

Risk and Crisis Communications

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Communication

- An act or instance of transmitting
- A verbal or written message
- A process by which information is exchanged between individuals
- A technique for expressing ideas effectively



Communication

- Exchange
- Intelligence
- Advice
- News
- Tidings



Risk Communications: When?

- When a hazard is serious and the public is ignoring the risk, the risk communicator helps overcome that apathy
- When a hazard is small, and the public is exaggerating the risk, the risk communicator helps reduce the concern



Risk Communications: Messages

- Watch out!
- Calm down!
- Combination of both



Risk = Hazard + Outrage (Peter Sandman)

- Hazard = Technical Risk
- Outrage = Trust, Responsiveness,
Control,
Fear

The risk communicator teases apart the Hazard from the Outrage – and then helps the client manage, minimize and control the Outrage



Crisis Communication: When?

- When both “Hazard” and “Outrage” are high
- Event has happened that genuinely endangers people – or threatens too in the near future
- People are fearful about what might happen, or angry about what has happened, or both



Crisis Communications: Why?

- To help people bear their feelings (“Outrage”)
- To help people cope effectively with serious situations (“Hazard”)



Crisis Communication: Information Content

- What do we know about the crisis?
- What do we want people to know?
- How can we communicate it effectively?



Crisis Communications: Logistics/Media

- How do we actually get our content into the hands and (hopefully) the minds of our audience?



Crisis Communication: Audience Assessment

- Who do we need to reach?
- What do they think already?
- How does this affect what we have to say?



Crisis Communications: Audience Involvement

- How do we make our communications meaningfully two-way?
- How do we keep audiences active rather than passive?



Crisis Communications: “Meta-messaging” (Sandman)

All the content of crisis
communications other than
information content:

- How reassuring to be
- How confident to sound
- How to address emotion

[Many crisis planners get this WRONG!]



Crisis Communications: Self Assessment

- How will our own values, emotions and political problems affect our CC?
- What are we likely to get wrong?
- What are the internal resistance points to getting it right – and how can we counter them?

Easier to answer “What are we doing wrong?”

Difficult to answer “Why do we keep doing it wrong?”



25 Key CC Recommendations:

1. Don't over reassure
2. Put reassuring information in subordinate clauses
3. Err on the "alarming" side
4. Acknowledge uncertainty
5. Share dilemmas
6. Acknowledge diversity of opinion



25 Key CC Recommendations:

7. Be willing to speculate, within reason
8. Don't over diagnose or over plan for panic
9. Don't aim for zero fear
10. Don't forget emotions other than fear
11. Don't ridicule the public's emotions
12. Legitimize people's fears
13. Tolerate early over-reactions
14. Establish your own humanity



25 Key CC Recommendations

15. Tell people what to expect
16. Offer people things to do
17. Let people choose their own actions
18. Ask more of people
19. Acknowledge errors, deficiencies and misbehaviours
20. Apologize for the things listed in 19.



25 Key CC Recommendations

21. Be explicit about “anchoring frames”
22. Be explicit about changes in official opinion, prediction or policy
23. Do NOT lie or tell half-truths
24. Aim for total candour and transparency
25. Be careful with risk comparisons



Crisis Communications: Media

- ❑ Do not be afraid of the media
- ❑ Understand the media
- ❑ Reach out to the media
- ❑ Nurture your relationship with the media
- ❑ Ask the media to “help” YOU
- ❑ Make the media your friends
- ❑ NEVER lie to the media



Crisis Communications: Media

- Acquire “media training”
- Seize the opportunity to appear in the media
- Pursue media opportunities
- Follow up the story for long-term impact
- Correct errors immediately
- Offer praise for a story well told
- YET.. maintain a balance re: the media

