

COMMUNICATING AMIDST A CRISIS

Creating your plan and best practices for when a crisis (like COVID-19) shows up in your region





Public Relations

Your mission—whether it's a product launch, recruitment, or just a better bottom line—depends on your reputation and trustworthiness. PR helps shape the narrative to the perception you want.



Creative

Your brand conveys your professionalism and your value as it identifies your audience. Is there room for improvement?



Crisis Communications

Whatever the cause, bad news affects everything from morale to customer sentiment and it can take years to recover. Correctly managing a difficult situation can make the difference in your business' future.



Digital

Your website, your social media and your email list communicate your message, but are you optimizing these platforms and learning all you can from your customers' engagement?



Events

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make sure it's an opportunity to remember. When you gather dignitaries, stakeholders, community influencers and journalists, your event should be closely considered and thoroughly planned.



Community Engagement

Whether the success of your work relies on the vote of elected officials or you just need to build a coalition of community advocates, your communication strategy is essential.



Public Affairs

Whether you're looking for a yes vote or a no vote from a public body, you need an experienced PR partner to help achieve your goals.



Message Development/ Discipline Training

Proper analysis and training are critical to ensure that your message is effective.

OUR WORK WITH MUNICIPALITIES AND WITH PUBLIC WELFARE AMIDST CRISIS

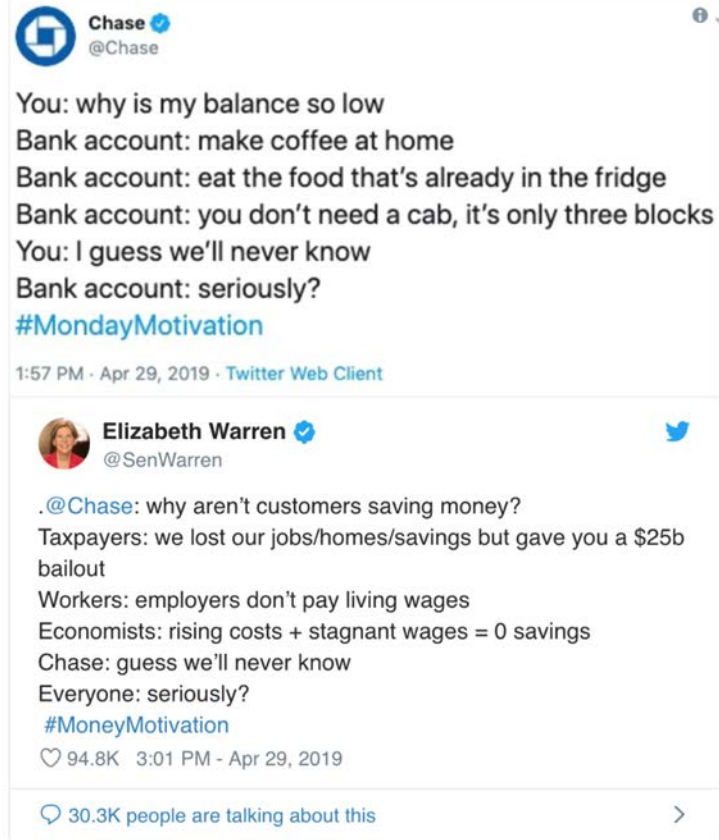


“There’s nothing quite as contagious as an idea.”



WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Self-inflicted



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WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Accusation or incident

Ex-A&M employee arrested on charge of hiding camera in restroom



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WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Any community-wide crisis



HOW A CRISIS AFFECTS OPERATIONS, REPUTATION AND GOALS

- Personal credibility
- Trust in your leaders, electeds and the COG overall
- Distraction from overall objectives, short and long term



STAKEHOLDERS

- Elected officials, county/city, member entity staff, et al.
- In a time when face to face is off-limits, digital and phone communication is key
- The order—and format—in which you inform them will make a big difference



MAKING A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Checklist
 - War room
 - Logistics point of contact
 - Wi-fi
 - Media parking
 - Media staging areas (inside and out)
- Media relations
 - Authorized spokespeople
 - Approval process
 - Distribution channels
- Communication Cascade
 - Internal Audiences (always first)
 - External Audiences



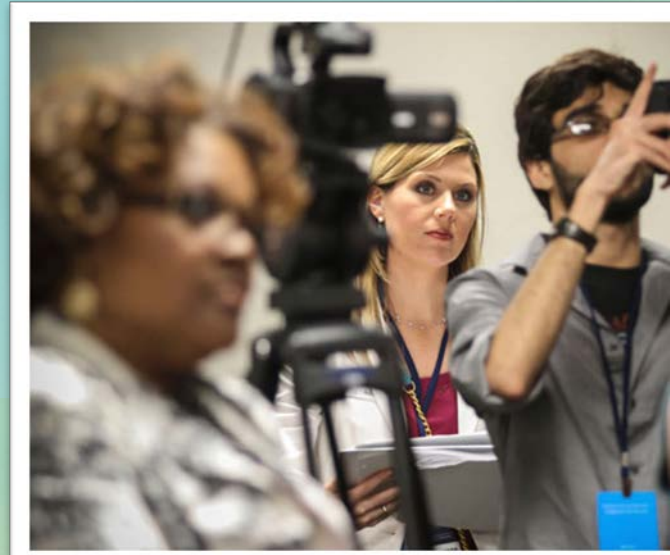
HOUR ONE

- Get the facts
- Circle the wagons
- Touch base with the media
(if aware/inquiring)
- Notify key audiences identified in
plan



MEDIA RELATIONS TIPS

- Be the most responsive and most accurate source
- Always take the call and follow up
- A crisis is no time for “off the record”
- Prepare spokespeople for interviews



RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

There are three simple principles to follow in order to develop a solid working relationship with the media:

1. Answer press inquiries promptly
2. Be accurate
3. Be honest and straightforward



PROMPTNESS

- Reporters are on a deadline—treat them with the same kind of respect as other business associates.
- If you return reporters' phone calls/inquiries promptly, then they will begin to rely on you for information for a story.
- If they know that you delay returning calls, they may look elsewhere or start digging.
- Establish an atmosphere that encourages reporters to come to you when they have a question.



ACCURACY

To be accurate, your comments should be focused on the issue at hand, uncluttered by extraneous matters.

- Make your points **simply, directly and repeatedly**.
- Don't be shy about repeating your message. Develop an effective, concise, clear message, then deliver it over and over again.



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HONESTY

- Reporters are a cynical bunch. Let them know you're not trying to mislead them or hide anything.
- If you gain a reputation as a reliable source of information who will help reporters do their job, they will likely cut you some slack.
- If you are honest with reporters, chances are good they will believe you in a crunch.



HOW TO PREPARE

1. Understand the type of interview.
2. Develop a message, stick to it.
3. Appearance counts.



UNDERSTAND THE TYPE OF INTERVIEW

- Will it be a “live” conversation with a news anchor or reporter?
- Will it be recorded, edited and used as part of a larger story for TV?
- Will this be for radio?
- Is this interview for a print or online publication?



"LIVE" CONVERSATION WITH NEWS ANCHOR OR REPORTER

- Relax, be natural.
- It's okay to talk with your hands.
- You will look at and speak to the anchor.
- To convey trust, look the anchor in the eye.
- Don't be distracted by bright lights, floor managers and studio techs. They will be walking around, even talking during your interview. Arrive at the studio early so you can get comfortable with this environment.



"Live" Conversation with News Anchor

- This is "live" TV, so be sure to prepare.
- You don't get a second chance.
- You'll need to speak in soundbites, which means keeping your answers to 20-30 seconds.
- Don't be caught off guard if the anchor asks you a negative/controversial question.
- Don't answer a negative question with a negative answer.
- Keep in mind, not everyone watching at home knows what your acronyms mean or how COGs work. Educate them!



RECORDED AND EDITED INTERVIEW

- The reporter will be standing next to the photographer, off-camera—look at the reporter.
- Speak in short soundbites (20-30 sec.).
- Speak in complete sentences so reporters have little opportunity to take your comments out of context.
- When a reporter asks a negative/controversial question, only answer with a positive point.
- Stick to your message so nothing is taken out of context.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so.



RADIO INTERVIEW

- Talk as if you were addressing an individual.
- Enunciate as clearly as possible.
- Direct the listeners' imagination, and use words to create vivid imagery.
- Active verbs and anecdotes are crucial because they provide listeners with a visual image.
- Be ready to respond and know what you want to say. Lengthy pauses are especially noticeable and distract the radio audience.



PRINT AND/OR ONLINE INTERVIEW

- Typically, these are the most time-consuming interviews.
- Keep in mind you are always “on the record” in interviews.
- Know the difference between “off the record” and “on background.”
- Don’t say anything you would not wish to see in printed or online copy.

Everything in your office is also on the record; i.e., documents on your desk, placards on the wall, phone calls you might receive, etc. When possible, conduct the interview in a neutral conference room.

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Develop Your Message

- Draft 4-5 talking points.
- Determine “home base.”
- Keep your points conversational and brief.



CONSIDERATIONS: APPEARANCE AND LOCATION

In Studio:

Business casual always works. Remember, you'll be opposite a news anchor, so you don't want to look too casual. We recommend any official representative wear their uniform if appropriate. Otherwise, go business casual. Solid colors look best on screen, although we don't recommend white or black.

You may choose to powder your nose to eliminate shine. Spray your hair to avoid distracting flyaways. Looking out of sorts communicates panic.

“In the Field” or “On Location”:

Wear what you'd wear as a representative of your department or city.

The logo for Elizabeth Christian Public Relations (ECPR) is a dark teal square with the letters "ECPR" in white, sans-serif font.





CONSIDERATIONS: MANNERISMS AND EXPRESSIONS

Your facial expression

A pleasant, natural closed-mouth smile always aware of your "resting face."

How you sit

TV magnifies quirks and mannerisms.

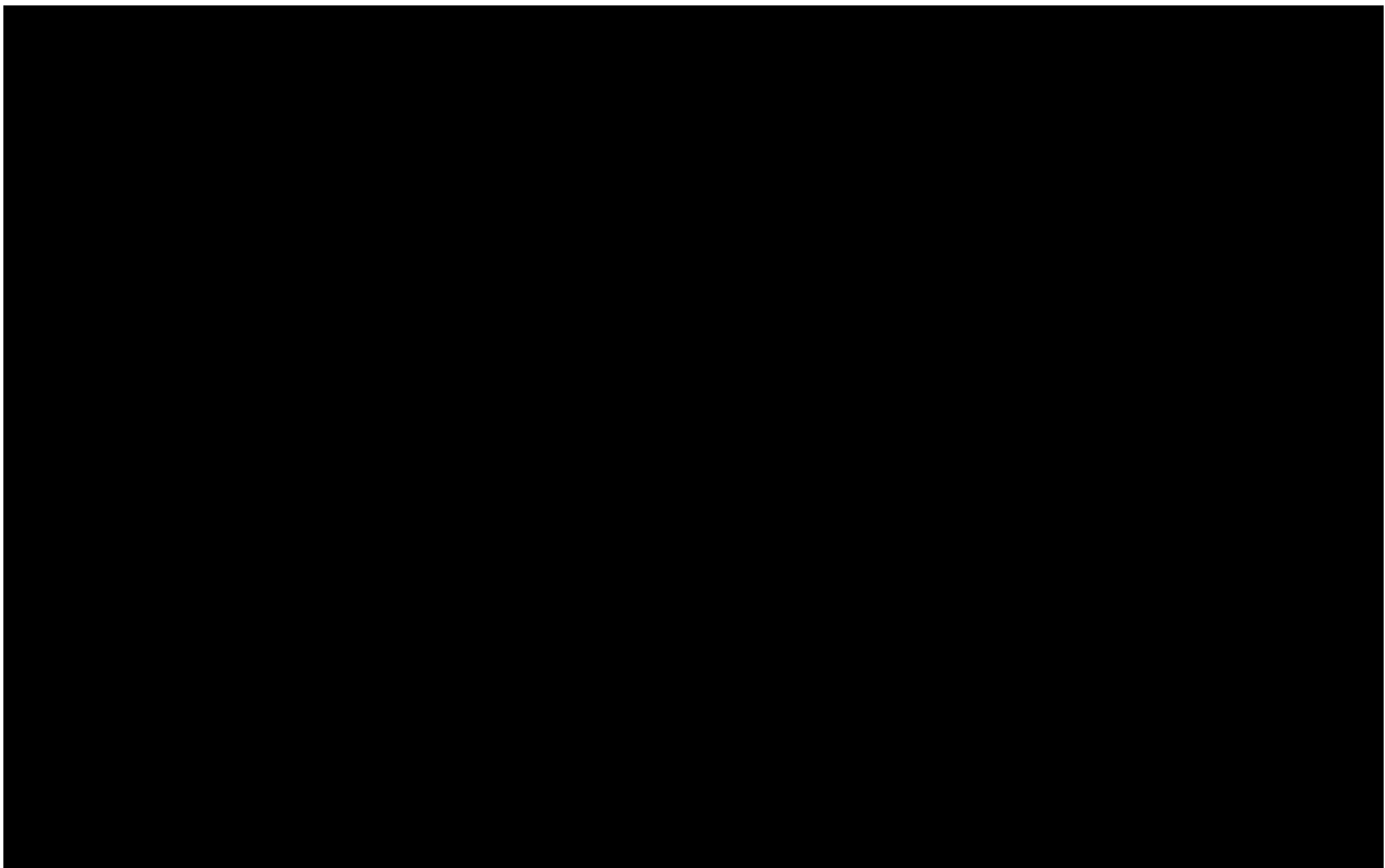
Exercise personal control and poise.

Remember that you are likely to appear from a variety of angles, so you should always present interest and comfort. It's okay to use your hands.

Sit forward in your chair, leaning slightly forward. Pay attention to your posture. Are you slouching? Stiff? Don't click your pen, hold your hand too tightly, swing your legs or shift in your chair.







DOS AND DON'TS OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

What to do if you're faced with a media inquiry

DO immediately alert your crisis response team of any communications you engage in. It's better for the team to be prepared when responding to an inquiry.

DO be polite. Just because you cannot supply the reporter or editor with an answer doesn't mean that you have to brush them off in an unpleasant way.

DO be helpful. Refer the reporter to your communications team.

DO write down the reporter's name and media outlet if they have appropriately identified themselves. Pass along that information to your communications team.

DO ask questions about potential situations ahead of time. It is best to have a plan as to how to handle a particular situation ahead of time.

DOS AND DON'TS OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

What NOT to do when faced with a media inquiry

DON'T say “No comment.” It’s okay to simply respond that you don’t have that information or that you are not the appropriate spokesperson to answer.

DON'T assume a conversation with a reporter is off the record. Even a casual comment may be used for a media story. Off the record is different than on background.

DON'T act as if you are hiding something. Please express that you will be honest and upfront with the media, and will provide them with as much information as you can. *We have a plan in place for many potential crisis situations, and we are prepared to handle these situations quickly and honestly.*

DON'T ask the reporter additional questions. You don’t want to facilitate a conversation with the reporter, as that will allow them more time to get information from you.

DOS AND DON'TS OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

The general rule of thumb for public crisis communications is three-pronged:

- Identify the problem and reveal as many details as possible about what happened, while adhering to legal restrictions.
- Apologize for mistakes. A simple “I’m sorry” goes an extraordinarily long way toward making the public feel better about an issue.
- If appropriate, emphasize that your organization has a plan in place to rectify the situation and put that plan into action as quickly as possible. Fix any flaws in the plan to ensure it never happens again.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

- Be timely and supportive—but not lighthearted.
- Loop in your platform administrators early.
- Watch for comments, direct messages, mentions and trending sentiment.
- When a social media platform becomes the epicenter of a crisis.



POTENTIAL SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS

- Damage control.
- Control the narrative.
- (Re)build trust and even emerge with a stronger reputation.
- Drive external action such as with COVID-19: social distancing, hand washing, discouraging stockpiling, redirecting to alternate service locations



SOCIAL MEDIA: COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

- Monitor for abuse and misinformation.
- Make people feel heard and host the conversation about your crisis (so it isn't hosted elsewhere).
- Turn casual observers and even detractors into your advocates.





QUESTIONS?

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