual problems.
- In fact, the FDA Criminal Investigation Unit has already made an arrest of an Individual in Central Pennsylvania who allegedly falsely reported he found a syringe in our product The penalty for this type of crime Is a \$250,000 fine and a maximum of five years In prison.
- Our first concern Is consumer safety. For that reason, the President of Pepsi-Cola and the head of the FDA have been in constant communication to insure that everything humanly possible to assure consumer safety Is first and foremost In our actions.
- First of all cans, as you might Imagine, are the most difficult of all consumer packages to tamper with, and because our production processes are performed at such high speeds it's virtually an Impossibility to Introduce a foreign object
- Canned products are produced In 140 separate and distinct locations—we produce between 20 and 30 million cans per day. The cans themselves originate from different suppliers, and are filled at different times. It's Implausible to think that these events could occur simultaneously. In fact, news reports have highlighted the safety and integrity of our manufacturing

- process—It's been reported that the canning process we use is probably the most tamper-proof of all manufacturing processes.**
- ***The FDA has not recommended product recall. They have issued a statement that our products are safe, and as a precaution, are encouraging consumers to pour the contents of all packages into a cup before drinking. We ask that people use their own good judgment and common sense on this matter.***
 - ***There have been no injuries, nor have our investigations found any foreign objects in any unopened cans.***
 - ***This is a criminal investigation; product tampering and false reports of tampering are criminal offenses. Therefore, in cooperation with the FDA's Criminal Investigation Unit we're unable to comment any further.***
 - ***If you see anything unusual - please don't hesitate to call us back. That's what we're here for.***

Figure 9.5. The talking points prepared for Pepsi-Cola employees responding to calls from consumers inquiring about the syringes in cans. Reprinted by permission of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

PHASE 2: COOPERATION WITH THE FDA

The FDA inspected Pepsi's manufacturing process in meticulous detail. Pepsi's vice president of product safety said, "Each and every canning line at the production plants in question was studied very carefully to see if there was any way to infiltrate the line. Employee records were checked. Shipping and customer inventories were reviewed. Consumer complainants were interviewed" (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 5).

It had already been determined that the cans involved in the complaints were filled and sealed at various plants and at various times. According to Weatherup, "some of the cans were bottled 6 months ago, some 6 weeks ago, some 6 days ago" (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 5).

The FDA agreed that, considering the high speed and integrity of the production line as well as the constant observation of the process, it was virtually impossible for a syringe to have been placed in a can either accidentally or maliciously. Considering also that the cans came from different plants, it was determined that the syringes were placed in them after they were opened. Also, no syringes were ever found in unopened cans.

Although no injuries were reported, there was great fear of the possible transmission of AIDS through the syringes. Health officials announced that there was no risk to consumers' health from syringes in the can. Because there was no health risk and no culpability on the part of the Pepsi process, there was no need to recall the product.

Madeira said, "We were committed to putting consumer safety first, but a recall would not end the crisis or restore consumer confidence. The only thing that would stop this was to discourage—in the strongest possible terms—tampering with an opened can."

PHASE 3: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A STRATEGY

Armed with research that vindicated the company, the crisis team set out to begin an extensive media battle.

Tuesday, June 15

The production subteam produced video footage. It was intended to be so visually persuasive as to eliminate in viewers' minds the possibility of malicious tampering in the plants. Although Weatherup and the FDA made public announcements, the crisis team knew that consumers would be more likely to believe what they could see rather than what they were told by the company head (who could conceivably lie for economic gain). Because there was no way to take all consumers to the plants, Pepsi did the next best thing and took the plants to the consumers through videotapes of the plants in operation.

The B-roll footage showed the canning process: cans being inverted, cleaned, inverted again, filled, and sealed—all under careful inspection and all in nine tenths of a second. The footage was transmitted via satellite to television news programs all over the United States. Three other videotapes followed over the next 3 days showing more scenes of Pepsi's commitment to consumer safety (see Fig. 9.6).

“A can is the most tamper-proof packaging in the food supply,” said Weatherup. “We are 99.99% certain that this didn't happen in Pepsi plants” (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 6).

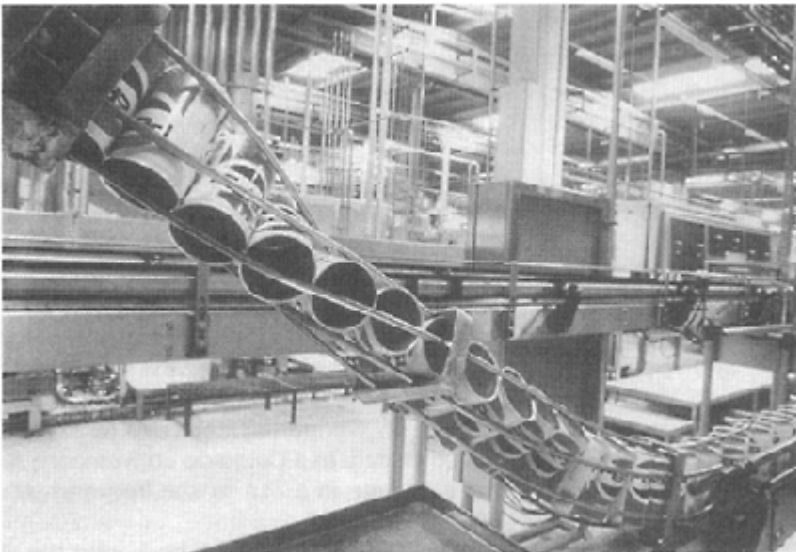


Figure 9.6. Still photos and video footage of the rapid Pepsi manufacturing process convinced consumers that it would be extremely unlikely for syringes to be placed in cans, either accidentally or intentionally, at the plants. Reprinted by permission of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

Madeira said, “Our strategy was to reassure the public that this was not a manufacturing crisis. What was happening with syringes was not occurring in our plants” (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 7). In addition to the videotapes, Weatherup’s interviews were aired on all the television networks on Tuesday evening. The Public Affairs Department took hundreds of calls from the print and broadcast media across the country. The FDA’s Kessler and Pepsi’s Weatherup both appeared on ABC’s *Nightline*. Their message was that the crisis was actually a series of hoaxes by people trying to make easy money. Kessler mentioned that the first arrest had been made in Pennsylvania and that others would follow (Pepsi-Cola, 1993a).

The consumer relations members of the crisis team talked to 2,000 consumers. News releases were distributed announcing the FDA’s intention to prosecute persons who filed false claims of product tampering.

Wednesday, June 16

The day began with Weatherup’s appearances on CBS’s *This Morning*, NBC’s *The Today Show*, and ABC’s *Good Morning America*. The coverage originated from the offices in Somers, and crews were setting up as early as 4 a.m. (see Fig. 9.7). That evening, Weatherup appeared on PBS’s *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* and CNN’s *Larry King Live*. Most viewers who telephoned in during the latter show emphasized their support for the company.



Figure 9.7. Pepsi CEO Craig Weatherup met with the media at a 1993 news conference. Reprinted by permission of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

Madeira said, “Wednesday was pivotal. The media understood our production integrity, and we were gaining support as the day went on. We were hopeful that the FDA would announce more arrests as reports of hoaxes and recantations poured in from police across the country” (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 8).

By June 16, some 65 cases of tampering had been reported. On this date, the crisis team had the hoax to end hoaxes. A surveillance camera in a Colorado convenience store had captured a woman placing a syringe in a can as she approached the checkout stand. The team prepared to broadcast the tape but held it back after the FDA requested waiting until the arrest was made.

In the meantime, tampering claims were made in four additional states. Persons who had already made claims began to confess, hoping to avoid prosecution.

Thursday, June 17

The first editorial cartoons appeared. Bryant’s favorite was one of a Pepsi delivery man wheeling in a case of Pepsi saying to a physician, “Doctor, the syringes you ordered are here.” Bryant said, “The fact that people could laugh about the crisis suggested it was no longer a serious concern and that public confidence in the reports was failing.”

The FDA held a news conference on Thursday when FDA Commissioner Kessler was expected to announce arrests, but the Pepsi crisis team was elated when he also stated, in unequivocal terms, that Pepsi was completely exonerated, that it was a victim of the hoaxes. “The notion that there has been nationwide tampering of Diet Pepsi is unfounded,” he said via satellite (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 9).

At this point, Pepsi released the Colorado surveillance tape, which team members called “the smoking gun.” Weatherup made comments to go along with the silent video footage. The tape showed how simple and how fast it was to place a syringe in an open can. Pepsi couldn’t have asked for a stronger tool to convince consumers of the hoaxes.

Friday, June 18

On Friday, Pepsi considered the crisis over. To certify the ending, it created an ad that ran on Monday, June 21. The ad’s headline was “Pepsi Is Pleased to Announce... Nothing” (see Fig. 9.8). The copy stated that the claims were hoaxes and, in effect, told people that Pepsi was still the refreshing drink consumers have enjoyed. It also urged consumers to participate in special offers beginning the July 4th weekend.

At headquarters, 1,200 employees attended a meeting to celebrate their victory over the crisis. They viewed the videotapes that helped end the crisis and witnessed firsthand the ad that would appear in newspapers on Monday. The videotapes and ad were also sent to the 400 Pepsi facilities so that those employees could view them.

The company, which had suffered a \$30 million loss in sales as a result of the crisis, knew it was time to rebuild its market share. In a personal letter to employees, Weatherup wrote, “It’s time now for us to move quickly and decisively to restore...our business” (Pepsi-Cola, 1993b, p. 10).

With the hot summer days approaching, Pepsi’s marketing department created a “Thanks America” program. A \$1-off coupon appeared in newspaper ads. “Thanks America” buttons were worn by Pepsi employees, who also distributed the coupons to their friends and neighbors.

A week after the first hoax was uncovered, consumers bought 800,000 more cases of Pepsi products than the week before the crisis. Sales began to rebound, and they bounced back completely during the summer. The week of July 4th was Pepsi's strongest week of 1993.

The Pepsi-Cola Company won the prestigious Silver Anvil Award for businesses—bestowed by the Public Relations Society of America—for its campaign against “The Great Pepsi Hoax.” The company was praised for showing to customers, the media,

Pepsi is pleased to announce... ...nothing.

As America now knows, those stories about Diet Pepsi were a hoax. Plain and simple, not true. Hundreds of investigators have found no evidence to support a single claim.

As for the many, many thousands of people who work at Pepsi-Cola, we feel great that it's over. And we're ready to get on with making and bringing you what we believe is the best-tasting diet cola in America.

There's not much more we can say. Except that most importantly, we won't let this hoax change our exciting plans for this summer.

We've set up special offers so you can enjoy our great quality products at prices that will save you money all summer long. It all starts on July 4th weekend and we hope you'll stock up with a little extra, just to make up for what you might have missed last week.

That's it. Just one last word of thanks to the millions of you who have stood with us.

Drink All The Diet Pepsi You Want.
Uh Huh.



Figure 9.8. The ad that Pepsi ran in newspapers nationwide in June 1993 to declare the end of the crisis. Reproduced by permission of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

regulatory officials, shareholders, and its other publics that the company's manufacturing process was safe and that widespread tampering was not possible.

The Pepsi crisis team concurred that it succeeded because it was honest and open and because it had looked at the problem through the eyes of the public (Pepsi-Cola, 1993a).

Bryant and the members of the Seattle crisis communications team considered the local media's coverage to be balanced and believed that their own determination to be open secured that balance. Cooperation with the FDA, they felt, was essential. Alpac had a history of a corporate culture that valued its employees, which contributed to employee cooperation during the crisis. Alpac employees played a vital role in the campaign and felt a sense of being a part of both the crisis and the recovery. "Support of retailers and consumers," Bryant said, "results from a long history of positive community relations on the part of Alpac and excellent customer relations. The Behnke family had been known in the area for its philanthropy. There was a reservoir of goodwill so that people gave Pepsi and Alpac credit for telling the truth." Alpac was sold to Pepsi-Cola shortly after the crisis.

To this day, there has been no proven explanation of how the syringe got into the can in the home of the Triplets.

CASE: CELLULAR PHONES AND THE CANCER SCARE

The cellular telephone industry enjoyed rapid growth in the early 1990s. It was averaging approximately 10,000 new customers daily as cellular phones became a necessity rather than a frill.

On January 21, 1993, a Florida widower, David Reynard, still grieving over his wife's death from brain cancer 6 months before, appeared on the Cable News Network (CNN) *show Larry King Live* and told millions of television viewers that he believed his wife's fatal illness was caused by electromagnetic waves from a cellular phone. Following is an excerpt from the transcript:

Mr. Reynard: There were several things that were quite obvious. And a second MRI basically showed she had a large [unintelligible word] type tumor located just behind and above her left ear.

Larry King: When did she die?

Mr. Reynard: May the 24th of last year.

Larry King: When did you start to think, "This has something to do with the cellular phone?"

Mr. Reynard: I think when I saw the first MRI and saw the location of the tumor. It appeared that it was in the location directly next to the antenna, and the tumor seemed to be growing inward from that direction.

The show then played a graphic videotape of the dying wife relating her deposition of the matter. To many viewers, this supporting "information" served to verify the claim, despite the fact that no scientific or medical data had been presented. In fact, data were presented to the contrary, but that could not compete with the emotionality of the man whose wife had died.

Here is another excerpt from the transcript as Eleanor Adair, a Yale University scientist, was questioned by King:

Dr. Adair: Yes, I was co-chair of the committee that spent 9 years reviewing the literature and looking into all kinds of questions similar to this one—the possibility of health effects.

Larry King: And?

Dr. Adair: And the standard is set at levels well above those that are emitted by such devices as cellular telephones.

King: Could his wife have been a victim?

Dr. Adair: No, I don't believe so, no.

King: You don't see any connection at all?

Dr. Adair: None at all, because the power output from a cellular telephone is just too low. It can't do that kind of damage to tissue.

King: And they've been sufficiently tested?

Dr. Adair: They have been tested, and the frequencies at which these devices operate have been tested in laboratory experiments for many, many years.

King: To your knowledge, have there been lawsuits?

Dr. Adair: There are lawsuits pending, and one that was just concluded yesterday with respect to the police radar instruments that also had been alleged to cause cancer.

King: Do you make any relationship between the position of the antenna and the position of the tumor?

Dr. Adair: No, I don't. Cancers occur in the brain at many places. People have had cancers as long as individuals have inhabited the earth....

As viewers began to call into the talk show, one claimed to get dizzy when using a cellular phone. One challenged Adair's research, although citing none to the contrary. One asked if a cordless phone was dangerous, too.

Stocks began to fall. Motorola, the largest manufacturer of cellular phones, and McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc., the nation's largest cellular carrier, saw their stocks drop by more than 15% (Kaye, 1993).

Thus, a crisis was born for the cellular telephone industry—in both manufacturing and service companies. Cellular One, a division of McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc., in the Pacific Northwest, was the largest cellular carrier with 3.8 million subscribers, 250 locations in the United States, and 105 markets.

KEN WOO, CELLULAR ONE

Ken Woo, Cellular One's media relations manager, had been with the company for a year and a half when the crisis erupted in 1993. At the company, media relations reported to district public affairs, which reported to the director of sales and marketing. The director of sales and marketing reported to the vice president and general manager of the Washington and Alaska district, who in turn reported to a regional president for Cellular One. The regional president reported to the president and CEO of McCaw/AT&T Wireless Services.

Despite all the layers, Woo said he had “a dotted-line relationship to Bob Ratliffe,” who reported directly to the president/CEO of McCaw as well as to Marilyn Laurie, the senior vice president of AT&T Public Relations and Employee Communications.

Woo’s department, which consisted of nine staff specialists and one administrative assistant, interacted regularly with Ratliffe’s division, McCaw Corporate Public Relations. “I talk to Bob regularly. Then, other district public relations people get together via conference call every 2 weeks, more often if there are ‘hot issues’ to be dealt with, like the cancer scare,” said Woo. He went on:

I heard about the Reynard case from Steve Young at CNN who was preparing a report on it. Then Ron Nessen, vice president of public relations for the Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA) sent an industry alert to all carriers.

My first reaction was to gather facts. I had some knowledge of the technology of cellular phones, but we needed more. We had to understand what we were being targeted for, and we had to find experts to support whatever response we would come up with. (Fearn-Banks, 1996, pp. 54–58)

Woo’s office contacted Arthur Guy, a University of Washington professor emeritus in bioengineering, asking him to brief the office on the issues. Woo also attended a bioelectromagnetics meeting in Los Angeles to round out his knowledge of the subject.

Reynard filed suit against the manufacturer of his cellular phone, NEC America, and the cellular carrier that provided the phone’s service, GTE Mobilnet. Although Cellular One was not in the legal battle, the crisis affected all cellular phone manufacturers and all service companies.

Reynard continued to make appearances on television shows. He told his story on *20/20*, *Nightline*, *The Today Show*, *Donahue*, and *The Faith Daniels Show*. As each show aired, more and more consumers grew fearful of cellular phones. There were phone calls by the thousands to manufacturers and carriers, including Cellular One and McCaw Cellular. A typical news story is shown in Figure 9–9.

Woo was concerned about Reynard and people like Reynard, whom he called “nonexpert experts.” He said:

They are the sound bites that are popping up lately on television news regarding people expressing opinions for which they have no expertise. David Reynard was a nonexpert-expert making claims unsubstantiated by his own doctors that his wife’s brain tumor was the direct result of cellular phone use. His own doctors said they doubted the cause-and-effect claims. (Fearn-Banks, 1996, pp. 54–58.)

Woo followed the pretrial testimony in the case and said, “[Reynard’s] wife’s physicians said the size of the growth seemed to indicate the tumor was there long before he claimed she began using a cellular phone.”

The case was subsequently thrown out of court, but not before it had frightened cellular phone users and caused damage to the industry.

Woo primarily blamed the media. Once a journalist himself, this was a sensitive point with him:

These nonexpert-experts are handy for reporters on the run with no time to check out their expert credentials. It's a form of "instant public opinion," "instant polls."

In the old days when I was a journalist, we used to call them "man-on-the-street interviews." It is not scientific, does not accurately measure public opinion, does not provide balanced or accurate information, but is used for instant analysis—justification of a particular point of view.

You are seeing more of these kinds of sound bites—quotes as deadlines shorten and writers and reporters file for more editions and broadcasts than in the past. In the O.J. Simpson case, there was little public information available and "analysts and consultants" were hired to provide commentary on the guilt or innocence of people.

There was also the invasion of Haiti where retired military officers were called in to second guess where and when an invasion might take place and under what circumstances. Then you have the "Buckwheat" fraud on ABC-TV's *20/20* where nonexpert witnesses "substantiated" a bogus Buckwheat.

Cellular industry waits out a scare

BY MARCIA A. LUDWIG
JOURNAL AMERICAN BUSINESS WRITER

The past two weeks have been rocky for the cellular communications industry.

News reports and talk shows spread fear that portable cellular telephones may cause brain tumors, causing stocks to fall and public-relations personnel to work overtime trying to calm the public.

But analysts say the scare eventually should blow over, leaving no visible scars on the companies or their stocks. Company spokespeople agree.

"We give (the scare) a six- to eight-week life expectancy," said Herschel Shostek, a cellular-market consultant and analyst with his own firm in Silver Spring, Md.

The scare first erupted Jan. 21 when CNN's Larry King hosted David Reynard, a St. Petersburg, Fla., man who claims his wife's fatal brain tumor was caused by the cellular phone he bought for her.

McCaw Cellular Communications Inc.'s stock fell \$2 in the next day's trading to close at \$36.25. The Kirkland-based company's stock rose the following Monday, Jan. 25, but then slid to \$32.50 by the end of the week. The stock made two modest gains last week, edging up \$2.75, and closed last Friday at \$33.75 a share. McCaw is the nation's largest cellular carrier.

Motorola, Inc., of Schaumburg, Ill., one of the largest cellular phone and equipment manufacturers, watched its stock fall from \$61.375 the day before the talk show to \$53.375 a share last Friday.

“This has been a great example of how one story... got sensationalized by the talk shows. It’s impacting business. Motorola lost (11) percent of the value of their company,” said Bob Ratliffe, vice president of corporate affairs at McCaw.

To make matters worse, the Federal Food and Drug Administration on Friday issued a statement saying that although there is no proof at this point that portable cellular phones cause cancer, there is no definitive proof that they do not. Therefore, it advised cellular-phone users to limit the length of their calls and possibly to switch from portable phone usage to phones with remote antennas, such as car phones.

(The cellular industry is underwriting a story on portable-phone safety in response to the scare. Cellular carriers point to thousands of existing studies done on different frequencies showing no long-term health effects of cellular phone usage.)

Craig McCaw, chairman and chief executive officer of McCaw, spoke about the FDA’s statement to CNN’s Lou Dobbs Friday afternoon. He said he was “encouraged” by the FDA’s actions so far.

“We believe in our hearts that we’re right,” that cellular phones are safe, he said.

Ratliffe uses his cellular phone an average of 6,000 to 7,000 minutes a month, far above the average user’s call time of 170 minutes a month.

“I’m not worried at all,” he said.

Analysts said although cellular-company shareholders have been nervous lately, they should adopt a similar attitude for the long term.

This scare is comparable to the video display terminal scare a few years ago, said Paul Andrews, analyst with AG Edwards & Sons Inc. in St. Louis.

People were worried about the electromagnetic fields generated by computer screens, but that scare “was in the news for six to nine months, then it went away. People are still using video display terminals,” he said.

The Eastside’s other cellular carrier, US West’s NewVector Group in Bellevue, has been busy educating its customers about the scare and has prepared a bill insert for the next billing cycle that details information currently available, said Lisa Bowersock, spokeswoman.

Only a “couple hundred” calls from concerned customers have been received nationwide on the issue, out of roughly 10,000 calls received by U.S. West each day, she said.

US West NewVector is a subsidiary of US West Inc. of Englewood, Colo. Its price has remained stable the past two weeks and closed at \$39.875 a share last Friday.

Both Bowersock and Ratliffe said they have detected no increase in sales of their cellular services or cellular phones from their dealers.

Figure 9.9. News story in *Journal American*, Bellevue, Washington, February 8, 1993, about the cellular telephone cancer scare. (Source: Reprinted with permission of *Journal American*.)

Even though a nonexpert-expert caused the cellular phone scare, the crisis was still very serious. The only crisis that would be worse is if the charges had been substantiated.

The Cellular One staff benefitted from its corporate culture, which Woo said was in a “we” mode during the crisis: “We have an entrepreneurial spirit that is fed by highly educated professionals working at being the best in their field. We value innovation, making the system work for customers, simplicity, excellence, teamwork, good judgment, and delivering on our promises.” Woo felt that his media relations staff had good relationships with the media. He thought that he had good relationships with the West Coast media dating from the time when he was a CBS reporter based in Los Angeles. “There’s a good exchange,” he said. “I hope it was because of my relationships with people that we had a strong degree of responsible reporting on this issue.”

During the crisis, the workday was expectantly busy. It started with reviewing overnight sweeps and opinion polling. The key media were checked to see what new information had been reported on the subject. The corporate team updated the staff on what new information it had. Then Woo shared stories and situations with field communicators. They brainstormed new ideas for dealing with the issues. Next, Woo followed up on work from the previous day, and he ended the day by meeting with key editors and writers to talk about what was known and unknown.

Also during the crisis, an industry and public affairs roundtable was established that consisted of public relations executives from member companies. The roundtable planned an information program aimed at the following publics: Wall Street analysts, government regulators, congressional hearings, and general public. Ratliffe of McCaw’s corporate public relations operation attended these sessions and reported back to Woo and the staff at Cellular One.

Cellular One was concerned primarily with two publics: consumers and the media. For consumers, the company developed a document called “Communications Guidelines for Questions About the Health Effects of Cellular Phones” for employees who had contact with customers. These employees were instructed not to generate their own materials, but to speak from information in the document. They were also urged to conform to regular company policy and refer calls from the media to public relations personnel.

The communications guidelines had three tiers. The first tier gave employees speaking points, which stressed that cellular phones did not cause cancer or any other health problems, that the company was concerned about customer health and safety, and that people were unnecessarily frightened. The second tier was used for customers who wanted additional information. In this case, a letter was mailed to them along with a position paper about the safety of cellular phones. The third tier was used for customers still unsatisfied with the company’s response. These customers were referred to corporate personnel to be handled personally.

Woo followed a document he had written and refined over a period of years in a previous position with another company. He had input from Jim McFarland and John Renforth, who were, at the time, with Ogilvy and Mather and served as public relations counsel to Woo’s company.

Woo was not a great believer in the value of news releases, characterizing them as “the most useless justifications for killing trees.” Instead, during the height of the crisis, he

conducted briefings with key regional writers and editors and compiled research materials into a booklet titled “Cellular Telephones and Electromagnetic Fields” that explained the health and safety of cellular phones.

TODD WOLFENBARGER, McCaw CELLULAR

In 1993, Todd Wolfenbarger was director of communications at McCaw Cellular. Bob Ratliffe was vice president of communications and there were about a dozen people in the department. As Wolfenbarger explained:


Unlike Ken Woo, we deal with industry groups, with stock prices, and with issues that affect the company as a whole. We have 22 field communicators nationwide, and Ken is one of those. What essentially happened in the crisis is we would develop a message with Motorola and the Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA) and distribute it through our field communicators, who would take it to the media and the consumers.

Wolfenbarger admits that the cellular industry made an early error in that the original Reynard lawsuit was filed months before the *Larry King Live* show and was a prodrome to the crisis. “In fact,” he said, “there was a CNN report that ran a week and a half before (see the McCaw news release in Fig. 9.10) the *Larry King Live* show gave the crisis legs, and it ran in a way beyond anything we could ever have imagined.” He said that at the time of the lawsuit, McCaw had consulted scientists who told them that the risk factor was “unmeasurable.” Wolfenbarger added, “They said, ‘We don’t get funding by doing studies that find nothing.’ So,” Wolfenbarger continued, “McCaw believed science and decided it would not be a big deal.”

What was wrong is we had a really complicated message. We had Dr. Arthur Guy from the University of Washington with 30 years of electromagnetic experience. He didn’t want to oversimplify things because the functioning of the cellular phone is not a simple process. So, here’s this PhD being quoted about electromagnetic fields and another guy saying simply, “My wife is dead!” Then, the camera cuts to shots of his wife, and then we see that glint of a tear in his eye. It was public perception against science and we couldn’t win.

Another incident that was a mistake, according to Wolfenbarger, was a news conference called by Motorola:

Motorola had great information, a lot of research on hand, so we took a back seat to Motorola in the way the conference was run. They had their lead scientist, who is a brilliant guy, but he’s not used to reporters firing questions at him. I think he took for granted that he wouldn’t go into much detail so he



NEWS FROM McCaw® CELLULAR...

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**McCaw Cellular / Cellular One Encouraged by Customer Responses
– Congressional Briefing Re-affirms Cellular Safety –**

Kirkland, WA – Feb. 2, 1993 – McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc., which provides cellular phone service in more than 100 markets across the country primarily under the name Cellular One®, said Tuesday it was encouraged by the response of its more than two million customers to the recent stir caused by an alleged link of cellular to health risks.

The company's Customer Care centers reported a confident customer base with customer inquiries at normal levels. "While we understand why our customers might have been alarmed following the news stories, we are encouraged by their response," said Bob Ratliffe, McCaw's Vice President of Corporate Communications. "The scientific community has spoken to Congress and the market has started to rebound as customers get the facts that cellular is safe. I'm happy to report their actions speak louder than other peoples' words," he stated further.

In a representative California market, where McCaw has a customer base of 90,000, only 20 calls have been received about the health-related news stories. In fact, a sales promotion has resulted in a shortage of supply of portable phones.

McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc. (NASDAQ:MCAWA) operating under the name Cellular One® in most of its markets, is the largest cellular service provider in the United States and is developing and marketing a broad range of wireless communications services, including a cellular network that spans the continent, and is capable of transmitting voice and data communications.

McCaw Cellular owns a 52 percent interest in LIN Broadcasting Corp., which is engaged in cellular telephone operations, television broadcasting and specialty publishing. It also has a 32 percent stake in American Mobile Satellite Corporation, which is developing a satellite-based communications network to provide personal communications service to remote areas of North America now out of reach of terrestrial communications systems, and a 51 percent stake in Claircom, Inc., a joint venture with Hughes Network Systems, which is licensed to provide telephone service to commercial and private aircraft. McCaw Cellular is the nation's fifth largest paging service provider.

Contacts:
Bob Ratliffe, Vice President Corporate Communications

Todd Wolfenbarger, Director of Communications

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McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc. • 5400 Carillon Point • Kirkland, WA 98033 • (206) 827-4500

Figure 9.10. News release disseminated by McCaw Cellular during the cancer scare crisis. Reprinted with permission of McCaw Cellular.

said, "There are a thousand studies out." A reporter yelled, "Can you name two or three of them?" He couldn't, even though he was right; there are many studies. So, it looked bad.

During the crisis, McCaw's communications staff met each day at 6 a.m. in the boardroom to discuss what had happened in the news the previous day.

Numerous inaccuracies were reported, one reporter quoted another reporter, and so on. Wolfenbarger said, “We had one person who was dedicated to calling reporters and correcting errors—‘If you write about this issue again, I just wanted to let you know this is not the case. We have some information I can send you that will explain.’ This was helpful because few errors were repeated.”

The communications staff also developed talking points, which were put together in a customer response book and distributed to field organizations such as Cellular One. “Our talking points were similar to CTIA’s talking points,” said Wolfenbarger. “There’s a real sharp guy running their department, Ron Nessen, who used to be President Ford’s press secretary. He has a good feel for dealing with government agencies and how they react.”

The government agency that the industry was most concerned with was the FDA, which neither endorsed nor condemned the cellular phone. The FDA did advise consumers to limit their use of cellular phones. The industry took the FDA’s inaction as positive.

Craig McCaw, chairman and CEO of McCaw, appeared on CNN’s *Moneyline* with Lou Dobbs and said, “We believe in our hearts that we are right.” He also touched on the company’s concern that it was suddenly on the wrong side of the health and safety issue. He mentioned that cellular phones reduced stress in business and that stress caused illnesses. Wolfenbarger commented that:

Craig McCaw asked real specific questions of scientists. If the information had been negative and that phones were not safe, Craig, who is very health conscious, would have a problem admitting it.

We do think of ourselves as safety enhancers. Cellular phones save lives during earthquakes and hurricanes. Half a million people, each month, call 911 from their cellular phones to report accidents.

McCaw President James Barksdale decided that it was best to offer consumers options. Reporters at *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* were told that if McCaw customers had a problem with the safety of phones, they had three options:

1. They could trade in the cellular phones for transportable phones with antennas.
2. They could suspend service for up to 3 months, then access it back without cost when they felt comfortable doing so.
3. They could cancel their contracts without cost.

Wolfenbarger said fewer than 50 customers canceled. Of those, about half, he believes, had severely delinquent accounts and were looking for a way to get out of their obligation.

The story competed for news time and space with other consumer crises—among them, the Jack-in-the-Box fast-food chain, which had the E. coli crisis that was killing children who ate its hamburgers. “There was metal in tuna fish, lead in paint—all within a 1-week period,” said Wolfenbarger, “and I think all those crises helped ours die down. I can remember 20/20 debating whether it would do tuna fish or our story. After a while, people just sort of decided that [everyone] is out to get you in one way or another.”

He said McCaw considered comparing risks in its messages, but decided it did not want to say that anything was dangerous. “We kind of ditched that,” said Wolfenbarger, “and decided to promote the facts that the phones are safe, that we had extensive research to prove it, that we are concerned about the safety of our customers, and that we are going to study this issue for a long time.”

AT&T and McCaw Cellular Communications merged in 1995; Cellular One became AT&T Wireless Services. Cingular Wireless acquired AT&T Wireless.

CHAPTER TEN

The Crisis Communications Plan

CRISIS INVENTORY

Before an organization can develop a crisis management plan or a crisis communications plan, it must determine which crisis or crises the organization is most likely to face. A crisis communications plan's usefulness is directly associated with how specific it is to a particular type of crisis.

The workbook for this text takes the user through a step-by-step process of developing the crisis communications plan. Although there are several items in the plan that are mutual to all types of crises, varying information is needed for each type of crisis for maximum effectiveness. For example, a restaurant chain may decide that food poisoning and fire are its most probable crises. If a food poisoning crisis occurs, the media will want, and the public relations department should have, the following items readily available and in its crisis communications plan: recipes, a list of ingredients stocked, a list of vendors used, kitchen precautions and procedures, names and contact numbers of chefs and all other personnel handling food, and a list of medical experts for consultation and as spokespersons.

If a fire occurs, the public relations department should have, in a specific crisis communications plan, information about its evacuation procedures, its policy on using nonflammable decor items (such as window coverings and tablecloths), the floor plan of the structure, and fire experts for spokespersons.

The following list enumerates common types of crises. There are, of course, numerous others. Companies and organizations are advised to consider the list carefully and add types of crises specific to their operations.

Common Types of Crises

- acquisition
- age discrimination
- alcohol abuse bank-
- ruptcy
- boycott
- bribery
- chemical spill or leak
- computer failure
- computer hacking
- contamination
- data loss/theft
- drug abuse
- drug trafficking
- earthquake
- embezzlement

explosion
fatality
fire
flood
hacking
hurricane
kickbacks
kidnapping
lawsuits
layoffs
merger
murder
negative legislation
plant closing
product failure
protest demonstrations
racial issues
robbery
sexual discrimination
sexual harassment
strikes
suicide
takeover
tax problems
terrorism
tornado
toxic waste
transportation accident
transportation failure
workplace violence

Some crises will involve more than one of the types listed, such as workplace violence and fatality, or boycott and sexual discrimination.

Perhaps the involvement of the entire company or of representatives from each department can help determine the crises the company is likely to face. Then each unit's selections could be compared and compiled into a company-wide list. When done properly, this can be an effective proactive employee relations program, a way of creating "we-ness," a way of including all of the employees in the company's decision making. Janitors, executive assistants, blue-collar and white-collar workers, midlevel executives, as well as top executives can have a say. After all, each employee stands to suffer if the company should go under after the most serious of crises. Furthermore, employees in each position classification have unique perspectives on things that can go wrong. Janitors are more aware of heating and cooling equipment, possible gas leaks, and so on. Workers on an automobile assembly line know more about the quality of cars than managers in carpeted offices.

However, if a company-wide crisis identification program is not feasible, a meeting of key employees familiar with all facets of the operation can determine the crises the company is likely to face. Such a meeting should certainly include more than public relations staff members. You do not want the company blaming the public relations staff for the failure to recognize a possible crisis.

Frequently, ascertaining probable crises can point out problems that prevent crises from occurring. This is the primary reason for company-wide involvement. The second best reason is to be able to manage a crisis once it occurs.

Every company and organization can experience many types of crises. Two questions must be answered: (a) How likely is this crisis? And (b) how devastating can the crisis be? Crisis communications plans should be developed for all crises believed to be both most probable and most devastating. To do this, the public relations department, with its key executives, must take an inventory. Each possible crisis must be ranked as follows:

- 0—Impossible; that is, the crisis has basically no chance of occurring.
- 1—Nearly impossible.
- 2—Remotely possible.
- 3—Possible.
- 4—Somewhat probable; has happened to similar companies.
- 5—Highly probable; may or may not have previously occurred in the company, but warning signs are evident.

Each crisis also should be ranked according to its potential damage to the company. The rankings in this category are as follows:

- 0—No damage, not a serious consequence.
- 1—Little damage, can be handled without much difficulty, not serious enough for the media's concern.
- 2—Some damage, a slight chance that the media will be involved.
- 3—Considerable damage, but still will not be a major media issue.
- 4—Considerable damage, would definitely be a major media issue.
- 5—Devastating, front-page news, could put company out of business.

For added security, when in doubt, rank a crisis in the next highest category. For instance, Company Z determines that there are five crises it could face: workplace violence, fire, protest demonstrations, negative legislation, and tax problems. Each of these crises might be ranked as shown in Figure 10.1.

Keep in mind that a crisis you determine to be unlikely simply because it never happened before can happen tomorrow. Both human nature and mother nature are very unpredictable, so natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes) and human failures should be expected to some degree.

After rankings for probability and damage are made, bar graphs should be made to clearly see and consider each crisis and compare it to others. (Bar graphing can be done on various computer programs or by hand.) At the base of each graph, write the name of each

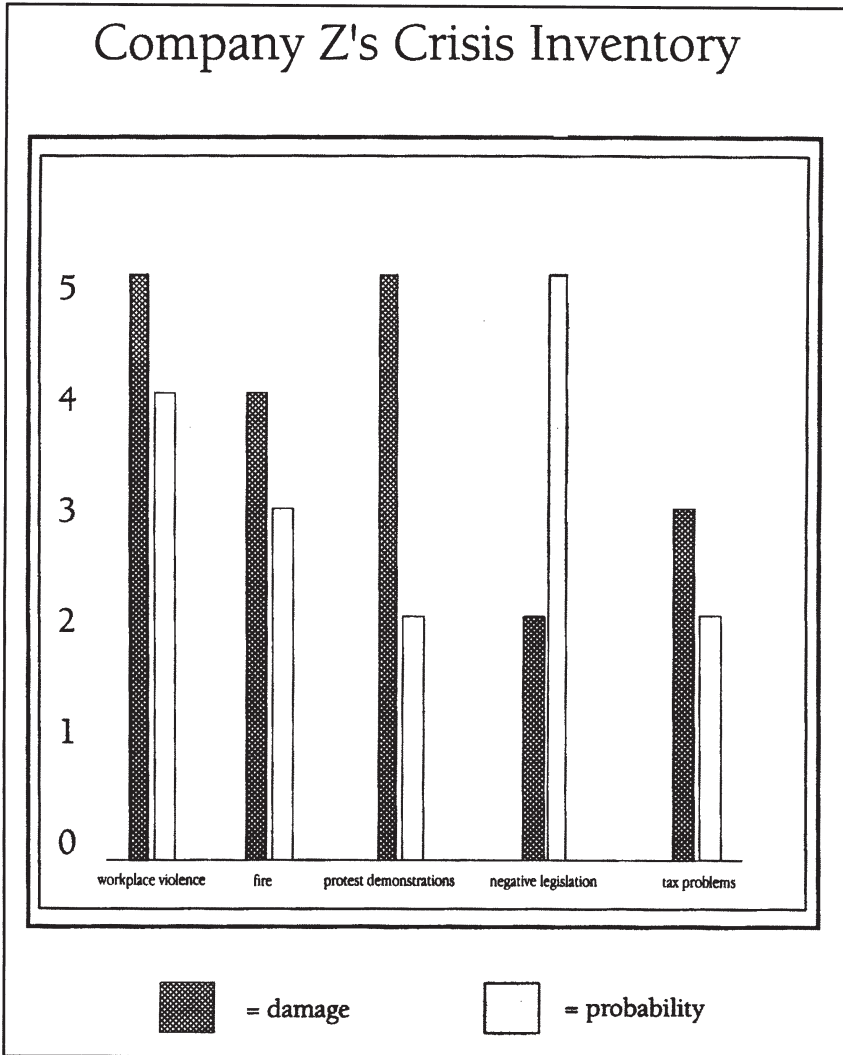


Figure 10.1. A sample bar graph showing how an organization might assess the probability of, and degrees of damage resulting from, various types of crises.

type of crisis. Plot the height of each bar according to numbers attributed to each crisis in the probability and damage rankings. Choose different colors or shadings for probability bars and damage bars.

When Company Z plots its data on a bar graph, it resembles Fig. 10.1. Considering Company Z's graph, we see that the probability and seriousness of a crisis relating to tax problems is not as crucial as in the other crises. This does not mean that a crisis plan is not important for tax problems, just not as important as for other issues, and not a priority.

According to the graph, the possibility of Company Z's suffering a crisis resulting from negative legislation is likely, though not particularly critical. On the other hand, protest demonstrations are critical, although not very likely. Workplace violence and fire seem both likely and critical.

Most organizations plan for crises ranked high in both probability and damage. In this case, Company Z would probably develop crisis management and communications plans for workplace violence first, then for the other crises in descending order of importance: fire, protest demonstrations, negative legislation, and tax problems.

Sometimes organizations make crisis plans for the most devastating crises no matter how probable or improbable they may be. In this case, Company Z would develop plans for workplace violence first, followed by protest demonstrations, then fire. Naturally, aversion of Murphy's Law can be expected: That crisis for which you have no plan will likely happen. Moreover, you will find that any plan, and the process of developing that plan, will make you more prepared for crises generally.

Some organizations, having several crises classified with similar rankings in all categories, make general crisis communications plans with detailed information for all types of crises, although sometimes the detailed information is omitted.

Many companies, fearing all possibilities of crises equally, merely adopt a policy of "open and honest response" with the media and all publics, and plan to be in a total reactive mode during a crisis.

The importance of the crisis inventory is to force organizations to think about the possibilities. Sometimes the most ridiculous crisis occurs, something no one in the company could predict. Pepsi probably never dreamed that it would have a crisis of hypodermic syringes in its cans. On the other hand, Foodmaker and Jack-in-the-Box could certainly have anticipated children dying from eating hamburgers, and Exxon could have anticipated the worst oil slick in America.

The ranking procedure may introduce ideas for prevention programs. You also may realize that your organization is more vulnerable than you anticipated.

Considering that the toll of stress and emotion during a crisis necessarily affects one's thought processes, a carefully developed crisis communications plan is the best substitute for a fully functioning brain. Even if you remain cool and calm under pressure, others in the company may not. The crisis communications plan alleviates this problem, too.

DEVELOPING THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Once likely crises have been identified, the crisis communications plan can be written. A crisis communications plan can be part of a larger crisis management plan (CMP) or it may be a stand-alone document to help public relations practitioners handle crises more effectively.

The CMP includes information such as evacuation procedures; emergency staffing of various departments of a company; and places to purchase or rent emergency equipment, tools, or vehicles—all the things a company may need in a crisis.

Public relations during a crisis focuses on communications with the company's publics during the crisis; for the most part, the same publics to which normal PR activities are directed.

The CMP is sometimes a large volume of instructions, whereas a crisis communications plan should be a more manageable, easier-to-read document. After a crisis has erupted, employees are likely to look at a large volume and say, “We don’t have time to read this now,” and then proceed to handle the crisis by “winging” it. The crisis communications plan should be organized in such a way that the practitioners can quickly turn to each section. Some professionals use tabs in a notebook; others use a table of contents. Keeping the crisis communications plan on a computer can be dangerous because many crises prevent access to offices (fire, earthquakes, explosives, etc.).

Many companies (such as Johnson & Johnson after the Tylenol crisis) urge employees to keep copies of the plan in various key spots—the office, at home, near the night stand, or in the car. That way, the odds are good that at least one copy will be readily available should a crisis or disaster occur.

If a crisis inventory determines, for example, that there are three likely crises, the organization should draft a crisis communications plan for each type. A plan for an earthquake must be different from a plan for a product failure. The publics maybe different; the media maybe different; the message must be different.

The crisis communications plan states purposes, policies, and goals, then assigns employees to various duties. It generally makes communication with publics faster and more effective and should help end the crisis more swiftly than without a plan.

When a crisis communications plan is ineffective, it is usually because the type of crisis was not anticipated or because variables arose that were not anticipated. For example, spokespersons or supplies may not be available. The crisis communications plan sometimes fails because it is outdated. Such plans should be updated regularly.

Even if unanticipated variables do arise, the crisis communications plan should be more effective than having no plan at all. Still, it must be remembered that a crisis communications plan is not a manual guaranteeing success, with everything done “by the book,” but a guide that must be flexible.

An effective crisis communications plan should have the following components arranged in an order that best suits the organization and the particular crisis or disaster:

- Cover page
- Introduction
- Acknowledgments
- Rehearsal dates
- Purpose and objectives
- List of key publics
- Notifying publics
- Identifying the crisis communications team
- Crisis directory
- Identifying the media spokesperson
- List of emergency personnel and local officials
- List of key media
- Spokespersons for related organizations
- Crisis communications control center
- Equipment and supplies
- Pregathered information
- Key messages
- Web site

Trick questions
List of prodromes
List of related Internet URLs
Evaluation form

Cover Page

The cover page of a crisis communications plan is similar to the cover page of a term paper. There are as many ways of doing one as there are ways of doing crisis communications plans. It should include at least the date when the plan was written as well as revision dates.

Introduction

The head of the company or organization usually writes the introduction (or the PR practitioner ghostwrites it for the CEO with his or her approval). The purpose of this component is to persuade employees to take the crisis communications plan seriously. It stresses the necessity and importance of the plan and it emphasizes the dire results possible when a plan is not followed.

Acknowledgments

This crisis communications plan component takes the form of an affidavit signed by all crisis personnel as well as by key executives, indicating that they have read the plan and are prepared to put it into effect. The signatures assure management that its personnel have read the plan.

Rehearsal Dates

Dates of rehearsals for all crises are recorded here. The most damaging and most likely crises should be practiced at least annually if not every 6 months. Rehearsal for any type of crisis is helpful even if an eventual crisis turns out to be somewhat different.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose statement details the organization's policies toward its publics. It might say, for example, "In a crisis, an open and honest disclosure with the media shall be stressed." The purpose is an expressed hope for a recovery and return to normalcy, to get out of the media. The objectives are responses to the question, "What do you hope to achieve with this plan?" Objectives should not be overly ambitious in difficulty or number. For example, a company may adopt the following goals:

1. To be seen in the media as a company that cares about its customers and employees.
2. To make certain that all communications are accurate.

List of Key Publics

The key publics list should include all publics, both external and internal, with which the organization must communicate during the crisis. The list varies with organizations, but

may include the following as well as others:

- board members
- shareholders
- financial partners
- investors
- community leaders
- customers
- clients
- suppliers
- vendors
- neighbors of physical plant(s)
- competitors
- key management
- employees
- legal representation
- media
- union officials
- retirees
- government officials (city, state, county, federal)

Although all publics need not be notified in every crisis, the list of key publics should be comprehensive. It is easier to eliminate unneeded publics at the time of crisis than it is to think of all the crucial publics during the stress of a crisis.

Publics fall into the following categories:

Enabling publics—those people with the power and authority to make decisions: the board of directors, shareholders, investors, and key executives. Notifying enabling publics is a priority.

Functional publics—the people who actually make the organization work: employees, unions, suppliers, vendors, consumers, and volunteers in the case of nonprofit organizations.

Normative publics—those people who share values with the organization in crises: trade associations, professional organizations, and competitors.

Diffused publics—those people linked indirectly to the organization in crisis: the media, community groups, and neighbors of the physical plant.



MESSAGE: There has been an explosion in the plant. There are injured employees. We do not know, at this time, the cause of the explosion or the extent of injuries of the employees. An investigation is underway.

Methods of Communication

	TELEPHONE	E-MAIL	FAX	LETTER BY MESSENGER	LETTER BY MAIL	NEWSLETTER	BULLETIN BOARD	PERSONAL VISIT	NEWS RELEASE	MEETINGS
P U B L I C S	EMPLOYEES	* J. Naas				* J. Naas	* J. Naas			
	EXECUTIVES	* Nelson J.	* Nelson J.					* Nelson J. M. Yerima		* Nelson J.
	CUSTOMERS				* Damian L.					
	BOARD OF DIRECTORS	* Nelson J.			* Damian L.				*Gina A.	
	ELECTRONIC MEDIA	* K. Stone		* K. Stone					*Gina A.	
	DAILY NEWSPAPERS	* Gina A.							*Gina A.	
	WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS			* Gina A.		* Damian L.				
	SHARE HOLDERS		* Ann C.				* Ann C.			
	COMMUNITY LEADERS			* Karen N.			* Karen N.			

* Staff member responsible for communications and followup.

Figure 10.2. A sample chart showing how an organization might plan to communicate with key publics during a crisis. It includes key talking points and ways of communicating. The lists of publics and types of communication can be longer, shorter, or otherwise different depending on the organization's needs.

Notifying Publics

To notify publics, a system must be devised for contacting each public, and that system should be described in the crisis communications plan. For internal publics, many companies use a chain procedure, such as a telephone tree, in which each person is specifically designated to call others. The person who learns about the crisis first notifies the CEO, the head of public relations, and the head of the department that maybe involved. The chain should be clear and error-free, even in the event that certain individuals are not reached.

An appropriate means of notification must be decided on for each public. A news release, for example, is appropriate primarily for the news media, not for other publics.

Board members are often reached by telephone or fax. E-mail or other computerized communications are also used. The media can be notified by way of telephone, wire service, fax, press conference, e-mail, or news release. Other methods used for notifying publics include telegrams, per-sonal visits, letters, advertisements, bulletin boards, and meetings (see Fig. 10.2).

Identifying the Crisis Communications Team

The crisis communications team members, along with back-ups, should be preselected. The team manager is usually, but not always, the head of public relations. He or she has

specific responsibilities: communicating with top management, making decisions, drafting or approving major statements, and notifying the rest of the crisis communications team.

The assistant crisis manager assumes responsibility when the manager is unavailable (a second back-up may be beneficial, if possible). The control room coordinator sets up the room with necessary furniture, equipment, supplies, and tools. An efficient executive assistant can be appointed for this position.

Other PR personnel have the responsibilities of preparing news releases and statements, contacting the media, and reporting all actions to the crisis communications manager. These people may notify employees or volunteers through letters or by writing telegrams to the mayor and governor, by telephoning union officials and others, and so forth.

Crisis Directory

The company should prepare a crisis directory, listing all members of the crisis team, key managers in the company, and key publics or organizations, along with titles, business and home telephone numbers, cellular phone numbers, fax and e-mail addresses, as well as business, home, and vacation addresses. It is also helpful to list the phone numbers of friends, neighbors, and relatives who are frequently in contact with persons crucial to the crisis recovery.

The crisis team should be large enough to get the job done, but no larger. Too many people make it difficult to get tasks completed and decisions made. There is no time in a crisis for egos; each person must be a team player. It is also preferable that crisis team members be generally healthy and capable of working under stress. They should be reliable professionals, whether gofers, interns, or assistants.

Identifying the Media Spokesperson

The media spokesperson must be selected carefully. To the public, this person is the company or organization.

Actually, sometimes several persons are spokespersons. This is an arguable point in the public relations profession. Some argue for one spokes-person per crisis, usually the CEO. Others argue for several spokespersons, depending on area of expertise. Clearly, the decision is a matter of what suits the company and type of crisis best.

Even if the CEO is an effective spokesperson, he or she may not be particularly knowledgeable about a technical aspect of the crisis. For example, during an oil spill, the company CEO is not the only important spokesperson; also needed is a person qualified to talk about what will be necessary for the clean-up. Frequently, university professors are called on for their specific knowledge about technical aspects of a crisis and for their credibility.

Another school of thought is that CEOs have no credibility because they have too much to lose. However, if lives are lost or in danger—including the lives of animals—most professionals agree that the company head must be the chief spokesperson.

In all cases, at least one, and preferably two or three, back-up spokespersons should be preselected in case the preferred person is unavailable at the time of the crisis. Crises can occur when people are on vacation, on business trips, or sick with the flu. When the 1989 San Francisco earthquake struck, for example, the first two designated spokespersons for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company were at the World Series game at Candlestick Park. The third spokesperson on the list was called and pressed into service.

An effective crisis spokesperson must have some position in the company. It is usually not the PR head, even if the PR person is normally the company's spokesperson. The spokesperson must also be articulate, powerful enough to make decisions, accessible throughout the crisis, able to talk clearly in concise sound bites, and pleasant to the eye of a camera. Moreover, the spokesperson in a crisis must appear rational, concerned, and empathetic. He or she should be pretrained, rehearsed well in advance of the crisis, and briefed prior to the crisis response. The organization's legal adviser should be consulted before statements are made.

If the public relations department is a small or one-person operation, it maybe beneficial to have capable, trustworthy volunteers to perform some tasks. Outside public relations firms that specialize in crisis planning and handling might be used. A nonprofit organization can often get PR firms to help pro bono (done or donated without charge). Many nonprofit organizations have PR practitioners on their boards of directors, anticipating the need for their assistance during a crisis.

At times, one person may be required to perform all communications roles. On the other hand, in large companies several people may perform each role.

List of Emergency Personnel and Local Officials

If the crisis is a disaster or emergency, various emergency personnel need to be contacted. A list should be made of contact numbers for police, fire officials, hospitals, the health department, utilities, and paramedics.

If the crisis affects large numbers of people or is a threat to the safety of people, government officials must be contacted. This list should include contact information for the mayor, governor, city council members, county officials, state legislators, and U.S. senators and representatives.

Sometimes union officials must be notified and therefore should be listed, as well as key citizens groups and community organizations.

List of Key Media

After key executives are called, the media are the next most important public to notify of the crisis. A list of media contacts—newspapers, television, radio, wire services—should be completed and listed in order of importance. If particular editors or reporters are important to telling the story to the organization's benefit, a list of their home numbers and emergency numbers will be advantageous.

The media list should contain contact information for morning and afternoon metropolitan dailies, certain weeklies, all TV news stations, the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, all radio news stations, and trade publications.

Spokespersons for Related Organizations

If an organization suffers a severe crisis, there maybe spokespersons outside the organization who may be questioned. It may be effective to make a list of who these people might be and of how to contact them at any time of day. It also might be effective to meet with them so that they are familiar with your company; with how you will handle a crisis, if it occurs; and with how to reach you.

Sometimes other spokespersons have information you don't have. This information may help you communicate more effectively. So, you need to be able to reach them. Because most people have cell phones, this could be a simple task.

In the Metro Transit case in chapter 8, involving a bus accident and shooting, the news media interviewed the public information officers for the bus company, the police department, the fire department, the hospitals, and spokespersons for county and city officials. The bus company spokesman learned from the news media that a gun was found on one of the victims, and had to scramble to get to the police to find the information. In this case, the spokespersons got together at the site of the accident and determined that they would refer the media's questions to one particular spokesperson. If, instead, the spokespersons had exchanged cell phone numbers, e-mail addresses, or home phone numbers prior to the crisis, they would have been aware of what procedure to follow regarding the media spokesperson.

Crisis Communications Control Center

The location of the crisis communications control center must be determined in case regular office space is unavailable. After disasters and emergencies, offices are often damaged, without power, or inaccessible.

Several possible sites should be listed in the crisis communications plan, as well as the persons instrumental in gaining access to these locations. Suppose, for example, a local church has offered its conference room. Who gave permission to use the room? Who can unlock the doors of the church and conference room? Does the permission include use of electrical outlets and furniture? Does the site have adequate space for the media to work?

Equipment and Supplies

Determine and list all of the equipment and supplies needed by the crisis team, media, and visiting publics. The list could include, but is not limited to, the following:

- chairs and desks
- bulletin boards
- flip charts and chalkboards
- computers or typewriters (perhaps manual typewriters in case power is a problem)
- computer printers
- telephones and cellular phones battery-powered televisions and radios maps of the plant or crisis area battery-powered flashlights and lamps

- police radios
- walkie-talkies
- company letterhead, pens, and pencils
- telephone directories
- contact lists and media directories
- press kits
- CMPs and crisis communications plans
- street and highway maps
- food and beverages
- copying machine (s)
- first-aid kits
- cameras and film
- extension cords and generator power packs

Pregathered Information

Prepare and gather various documents that may possibly be needed during a crisis. Keep identical sets of documents in various locales to ensure availability. The types of documents that can be gathered in advance include safety records and procedures, annual reports, photos, company backgrounders, executive biographies, company maps, branch office locations, quality control procedures, product manufacturing procedures, and company fact sheets (including such data as numbers of employees, products manufactured, and markets served).

Skeletal news releases can be prepared as long as the PR practitioner anticipates the type of crisis and can make a statement on behalf of the company. As shown in Fig. 10.3, a news release can be written in advance with blank spaces left for data to be filled in (such as the magnitude of the crisis and relevant dates and names).

Key Messages

Under the stress of a crisis, it is easy to forget, or at least fail to state properly, the main points you want to convey to publics or to a specific public. Even when there is no crisis, experienced spokespersons prepare in advance the primary information they want emphasized in what are called key messages or speaking points.

The act of preparing key messages will help you organize your thoughts and will provide consistent information to publics. Each message must be accurate, brief, easy to use in a quote, and memorable. The spokesperson must be easily able to work the key message into responses to questions. Such messages also help reporters—who are looking for great quotes—to do their jobs.

Effective key messages help avoid misquoting, enable the spokesperson to tell his or her side of the story, and give the spokesperson a way to answer trick questions comfortably. Most of all, they establish credibility for the organization in crisis.

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Date _____

Contact: _____
(name/phone number)

_____ (name of celebrity) DIES

(SEATTLE) _____ (full name and title) _____ died today of _____ (cause of death) at _____ (time of death) _____ at Swedish Hospital Medical Center in Seattle. He/She was _____ (age).

Further details will be released by _____ (name of person to make announcement—family member or professional contact) _____ at a news conference scheduled for _____ (time of news conference), at Swedish Hospital, Glaser Auditorium, 747 Summit Ave.

Figure 10.3. A sample fill-in-the-blanks news release.

Web Site

Placing news on the organization's Web site and preappointing webmasters to keep updated information on the site will reduce both the number of phone calls from publics and the amount of time put into crisis recovery. The news put on the site should be brief or detailed depending on the nature of the crisis. In the event of an airplane crash, for example, the airline's Web site would, at first, merely acknowledge the crash. After families of victims are notified, the names of victims would be listed. Regular notices of progress in the investigation would also be posted.

The concern of the company should be expressed and prominently displayed. A statement from the highest executive in the company is expected by the public. The Web

site is an ideal venue for keeping safety rules, security precautions, and health policies posted. Restaurants might keep information posted on training new employees about cooking burgers at the proper temperature, using gloves when handling food, or policies that discourage employees with colds and other infectious diseases from working with food products.

The Web site is also a bulletin board for informing publics of the organization's community relations projects and other activities that give back to the public. The Web site can afford your organization the opportunity to be a Model 4, two-way symmetric company (see chap. 3). It can encourage feedback, comments, and questions from publics and provide publics with responses and explanations. Finally, the Web site can reveal how the company is making changes as a result of public comment.

Trick Questions

When a crisis occurs, what questions can you predict the news media will ask a spokesperson? Check chapter 3 for types of trick questions. Reporters may not ask certain questions intentionally to trick the spokesperson, but the end result—if a question is not answered carefully—can make the spokesperson and his or her organization look bad.

A spokesperson for a restaurant, for example, might be asked the following trick questions:

1. Off the record, didn't you know this might happen?
2. If the fire happened during the lunch hour, how many people might have been killed?
3. Don't you buy your ground beef from the meatpacker who sold bad meat to the other restaurant?
4. As at most popular restaurants, the work here is very fast-paced and stressful, right?

List of Prodromes

Prodromes are the warning signs that a crisis may occur. List these in the crisis communications plan. If any of the prodromes actually happened, log into the plan what the company did in response and when. This helps the spokesperson answer the media question, "Did you have any warning that this might happen?"

As an example of a prodrome, consider the normally good employee who is unusually tardy and seems stressed out and irritable. Management notices the problem and gets help for the employee. Or take another example: several near-accidents in the organization's parking lot. Management takes notice, determines that the parking lot has confusing directional signs, and has the signs redone.

Heeding prodromes carefully can often prevent a crisis and help show that the organization is concerned with resolving problems. The prodromes section of the crisis communications plan should be regularly updated.

List of Related Internet URLs

List the URLs of organizations and companies that may have information you need during a crisis. Also include brief descriptions of the data available at the URLs. For example, a restaurant might list the URLs for the National Center for Infectious Diseases,

the state department of health, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Center for Disease Control.

Evaluation Form

Evaluation is a crucial step in preparing an effective crisis communications plan. As assessment, it is helpful in determining what did and did not work. It also helps plan for, prevent, and cope with future crises by pointing out what needs to be revised in the crisis communications plan.

An evaluation form should be developed and placed at the end of the crisis communications plan for later distribution of internal publics for input. An environment where suggestions are made freely will add to the effectiveness of the evaluation and crisis communications plan.

APPENDIX A

Generic Crisis Communications Plan for a Large Company

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DEFINITIONS

Crises

Crises are unplanned events that directly or potentially threaten our company's reputations; the environment; the health, safety, or welfare of employees; and the health, safety, or welfare of citizens in communities surrounding our plants.

Events that fall into this category include: fires, explosions, bomb threats, civil disturbances, equipment malfunctions, environmental impacts, widespread illness, hazardous material spills, and other types of incidents.

Minor Crisis

A *minor crisis* is confined to a limited area of a building; results in minimal, if any, disruption of operations; is quickly brought under control; does not require evacuation other than by a few employees in the immediate vicinity; and causes a minor injury or none at all. Media inquiry is possible with events in this category but apt to be minimal.

Major Crisis

A *major crisis* may involve significant injury or loss of life, prolonged disruption of normal operations, substantial property damage, or a significant environmental impact—or holds potential for any of these. Media inquiry is more likely to occur with events in this category, especially if other municipal emergency response groups have been called in for assistance.

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

In the event of a minor or major incident on any of our sites, every effort will be made to communicate as appropriate to employees, management, surrounding communities, other target publics, and the news media promptly and accurately. The appropriate division of communications staff will be the primary information source available to the news media.

When a crisis occurs, it is necessary for communications personnel to gather facts and data quickly, including the nature of our response to the crisis. The following communication efforts will strive to alleviate employees' concerns, minimize speculation by the media, and ensure that our position is presented.

It should be noted, though, that many incidents occur that are relatively minor in nature and are consequently not covered by the media. Nevertheless, it is essential to gather facts about the incidents and have them available to communicate, if necessary, to appropriate audiences.

The nature of that communication is outlined in the following plan.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each site's Crisis Committee (at the various sites) is responsible for the following: identifying, confirming, investigating crises; developing strategies for managing crises; and developing strategies for recovering from crisis incidents.

As a member of the Crisis Committee, communications personnel will:

- Provide a representative at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) if activated
- Control the release of information to employees, surrounding communities, and to the news media
- Maintain contact with media representatives
- Establish and maintain a news conference center, if necessary

Two, and in some cases, three communicators may be required for adequate crisis communications response. Those communicators will function in the following roles: Public Relations (PR) Lead, Incident Command (IC) Interface, and PR Back-up.

The responsibilities for each communication role are outlined as follows:

- PR Lead
 - Received initial notification
 - Designates staff member as IC Interface
 - Designates staff member as PR Back-up (if necessary)
 - Receives initial facts and updates from IC Interface
 - Prepares initial statement for release
 - Fields media inquiries to office
 - Briefs executive identified as spokesperson
 - Joins Emergency Operations Center team, if activated
 - Provides updates to senior executives
- Incident Command (IC) Interface
 - Joins IC team
 - Gathers and documents facts as they become known
 - Shares initial facts and updates with PR lead in main office
 - Prepares initial statement for release (if necessary)
 - Briefs affected organization management and employees
 - Fields media inquiries (if necessary)
- PR Back-up
 - Updates corporate personnel as necessary
 - Fields additional media inquiries to office
 - Fields employee inquiries to office
 - Conducts in-field interviews with media (if necessary)
 - Sets up media conference room (if necessary)

NOTIFICATION OF A CRISIS

Notification is an extremely important process in managing crises and sending the right messages to all audiences. When notification goes well, it makes the rest of the crisis communications job more streamlined and effective than when it doesn't.

Notification of incidents and crises (both major and minor) have been examined by an Ad Hoc Committee to the Corporate Crisis Committee for the past year. Members of this Ad Hoc Committee included PR/Communications, Fire and Security, Facilities, and Emergency Response Coordinators.

This committee has reviewed the entire notification process from the moment a crisis begins to the point that a crisis warrants informing senior corporate executives, including the chief executive officer. This committee has endeavored to determine the most reliable notification process for each site Crisis Committee to use.

Notification Process in Brief

Notification is initiated from the area where a crisis has occurred or been identified. The person who discovers the crisis or incident calls the site emergency number, which is connected to the site Fire Station Dispatch office. A senior Fire Officer is then dispatched to the incident site, evaluates the magnitude of the crisis, and then contacts the Fire Dispatch to notify additional emergency response organizations. From that point on, notification occurs according to defined call lists and through chain-of-command channels.

Site Communications personnel are now notified directly by the respective site Fire Dispatchers. Once that initial notification occurs, the Communications representative receiving the call should, in turn, notify Corporate PR offices and the company switchboard operators as soon as he/she obtains information about the incident, and then follow the procedure noted on pages XX through XX.

COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MINOR CRISIS

Minor Crisis

1. Division Communications receives notification from the Fire Dispatcher and compiles the basic facts and chronology of the event (possibly using an Incident Information Sheet).
2. Division Communications representative becomes the PR Lead and informs other communications team members.
3. PR Lead determines if more information is necessary and if a communicator should be dispatched to incident site (Incident Command Interface).
4. PR Lead calls Incident Commander (this is usually the senior Fire Officer at the incident site).
5. PR Lead notes more details about the incident (type of incident, when and where the incident occurred, chemical involved and potential chemical reactions, emergency response personnel on site, number of employees evacuated, any injuries, work performed in the building, what is being done to mitigate the incident, and who the appropriate contacts are and how to reach them).
6. On hours, PR Lead notifies and confers with PR Manager (or back-up). Off-hours or on weekends, PR Lead notifies and confers with PR Manager and PR Duty Officer when practical. If the PR Lead determines that the off-hour incident is likely to

generate media inquiries, such notification must be made immediately. The PR Duty Officer should notify the Switchboard Operators (555-1000) and tell them to direct media inquiries to the person serving as PR Lead.

7. PR Lead and PR Manager agree to key messages and response to query statement.
8. PR Lead or PR Manager notifies Corporate PR Manager.
9. PR Lead prepares response to query statement, confers with division management, and obtains approval on statement.
10. PR Lead sends statement via fax to PR Manager and to Corporate PR Manager.
11. PR Lead serves as prime contact for media. PR Manager and Corporate PR Manager serve as back-ups.
12. PR Lead fields media inquiries and makes follow-up calls to media if necessary.

COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MAJOR CRISIS

Major Crisis

1. Division Communications receives notification from the Fire Dispatcher and compiles the basic facts and chronology of the event (possibly using an Incident Information Sheet).
2. Division Communications representative becomes the PR Lead and informs other communications team members.
3. PR Lead determines if more information is necessary and if a communicator (Incident Command Interface) should be dispatched to incident site to obtain firsthand information. PR Lead also designates another person as PR Back-up, if necessary.
4. IC Interface goes to site and obtains details from Incident Commander (type of incident, when and where the incident occurred, chemical involved and potential chemical reactions, emergency response personnel on site, number of employees evacuated, any injuries, work performed in the building, what is being done to mitigate the incident, and who the appropriate contacts are and how to reach them).
5. IC Interface calls PR Lead via cellular phone with details of incident. IC Interface should also continue to provide updates to PR Lead every 15-30 minutes or as circumstances change.
6. On hours, PR Lead immediately notifies and confers with PR Manager (or back-up). Off-hours or on weekends, PR Lead immediately notifies and confers with PR Manager and also notifies the PR Duty Officer. The PR Duty Officer should notify the Switchboard Operators (555-1000) and tell them to direct media inquiries to the person serving as PR Lead.
7. PR Lead and PR Manager agree to key messages and response to query statement.
8. PR Lead or PR Manager notifies Corporate PR Manager.
9. PR Lead prepares response to query statement, confers with division management, and obtains approval on statement.
10. PR Lead sends statement via fax to PR Manager and to Corporate PR Manager.
11. PR Manager informs PR Operations Manager and PR-VP (or acting PR chief) to review the incident, determine the need for additional on-site support, and decide

whether the PR news bureau should be opened if it is after working hours.
PR-VP decides at this point if executives need to be notified.

12. PR Lead or PR Manager informs Internal Communications Manager who ensures that appropriate internal communications staff will work closely with division communications personnel in collecting data for a timely report to employees.
13. PR Lead and PR Back-up serve as prime contacts for media. PR Manager and Corporate PR Manager serve as back-ups.
14. PR Lead determines if on-site media center is needed and designates PR Back-up to set one up.
15. PR Lead continues to receive information from IC Interface and updates statements accordingly.
16. PR Lead, in turn, provides updates to PR Manager and PR Corporate Manager.
17. PR Lead, PR Manager, and PR Operations Manager confer on whether a press release is needed. If so, PR Lead writes the release, clears it with division management and PR Manager. PR Manager clears release with PR Operations Manager, PR-VP, and other senior officials as required.
18. If incident in on-hours, PR Lead handles follow-up media and employee inquiries and notes incident in report, as necessary.
19. PR Manager and/or Division PR Lead develops report analyzing communications aspects of the incident and lessons learned. Report is distributed to PR Operations Manager and PR-VP, Division Communications staff, and Corporate PR Manager.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER (EOC) ACTIVATION

An Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a centralized location from which emergency response during a very severe crisis is coordinated and directed. A crisis that would force the site EOC to be engaged would be an earthquake or other incident (an act of terrorism) that causes multiple crises at once. Senior emergency preparedness personnel in the company contend that site EOCs along with the Corporate EOC would not be fully activated for a minimum of 2 to 3 hours after the devastating event (i.e., first tremors during an earthquake).

If the site EOC is engaged, all crisis communications would be directed from that point. For adequate communication response, it is recommended that two communicators should be assigned to the center. One communicator would serve as the Communications Manager who is responsible for coordinating external and internal communications, which may include the use of a runner system, in the event all electronic means of communications are out. The other communicator would serve as the Information Officer, responsible for documenting the sequence of events in support of communications and then generating any statements for release either internally or externally.

Each site EOC will be equipped with maps, stationery supplies, white boards, flip charts, viewfoil machines, telephones, and numerous other supplies. It is recommended that communicators make sure the following items are either stored in the EOC or are available nearby:

- Pads and pencils
- Laptop computer
- Portable printer or some other printing device
- Fax machine
- Cellular phone (s)
- Radio (s)
- Division Crisis Communications Plan

The procedure for communications response should be consistent with the procedure for handling a major crisis, the only difference being that all communications would be directed from the EOC itself.

IDENTIFICATION OF A SPOKESPERSON

After an initial assessment of an emergency, the Division General Manager (or designee such as an outplant general manager) will identify the appropriate spokesperson for the division.

Appropriate spokespeople for most divisions are as follows:

- Division Vice President/General Manager
- Plant General Manager (for other sites under division jurisdiction)
- Division Health Manager
- Division Environmental Manager
- Division Safety Manager
- Director of Facilities
- Division Communications Manager
- Public Relations Manager
- Corporate Public Relations Manager

All releases of information outside the division and company shall be by or through the coordinated efforts of Division Communications, Group and/or Corporate public relations personnel (as noted in the **Communications Procedure for Handling Minor or Major Crises**). Whenever possible, encourage the various inquiring publics to consult your organization's Web site for the most up-to-date and accurate content.

All releases of information within the Division will be coordinated by Division Communications personnel.

GUIDELINES FOR SPOKESPEOPLE

1. *Do not speculate.* Always stick to the facts. A more in-depth investigation is required to determine cause.
2. **Focus on two or three key messages to communicate and repeat them during the interview.** Keep answers short and to the point. TV reporters want "soundbites" of no more than 10 to 15 seconds. Try to bridge to your key messages throughout the interview.

3. **Use a technical expert.** There is no substitute for knowledge. If the questions are outside your area of expertise, find an appropriate technical spokesperson within the company.
4. **Speak in simple, common terms.** Avoid jargon.
5. **Remain calm.** Do not be intimidated into answering questions prematurely. You may tell a reporter that you need to clarify an important matter before you can answer questions.
6. **Do not use negative language.** Do not let reporters put words in your mouth.
7. **Consider human safety first.** When human safety or other serious concerns are involved, deal with those considerations first. You can admit concern without admitting culpability.
8. **Do not answer questions you do not understand.** Ask for clarification. Occasionally, this can be used to buy time to think.
9. **Ignore cameras and microphones.** Face the reporter. Don't look away or up at the sky. During videotaped interviews, it's acceptable to stop your statement and start over.
10. **Make only "on the record" statements.** There are no "off the record" statements.
11. **Avoid saying, "No comment."** If you don't know an answer, say so, then bridge to your messages.

FORMAT FOR BRIEFING SOMEONE IDENTIFIED AS A SPOKESPERSON FOR INTERVIEWS/NEWS BRIEFINGS

Executives scheduled to talk to the media should be provided a background briefing in advance of the interview. This policy should be followed even if the interview is only to be a brief telephone call.

The briefing should include the following 11 items:

- Date, time, and location of the interview
- Name of the reporter
- Name of the publication, wire service, station, and so on.
- Our experience with the reporter or publication—to help the executive understand the degree of caution needed in this interview and to prepare for the specific reporter's approach
- Subjects/issues/questions to be covered as requested by reporter
- Our position or recommended response and the data needed to discuss these subjects
- Top three to five messages we wish to make in the interview (not necessarily based on the reporter's suggested topics)
- List of other executives to be interviewed during this visit, including key topics and messages you suggest the other executives cover
- Issues, if any, that the executive (s) should avoid, and recommendations on how to sidestep them
- Background information/statistics that would be useful in preparing for the interview
- Proposed length of interview

If possible, this background material should be conveyed in writing so the executive (s) have a chance to review it carefully. Only under exceptional circumstances should you rely on an oral briefing.

In critical situations, it is also useful to prepare a thorough set of questions and answers to define the organization's positions and to be used in rehearsing the executive.

NEWS RELEASE

During an emergency situation, it may be determined that a news release should be distributed to the media. The purpose of the news release is to convey written information on the incident and to avoid misinterpretation.

Circumstances That May Require a News Release

- An accident, fire, or explosion that results in serious injury, death, or considerable property damage
- A health or environmental incident, or discovery of a health or environmental hazard that may affect employees, the surrounding community, or the environment
- A serious traffic or air accident involving company vehicles, products, and/or personnel
- Sabotage, abduction or extortion, bomb threats, or acts of terrorism involving company personnel, products, or property
- News of an incident that is likely to be known by employees or circulated in the community and create misleading impressions
- News of an event that is unusual enough to cause concern to employees, nearby residents, or community officials
- Consistently misleading news reports

Writing an Initial Statement for Release

Often, reporters will call before all the facts have been gathered. In such an instance, a simple statement acknowledging the situation is useful. The short statement avoids “no comment” and acknowledges that our company recognizes the need to cooperate with media.

Examples:

“Our company is responding to the situation (or name the emergency). We have trained and experienced people on-site working on the situation.”

“Our first priority is the safety of our employees and the public. We are gathering information, and as soon as details become available, we will inform the media through regular news conferences and updates to our organization's Web site.”

Information Appropriate for Release

During an emergency situation, there will be information that is appropriate to release to employees and to the media. Communications personnel should do the following:

- Tell what happened: Give a description of the emergency situation.
- Tell who is involved: Report how many employees were evacuated and if any have been taken to the hospital for observation or due to injury. Report when emergency team members and/or the various city or county fire departments and police arrived on the scene (if applicable).

- Indicate where it occurred: Give the street address of the scene of the emergency.
- Identify when it happened: Give the time the incident began.

Information That Is *Not* Appropriate for Release

Obviously, there will be a lot of information that is not appropriate for release until more is known about the nature of the crisis response and the extent of the impact.

- **Do not speculate on why the emergency occurred or what type of hazardous materials are involved.** Likewise, don't make any statement that blames any individual for the accident. (Although the cause of the incident may appear obvious, it cannot be accurately determined without an extensive investigation, nor can the blame be placed on an individual without a thorough investigation.)
- **Do not include "off the record" information** because there is no such information.
- **Do not overreact to or exaggerate the situation.** For instance, during a hazardous material spill, a reporter may ask for the "worst-case scenario" of what could happen with the chemicals involved in the accident. It is impossible to determine this until you have specific data regarding the hazardous chemicals involved. Bridge back to facts and messages.
- **Do not minimize the situation.** Never regard an emergency as a minor incident.
- **Do not release the names of injured individuals,** unless Human Resources authorized it following confirmation that the victim(s)' family(ies) have been notified.
- **Do not release dollar estimates concerning the extent of property damage.**

Normally, there is no way to accurately determine this until extensive studies have been conducted.

- **Avoid the "no comment" response because it often leads the reporter to speculate.**

If you don't know the answer to a reporter's question or if you can't discuss something, explain why in simple terms.

Writing a News Release

By following a few basic principles when writing news releases, our company stands a better chance of having reporters use the information with only minor changes. Remember to consult the legal department as needed.

1. **Tell the most important information in your lead paragraph.** Your "story" competes with other news and information, so the most important point should be stated clearly in the first paragraph.
2. **Answer four of the five "Ws"—Who, What, Where, and When.** Explain *what* the emergency is. Identify *who* is involved in the emergency as well as the material and equipment involved. Tell *where* and *when* the emergency occurred. Explain *what* action we are taking to mitigate or respond to the emergency. Do not explain *why* the event occurred unless complete information is available.
3. **Attribute information to a qualified source.** A news release is useful only if it conveys credible information.

4. **Write remaining information in descending order of importance.** If the media cuts off the bottom of your story, they will cut information that is least important to the public.
5. **Explain technical points in simple language.** A direct quote can add the human element to otherwise technical information and help explain a situation or event in layman's terms. Tell the real story. Avoid using language that is overly bureaucratic.
6. **Be concise.** A good news release is judged by the quality of information it communicates, not by its length. Stop writing when you've said all you need to say.

MESSAGES FOR THE NEWS MEDIA DURING ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES

Mention of the following points during interviews may help the company communicate its position on environmental issues.

- Our primary concern is for the safety of our employees, the communities in which we operate, and the public.
- We operate a state-of-the-art safety monitoring and control system in our factories and laboratories.
- We are prepared at all times to mitigate a chemical spill or leak.
- We work continuously to reduce our use of toxic chemicals in manufacturing processes and to minimize waste.
- Our standards for "worker hazardous materials safety exposure" meet or exceed standards required by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
- Our employees who work directly with hazardous materials receive special training in handling the materials safely. It is a mandatory requirement that employees attend such training.
- The company conducts periodic audits of its hazardous materials and hazardous waste installations, equipment, and operating procedures to ensure they comply with environmental regulations and permits during normal and emergency conditions.
- As in the past, the company will continue to work closely with state and federal agencies to meet or exceed environmental regulations, comply with test procedures, and report results to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Ecology (DOE).

AUDIENCES DURING A CRISIS

To effectively communicate your message, it's essential to understand who your audience is and how you want your audience to react.

There are two key types of audiences during an emergency.

1. People directly affected by the emergency.
2. People whose attitudes about the company might be influenced by information about the emergency.

These two types of audiences are broken into seven categories. Public Relations' objectives in dealing with each of these audiences are listed below:

- **Employees**—We want employees to know that their safety is the number one priority during an emergency. Employees need information regarding the emergency as soon as possible. This must be accomplished in a manner that assures employees that the company has their best interests at heart and that it can effectively handle emergencies.
- **Community Residents**—We want to quell any unnecessary fears. We want the surrounding community residents to know that we take quick, effective steps to protect the health and welfare of community residents and the environment. This can be best accomplished by responding quickly to community concerns and need for information.
- **Top Management**—This group needs to be kept informed in the event of an emergency as well as to be accessible as a resource if necessary.
- **Government Officials**—Key members of this audience need to be kept apprised of the emergency situation, as determined appropriate by the Government Affairs Department.
- **Customers**—Customers need to know that the company is concerned about crises that impact its operating divisions and that may affect production.
- **News Media**—We want the news media to know that the company is credible, concerned, and effective at dealing with emergencies, and that we understand and meet the unique needs of each type of media.
- **Vendors, Contractors, and Suppliers**—We want these audiences to know that we operate state-of-the-art safety monitoring and control systems in our factories and laboratories and that the company takes quick, effective steps to protect the health and welfare of its employees, vendors, and suppliers.

HOW PEOPLE RECEIVE INFORMATION DURING A CRISIS

In order to determine the most effective ways of communicating during an emergency, it's important to consider how each key audience potentially can receive information. The following sources of information for each audience must be considered in communications strategy for each emergency:

- Employees
 - Direct knowledge of the event
 - Other employees
 - Intercom and phone systems
 - Managers
 - Electronic mail
 - News media reports
 - Fire department/police/hospital spokesperson
- Community Residents
 - Direct knowledge of the event
 - Neighbors
 - News media reports

- Top Management
Company Security, Communications/PR Manager
Personal call(s) from concerned employee (s)
News media reports
- Government Officials
Government Affairs
News media reports
Concerned or scared citizen (s)
- News Media
Public Relations representative
Police and/or fire scanners
Other news media
Fire department/police/hospital spokesperson
Eyewitnesses, including employees
Bystanders with knowledge or hearsay First-hand view of the situation
Outside “experts”
- Vendors, Contractors, and Suppliers
Direct knowledge of the event
Employees and/or management
News media reports

TOOLS TO USE DURING A CRISIS

The following documents are recommended tools that each communications group can use or adapt to specific requirements. Note that a few of the tools will definitely have to be adapted, such as Site Map(s), Building Facts and Figures, and phone lists for key emergency response contacts.

These tools can prove very useful for documenting information related to incidents and for keeping track of media inquiries:

- Emergency response contacts
- Key division directors/managers
- Key communications/PR contacts
- Incident information sheet
- Telephone log sheet
- Initial release
- Checklist for establishing a news conference center
- Maps of division plants
- Building facts and figures

Incident Information Sheet

Complete using ink pen

Date: _____

Time: _____

Initial Report: _____

Update: _____

Describe the incident (i.e., hazardous material spill, equipment malfunction, serious injury, bomb threat, fire, etc.):

Indicate when the incident occurred and when crisis personnel first responded:

Describe which crisis groups are responding:

Indicate where the incident occurred (building number, column number, east or west side of building, etc.):

Describe the work performed in the building(s) where incident occurred (i.e., machining, office functions, mix of factory and office functions):

Estimate the number of employees evacuated:

Estimate the number of employees injured, nature of their injuries (to clarify misleading reports), and where they are being examined/treated (i.e., on-site medical, local hospital):

Describe what is being done to mitigate the emergency:

Telephone Log Sheet

Priority: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Call Received From:

Name _____

Organization _____

Location _____

Message:

Call back by:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Notes:

Example of Initial Statement for Release

At approximately _____ (time) _____ today (date), a _____ (fire, explosion, etc.) occurred on the _____ site of the _____ Division.

Crisis Response personnel are now responding as well as _____ (other support response groups or local municipalities). Our company's response groups include (list appropriate groups such as fire and security officers, medical doctors and nurses, safety personnel, industrial hygienists, environmental engineers, etc.).

Our major concerns are for the safety of our employees and the public and to minimize environmental impact.

We are now involved in determining what has happened and what is being done to mitigate the situation. As more details become available, we will pass them on to the media.

Checklist for Establishing a News Conference Center

In a major emergency, it may be necessary to establish a news conference center. This will be where the company can conduct briefings or news conferences, grant interviews, and issue official statements.

Because time is of the essence during a crisis, communications teams should designate certain locations as potential news conference centers and be prepared to carry out the checklist before an incident occurs.

Preliminaries

1. Check for the best time with company spokesperson.
2. Notify media of time and location.
3. Compile list of names of reporters and editors who indicate they will attend.
4. Compile background information of interest to reporters.
5. Invite outside officials as appropriate.
6. Assign someone to handle the physical arrangements for the news conference.
 - Video services to record event?
 - Junction box for TV and radio mikes?
 - Chairs, tables, podiums as required?
7. Brief staff on the subject, speaker(s), and schedule of events.
8. Prepare opening statement and review with lead speaker.
9. Review anticipated questions and answers with the speaker.
10. Check all sound equipment and tape recorders prior to the conference.
11. Place log sheet in conference room to obtain names and affiliations of attendees.
12. Place all news information and handout materials in conference room.
 - New releases
 - Background information, such as fact sheets, maps, statistics, histories, and biographical information
 - Copy of opening statement and other briefing materials
13. Escort the media to the conference room.
14. Use sign-in sheet.
15. Distribute background materials.
16. Have assigned staff member open the conference and establish the ground rules.
17. Monitor questions and answers closely. Make any necessary clarifications before the end of the event.

Afterward/Follow-up

18. Handle requests for follow-up information.
19. Monitor coverage received; contact any news organization that has an error in its report.
20. At an appropriate time, when the crisis atmosphere has cleared, contact reporters who attended and ask them what went well in terms of our handling the event and what could have been improved.

GENERIC CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: LARGE COMPANY

Crisis Contacts

	Office☐	Pager/Cellular☐	Fax☐	Home
<i>Key Division Directors</i>				
Jennifer Jones (South)	555-0001	C: 555-4892	555-8101	555-9801
Kourtney Johnson (North)	555-0121	C: 555-4241	555-8294	555-9123
Rebecca Arnold (East)	555-2127	C: 555-4101	555-8711	555-9777
Jeremy Kahlil (West)	555-3122	C: 555-4801	555-8222	555-9554
<i>Key Division Managers</i>				
Mary Bland (South)	555-0092	C: 555-1121	555-8111	555-9682
John Jackson (South)	555-0013	C: 555-6101	555-8221	555-9319
Sarah Yerima (North)	555-1764	N/A	555-8811	555-9276
Jonathan Kyle (East)	555-2809	N/A	555-8611	555-9211
Allison Millet (East)	555-2684	N/A	555-8314	555-9013
Nicholas Michael (West)	555-3093	N/A	555-8781	555-9901
<i>Telephone Operators</i>				
Mary Jackson (Supervisor)	555-2999	N/A	555-8722	555-3994
<i>Fire Dispatch</i>				
Adam Yerima	555-8894	C: 555-8676	555-9467	555-9276
Duane Troy	555-9075	C: 555-0328	555-5541	555-0101
<i>Safety Manager</i>				
Ron Nelson	555-1112	C: 555-3434	555-6875	555-0841
Julius Jones, Jr.	555-3756	C: 555-4441	555-1954	555-2395
<i>Medical</i>				
Ethan Floyd	555-7864	C: 555-3321	555-7764	555-1346
Allyson Bernardino	555-9090	C: 555-8341	555-5603	555-7651
Demetria Rudy	555-5642	C: 555-2390	555-6678	555-6431

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Public Relations

Ann Davis 555-7490 C: 555-4431 555-5505 555-6490

Jerry Brown 555-7456 C: 555-2210 555-9898 555-7069

Corporate Public Relations

Gina Arnold 555-8754 C: 555-7890 555-2479 555-0956

South

Regina Arnold 555-8754 C: 555-7890 555-2479 555-0956

Blair Liggins 555-0293 C: 555-7902 555-2478 555-9154

North

Kourtney Johnson 555-0121 C: 555-4241 555-8294 555-9123

Myrtle Jenkins 555-2123 C: 555-4545 555-9045 555-8456

East

Beleria Fulk 555-2345 C: 555-7690 555-3147 555-9067

Anthony Floyd 555-0789 C: 555-4680 555-4896 555-3558

West

Anne Burford 555-1212 C: 555-0097 555-7847 555-0321

O.M. Thornton 555-9557 C: 555-4502 555-5575 555-3498

Katie Marsh (Back-up) 555-9057 N/A 555-0092 555-2664

APPENDIX B

Crisis Communications Plan for a Nonprofit Organization: Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS OUTLINE

I. THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

A. Objectives

- Contain the Crisis Events
- Reduce Risk to Agency
- Respond to Media and Community

B. Select a Crisis Team

- Board/Public Relations Committee
- Top Management Representative
- Legal Representative
- Medical Experts
- Personnel/Human Resources
- Other

C. Designate a Spokesperson

- Believable
- Knowledgeable
- Articulate
- Accessible

D. Prepare a Fact Sheet

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters History
- Information on Programs and Services

E. Prepare a Contact List

- Board President
- Attorney
- Insurance Agent
- Internal Staff and Board
- Field Managers
- BB/BSA Staff
- Government Authorities
- News Media
- Community Leaders and Supporters

F. Training Re: Crisis Intervention

- Board
- New Board Orientation Training
- Staff

G. Networking

- Court System
- Police
- Media
- Social Service System
- Government and CSA Protective Services
- Community Leaders (Recognition and Involvement in Agency)

H. Select a News Site

- Accessible
- Availability of Electrical Outlets
- Telephones

I. Get Management Approval

- Solicit Participation
- Obtain Endorsement of Plan

II. WHEN YOU KNOW IN ADVANCE

A. Evaluate the Situation

- Analyze Options
- Anticipate Reactions
- Develop Strategy

B. Develop the Strategy

- Include Top Management
- Inform Employees in Advance
- Notify Government Officials
- Contact the Media

III. WHEN THE CRISIS HAPPENS

A. Assess the Situation

- Confirm the Facts
- Investigate Rumors
- Identify and Locate Witnesses
- Analyze Expert Information

B. Mobilize

- Take Security Measures
- Adapt Crisis and Media Plans to Actual Events
- Assign Responsibilities

C. Prepare a Statement

- Release Confirmed Facts
- Provide Background Information
- Communicate Positive Actions and Concerns

D. Notify Contact List

- BB/BSA Personnel
- Field Manager
- Director of Marketing
- Communications
- Attorney
- Insurance Agent (if applicable)
- Neighboring Agencies
- Government Officials
- News Media
- Community Leaders

E. Respond to Media/Coordinate Coverage

- Alert Receptionist and All Staff
- Refer All Calls to Designated Spokesperson
- Make Press Site Available

F. Inform Volunteers, Parents

- Changes in Operation or Programs
- Duration of Disruption
- Extent of Problem

IV. CRISIS FOLLOW-UP

A. Follow-up Plan

- Analyze Implications/Responsibilities
- Legal
- Financial
- Resolve Loose Ends
- Prevent Repercussions
- Hostile Reactions
- Negative Actions
- Anticipate Long-Term Effects

B. Evaluate the System

- Monitor Responses
- Assess and Measure Results
- Refine System

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of (Agency) is affiliated with Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, and it holds the highest affiliation ranking, that of being a Full Member Agency. The Agency's screening and service delivery policies conform to those required by Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America.

This Agency is concerned with the well-being and safety of all children, and therefore, its volunteer selection and match supervision procedures are designed to reflect that concern.

Our screening procedures require an applicant to attend an orientation session conducted by a professional staff member. Each volunteer applicant must complete an application form and provide three references. A criminal history check is conducted, and then each applicant undergoes an in-depth screening interview with a social worker. An additional interview is scheduled in the applicant's home and conducted before any match takes place. The professional staff reviews each case to determine if any applicant would be suitable as a Big Brother or Big Sister. Applicants not meeting the Agency's criteria are not accepted as volunteers in the program.

In addition to having a professional staff, the Agency's service delivery is also evaluated by the Board of Directors. This agency has served thousands of youngsters since 19(XX), and volunteers have helped these youngsters in positive growth and development.

(If EMPOWER or other child abuse prevention and education program is in place at your agency, include a sentence to that effect here.)

Our philosophy is to cooperate with agencies and authorities in their efforts to protect the children of our community. We work closely with the parents and children we serve to assure that they find the volunteer/child relationship to be enjoyable and beneficial to the child.

SAMPLE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMUNICATION CHAIN

IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

ALLEGED SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

RESPONSE TO POLICE INQUIRIES

INJURY OR DEATH OF CHILD OR VOLUNTEER

MISUSE OF AGENCY FUNDS

IMPROPRIETY IN A RELATIONSHIP

DISCRIMINATION/VIOLATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

SUSPENSION OF FUNDING

SAMPLE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN: COMMUNICATION CHAIN

In the event of a crisis, this is the communications route to follow:

1. Contact Executive Director.
2. Contact family in person (if applicable).
3. Executive Director contacts President of board.
4. Executive Director contacts agency spokesperson.
5. Executive Director contacts Field Manager for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America.
6. President of board contacts Executive Committee.
7. Executive Committee members contact remaining board members.
8. Executive Director contacts local and state authorities as prescribed by law.
9. Executive Director and President of board deliberate and determine appropriate action.
10. Executive Director contacts agency staff.
11. Letters sent to parents and volunteers.
12. Neighboring agencies notified.
13. Agency spokesperson contacts media in certain crisis situations.
14. All media inquiries routed to agency Web site and spokesperson.
15. Agency spokesperson contacts Director of Marketing and Communications for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America and encourages media to review Web site if the number of inquires are extensive.

SAMPLE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN: IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

1. Adoption of Crisis Management Plan
2. Selection of Media Spokesperson
 - A. Primary: Director of Public Relations
 - B. First Alternate: Executive Director of Agency
 - C. Second Alternate: President of Board of Agency
3. Staff Orientation
4. Board Orientation
5. Volunteer Orientation
6. Media Orientation
7. Annual Review

SAMPLE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES IN THE EVENT OF ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE

1. Protect Little Brothers and Little Sisters from abuse and molestation.
2. Comply fully with the law.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE BY VOLUNTEER

1. Executive Director (or in her/his absence the designated staff person of authority) collects all the facts available from the reporting individual (mother, child, caseworker) or agency (police department, social services department). The staff shall abide by the direction of the Executive Director, or Director's designee, in all actions regarding possible, potential, or actual child abuse cases.
2. As a general rule, the Executive Director notifies the Big Brother or Big Sister involved by telephone or in person, as soon as practical, that a report has been made to the agency that he or she is suspected of child abuse. This verbal report will be immediately followed by a telegram. However, the Executive Director, in consultation with the caseworker and informed Board members, may, in appropriate circumstances, decide not to notify the Big Brother or Big Sister of the report until the authorities have had a reasonable opportunity to investigate the report. In the making of such a decision to do so, the following factors shall be considered:
 - (a) The likelihood of further abuse of the child;
 - (b) The likelihood of threats or actual harm to the child, the child's parent/guardian, or others;
 - (c) The likelihood of additional contact with the child or the child's parent/guardian pending the investigation;
 - (d) The likelihood of attempts to dissuade the child or others from cooperating with the investigating authorities;
 - (e) The likelihood of flight by the Big Brother, Big Sister or others involved;
 - (f) The likelihood that the police investigation will be materially hindered.
3. Executive Director, or designee, notifies the child's family in person, the Board President, agency spokesperson and the remainder of the communications chain.
4. Executive Director, or designee, and the child's caseworker contact the parent/guardian of the child in a personal visit to inquire about the child's condition, verify facts, express concern, extend support, and advise the parent and child that the match has been suspended during the investigation and neither the parent nor the child is to have any contact with the volunteer.
5. Executive Director, or designee, notifies the agency's attorney.
6. Caseworker reports the incident to the appropriate authorities, as required by federal, state, and local laws.
7. At this point, the Board President and Executive Director will determine the appropriateness of notifying all Board members of the alleged incident.
8. If any media or police authority contacts the agency concerning the alleged incident, they must be referred to the agency spokesperson, or the appropriate alternate in the spokesperson's absence. Only the agency spokesperson is authorized to make public statements. If any other staffer board members are contacted by the media or police, they are to answer no questions and immediately refer all calls to the spokesperson.
9. In the event that an attorney representing the child or the volunteer contacts the agency, no questions are to be answered and the call must be immediately referred to the Executive Director, or designee, who will refer these calls to the agency's attorney.
10. Executive Director will verbally report incident to the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America Field Manager. Written reports will follow as needed and requested.

11. Executive Director, or designee, will call the insurance agent concerning the allegation. The Executive Director will follow up with a written notice within 24 hours.
12. Executive Director, Program Director, Caseworker, and Board President all thoroughly document their involvement in handling of the incident. The Executive Director will take possession of the Big Brother and Little Brother or Big Sister and Little Sister files. The files will include, but will not be limited to the following:

Big Brother or Big Sister:

- (a) Application
- (b) Reference letters
- (c) Interview write-up
- (d) Supervision contact notes
- (e) Police check results
- (f) Federal Bureau of Investigation check results
- (g) Proof of automobile insurance
- (h) Applicant's driving records
- (i) Documentation of reasons for suspension of match

Little Brother or Little Sister:

- (a) Phone inquiry
 - (b) Application
 - (c) Information release form
 - (d) Interview write-up
 - (e) Supervision contact notes
 - (f) Documentation of reasons for suspension of match
13. As soon as practical, and with regard to every case of alleged child abuse, the Executive Director or designee shall give the Executive Committee of the Board a complete oral report of the case, with such analysis and recommendations for future policy as may be appropriate in light of the experience. A written report shall be prepared, with direction of legal counsel, as requested by the Executive Committee.
 14. The agency shall assist the parent/guardian and Little Brother or Little Sister with referrals to appropriate professional counselors, and, if the agency determines it to be necessary, will cover reasonable costs for this independent counseling. The agency will not volunteer information concerning insurance coverage, but if asked by the parent/guardian, will respond that there may be insurance coverage.

**STANDARD RESPONSE TO POLICE INQUIRIES CONCERNING
ALLEGED INCIDENTS**

“We are very concerned with the welfare of this child, as we are with all our children, and we are anxious to fully cooperate with the investigation. Because of the privileged nature of our records, it is necessary for us to request a subpoena in order to release our files.”

If asked, the agency's spokesperson can verify that a particular volunteer and/or child [is] or were members of the organization and the dates of their membership. The addresses and phone numbers will also be given to the police. Upon request, the spokesperson will inform the police of the names, addresses and phone numbers of all Little Brothers or Little Sisters that the Big Brother or Big Sister in question has been matched with.

[Editor's note: Police will often seek agency cooperation in learning the identity of other volunteers brought into the agency by the suspect, as well as other Little Brothers or Sisters the suspect may have been matched with in the past. Local counsel should be sought for advice, but it is recommended that the agency cooperate, but only through the legal compulsory process of subpoena to better protect the agency. When the police requests the agency cooperation in not communicating the allegation to the volunteer or in not immediately suspending the match (so as to not interfere with their pending investigation), such a request should be granted. However, this request should be in writing to protect the agency from its responsibility to immediately notify the parties and to suspend the match pending investigation.]

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF AN INJURY OR THE DEATH OF A LITTLE BROTHER/SISTER OR BIG BROTHER/SISTER WHILE INVOLVED IN AN AGENCY ACTIVITY

1. Any staff member that becomes aware of the incident is to report it immediately to the Executive Director and the Program Director. If the incident occurs at night or on the weekend, the above-mentioned staff members are to be contacted at their homes.
2. The Executive Director, or the Program Director as designee, will collect all additional information from police, hospitals, family members and anyone else involved.
3. The Executive Director will report the incident to the President of the Board, or to the Vice-President in the President's absence.
4. If Executive Director and Board President deem it appropriate and necessary, Executive Director will contact the agency's legal counsel.
5. In the case of a minor injury, if the family of the victim has not been notified of the incident, the Executive Director will attempt to make this contact. In the event of serious injury or death, the agency will not give initial notification to the family; rather, that will be the task of the police authorities.
6. The Executive Director will contact the agency's insurance agent within a reasonable period of time, and will follow up in writing within 24 hours. The Executive Director, or designee, will file all necessary forms.
7. The agency will cooperate to the fullest extent with all police and medical personnel. The Executive Director, or Board President in the Director's absence, will be the only authorized spokesperson to these outside agencies.
8. In the event that the agency is contacted by the media, all questions are to be referred to the agency spokesperson.
9. The Executive Director and all agency representatives involved will thoroughly document for the case files, all their actions related to the incident.

10. The Executive Director, or designee, will follow up with the victim's family in order to offer support. Whatever resources the agency has available, or whatever community resources are available—as covered by the agency's insurance policy—will be offered to the family.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF MISUSE OF AGENCY FUNDS BY STAFF OR BOARD MEMBERS

1. If the alleged misuse of funds involves a staff member other than the Director or if it involves a board member, the incident must be immediately reported to the Executive Director, who will then report it to the Board President. In the absence of the Executive Director, the incident is to be reported directly to the Board President. If the alleged misuse involves the Executive Director, the incident must be reported immediately to the Board President or Vice-President in the President's absence.
2. The Executive Director will investigate the incident to the fullest extent possible and will report the findings at a special session of the Executive Committee. If the incident involves the Executive Director, it will be investigated by the Board President or designee.
3. The Executive Committee, and the Executive Director when appropriate, will determine the appropriate course of action, which may include, but not be limited to:
 - (a) Suspension of employee, with pay, pending further investigation; suspension of board member.
 - (b) Suspension of employee, without pay, pending further investigation.
 - (c) Immediate dismissal of employee or termination of board member.
 - (d) Informal agreement with employee or board member for restitution.
 - (e) Formal filing of criminal charges against employee or board member.
4. The Executive Director or Board President will utilize the services of the agency attorney; the agency bookkeeper; the agency auditor; or the agency's insurance agent, as needed.
5. In the event that the agency is contacted by the police, all questions are to be referred to the person of highest authority not involved in the incident, that is, Executive Director, Board President, Board Vice-President. No other staff member or board member is authorized to answer any questions.
6. In the event that the agency is contacted by the media, all questions are to be referred to the agency spokesperson. The agency spokesperson is the only person authorized to speak with the media.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF IMPROPRIETY IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF A VOLUNTEER, AGENCY STAFF OR BOARD MEMBER WITH THE PARENT OF A LITTLE BROTHER OR LITTLE SISTER

1. The alleged impropriety must be reported immediately to the Executive Director. If the director is involved in the incident or unavailable, the incident should be reported directly to the Board President.

2. The Executive Director will investigate the incident to the fullest extent possible and report the finding at a special session of the Executive Committee. If the incident involves the Executive Director, the Board President, or designee, will investigate.
3. The Executive Committee, and the Executive Director when appropriate, will determine the course of action, which may include, but not be limited to:
 - (a) Suspension of employee, with or without pay, pending further investigation; suspension of board member or volunteer.
 - (b) Immediate termination of employee without pay.
4. Agency's attorney and/or insurance agent will be contacted as needed.
5. Executive Director, or designee, will follow up with the parent of the Little Brother or Little Sister to give whatever agency support may be appropriate.
6. The Board President and Executive Director will determine the appropriateness of notifying all board members of the alleged incident.
7. In the event that the agency is contacted by the police, all questions are to be referred to the person of highest authority not involved in the incident, that is, Executive Director, Board President, Board Vice-President. No other staff member or board member is authorized to answer any questions.
8. In the event that the agency is contacted by the media, all questions are to be referred to the agency spokesperson. The agency spokesperson is the only person authorized to speak with the media.
9. In the event that an attorney representing the parent of the Little Brother or Little Sister contacts the agency, no questions are to be answered and the call must be immediately referred to the Executive Director, or Board President. The Executive Director or Board President will then refer these calls to the agency's attorney.
10. The Executive Director and Board President will thoroughly document their involvement in the handling of the incident.

**STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF CHARGES OF RACIAL OR
SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION OR VIOLATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS BY
POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS, OR THOSE WHO HAVE APPLIED FOR,
OR BEEN FIRED FROM AGENCY STAFF POSITIONS**

1. Executive Director, or the Board President in the Director's absence, collects all the facts available from the reporting party.
2. Executive Director or Board President discusses the charges with the agency's attorney.
3. Board President determines appropriateness of calling a special session of the Executive Committee.
4. Executive Director discusses the situation with their Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America Field Manager.
5. In the event that the agency is contacted by the police, or an attorney for the plaintiff, all calls must be referred to the Executive Director, or Board President in the Director's absence.

6. In the event that the agency is contacted by the media, all questions are to be referred to the agency spokesperson. The agency spokesperson is the only person authorized to speak with the media.
7. The Board President will determine the appropriateness of immediately notifying all board members of the charges.
8. All agency personnel and board members involved thoroughly document their handling of the events.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE EVENT OF CHASTISEMENT OR SUSPENSION OF FUNDING BY UNITED WAY OR OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

1. The Executive Director immediately makes a verbal report to the Board President and sends a copy of any correspondence from the funding source.
2. The Board President determines the appropriateness of calling a special session of the Executive Committee.
3. The Executive Director, Board President, and—when applicable—Executive Committee determine the course of action, which may include, but not be limited to:
 - (a) The Executive Director and Board President co-author a letter to the funding source explaining the agency's position.
 - (b) The Executive Director and Board President arrange a meeting with key people from the funding source.
 - (c) The Executive Director prepares all materials that may be necessary for such a meeting.
4. The Board President determines the need to immediately notify all board members of the incident.
5. In the event that the agency is contacted by the media, all questions are to be referred to the agency spokesperson. The agency spokesperson is the only person authorized to speak with the media.

SAMPLE MEDIA STATEMENT

Allegation of Child Abuse

We are aware of the recent allegations against a former Big Brother in our Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. We are very concerned about anything that might harm any of our children and we are offering our full support to the family. This agency's primary concern is for the welfare of its children. Our agency is an affiliate of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, which sets strict standards for volunteer screening. Our agency is cooperating with the legal authorities to resolve the questions raised by these allegations. Since this is a very sensitive matter, I know that you will understand that I am not free to comment any further at this time.

Volunteer no further information. If requested, only this information can be given:

1. Verification that a particular BB volunteer and/or child is associated with your agency.
2. Historical background statement of BB/BS.
3. Confirmation that there is a screening process and what the screening process entails.

Agency Being Sued

We have been asked to comment on the recent suit brought against our agency. Because of the legal process currently underway, we have been advised not to comment on this pending litigation. We do wish to state, however, that this agency's primary concern is for the welfare of its children. We take great care to provide a safe and responsible service to our community.

Criminal Allegation Against Agency Volunteer/Staff

We are aware of the recent allegations against (a current/former volunteer/board/staff member) in our Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. We have been advised that information regarding this allegation is confidential at this time and we are not permitted to discuss the case. However, we do wish to state that this agency's primary concern is for the welfare of its children and we are cooperating with the legal authorities to resolve the questions raised by these allegations.

SAMPLE STATEMENT FOR NEIGHBORING AGENCIES

We have been asked to comment on the recent allegations in a neighboring community. Let me just say that our agency's primary concern is to provide a safe and responsible service to the children of our community. We take great care to screen all individuals who work with the children in our program. Our agency is an affiliate of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, which sets standards for volunteer screening. We are not, however, in a position to comment concerning matters under investigation in another jurisdiction.

SAMPLE LETTERS TO VOLUNTEERS/PARENTS/BOARD MEMBERS

Letter to Volunteers

Dear Volunteers,

You may have heard allegations made concerning a Big Brother who was previously matched in our program. Since you are a volunteer in our program, I feel it is important to communicate to you that we are very concerned and saddened by this charge.

The staff is offering its full support to this child and the family. Additionally, our agency is cooperating fully with the proper authorities in their investigation of these allegations. Because our case files are confidential, we are not able to discuss details of the case.

However, we want you to know that our main concern is to provide responsible and safe services for the children we serve. Nationwide, Big Brothers/Big Sisters is in the forefront of using screening methods with volunteers. As you know, this agency has an in-depth screening process. We believe we do as much as we can to protect the integrity of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program and to maintain high standards of service. More

than (XXX) children were successfully matched with Big Brothers and Big Sisters by the agency in the past year.

Since this is a sensitive legal matter, I am not at liberty to say any more at this time. However, please don't hesitate to call me if you have any questions or if I can be of assistance.

Be assured of our continued gratitude and support of you and the child you are matched with through our program.

Sincerely,

(Executive Director of agency)

(This letter can be adjusted for any crisis. The important thing to remember is to be honest, sincere, and supportive.)

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

You may have heard allegations made concerning a Big Brother who was previously matched in our program. Since your child is involved in our program, I feel it is important to communicate to you that we are very concerned and saddened by this charge.

The staff is offering its full support to this child and the family. Additionally, our agency is cooperating fully with the proper authorities in their investigation of these allegations. Because our case files are confidential, we are not able to discuss details of the case.

However, we want you to know that our main concern at Big Brothers/Big Sisters is to provide responsible and safe services for the children we serve. The children are our clients and we do everything we can to act in their best interest.

Nationwide, Big Brothers/Big Sisters is in the forefront of using screening methods to prevent entry into the program of individuals who may wish to harm children. There is an in-depth screening process that potential volunteers must go through prior to matching. The process consists of character references, an in-depth interview to gather information about personal history, a home assessment and police check. This agency also has in place EMPOWER, the child abuse prevention and education training program developed nationally to provide yet another deterrent, and a way for the children in our program to know how to handle a potentially harmful situation (if applicable). We believe our agency maintains high standards. More than (XXX) children were successfully matched with Big Brothers and Big Sisters by this agency in the past year alone.

Since this is a sensitive legal matter, I am not at liberty to say any more at this time. However, please don't hesitate to call me if you have any questions or if I can be of assistance.

Be assured of our continued gratitude and support of you and your child.

Sincerely,

(Executive Director of agency)

(This letter can be adjusted for any crisis. The important thing to remember is to be honest, sincere, and supportive.)

Letter to Board Members

Dear Board Member:

You may have heard of the recent allegation of child molestation concerning a Big Brother. As a member of the governing body, I want to assure you of our support of the family and of our full cooperation with the proper law enforcement officials. Enclosed are copies of letters sent to all volunteers and families.

There is very little more I can tell you at this time. If you have any questions or concerns that you wish to share, or if you are contacted by anyone regarding this sensitive matter, please give me a call. I may be reached at the following numbers: (phone numbers).

Sincerely,

President, Board of Directors

(This letter can be adjusted for any crisis. The important thing to remember is to be honest, sincere, and supportive.)

LEGAL TERMS: DEFINITIONS AND PROCESSES

Arraignment—The first step in a criminal action after a person has been formally charged with a crime. The defendant is brought before a judge or magistrate and informed of the nature of the charges, his/her constitutional rights, and asked to plead either guilty or not guilty to the charges.

Arrest—The seizing of a person by the police or other law enforcement official in the belief that he/she committed a crime. A person is under arrest whenever not free to leave, and at that time must be given Miranda or constitutional rights.

Arrest Record—A listing of all the times a person has been picked up by the police because the police believe that he or she had violated a law. Such records are not generally available to the media or to the public, but are limited to law enforcement agencies. Also known as “rap” sheets.

Assault—An attempt to unlawfully cause bodily injury to another, sometimes combined with battery to actually include an unlawful or offensive touching.

Blank Subpoena—The form which is filled out by the party seeking to compel the recipient of the subpoena to either testify or produce documents. It comes in both subpoena ad testificatum and subpoena duces tecum forms, and it can be obtained from the office of the clerk of the court of whichever court the matter is to be brought before.

Civil Suit—The bringing of a claim, usually for monetary damages, to try to right a wrong which has been done to a person or to settle a dispute which cannot be otherwise resolved. The end result is usually an order for someone to do or stop doing something, or to pay money to the person who brought the suit.

Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor—Making available to a minor that which the law states is illegal for the minor to possess is contributing to the delinquency

of a minor. This includes providing a minor with alcohol, drugs, and automobile and keys (if unlicensed), and in some states, cigarettes and other legal tobaccos; also, seducing a child or statutory rape.

Conviction—The finding by a judge or jury that the defendant is guilty of the crime or crimes with which he/she was accused.

Conviction Record—A listing of all the times a person has been convicted of committing a crime. Such records are generally available to the media and the public.

Court-Ordered Subpoena—All subpoenas are issued by the court, even though the party seeking the particular testimony or documents fills them out and often has them served. However, the court may determine that a particular witness is needed in order to fully adjudicate the matter before it, and will order a court subpoena. Also used where attempts by the individual party to serve the witness have failed.

Criminal Suit—The bringing of a charge against a person who has allegedly violated one of the criminal laws of the state. The person who is the victim is the complaining witness, and the prosecuting attorney represents the state as the body that has been harmed. The person alleged to have committed the criminal act is called the defendant.

Defendant—In a criminal suit, the person accused of having committed a violation of the criminal laws. In a civil suit, the person accused of having violated a promise or agreement or having done something to harm the plaintiff.

Deposition—A sworn statement by a witness in either a civil or criminal suit concerning the testimony he/she will give at trial. It is often used to discover the facts of a case, or to preserve the testimony of a person who will not be available to testify at trial.

Felony—A criminal offense defined by society to be serious, the range of punishment going from 1 year and 1 day to life or death, and/or a fine, depending on the crime, circumstances and the state's laws.

Grand Jury—A group of 12 people selected from the surrounding community or county to sit for varying periods (average is 6 months to 1 year) and listen to the prosecutor's presentation of alleged criminal events which have occurred in the area. If the 12 people believe sufficient evidence exists to prosecute a case, an indictment is handed down. If the evidence is found to be insufficient, a "No True Bill" is issued and the case is dropped.

Gross Sexual Imposition—The forcing of someone to perform a sexual act while the person who is exerting the force is unclothed—usually kissing or touching, without rising to rape or sodomy.

Indictment—One method of filing formal charges against a person. It is handed down by a grand jury, which has heard only the prosecutor's evidence. It simply means that the grand jury believes that there is enough evidence against the accused to merit a trial. The indictment states the time and date and place of the alleged violation of the law, and the statute that the person is alleged to have violated.

Interrogations—The questioning of witnesses or suspects concerning the facts of an incident. This can occur anywhere, but if the person is not free to leave, he/she is under arrest and must be given Miranda warnings before interrogation.

Involuntary Sexual Battery—The offense of sexual touching of another when the person who is performing the touching believes the person wants to be sexually touched, but the person really does not.

Lewd and Lascivious Acts—Actions which are intended to sexually excite both the actor and the recipient of the act, such as flashing, oral sex, and sexual stimulation of the actor's or another's sexual organs. Usually used in the context where one of the two (or more) participants have not voluntarily engaged in the activity, either because he/she is too young or otherwise unaware of the nature of the activities in which he/she is a participant.

Lewd Assault—Attempt to cause physical harm by means of a sexual act. Usually an attempt to touch a male's or female's sexual organs, or, less frequently, attempted rape or sodomy. There need be no actual contact for an assault to have occurred—only the intent and attempt.

Miranda Warnings—Warnings to be given every time a person is under arrest; they include the right to remain silent, the fact that anything said can and will be used against them in a court of law, the right to have an attorney present, and the right to have an attorney appointed if he/she can't afford one.

Misdemeanor—An offense defined by society to be criminal, but not nearly as serious as a felony, punishable by from 1 day to 1 year in jail, or a fine.

Molestation—The offense of touching a child's sexual organs, either through clothing or without. Most courts recognize this as always being nonconsensual, especially with young children.

Motion to Quash a Subpoena—Can be brought on behalf of the rights of the recipient of either a subpoena ad testificatum or a subpoena duces tecum; usually used with a subpoena duces tecum, where the individual or organization served with the subpoena believes that constitutional privacy rights and other rights will be violated if they are required to provide the requested documents. This is the only legal way to challenge and possibly avoid having to comply with a subpoena.

“No True Bill”—The decision returned by the grand jury when it believes the prosecuting attorney does not have sufficient evidence to prosecute a case.

Order for Closure/Seal of Records—An order by a court sealing the court file of a person so that no one can access the information contained in the court file. Often done in child abuse cases to keep the child's testimony secret, and to protect the child's identity.

Plaintiff—The person in a civil suit who claims he/she had been wronged either by the action or inaction of the defendant; in a criminal suit, the state is the plaintiff in the case.

Professional Negligence—A wrongful action or inaction of an attorney, doctor or other professional person which thereby results in a harm or damage to the person he/she was supposed to be helping. Also called malpractice.

Prosecutor—The person who represents the state and all victims of crimes. Also known as the district attorney, state's attorney, or circuit attorney.

Rape—The forcible action of sexual intercourse upon a female without her consent. In many states, it can only be performed by a male against a female to whom he is not married, although some states are now recognizing rape within a marital relationship. Rape of one male by another is called sodomy.

Sexual Battery—The offense of sexual touching of another person without his/her consent.

Sexual Imposition—The forcing of someone to perform a sexual act, usually kissing or touching of the sexual organs, without his/her consent. This is usually done while the person being touched is fully clothed.

Sexual Misconduct—This is similar to sexual imposition, and it is often used to replace the charge of statutory rape.

Sodomy—The performance of a sexual act termed “unnatural” upon another, or the requiring of another to perform the sexual act. This includes cunnilingus, fellatio, and anal sexual intercourse, as well as bestiality. This does not require force—it can be consensual.

Statutory Rape—The act of sexual intercourse with a female who is under the statutory age for consent. In almost all states, only a female can be statutorily raped. Consent is immaterial; if the female is less than the required age, the man is guilty of statutory rape.

Subpoena—An official court document summoning the recipient to appear at a particular time and place to give testimony in person; it can be either for a hearing, a deposition, a trial, or other legal proceeding. Also called a subpoena ad testificatum.

Failure to appear as ordered can result in the person so summoned being held in contempt of court and having to either pay a fine or go to jail.

Subpoena Duces Tecum—A court order requiring that on or before a certain date, the recipient, often the custodian of records, provides specified documents to the party issuing the subpoena. This does not require the person so providing the documents to appear or testify, but merely to provide access.

Sample Media Coverage

Following are samples of publicity received by Big Brothers/Big Sisters agencies. These articles are not chosen to single out agencies having suffered through such situations, but rather to help others learn from their experiences. Some of these samples demonstrate how best to handle crisis situations; the other articles illustrate the wide range of what makes a Big Brothers/Big Sisters agency newsworthy.

Types of Crisis Situations

Although many agencies feel the only kind of negative publicity generated is from child molestation allegations, there are a variety of crisis situations when an agency might find itself dealing with the media. One of the cardinal rules is to “distinguish a problem from a crisis.” Take corrective action on problems and remember that both problems and crises can be controlled. Some examples of crisis situations include:

- Child abuse/molestation allegation
- Embezzlement of agency funds
- Sexual or racial discrimination suit/sexual harassment
- Drug related arrest of staff or youth or volunteer in program
- Major fire or explosion—wherever matches are together, for example, at circus or sporting events, bowling centers; could also involve the destruction of the agency’s office or property
- Injury or death of child or volunteer during agency sponsored activity
- Natural disaster—generally affecting agency offices
- Suspension of funding by United Way or other funding institutions
- False allegation about agency

Each of these situations has caused crisis or emergency dealings with the media for some Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs. It is important to remember that the media considers many issues newsworthy and that your agency should respond by planning before the need arises.

These are just some examples of crisis situations that may (but hopefully will not) befall your agency.

Possible Questions and Suggested Responses

Question: Media: “What do you think happened?”

Response: Spokesperson: Refrain from speculation on what or why something happened. It is better to say, “I don’t know,” unless you actually have the facts.

Question: Media: “How much damage was sustained?” or “How large a potential suit are you facing?”

Response: Spokesperson: Do not try to estimate any dollar amount. Such guesses can affect amounts of lawsuits or even insurance claims, seldom to your advantage.

Question: Media: “Will you be reviewing your screening procedures after this incident?” or, “How will your procedures change as a result of this incident?”

Response: Spokesperson: Never indicate that your current practices could in any way be considered negligent. “We have no reason to believe our practices or procedures are in need of immediate revision” is an appropriate response. Never instigate a program review during a time of crisis. This could be interpreted by the news media as an indication that you were at fault or negligent. Also, be especially sensitive to any staff changes or layoffs during a crisis. This, too, can be taken as an indication of wrongdoing or staff dissatisfaction, which could result in renewed or extended media coverage.

Question: Media: “Will the volunteer be allowed to serve as a Big Brother or Big Sister again?”

Response: Spokesperson: “The match has been suspended pending the outcome of the allegations. However, you should know that because of the one-to-one nature of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters service, adults who are matched with children in our program are carefully screened. The process is thorough and comprehensive and includes references, police record checks, in-person interviews, and home assessments. The volunteer selection process is designed to assure that the matches made are as appropriate as possible, keeping the child’s safety and well-being in mind at all times.”

Question: Media: “Have any rules or regulations been broken that you know of?”

Response: Spokesperson: In answering this question, be honest, but not expansive. If it is known that rules were compromised, your answer should be that “it appears as if that may be a possibility however, the situation is still under investigation.” At this point, most cases of wrongdoing are in the preliminary states. It is not appropriate to say that situations are more than allegations. Your interpretation of events should not be added to your message to the media—you will be held responsible for what you say if you assign guilt where legally there is none.

Question: Media: “Is the issue of child sexual abuse a major problem for Big Brothers/Big Sisters agencies?”

Response: Spokesperson: This is a tricky question to answer as it addresses a major issue and reflects on the entire Big Brothers/Big Sisters Movement. A suggested response to questions of this nature is “The problem of child sexual abuse is not unique to Big Brothers/Big Sisters. That is why Big Brothers/Big Sisters has been in the forefront of requiring screening for adults who work with or volunteer to spend time with children. We also have in place at this agency EMPOWER, a child abuse prevention

and education program designed to inform children to report any inappropriate behavior to a trusted adult.” Stressing your agency’s prevention and education program will inform the media that you are doing as much as possible about the problem of child sexual abuse.

Question: Media: “How will service be affected due to your agency’s recent loss of funding?”

Response: Spokesperson: “Big Brothers/Big Sisters provides a much needed service to this community. Therefore, we do not anticipate that service will be cut back at this time. We will be looking for alternative funding sources.” If there are questions concerning the possibility of reinstatement of your funding, this could be indicated. “We have requested a hearing to present our situation for consideration of reinstatement.”

We have previously discussed the issue of “No comment.” It is being reiterated here in order to get across the importance of not using this phrase. This is an unwise response to any question put forth by the media, and it is generally interpreted to mean “I know something but I’m not telling because it is damaging to me.” The media will continue to dig and pursue when confronted with this simple statement, so use of this hedge will not serve you well. It is far better to be as open and accessible as possible. The facts can be provided with greater accuracy, the story will generally become more positive as a result of your input, and the media will respect you for being cooperative and taking the initiative. You do have the right to refrain from commenting; however, you should explain why you can’t comment; for example, “the case is in litigation and, therefore, we cannot comment on the specifics of the case.”

APPENDIX C
Crisis Communications Plan for a
Small Business

UDUB Burger Drive-In's Crisis Communications Plan for E. coli and Hepatitis A

Crisis Communications Plan Team

Department of Communications

University of Washington

Professor Kathleen Fearn-Banks

Written March 10, 1999

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Revised May 25, 1999

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Revised February 6, 2006

Joel Bellazza

Tested: _____

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 - Local Television News Personnel
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Hepatitis A Fact Sheet
Glossary of Food-Related Illnesses
Community Relations Programs*
Employee Relations
Employee Handbook*
Cooking Procedures*
Advertising*
Photographs and Memories*
URLs for Food Poisoning

*Item is not included due to its personal nature.

UDUB BURGER'S CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Why Is This Plan Important?

With the plethora of controversy and crisis surrounding the food industry, particularly the fast-food industry, it is always advisable to be prepared for any possible emergency that could damage our establishment. UDUB's hamburger stand has a good reputation among fast-food consumers in Seattle, our target market, and we need to make sure that our reputation is not damaged.

What Could Happen If the Plan Is Not Followed?

If this crisis communications plan (CCP) is not followed in the event of an emergency, the company's good name and reputation in the community could be damaged, which may result in a loss of business. Because trust and reliability are important to consumers, they must feel that they can trust that a certain problem will not reoccur and that they are safe eating at UDUB Burger Drive-In.

Has a Crisis Happened at UDUB Burger Before?

Fortunately, there have not been any reports of food poisoning from our customers. However, we should always be prepared for this type of crisis because it is a common problem in the fast-food industry.

Has a Crisis Happened to Similar Companies?

Yes. The E. coli outbreak that occurred at a Jack-in-the-Box in 1993 was a warning to all fast-food organizations. That crisis, which had a negative effect on the chain's name and reputation, serves as a good example of what not to do when dealing with the media in the midst of a crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

By signing this statement, I verify that I have read this CCP and am prepared to put it into effect.

President and CEO

(Signature and date)

Vice President and CFO

(Signature and date)

Vice President

(Signature and date)

Office Manager

(Signature and date)

STATEMENT FROM MANAGEMENT TO EMPLOYEES

There are many high-risk factors surrounding the fast-food industry, making it necessary for all food organizations to be ready for a potential public crisis at any time. Our risks are heightened by the nature of our industry: We provide quick and simple food service. Especially with meat, there is a high risk of food poisoning if the meat is not cooked properly. Because of these dangers, it is vital that UDUB Burger's employees are prepared to deal with the media and the public quickly and efficiently in the event of a crisis.

We have worked for many years to build an impeccable reputation with the public for providing clean, quick, and quality service and food to our consumers. Because the most damaging scare in the food industry, particularly with hamburgers, is food poisoning—particularly the E. coli virus and hepatitis A—it is crucial that UDUB Burger be prepared for any possible circumstances involving a patron of our restaurant becoming ill from our food. As mentioned earlier, the E. coli crisis that struck Jack-in-the-Box was a prodrome to all fast-food handlers. In order to prevent similar damage to our company, we must take very seriously what happened at Jack-in-the-Box and what Foodmaker did wrong in communicating with the media and the public.

If this CCP is not followed in the event of a crisis, irreparable damage to the reputation of UDUB Burger Drive-In is possible. The loss of trust among our consumers could also lead to a large loss of business. In dealing with this crisis plan, we must keep in mind that trust and reliability are incredibly important to consumers when choosing a place to eat, and UDUB Burger must protect its reputation as being a reliable fast-food source. We trust that all employees will keep up their outstanding work in order to protect our company from such a crisis.

Purposes

In the event of an E. coli or hepatitis A outbreak, we must take immediate action to inform our publics of the situation and the measures they need to take. Our open and honest transfer of information to the media and health care facilities will eliminate confusion among our publics. By being truthful and forthright, the crisis situation can be more smoothly resolved and action can be taken to eliminate any future problems.

Objectives

We will make every effort to:

1. Initiate the CCP within 2 hours of the crisis outbreak in the event of a suspected *E. coli* or hepatitis A infection from food eaten at one of our restaurants.
2. Inform all health care organizations that might be involved with the situation.
3. Inform all owners and managers within 3 hours of the outbreak.
4. Inform the media and restaurant patrons within 4 hours of the outbreak.
5. Keep the media and all publics regularly informed of updated information through regular news briefs and updates to the company's Web site.
6. Maintain honesty with the media about all known information.
7. Find the source of the problem as soon as possible.
8. Distribute our findings to the media and all publics.
9. Develop ways to alleviate future problems.
10. Implement necessary changes as soon as possible and resume business as usual.

Crisis Inventory and Results

The accompanying crisis inventory graph (see Fig. C.1) analyzes five possible crises that could occur at a UDUB Burger Drive-In: *E. coli* poisoning, hepatitis A poisoning, fire, injury, and violence. By studying the probability of each possible crisis and the amount of possible damage that could result if that crisis occurred, it was determined that UDUB Burger Drive-In is more vulnerable to the crises involving *E. coli* or hepatitis A outbreaks. This crisis plan was created to suit the needs of UDUB Burger Drive-In in case one of these emergencies should occur.

WARNING SIGNS OF A POSSIBLE CRISIS

E. coli

- The *E. coli* crisis that occurred at a Jack-in-the-Box cost the company a large amount of customers. UDUB Burger can prevent this type of crisis by following proper food-handling instructions and by being aware of the quality of hamburger meat served to customers.
- Employees will be trained in meat-preparation techniques to ensure that the hamburgers reach a temperature high enough to kill *E. coli* bacteria.

Hepatitis A

- Warning signs of a potential hepatitis A outbreak include employee illness, failure to wash hands, and improper food handling. All employees will be educated in how to prevent the spread of hepatitis A.
- If an employee contracts hepatitis A, the individual will not be allowed to work until he or she is declared "safe" by the Department of Health.

Fire

- The 1968 kettle fire at the UDUB Burger Drive-In in Lake City was a wake-up call to all employees. Five days of business were lost. Employees could have been seriously

injured. Instructions for fire prevention can be found in the UDUB Burger Drive-In Employee Handbook.

- Unsafe working conditions or malfunctioning equipment could lead to a potentially dangerous fire. All employees will be trained to recognize possible dangers in the preparation area.

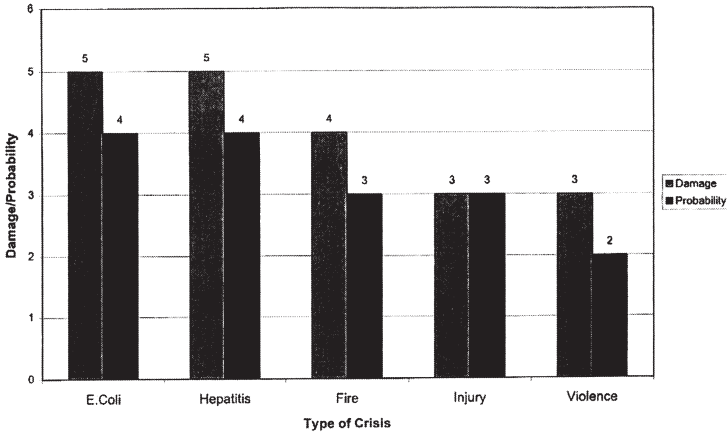


Figure C-1. A crisis inventory graph for UDUB Burger Drive-In.

Injury

- Whether involving employees or customers, injury in the workplace can create serious long-term problems, such as loss of business, reduced workforce, negative publicity, and legal repercussions.
- Employees will be trained to take precautions and to notice potentially hazardous areas, such as wet floors, construction areas and other unsafe areas.

Violence

- Whether involving employees or customers, violence in the workplace is a tragic event with serious consequences.
- Employee training, counseling, and other preventive measures will be taken to curb the possibility of violence occurring at a UDUB Burger Drive-In establishment.

THE MEDIA SPOKESPERSON

The media spokesperson represents the company and speaks on behalf of the company. The spokesperson must be selected very carefully. In addition, two or three back-up spokespersons should be selected in advance in case the primary spokesperson is unavailable at the time of a crisis.

Criteria for Selecting

- The spokesperson must have the power to make decisions and be accessible throughout the crisis.
- The spokesperson must be articulate. He or she must be able to talk clearly, concisely, and in a pleasant manner.
- The spokesperson must appear rational, concerned, and empathetic during a crisis.
- Multiple spokespersons, when used, must all be prepared to say the same thing.

Interview Tips

Primary and Backup Spokespersons

Office Phone

Cell Phone

Home Phone

E-Mail

Spokesperson 1: _____

Spokesperson 2: _____

Spokesperson 3: _____

Spokesperson 4: _____

- Prepare for answering who, what, when, where, why, and how questions.
- Focus on two or three key messages to communicate and repeat them during the interview.
- Gather background information that may be useful during the interview.
- Be aware of subjects, issues, and questions that might be brought up.
- Be accessible and pleasant to reporters: Show respect, and remember their names, if possible.
- Avoid saying, “No comment.”
- Be honest.
- Remain calm, courteous, truthful, concerned, and, if necessary, apologetic.
- Face the reporter, not the camera or the microphone.
- Avoid jargon: Speak in everyday language.
- Do not speculate. Do not answer questions you don’t understand. Ask for clarification.
- Be trained ahead of time, rehearsed well in advance of the crisis, and briefed prior to responding to the media.

Trick Questions

Reporters might bring you into a difficult situation by asking you trick questions. Following are examples of various types of trick questions.

1. Speculative questions that begin with if:

- “If the hamburgers that were infected were served during the normal lunch hour instead of late at night, how many people would have been infected?”
- “If the hamburgers had cooked at a higher temperature, would the E. coli outbreak have happened?”

2. Leading questions:

- “You do agree that UDUB Burger could have avoided this crisis, right?”

3. Loaded questions:

- “Isn’t it true that you knew there was an E. coli outbreak but couldn’t do anything to stop it at once, so it caused so many deaths?”
- “Isn’t it true that you knew of possible E. coli in the undercooked hamburgers?”
- “Isn’t it true that you knew this employee had hepatitis A and that you failed to do anything about it?”
- “Isn’t it true that the shift manager should have been aware of the warning signs of this crisis?”

4. Naïve questions:

- “What type of food does UDUB Burger Drive-In serve?”

5. False questions (containing inaccurate details that reporters want you to correct):

- “There were only two employees during the rush hours, right?”
- “About 90% of your meat comes from the same plant that the contaminated meat from Jack-in-the-Box came from, correct?”
- “More than seven people have been affected by the virus strain that started here at your restaurant, right?”

6. Know-it-all questions:

- “We have all the facts. I just need to confirm a few things with you, okay?”
- “I have all of the details, but could you give me some wrap-up comments about this crisis?”

7. Silence: This tactic aims to get you to “spill your guts.”

8. Accusatory questions (designed to make you blame someone else):

- “Who is actually responsible for this crisis?”

9. Multiple-part questions (designed to be intentionally confusing):

- “What is the temperature at which you cook your meat, and is that the regulation for Washington? If it is, then how can someone contract this virus if heat is supposed to kill it?”

10. Jargon questions: Make sure to avoid using technical words that can confuse publics.

11. Chummy questions:

- “Hey Pal, off the record, why do you think this happened?”

12. Labeling questions:

- “Would you say that the atmosphere here at UDUB Burger is ‘stressful’?”
- “Would you call the fast-paced environment stressful enough for one to lose sight of a specified task?”

13. Good-bye questions (reporters give the impression that the interview is over before asking such questions):

- “Good-bye. Oh, by the way, how did this crisis actually happen?”

LIST OF EMERGENCY PERSONNEL

Seattle Police Department

610 3rd, Seattle 98104

911

Media Relations: 684-5520

Fax: 684-8197

Fire Department 301

2nd, Seattle 98104 911

Dept. Info: 386-1400

Fax: 386-1412

Harbor View Medical Center

325 9th Ave. S., Seattle 98104

PR: 731-4199

Fax: 731-8605

Virginia Mason

925 Seneca, Seattle 98101

Communications: 583-6082

Fax: 223-6744

UW Medical Center

1959NE Pacific St., Seattle 98105

PR: 543-3620

Fax: 685-3333

Swedish Medical Center

PR: 386-6797

King County Department of Health

206-269-4755

KEY MESSAGES

E. coli

In the event of an *E. coli* outbreak, UDUB Burger employees' first priority is the care of its customers. Warning the public of the symptoms of *E. coli* is the first order of business. The symptoms can include one or more of the following: abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhea, and nausea. Our primary concern is with those who are infected with *E. coli*. Without knowing the exact location where the *E. coli* originated, whether from the meat distributor or inside our store, we promise the public that the source of the bacteria will be discovered as promptly and effectively as possible.

We will also restate consistently the fact that we are concerned with the E. coli problem and that our primary concern is for those infected. We will restate how careful and cautious UDUB Burger is in preventing diseases such as this one from occurring. We will state that our employees cook meat to the standard temperature set by the FDA and that employees follow proper cleaning procedures outlined by the FDA. We will explain that employees are required to receive a food-handler permit prior to working at UDUB Burger.

The following key messages should be stressed in the order indicated:

1. Our biggest concern is for those affected.
2. We are sorry for what happened and we take full responsibility for what happened.
3. We don't know how it happened, but we are trying to find out and we'll let you know as soon as we know.
4. We maintain a strict and thorough process on avoiding problems such as these from occurring by requiring our employees to receive a food-handler permit.

Hepatitis A

In the event of hepatitis A scare, UDUB Burger employees' first priority is the care of its customers. Warning the public of the symptoms of hepatitis A is the first order of business. The symptoms can include one or more of the following: fatigue, nausea, vomiting, fever/chills, jaundice, pain in the liver area, dark urine, light-colored stools, and/or abdominal pain. Our primary concern is with those who are infected with hepatitis A. Without knowing the exact location where the hepatitis A originated, whether from one of the employees or an external source, we promise the public that the source of the disease will be discovered as promptly and effectively as possible.

We will also restate consistently the fact that we are concerned with the hepatitis A problem and that our primary concern is for those infected. We will restate how careful and cautious UDUB Burger is in preventing diseases such as this one from occurring. We will state that employees are required to receive a food-handler permit prior to working at UDUB Burger and that they must wash their hands before handling food.

The following key messages should be stressed in the order indicated:

1. Our biggest concern is for those affected.
2. We are sorry for what happened and we take full responsibility for what happened.
3. We don't know how it happened, but we are trying to find out and we'll let you know as soon as we know.
4. We maintain a strict and thorough process on avoiding problems such as these from occurring by requiring our employees to receive a food-handler permit.

EVALUATION OF PLAN EFFECTIVENESS AFTER A CRISIS

After a crisis, the following steps will be followed to ensure that UDUB Burger is better prepared for the future. This evaluation is for looking at what went right and what went wrong during the crisis. It covers all aspects of the crisis, including media relations, community relations, and the crisis management team's performance. It is vital to evaluate the company's CCP while the crisis is still fresh in employees' minds. Thinking about all aspects of the crisis will help determine what we can do better next time.

1. Media relations: Review the media's coverage of the crisis. Were there areas in which we could have received better or more positive coverage of our company? Would the coverage have been better if we had taken more time to build strong media relationships before the crisis?
2. Community relations: Did the community act favorably to how we handled the crisis? If not, what can we do to build better community relations (i.e., public service donations or activities)? If we donate money or services, make sure that the public is aware of it (through media coverage or information at our restaurant locations).
3. Crisis management team: Did all team members perform well under pressure? Were there certain members who should have been put "behind the scenes" or on the "front lines" (speaking to the media, etc.)? Should any members be replaced by others should another crisis occur? Was the crisis control room properly stocked? Was there anything missing that needs to be ordered or created?

PREGATHERED INFORMATION

Generic News Release for E. coli

A UDUB Burger Drive-In customer is being treated for symptoms of E. coli at (name of hospital). His/her condition is _____. It is not known at this time if he/she contracted the illness at the UDUB Burger Drive-In location where he/she dined on (date).

"We are very concerned about (victim's name) and we are monitoring his/her condition closely. Whether the illness came from food at UDUB Burger or other causes, we wish for his/her speedy recovery," said _____, UDUB Burger's owner and president.

According to (whom), (victim's name) ate a hamburger at the UDUB Burger Drive-In located at (address or neighborhood). He/She is said to be experiencing (symptoms).

The health department is currently investigating to see if there is a possible link between the burgers served at UDUB Burger and the victim's illness. In the 45-year history of UDUB Burger Drive-In, there have been no other reported cases of this illness.

UDUB Burger Drive-In has a strict sanitary code that requires employees to cook hamburgers to 160 degrees, 10 degrees higher than required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Employees are thoroughly trained in cooking according to safety and health procedures.

E. COLI FACT SHEET

Definition of E. coli

E. coli is an emerging cause of food-borne illness. E. coli are germs (bacteria) that normally live in the intestines of people and animals. There is no treatment for E. coli.

What Are the Symptoms?

The most common symptoms are severe stomach cramps and diarrhea. Some people vomit or run a fever, but these are less common. These symptoms usually go away by themselves after 6 to 8 days. In a small number of people, this strain of E. coli can cause a rare but serious problem called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).

Methods of Communication

In the event of a crisis, the following publics should be contacted in the manner indicated in the chart.

<i>Public</i>	<i>Telephone</i>	<i>E-Mail</i>	<i>Fax</i>	<i>Letter by Mail</i>	<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>Bulletin Board</i>	<i>Personal Visit</i>	<i>News Release</i>
Meeting								
Owners	•	•						
Executive	•	•						
Employees				•	•	•		•
Electronic media		•				•		
Daily newspapers		•				•		
Weekly newspapers		•				•		
Suppliers		•	•					
Community leaders				•	•			

What Is HUS?

HUS is a disease that affects the kidneys and blood-clotting system. In severe cases, dialysis is used for a limited time to do the kidneys’ work. Some people also develop a bleeding problem or low red blood cell count (anemia).

Where Is E. coli Found?

It lives in the intestines of healthy cattle and gets into the meat when cattle are slaughtered. The germs are killed when the meat is thoroughly cooked. Germs have also been found in raw milk, apple cider, and salami.

How Is E. coli Spread?

E. coli must be swallowed to cause an infection. This can happen if you eat or drink something that contains these germs and is not properly cooked or pasteurized. The germs can be spread from person to person if someone who is infected does not thoroughly wash his or her hands with soap and water before preparing food for others.

How Is E. coli Prevented?

Take the following steps to avoid infection:

- Do not eat nonpasteurized dairy products or undercooked ground beef.
- Do not drink raw milk or apple cider that is made from unwashed apples.

- Always wash your hands with soap and water after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, or handling raw meat.

HEPATITIS A FACT SHEET

“What Is Hepatitis A?”

It is a highly contagious virus that attacks the liver. It is the seventh most commonly reported infectious disease in the United States (behind gonorrhea, chicken pox, syphilis, AIDS, salmonellosis, and shigellosis). Hepatitis A accounts for as many as 65% of all viral hepatitis cases in the United States each year. It is the most prevalent type of hepatitis.

What Are the Symptoms?

The common symptoms of hepatitis A are fatigue, nausea, vomiting, fever/chills, jaundice, pain in the liver area, dark urine, light-colored stools, and/or abdominal pain.

How Do You Get Hepatitis A?

The hepatitis A virus is transmitted by the fecal-oral route through close person-to-person contact or by ingesting contaminated food or water. Infection has been shown to be spread by:

- Close personal contact with someone infected with hepatitis A.
- Eating foods contaminated by infected food handlers.
- Contact with infected children (who do not usually show symptoms), who can then infect nonimmune children or adults at home or in child-care centers.
- Ingesting raw or undercooked shellfish (e.g., oysters, clams, mussels) from waters contaminated with the virus.
- Ingesting contaminated food or water during travel to underdeveloped areas.
- Transmission through blood transfusions or sharing needles with infected people using injectable drugs.

What Is the Course of the Disease?

The incubation period for hepatitis A, which varies from 10 to 50 days (mean 30 days), is dependent on the number of infectious particles consumed. Infection with very few particles results in longer incubation periods. The period of communicability extends from early in the incubation period to about a week after the development of jaundice. The greatest danger of spreading the disease to others occurs during the middle of the incubation period, well before the first presentation of symptoms. Many infections do not result in clinical disease, especially in children. When the disease does occur, it is usually mild and recovery is complete in 1 to 2 weeks. Occasionally, the symptoms are severe and convalescence can take several months. Patients suffer from feeling chronically tired during convalescence and their inability to work can cause financial loss. Less than 0.4% of reported cases in the United States are fatal. These deaths usually occur among the elderly.

What Is the Treatment?

There is currently no treatment for hepatitis A, although rest and proper nutrition can relieve some symptoms. The most important factor affecting the severity of the disease is age.

How Dangerous Is Hepatitis A?

A very small percentage of people infected with hepatitis A are at risk for serious complications. An estimated 100 deaths occur in the United States each year from the virus.

Does It Come From a Specific Food?

The virus has not been isolated from any food associated with an outbreak. Because of the long incubation period, the suspected food is often no longer available for analysis. No satisfactory method is presently available for routine analysis of food. Cold cuts and sandwiches, fruits and fruit juices, milk and milk products, vegetables, salads, shellfish, and iced drinks are commonly implicated in outbreaks. Water, shellfish, and salads are the most frequent sources. Contamination of foods by infected workers in food-processing plants and restaurants is common.

GLOSSARY OF FOOD-RELATED ILLNESSES

Botulism—A disease caused by contamination of certain foods by the botulism bacterium commonly found in the soil. The botulism toxin is produced when the bacteria grow in improperly canned foods and occasionally in contaminated seafood. Common symptoms are headaches, nausea, vomiting, constipation, and overall weakness. It progressively attacks the nervous system, causing double vision, muscle paralysis, and difficulty with breathing and speech. Symptoms appear 8 to 12 hours after eating contaminated food. Death may occur within 3 to 7 days without treatment. There is an antitoxin to treat the disease.

Campylobacteriosis—Bacteria found in the intestinal tracts of healthy animals and untreated water surfaces. Inadequately cooked animal products and nonchlorinated water are the most common reasons for human infection. It can be easily killed by heat above 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Common symptoms are abdominal cramping, diarrhea, fever, headache, muscle pain, and nausea. Symptoms appear 2 to 5 days after eating contaminated food and may last 2 to 7 days.

Clostridium Perfringens—Bacteria found in soil, unprocessed foods, nonpotable water, and the intestinal tract of humans and animals. It is a milder form of botulism. Symptoms include abdominal pain and diarrhea. Symptoms appear 8 to 24 hours after eating contaminated food and may last 1 to 2 days.

E. coli Hemolytic Colitis—Bacteria that comes in many forms; most are harmless except the E. coli 0157:H7 strain. Abdominal cramps and bloody diarrhea are the distinctive symptoms of this strain. Other symptoms are fever, nausea, and vomiting. These symptoms appear 3 to 5 days after eating contaminated food. Symptoms may last 10 days.

Hepatitis A Virus—A highly contagious virus that attacks the liver. The virus is transmitted by the fecal-oral route, through close person-to-person contact, or by ingesting contaminated food or water. Common symptoms are fatigue, nausea, vomiting,

fever, jaundice, pain in the liver area, dark urine, and abdominal pain. The disease can stay in the body for 10 to 50 days without showing symptoms. Recovery usually takes 1 to 2 weeks.

Listeriosis—Bacteria that live in humans and animals. It is usually associated with cattle and sheep having abortions and encephalitis. The elderly, newborn babies, pregnant women, and people with a weakened immune system are the most vulnerable to this infection. Possible symptoms are fever, headaches, nausea, and vomiting. Symptoms appear 3 days to a few weeks after eating contaminated food and may last several days. Death may occur in rare cases.

Salmonellosis—Bacteria spread through contact with human or animal intestinal contents or excrement, usually found in raw meat, fish, poultry, and eggs. Symptoms, which are headache, vomiting, nausea, chills, fever, diarrhea, and abdominal cramping, appear 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food. The symptoms may last 2 to 7 days.

Staphylococcal Intoxication—Bacteria found on the skin and in the nose and throat of most humans. People with sinus infections and colds are high carriers. Infected wounds are rich sources of this bacterium. Sewage, raw milk, and untreated water are carriers. Symptoms are vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, and abdominal cramping. Symptoms appear 1 to 8 hours after eating contaminated food and may last 1 to 2 days.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

- UDUB Burger is an equal opportunity employer.
- UDUB Burger pays at least \$7.00 an hour to start. A \$1.00 per-hour bonus is paid to employees working between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m., and between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- The opportunity to get raises in pay occurs twice a year at evaluation time.
- Benefits include the following (see the Employee Handbook for more information):
 - Health and dental insurance plan.
 - Employee scholarship plan.
 - Child-care benefit program.
 - Community service plan.
 - 401(k) tax-deferred retirement savings plan.
 - Overtime hours will be paid at a rate of time and a half (based on the employee's regular hourly wage).
 - Half-price food.
 - Bonus program for new employee referrals.
 - All employees check the "All Hands Notices" on the bulletin boards before they step onto the floor to work.

URLs FOR FOOD POISONING

National Center for Infectious Diseases Web site: <http://cdc.gov/ncidod.ncid.htm>

- Learn about the NCID
- Disease information

- Bacterial information
- Access *Emerging Infectious Diseases* (journal)

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/ecoli.htm>: Public Fact Sheet About E. coli

- What is it?
- Who gets it?
- How does it spread?
- What are the symptoms?
- How is it diagnosed?

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/hepafact.html>: Public Fact Sheet About Hepatitis A

- What is hepatitis A?
- How does it spread?
- How is it contracted?
- Overall history

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

- What the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Web site does
- Health news
- Hepatitis information
- Ideas for protecting oneself from diseases

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/>

- Washington State Department of Health Web site
- Frequently asked questions about diseases
- Frequently called safety phone numbers in the area
- Current health issues in Washington
- General facts to keep us informed

www.jackinthebox.com

Jack-in-the-Box Web site

www.ificinfo.health.org

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