

# During a Crisis, It's Not Just the Outside that Counts – The Inside Matters, Too

Most organizations know the importance of having a crisis communication plan in place before they need it. But has your organization included internal audiences in its crisis communication planning?

A situation that could affect the stability, reputation or viability of an organization is a crisis situation. These risks can be both internal and external. While you are working to maintain your reputation externally, don't ignore your internal audiences. Your employees are your ambassadors to the outside world, and you have to make sure to maintain internal stability so you can keep your operations running as smoothly as possible.

Here are a few things to consider for dealing with your internal audiences during a crisis.

## 1. Have a Media and Social Media Policy (Beforehand)

Every organization should have a clear media policy now that covers who can speak to the media and in what situations. Putting a media plan in place after a crisis situation develops may appear as if you have something to hide.

In years past, you could limit your policy to who can say what and when. Today, you have to think about social media exposure and portable recording devices – everyone is carrying the ability to take photos or record video in their pocket. Make sure that the policy language is clear and unambiguous.

For social media, make sure your employees know that their [social media accounts](#) should not disclose confidential information or imply that personal postings represent the organization.

Here is an example of what to say in relation to recording devices:

“The use of camera phones or any other type of camera or image recording device to take photographs on FIRM/COMPANY property, including rented facilities, parking lots and company vehicles, is prohibited except for authorized business purposes or business-sponsored functions. Any employee who observes any person taking pictures must report it immediately to his or her supervisor.”

## 2. Gather the Facts

To get started, develop a list of the following elements so needed tactics can be discussed:



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- A summary of the details of the crisis, including key players, dates, times, location and other important pieces of information.
- Who will be affected by this situation? It is likely that more than one audience will be affected by a given situation.
- What are the legal implications of the situation? What can and cannot be disclosed?
- Consider the timing of communication. When and how will you release information?
- Which media outlets are likely to be most interested in the situation? Familiarize yourself, if you haven't already, with the reporters who are likely to cover your story and keep them in the loop to maintain trust and credibility.

### 3. Reassure Employees

As soon as you become aware of a crisis situation, get your team together and break out your crisis communication plan. Make sure your employees know that you are aware of the situation and looking into it. You don't have to have all the answers, but you do have to let people know that you are in control and take the situation seriously.

Employees of an organization are, by their very nature, invested in its success. They can be your best allies and ambassadors, but they need to be reassured that management is handling the situation competently and is committed to being honest and transparent.

### 4. COMMUNICATE!

When you have enough information, share as much as is reasonable within the limits of confidentiality and legal implications. Updating employees throughout the crisis is important for maintaining trust. Prepare all internal communication (written or verbal) with the same messaging as the external communication. Information should be provided internally before externally. You don't want your internal audience learning about developments from sources outside the organization.

Employees will have questions, so let them know whom they should direct those to – their direct supervisor, HR or a member of the crisis team?

If law enforcement is involved in your crisis, it may move more slowly than people would like, and there may be much that can't be discussed due to the investigation. Make sure to remind people that this is part of the process.

### 5. Give Your Employees a Way to Reply

When a crisis hits, reporters are likely to reach out to numerous people within your organization. Make sure to warn employees so they are not caught off guard.

Create notecards that can be put at every phone with exact wording of what you want people to say. For example:

- Say: "Thank you for contacting us. Let me take your information, and I'll make sure the right person gets back in touch with you."
- Ask for the reporter's full name, affiliation and contact information.

- Immediately alert the designated spokesperson, and pass along all relevant reporter information.

Some reporters will attempt to get information from anyone who answers the phone. All employees must be diligent about not engaging in conversation with reporters. It is important to refrain from making any comments to a reporter that could be used in a story. Tell employees to stick to the “script” outlined above: Take their information and assure them, politely, that they will receive a call back from the appropriate individual(s) in time for their deadline. Do *not* engage the reporter in idle chatter.

## Coming Out on Top

Going through a crisis with a friend or a family member can help strengthen your relationship. It is no different in a work relationship. With staff, management and the [crisis communication team working together](#) with honesty and transparency, you can come out of a crisis with increased employee loyalty and retention.

This summer, dust off your [crisis communication plan](#) and make sure it includes your internal audiences. If you need help evaluating your current plan or creating a new one, contact Michelle McCormick, Senior Vice President, Public Relations, at [mmccormick@jaffepr.com](mailto:mmccormick@jaffepr.com) or 281.975.9447.