

Student's Guide to Crisis Management

Lessons from the Arthur W. Page Center for Ethics and Integrity in Public Communication

Rationale and Overview

Crisis management is a response by an organization to a major, unpredictable event that threatens the organization, its stakeholders, or the public. A crisis usually brings negative media coverage of the organization. Once a crisis happens, news and information spread quickly. Thus, every organization should be thoroughly prepared for a crisis. These video materials are designed to help students explore diverse crisis situations and learn to effectively manage them.

Module Instructions

Watch video clips from public relations practitioners on crisis management relations and then answer the following questions based on those clips. The remaining activities for this module involve reading three short articles and answering the questions provided.

Learning Objectives

Through interviews with public relations practitioners, this module will show the ways in which a crisis happens and how to deal with that crisis. In particular, the activities in this lesson are designed to help you:

- Comprehend the meaning of crisis, crisis management, and crisis response;
- Identify what practitioners define as key “first steps” in managing a crisis;
- Understand the roles of the practitioner and the CEO in a crisis;
- Consider how new media technologies impact the way a crisis should be handled.

Key Concepts

The following concepts are integral to understanding crisis management. Before watching the video clips, please follow the [link](#) to the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) and read the article, “Crisis Management and Communications” written by Coombs (2007). Based on the reading, define the concepts: crisis, crisis management, and crisis response.

Module Activity: Watch Video Clips

The following video clips include portions of interviews with public relations practitioners related to the issues of crisis management. These video clips are available at the website for the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication. First, please visit the [Center's website](#), then go to [Oral History Collection](#). Click on the Ethics in Public Relations Finding Index [link](#). With this index, you can easily access material within and across interviews by topic, issue or specific question. Among the various topics, please click on [Crisis Management](#), and then you can access the 14 video clips.

1. Charlotte Otto	6. Anne Barkelew	11. Jack Koten
2. Peter Debreceny	7. Harold Burson	12. Marilyn Laurie
3. Jim Murphy	8. Ron Culp	13. Tim O'Brien
4. Larry Foster	9. Joyce Hergenhan	14. Kurt Stocker
5. Ed Block	10. Jon Iwata	15. Richard Edelman

Module Activity: Video Clip Questions

The following discussion questions are designed to encourage critical thinking on crisis management. After watch the video clips, please answer the following questions:

1. What is the first and most important thing to do in a crisis situation?
2. In a crisis situation, media are powerful; how the press responds to a given situation has a great deal to do with how the public responds. Thus, what should public relations practitioners do when they speak to the media?
3. As the Internet has developed, it has greatly influenced organizational and media communications. For organizations, what are the challenges and advantages in managing a crisis? What do you think about the role of the Internet in terms of managing a crisis?

Module Activity: Reading and Question

In Alleen Pincus's article "Media and Crisis Communications: The Role of the CEO", Pincus emphasizes the important role of the CEO to maintain open communication during a crisis. Please follow this [link](#) and read this article, in which Pincus lists the five steps to insure that the

CEO plays the role of central communicator. Then answer the question.

4. What is a CEO's role in crisis situations?

Module Activity: Additional Reading and Questions

An ethical approach to managing crises is critical. Please follow the link and read the news article "[Internal Ethics and the Crisis Communications Machinery](#)" in *PR News* (Nov. 2006).

This news article focuses on the importance of ethical corporate culture in crisis management. After reading the article, please answer the following questions.

5. What is the role of ethics in crisis situations?
6. What is the "first step" for public relations practitioners in encouraging an ethical organizational environment?

Module Activity: Final Reading and Questions

Crisis managers should use proper strategies that reflect greater acceptance of responsibility. It is necessary to determine the type of crisis before developing a strategy. Coombs (2007) suggested a list of crisis types and strategies and how to apply these strategies. Please follow the [link](#) and read the article "Crisis Management and Communications." After reading the article, please answer the following questions.

7. What are the crisis types based on attributions of crisis responsibility?
8. What are the attribution theory-based crisis communication best practices? From the video materials on the Center's website, find examples to illustrate crisis situations, then identify the crisis type and discuss what type of crisis communication practice was used.

Additional Readings

Gaschen, D. J. (2003). Crisis - What crisis? Taking your crisis communications plan for a test drive. *Public Relations Tactics*, 10(5), 12.

Lukaszewski, J. E. (1997). Establishing individual and corporate crisis communication standards: the principles and protocols. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 42(3), 7-14.

Baron, G., & Philbin, J. (2009). Social media in crisis communication: Start with a drill. *Public Relations Tactics*, 16(4), 12.

- Adams, W. C. (2000). Responding to the media during a crisis: It's what you say and when you say it. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 45(1), 26-28.
- Coombs, W. Timothy. (1998). An analytic framework for crisis situations: Better responses from a better understanding of the situation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(3), 177-191.

Additional Resources

- Arthur W. Page Society Case Studies: *Merck & Co.: Gardasil Case Study 2008* ([link](#))
- Arthur W. Page Society Case Studies: JetBlue Airways: Regaining Altitude After the Valentine's Day Massacre of 2007 ([link](#))
- Foster, L. G. (2002) Tylenol 20 years later. *Public Relations Strategist*, 8(4), 16-20. ([link](#))
- Goodman, P. S. (August 10, 2010). In Case of Emergency: What Not to Do. *The New York Times*. ([link](#))
- Toyota's Digital Disaster. (February 2, 2010). *The Daily Beast* from *Newsweek*. ([link](#))

References

- Internal Ethics and the Crisis Communications Machinery. (November 2006). *PR News*. Retrieved from http://www.prnewsonline.com/legalpr/News_InternalEthics.html
- Coombs, W. T. (Oct. 30, 2007). Crisis Management and Communications. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/crisis-management-and-communications/>