

Supplemental Information

RMA **COMMUNICATE
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Reputation Management Associates
Communication Training, Consulting and Executive Coaching

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Thank you for attending one of my recent sessions!

I have included in the pages that follow several articles, tips, snippets, etc. that I have written over the last few years to help bide the time until we see each other again.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have on how to be a more effective communicator. I specialize in helping companies and executives better communicate, whether it's a sales call, business presentation, news interview, crisis situation, or any one-on-one conversation. In addition, I can help you and your organization develop messaging that is concise, on-target and meaningful.

Always remember, great communicators are made, not born!

Best regards,

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About Anthony Huey

Anthony Huey is a highly-rated speaker and communications consultant who offers session attendees pragmatic communications tools, tips and techniques they can use immediately.

Anthony's 20-year career includes tenures as a news reporter, magazine senior editor, crisis management specialist, media relations consultant and executive speech coach. He is president of Reputation Management Associates, a leading national communications training and crisis consulting firm. Anthony has presented more than 2,500 media, crisis and presentational skills training workshops, seminars and speeches in his career.

His past client work includes a wide variety of advertising, public relations and communications initiatives for hundreds of companies and organizations, including Nike, Victoria's Secret, Eli Lilly, Nationwide Insurance, The Kroger Company and Procter & Gamble.

Anthony has a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from The Ohio State University.

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Social Media

Over the course of just a few years, most organizations have grown their social media presence as an extension of their brand and an added tool in their marketing mix. Whether you are just starting out or have amassed a number of connections on Facebook, Twitter and the like, here are a few tips that we've found helpful to keep those online interactions pertinent.

Keep it meaningful

Think of social media in terms of real-life conversations. Would you call a friend to tell them what you are eating for lunch? Probably not. But, would your friends be interested in an event you are planning or hearing information that could help them within their daily lives? Probably. There's a slippery slope when it comes to what kind of information to share through social media networks. Consider these questions before hitting that post button. Is this information relevant, timely, entertaining, informative or helpful? If so, then post away.

Engage your audience

It's no secret, everyone wants their opinion heard. We've found that asking questions of your social media connections delivers the highest number of interactions. And let's face it; sometimes you need a second opinion. Remember, questions you ask don't have to be completely formal. Have some fun, and think outside of the box to get that online conversation going.

Offer your expertise

Social media is all about building relationships. If you are only sharing information about what is going on with your company and your life, and not taking time to listen then you are missing the point. Make it a priority to be a resource for your connections. Also, share information through your social media outlets that you have found helpful from your online connections (and credit the source). Most importantly, if someone asks a question that you have a good answer to — take the time to answer them.

Develop your strategy

As social media is constantly evolving, your strategies will need to evolve too. It helps to have a long-term plan that isn't medium-specific, such as how to utilize your Facebook or Twitter presence, but rather goal specific. Think of what you want out of your social media presence and then brainstorm ideas that can lead you closer to that goal, regardless of which medium you use. After all, Facebook and Twitter aren't necessarily here to stay, but social media certainly will be.

Presentation Skills

Speak and Be Heard!

The perspiration slowly slides down the middle of your back. Your knees knock and your hands shake. Will you get through this or will you pass out on the spot? Sound like your first date? No, it's all happening because you are about to give a presentation.

Polls continue to rank public speaking as the No. 1 fear in America, even over death! That's right, more people are afraid to speak than to be eaten by a shark, burn, go blind, or dozens of other horrific things. The fact is that coming up with the right words often cause verbal panic.

But it's not just what you say, it's how you say it. Whether you realize it or not, your communication skills are constantly being judged by others. How you communicate in everything from casual conversations to formal presentations can make you a success or failure.

Here are a few simple tips from my presentational skills session that will make you a better communicator.

- The messenger is as important as the message. Most presenters spend about 80 percent of their preparation time on the content, and only 20 percent on practicing the delivery. It should be 50-50. Rehearse your presentation before you give it — not just to yourself but in front of a video camera or to someone else whose opinion you value. Ask that individual to ask questions afterwards so that you will be prepared when the audience asks them. Good speakers practice a new presentation at least 10 times out loud.
- Take the opportunity to speak publicly whenever the occasion arises. Practice on small audiences (Toastmasters, small groups of employees) first and work your way up to larger ones. Practice is absolutely vital, and the best practice is in front of a video camera.
- Credibility is critical. Your audience will scan every personal detail about you for clues of your character and temperament. Eyes, gestures and even posture will be included in the judgment.
- Look at the individual members of your audience. Let them catch a glimpse of your eyes — it makes them feel included and they will listen more closely. Besides, it humanizes an audience for you and therefore reduces your anxiety and apprehension.
- Speak loudly enough so no one is seen cocking his head, leaning forward to hear or leaning back with a vacant stare. After all, you are the center of attention and you cannot hide that fact by simply being inaudible. Pay careful attention to the ends of your sentences — do not let them drop off.
- Say articles, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs very quickly. Pronounce nouns and verbs with deliberation and strength.

- Arrive a bit early and get to know your audience. Even if you cannot chat with everyone in the room beforehand, you will at least feel that you are talking with other fallible humans and that will put you more at ease.
- Deep Breathing. About five minutes before speaking take in a very deep breath, then exhale slowly as you let all your muscles relax. Try doing it while standing. Caution: if you do this more than twice you could hyperventilate and pass out!
- Minor exercising. Go out in the hall and speed-walk for a few minutes. Exercise your legs and arms at the table while awaiting your turn. Get rid of that excess adrenaline.
- Don't announce your anxiety. I cringe when a speaker starts out: "I am a bit nervous so here goes..." In my training, I video tape participants and show them over and over again that while they are nervous no one can tell it during the video replay. That's an important point. As nervous as you are, shaking and sweating, you are probably the only one who knows it. That knowledge alone, gained through the video tape and critique session, is often enough to reduce nervousness by 30-40 percent.

The power to verbally convince is a tremendous asset. It can move people to do unusual things. You do not have to be born with the skill, but with training and practice you can learn to speak and be heard.

First Impressions

You can never take back a first impression. Think job interviews, business pitches, first dates. But we rarely think about the importance that first impression makes when we give a public speech or presentation. How you look, what you wear, and how you move can be the difference between making the sale or sailing into oblivion.

Take a former politician of a large Midwestern city. At the start of a luncheon speech to announce his new economic plan, the candidate was greeted by sniggering and hushed whispers from the crowd. It seemed a piece of the poor mayor's cherry cheesecake missed his mouth, found his chin, and decided to stick around for the speech. Post-speech chatter centered around the candidate's embarrassing public moment, and not on his well-thought out economic plan.

Fair or not — and we may all hate to admit this is true — but it's human nature to make quick judgments based on appearance. One of my colleagues, a former TV news anchor, struggled with this concept all the time. While she and her colleagues pounded the pavement to get the story right, consultants reviewed their hair, make up, clothes, and delivery, spending little time on actual news content. Didn't they want to critique their story? Didn't they want to analyze their writing skills? Didn't they want to tell my friend she was the next Barbara Walters? The answer was no. And after she stopped beating her head against the wall she finally figured out why. Viewers won't listen to the story if they are distracted by the person delivering it. So though you may be delivering a Pulitzer Prize-winning story, if your hair is a mess or your clothes aren't professional, you may as well be reading the phonebook.

The same is true for people listening to a speaker. An audience forms a perception of you before you even open your mouth, based on the non-verbal messages you send in the 30 seconds it takes to walk to the podium or the front of the board room.

Never mind your qualifications and forget your world-changing message. It's your appearance that matters first. It's a hard concept to swallow.

But don't argue about it or dismiss its importance. Realize it's true and work to improve your image. Here's how:

- 1) Start with what you wear. Make sure you have researched the group you are speaking in front of, and tailor your clothes to their daily dress code. If you are speaking to a group of professionals, then dress professionally. If you are speaking to a group of burly construction workers, don't wear a three piece suit. You will intimidate or disengage them before you say a word.
- 2) Move with purpose. As you walk to the podium, project an air of confidence by walking briskly and appearing energetic. Taking the stage with your head down, or walking tentatively gives the appearance you are a bit unnerved and not prepared. Remember, I'm talking positive energy, not arrogance. Big difference.

- 3) Connect with eye contact. Take command of the audience immediately by looking at the people as you start to talk. Even if you are using a script, make sure the first couple of sentences are memorized so that you are engaging the audience from the beginning, when it's most important. Meeting a few members of the audience beforehand — if possible — is a great confidence booster.

- 4) Warm up your audience. This is your time to establish a relationship. A smile can do wonders, as can speaking simply and directly. Immediately reading stuffy language off a script is one sure way to put distance between you and your audience. What you say in the first 30 seconds is crucial. This is your make or break time, and if you don't connect now you may not connect for the rest of your presentation. Take time to craft that opening paragraph, to wow your audience, to relate to them and their needs.

- 5) Get there early. Actually, your first impression begins when you first arrive at the place you will give your presentation. Getting there early allows you to check out your physical setting and make sure everything is in order for your presentation. It also allows you to mingle with your audience before your formal speech. It's much easier to speak in front of a group of people if you have met a few members of the audience personally. Focusing on a few friendly faces increases your confidence. And confidence is what a first impression is all about. Don't we all have a little spring in our step when we feel good about how we look? If you feel better about your appearance, that will do wonders to increase your confidence. At least it's one less thing to worry about when you walk to the podium. That and the Cherry Cheesecake.

Speech Writing Checklist

Just learned you have to write and deliver a speech? There is no question that the public's greatest fear is public speaking. According to a recent issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, one of top executives' greatest fears is public speaking. Presidents, chief executive officers and board chairmen may find it easy to direct large corporations, but put them before an audience and their authority diminishes. They are alone, being judged as individuals and they are uncomfortable.

Public speaking is an art and few people come by it naturally. Your best bet is to take a specially designed course to help you become a better speaker. In the meantime, here are some pointers to keep in mind.

- Take the opportunity to speak publicly whenever the occasion arises. Practice on small audiences (social clubs, small groups of employees) first and work your way up to larger ones. Practice is absolutely vital, and the best practice is in front of a video camera.
- If you get to pick the topic of your speech, tailor it to the audience you will be speaking to. Find out as much about the audience as possible before addressing it.
- Talk about something that you are interested in. If you are not enthusiastic about what you have to say, no one else will be.
- Never read your speech. Work from a detailed outline. Seeming spontaneous is the highest art of speaking. Moreover, focusing on your message instead of a bunch of words is the finest compliment to your audience. They will forgive slips of the tongue and awkward phrases if they feel you are speaking with them in mind.
- Rehearse your speech before you give it. Remember, good speakers practice a new speech 10 times out loud.
- About writing the speech:

↳ ***Open with an anecdote which will have meaning to the particular audience you are addressing*** — This sets the stage for what is to come and people will instantly decide whether you have anything of relevance to share with them.

↳ ***Do Not Overuse Quotes*** — It will sound like you never think of anything original on your own.

↳ ***Make Sure Your Speech is Organized*** — Avoid the temptation to add irrelevant information just because you think a particular piece of data happens to be interesting. Try this test: read your opening paragraph and your closing note. They should be tied together in some fashion to ensure a coherent speech.

Overcoming Nervousness

You call it fear but what you are really going through is an over-supply of adrenaline, a natural substance in the body. When your system receives too much adrenaline, that creates fear and anxiety. It is natural to be nervous before a presentation. Every professional entertainer experiences some kind of “butterflies” before a performance. The symptoms are usually a nervous stomach, perspiring, shifting eyes, death grip on chairs and so forth.

What can you do about it?

- Practice a few relaxation exercises before you go on — rolling your neck, swinging your arms, stretching.
- Take a deep breath, hold it for 8-10 seconds, let it out slowly.
- Stand naturally with your feet shoulder-width apart, your hands loose and relaxed. Then shake your hands and arms, letting the vibration work itself into the rest of your body.
- Nervousness adds adrenaline to your system — it can make you sharper and quicker — use it.
- Think of nervousness as a way of ensuring that you are “up” for the presentation.
- The best way to combat nervousness is to come totally prepared for the situation by knowing your subject matter and the major points you need to make. Practice every word 10 times out loud!

News Media Relations

The Business of Communicating with the Media

The modern definition of an executive's bad day: Arriving for work to find Bill O'Reilly or Anderson Cooper camped out in the lobby.

But even a routine call from a local reporter is enough to cause panic in many executives. "What do they want?" "What do I say?" "Why me?" they ask.

Increasingly, business news is front page news, no longer relegated next to the stock tables. Critical stories about product recalls, mergers, downsizing and hostile take-overs often replace crime and politics on the front page. Business news is hot. And that leads to the real question: Is your organization ready for intensive news media scrutiny? Remember, reporters now demand company executives, not public relations people, for important interviews.

To deal with the media, savvy executives are learning "journalistic jujitsu," by attending classes in media training and employing personal media coaches. Release the story . . . but control the flow of negative information in a responsible manner. By being candid and careful, business leaders can turn a bad situation into a positive public relations opportunity. All of this is important for one simple reason: Perception is truth!

But understanding the media and learning how to deal with reporters is not something that can be absorbed through osmosis. Media response workshops have replaced "stress management" as the training of choice in many companies. The seminars, usually conducted by former journalists, provide executives a chance to learn privately from their mistakes rather than read about them in tomorrow's newspaper or view them on the nightly news.

Executives are learning new techniques for dealing with intense media situations. Terms such as "**Bump and Run**," "**Nuggets**" and "**Bridging**" describe the techniques being used to teach business leaders how to respond in a positive manner.

They are learning how to quickly bump the negative questions, then "run" to their own positive comment on the situation. They learn how to stay "on-message."

The nugget is another simple technique, yet often forgotten in the heat and glare of a tense news interview: Keep your answer short and to the point (10 seconds max.), and do not babble on with more than you need to say. Without proper training and practice, you are doomed to failure. Remember: Reporters have done thousands (sometimes 10s of thousands) of news interviews in their careers. How many have you done?

With professional training, savvy executives understand how to bridge an unfair question with a quick phrase: "That's an interesting point, Tom, but the bigger question here is what our company has done to improve the situation. For instance . . ."

The bump, the nugget and the bridge will soon be terms that are understood and practiced by modern executives from coast to coast.

Basically, the message remains the same: Be honest, be candid and beware. Assemble the facts pertinent to the story. Know what you want to say. Candor receives more positive attention than “no comment.”

And the surprising result of candor is that an executive’s credibility is enhanced among those who matter most – employees, customers and stockholders.

Besides increasing credibility, being candid with a reporter usually gets his attention. More than likely, a reporter who has been treated fairly will take a second look at releases touting new products or services rather than pitch them in the round file. The upshot is positive coverage of those “good news” items you want to get before the public.

In the modern business world of instant communications, dealing with the media is not something to be passed off to other staff members or dismissed as unimportant. It begins with your commitment to learn and follow basic guidelines, such as:

- Responding to questions as directly and briefly as you can in a positive manner.
- Making yourself accessible to reporters.
- Providing supplemental information in the form of fact sheets.
- Having a professional understanding of the media’s needs.

Just as important, do not:

- Mislead or lie.
- Say “no comment.”
- Argue with reporters. Remember, they always have the last word.

The complete list of “do’s and don’ts” covers pages. But what is important is the recognition that dealing with the media requires special techniques and a commitment to professional training.

In today’s media-intense climate, business leaders must realize one truism: **Relationships with the news media are now a corporate responsibility** and not just a concern for the public relations department.

By learning the “how-tos” of media interviewing, executives can calmly walk through the door of their offices, even if “60 Minutes” is waiting in the lobby.

As a modern business leader, you need to be prepared, coached and aggressive. Then, invite Anderson Cooper in for some coffee!

Content, Not Tech, Future of Media Relations

Judging by the bazillions of tablets, smartphones and laptops I see people using every day in everyday places from coffee shops to restroom stalls (yes, we've all seen it), you'd think most people get most of their news from the Internet. But according to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, 66 percent of Americans still get most of their news from television. And although 43 percent of Americans said they now get most of their news from the Internet (people were allowed to name up to two sources), what does that really mean to companies and organizations trying to work with the media. I say not much.

People often ask me in our media training sessions if the tried-and-true interviewing techniques and tactics that we have taught our clients for nearly 15 years still work in the digital age. My response is to answer their question with another question: 'When you get your news "from the Internet" where do you get it?' Ninety-five percent of the time I bet you get it from a TV station's or newspaper's website. The method in which we digest our news may be changing, but the news gathering process has not. Five years from now TV sets and printed newspapers may go the way of telegraph, but you'll still have journalists sweating to make deadlines and being as grumpy as ever.

Content, not technology, is king and always will be. A human being still has to interview you, shoot and edit the video, write the words, pick the sound bites. After all what is a website, blog, video channel, etc. without content? Surely not very interesting and surely not somewhere you'd want to be.

The (Not So) Slow Demise of Old Media

As a former reporter and editor, and now media consultant, I have watched with great interest (and sadness) as the media have slowly crumbled in recent years. Thousands of print and broadcast reporters have lost their jobs, dozens of newspapers and magazines have folded, many more have stopped printing seven days a week. For sure the economy is to blame, but it's not the whole story. I argue that the economy has just expedited the current state of the media...but that's another story.

But, it's not ALL bad news, especially for you. The down economy may be dominating the news, but it is also having a major impact on the news business itself. And that means good news for you. Now is actually a great time to use the media to communicate your message. The economy is forcing many newspapers and TV stations to cut their staffs, making it much easier for companies and organizations to get positive stories in print and on the air...if they know how to do it.

But it's not all good news, smaller newsrooms have led to an increase in easy-to-report and sensationalized crisis-related stories (fires, explosions, fraud, recalls, work-place violence, etc.). Don't get caught unprepared if that crisis hits your company!

Five Reasons You Don't Need Media Training...(And why they're all wrong!)

During the Gulf BP disaster, I dug through my files searching for one letter in particular. The letter, a gift from a former colleague, was from a high-level communications executive at Exxon and is dated May 15, 1989. That would be just weeks after the Exxon Valdez disaster, arguably the worst PR blunder in modern history. Immediately after the disaster my friend had sent them a letter suggesting media and crisis communication training, since media coverage in Alaska would be intense. Their response to his letter was that they did not need help. As the story unfolded, the CEO of Exxon was not to be found. Now I keep that letter on the wall above my desk as a reminder that even those in the worst trouble will often say they don't need communications help. And big surprise, the world heard the same thing from BP's Tony Hayward.

So that your organization will not become the "deer in the crisis headlights," here, for your consideration, are the five most offered reasons that top executives have refused to accept my suggestion that they undergo professional media training

1. "Our legal staff has strongly advised me to say 'no comment' to the media."

I list this first for a reason. It is the single biggest mistake executives make in dealing with the media and an attorney always creates the bad advice. Let me be perfectly clear: There is no time when that phrase is acceptable. You don't have to answer media questions; you just have to be available and respond in a caring fashion. Examples of this failed legal strategy: Clinton, Enron, Tiger, BP.

2. "My media relations department handles all reporter inquires."

The execs at the top never like to be around when the news hits the fan. However, this is just the time they need to quickly respond and be open and honest. My favorite example of a leader showing up following trouble occurred following the explosion at a Ford Motor plant near Dearborn a few years ago. William Clay Ford held a news conference at the site shortly after the explosion and this was his first sentence: "This is the worst day of my life." How refreshing.

3. "I have an MBA from Harvard and I make 5-million dollars a year so no one needs to teach me how to answer questions."

Well, sir/madam, you are correct. Experienced and aggressive media coaches never teach anyone to answer questions. The session is about how to respond to reporters' areas of interest while making your point. The training emphasizes how to stay on-message, not how to answer questions. I spend three hours of a six-hour class on this concept alone.

4. "The media are all a bunch of liberals and hate big business."

This is straight out of Sarah Palin's playbook and it's silly. Although surveys show that about 80 percent of Whitehouse correspondents are registered Democrats, my guess is that a major survey of the political preferences of all reporters in the country would probably come out like voter registration: 25 percent Democrat, 25 percent Republican, the rest independent. The smart leader puts her own biases aside, then seeks out media interviews because they are clearly a marketing tool.

5. “No matter what I say they will just twist it.”

In the National Enquirer, maybe! Perhaps the boss is thinking of the editorial page and not the news pages. Perhaps he really doesn't understand the difference. Perhaps this is a really good reason he needs coaching and advice from a professional media trainer.

Here's the most important point of all. The media are (whether you like it or not) the most powerful force in the world. They will cover your disaster with or without your help. With your help, you have a better chance of saying what YOU want to say. Digest this; understand it.

My list is longer, but this is enough for today's lesson. I am still shocked every week when I run into an executive who does not understand the issues I have raised.

I hope you cut this out and put it on your boss's desk. She will either fire you or name you VP-Communications. But not to worry...life, like dealing with the media, will always be a risk. I think history shows (and I can prove) that doing news interviews is a risk worth taking when you know exactly what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Communicating In Crisis

Are You Ready?

The crisis you never expected suddenly strikes. Five hungry reporters are outside your door, demanding answers. Another dozen have phoned in the past 15 minutes wanting to know what happened and why? How will your organization react, and who will do what?

That, in a nutshell, is the problem facing many companies and organizations every day. You need only scan daily news reports to realize that your crisis could be just around the corner.

During my years in reputation management counseling, and as a journalist, I discovered that few organizations have a formal crisis communications plan. That can be very dangerous. In most cases, the perception of your company or organization is established in the first few hours after a crisis. Usually the news media are the ones who set that perception. Do you know exactly how your organization and its executives will react once a crisis occurs?

Here is what I have discovered in working with management teams that have just experienced an unforeseen crisis or who know a crisis is about to occur:

- Top management invariably say it is the public relations persons' problem.
- Worse yet, the organization may have no PR person or staff to rely on or blame.
- The company may have a "crisis plan" but it turns out to be two pages with phone numbers of people to be notified.
- Management decides that it is "an internal problem" and endorses the stonewalling philosophy.
- The official policy is "no comment."

All of these positions are weak and will leave you vulnerable. Every company or organization should have a detailed crisis communications plan that will explain in orderly fashion just what is expected of the executive staff. This plan gives exact detail on what each management person is to do in the first hour, the first day, the first week following the crisis situation, and finally, what the follow-up will be. Because it is a step-by-step process, a good communications plan is normally about an inch thick and will delve into what may seem like the most trivial of details. There is no question that the greatest weakness in crisis management planning is the failure to decide beforehand what you will do and who will do it once the crisis occurs.

My crisis communications plans concentrate on the news media because I believe in a very simple philosophy: **Perception is truth and the media creates the perception following a crisis.** For those who would even think of implementing a "no comment" philosophy with the media, I offer this fact: The trade journal, P.R. News, cites a survey that says 65 percent of the public takes "no comment" as an admission of guilt. The most important communications strategy in a crisis, particularly in the first few hours, is to be open with the public by being available to the news media.

What's Your Crisis Plan?

The most extreme tests ever in the strategic field of crisis COMMUNICATION management have occurred within the last decade. Much has been written about communicating during the 9/11 disaster, and we have heard much about how terrible communication was during Katrina/Rita. Even those of us with deep experience in this field have been overwhelmed by trying to figure out how we would have implemented a crisis communication plan for these two unbelievable but real events.

Most recently, Tiger Woods fell victim by not having a prepared communication plan for his own personal crisis. And, the unfortunate crisis in Haiti will inevitably reveal more crisis communication blunders.

Never again should any entity, no matter how large or small, say it does not have the time or funding for proper crisis communication planning. By “crisis communication” I mean: How will you control the media and communicate your messages to your key audiences quickly at the time of a major disaster?

Ask most corporate executives about their plans for crisis communication and chances are that many of them will say something like, “Sure, we’ve got a crisis plan. Harry over in public relations, takes care of that.”

But, just what does Harry really have? Unfortunately, in many cases, it’s just an emergency checklist with some phone numbers.

What will Harry do when 100 angry pickets show up outside your company headquarters?

What is Harry supposed to do when your top-selling product is recalled?

What does Harry tell the news media when you have to close that old plant and lay off 900 people? Or slash 10,000 employees? Or respond on live TV to the death of 500 employees?

If Harry does not know all the things that must be done immediately (and who will do them), then your crisis communications plan is in need of an overhaul.

Most of us like to think we do our best work in the midst of a crisis or controversy, when the adrenaline is flowing and we can make vital decisions in a split second. And, in fact, many executives do perform extremely well under pressure.

But, in a world when the wrong split-second decision can cost a company millions from negative publicity, not being prepared isn’t worth the risk — to executives or the companies they work for.

That official company crisis management plan may include a lot of the right ingredients such as a company spokesperson, crisis team members, a list of telephone numbers and perhaps even a list of potential crises. It might even hint as to who is to do what in a crisis. Undoubtedly, most will include a phrase like “never say ‘no comment’ and always answer reporters’ telephone calls.”

A crisis communication plan should include all these points and a lot more. But crisis plans, for the most part, are just too broad. At the very best, they are merely the starting point for handling a crisis.

What is an Executive to Do?

For starters, if your organization has a crisis plan, dust it off and take a look at it. If you do not have one — and you are not alone — it is time to start thinking seriously about developing one.

It may be something you can do internally, or you may want to bring in some outside expertise. It depends on your internal capabilities and how important the plan is to you. It has been our experience that even major organizations with large public relations staffs often need the outside objectivity and expertise they can get from trained crisis management professionals. Experience is by far the best teacher in dealing with crises, but gaining that experience on the job is too dangerous for a business with its reputation and financial future on the line. Usually it makes sense to go to people who already have the experience; professional crisis communicators.

However you choose to design your crisis plan, you should start by thinking of all the things that could pose a crisis to your organization. Crises are nondiscriminatory. They can hit any of us, and when we least expect them. We certainly know that now.

Some crises arise because of a conscious business decision on your part. You make the decision knowing it will create public relations problems. Plant closings, layoffs — these fall into that category. Other crises are beyond your control — fires, recalls, or sabotage for example.

But whether or not you can plan on a particular crisis, you can always prepare for one.

Boy Scout Motto: “Be Prepared”

For instance, if you are in the chemical manufacturing business and a chemical spill is a possibility, assume you will have one and draw up a plan on how to handle it. Sure, you cannot plan for every detail, but some work now will prevent a lot of headaches and save precious time later.

What is the worst thing that can happen to your organization? How will you deal with it? If there is even a slight chance that it could happen, assume that it will and write it into your communication plan.

When our clients start getting into details and ask what they should include in their list of potential crises, our usual response is: Think of a crisis as anything that can happen to your organization that could generate negative publicity. A crisis does not have to be an explosion or strike. It can be as simple as a real estate transaction, major employee theft in corporate headquarters or an angry employee on a killing spree.

Once you get a handle on what a crisis is, then you can start thinking of how to deal with it. That is where the plan comes in.

When the reporters and photographers are at your office door, you will not have the time to start figuring out who is in charge, what to say and who will say it. A crisis plan is a detailed document that provides management with a “general” methodology to handle “general” crises. What a crisis plan isn’t is a complete plan to deal with every specific crisis. You cannot write a plan to handle every crisis because each one is going to be different. A good plan works because it forces a crisis management team to take actions to handle specific problems associated with a specific crisis.

Immediate Implementation

Like every other plan, a crisis plan has to have a trigger. When a crisis hits, there has to be a reporting process that moves it to the team leader in a matter of minutes. The team leader then needs to activate the team immediately. In a crisis, time is a luxury you never have.

Before a specific crisis occurs, you can be certain that not even the best of crisis plans will include everything you need to handle the situation. So, pick your team well. The team leader should be someone who knows the organization inside and out and has the authority and clear channels to get to the top when he needs to. Name one person to be your company spokesperson, and name a backup. In a crisis, you need to speak with only one voice. Make sure both persons have been trained in how to deal with the news media. A crisis isn’t the time to take chances with someone who tends to exaggerate, lays blame, or gets stage fright in front of a camera.

Depending on your business, the rest of the team should include representation from public relations, legal, management, personnel, security and specialists who know the details of a specific crisis. If you have a chemical spill, ideally a chemist ought to be on the team so you know what risks the chemical does or does not pose to the general public.

Do not saddle the crisis communications team with other duties during a crisis. If the crisis is real, then it ought to be their top and only priority. Make sure they have access to all the information, i.e., who, what, when, where, why and how. A crisis is no time to hold back information from your crisis team. Do not assume your team has all the same information you do.

Plan & Practice Now

Perhaps the single most important thing you can do for your crisis team is to have all of them trained in how to respond to the news media. It should be mandatory that your team go through role-playing with people who are professional media response trainers. But understanding the media and learning how to deal with reporters is not something that can be absorbed through osmosis. Seminars on media relations, usually conducted by former broadcast journalists, provide executives a chance to learn privately from their mistakes rather than read about them in tomorrow’s newspaper or view them on the nightly news.

Now You're Ready

Planning for a crisis is work that usually gets put on the back burner. That is wrong. All responsible property owners have fire insurance. Most never use it, but they carry it. The same should be true with a crisis management plan. Be thankful for every day that you do not have to implement such a plan. If you do not have one, pause for a moment and visualize how you would act and feel just five minutes after a major disaster strikes your organization.

Always remember: "When you hear the thunder, it is too late to build the ark."

K.I.S.S.

I just finished cleaning out some of our files and ran across an ad that was placed in the *Wall Street Journal* some time ago. I think we all need to be reminded that the K.I.S.S. (Keep it Simple Stupid) Philosophy needs dusting off now and again. Here's the copy from the ad.

Keep It Simple

Strike three.
Get your hand off my knee.
You're overdrawn.
Your horse won.

Yes. No.
You have the account.
Walk.
Don't walk.
Mother's dead.

Basic events require simple language.

Idiosyncratically euphemistic eccentricities are the promulgators of triturable obfuscation.

What did you do last night? Enter into a meaningful romantic involvement, or fall in love?

What did you have for breakfast this morning? The upper part of a hog's hind leg with two oval bodies encased in a shell laid by a female bird, or ham and eggs?

David Belasco, the great American theatrical producer, once said: "If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea."

Making Your Message Memorable

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it.

Whether you realize it or not, your communication skills are constantly being judged by others, often subconsciously. How you communicate in everything from casual conversations to formal presentations can be the difference between success and failure. Don't miss what is often your only opportunity to connect and leave a lasting impression.

These highly interactive, hands-on sessions teach effective ways to communicate your message to a wide variety of audiences you deal with every day, including customers, prospects, internal staff, boards of directors, management, community partners, the news media, elected officials, investors, and many others.

Anthony has spoken to thousands of executives on the following topics:

- **Making Your Message Memorable: Presentations**
- **Making Your Message Memorable: Conversations**
- **Communicating in a Crisis**
- **Talk like a Leader: Perception is Truth!**
- **Surviving a News Interview**
- **Crisis Management in the Age of Social Media**
- **Advanced Selling Skills: Sales Message CPR**
- **Delivering Your Message on the Front Lines**
- **Insider Secrets to a Re-energized PR Program**

Session Lengths & Fees

Each session is tailored to fit your specific time constraints, level of knowledge, communication goals or presentation situation. Any number may attend.

Up to 3 hours: \$5,000
More than 3 Hours: \$7,000

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