

Advisor

THE Newsletter of Effective Communication

Special Report:

COMMUNICATING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

There is little doubt that September 11, 2001, will be remembered by all Americans as an historic date – much like July 4th, November 22nd and December 7th. Indeed, the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States will be nation-changing, if not world-changing. Many of the changes remain to be seen. But even the immediate consequences of the worst terrorist act in history are nothing short of historic:

- Seven buildings in New York's World Trade Center Complex (including the two, 110-story Twin Towers) collapsed or partly collapsed.
- A portion of the Pentagon was destroyed.
- Approximately 4,000 people died, including 266 passengers and crew on the four commercial airplanes hijacked by the terrorists.
- Trading on all U.S. financial markets stopped for four days – the longest shutdown in 68 years.
- For the first time ever, the government grounded all commercial flights, some 40,000 in all.
- In major cities across the country, skyscrapers and government buildings were evacuated and millions of workers were sent home.

There is also little doubt that the catastrophic events of September 11 and their fallout have taken crisis management and communications into a new era. Employers are struggling to keep employees reassured and focused amid worker uncertainty about their safety, their priorities and their jobs. These and other new dynamics pose serious challenges for business professionals who must ensure the continued viability of their businesses, while being ever more responsive to the information needs of people both inside and outside their organization.

Undoubtedly, 9.11.01 will become one of the most widely examined case studies in the history of modern crisis management – joining the ranks of events such as the Tylenol poisonings and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. It will be a valuable tool for those concerned with preventing or managing human-caused crises. But even at this early point, important lessons in crisis management and communications have emerged. This – our Fall issue of *Advisor* – is a special report on several of those lessons.

Please check our Web site for periodic supplemental information updates about communicating in times of crisis. www.ammermanexperience.com

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 2

In a Crisis, Expressing Compassion Publicly Is Not Only Appropriate, It's Crucial

Establishing credibility is the overriding goal of all communication. And research now shows that a key component of credibility is expressing empathy or caring.

PAGE 3

What the Airlines Can Teach You About Helping Employees Cope with Tragedy

A pioneer in the field of human services response offers her perspective on what organizations can, and should, do to help employees cope with tragedy.

PAGE 4

Communicating With Employees: Priority One in a Crisis

A review of the basics of communicating with employees during a crisis.

PAGE 6

The Security Paradigm Shift: From Necessary Evil to Necessity

Prior to September 11, security was seen as a necessary evil. Today, evil has necessitated security. The importance of having effective security, and communicating about it.

PAGE 8

Back to the Drawing Board: Most Likely, Your Crisis Management Plan Is in Need of Review, if Not Revision

Many companies were caught unprepared to deal with some of the challenges posed by the events of September 11. How comprehensive is your crisis management plan?

PAGE 9

Will Your Front-line Employees Be An Asset or a Liability in a Crisis?

Front-line employees can play a critical role in helping an organization steer clear of, or navigate successfully through, a crisis.

PAGE 11

Rudolph Giuliani: Consummate Crisis Communicator

The September 11 tragedy has unearthed a number of savvy communicators worth studying. One is New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

PAGE 12

We're Here to Help

The Ammerman Experience has veteran status in preparing people to manage a crisis, and to communicate effectively during crisis situations. A look at some of the help we offer.

In a Crisis, Expressing Compassion Publicly Is Not Only Appropriate, It's Crucial

Today we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country. I have . . . ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families . . . Terrorism against our nation will not stand. And now, if you'll join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families and America."
President George W. Bush

In the news media's coverage of the September 11 tragedy, we saw countless examples of people expressing sorrow for the loss of life and suffering caused by the terrorist attacks. Politicians, business executives, average citizens, even entertainers and seasoned journalists struggled to find the right words or fight back tears.

What was less visible was the task before many managers – calming and reassuring employees during that horrible morning and beyond. Many managers made the appropriate decision to allow employees to monitor events or to go home to spend time with families. Others did not, and required workers to try to continue working. Today, those managers are feeling the fallout of having to deal with employees who are less trusting and more skeptical. Building a foundation of trust with the public and the workforce is vital to open and effective communication.

Expressing sorrow or concern publicly in the wake of a tragic event is understandable. It is also crucial. Why? Because empathy or caring is a key component of credibility. And establishing credibility must be the overriding goal of any communication. If your audience does not see you as a credible source, you won't get your message across or be able to address their concerns.

Credibility, trust or believability is

overwhelmingly determined in a specific part of the brain – the non-rational part (the brain stem and limbic system). When most people communicate, they aim their message at the rational part of the brain (the cerebral cortex). They rely on logic and common sense to move someone to action – e.g., to learn something, to change their mind about something, to do something. And while our goal must be to reach this rational part of the brain, our message must first pass through the non-rational or emotional part of the brain.

Consider these actual occurrences reported in *The Wall Street Journal*: At one company in Atlanta, the CEO went into the office of an employee who, along with other employees, was watching the TV news coverage on September 11, and ordered him to turn off the set. And at a Pennsylvania company, a boss grudgingly agreed to allow employees to leave work early to pick up their children at schools that closed early for the day. Think of how these situations could have been handled differently – and more effectively – if the managers would simply have expressed some concern. In the Atlanta example, for instance, the CEO still could have asked the employee to turn off the TV, but first should have said something like, "I know you're concerned and upset about what has happened, but we've got deadlines to meet and I'm worried that our

Empathy/caring accounts for half of a person's credibility and is assessed in the first 30 seconds.

customers won't be taken care of."

In the spoken medium, if you want to get your message across, you must reach and connect with the non-rational part

of the brain. You have to convince this part of the listener's brain that you are credible, believable, trustworthy, even likeable.

What Makes a Source Credible?



Source: Susan Santos, [The] Focus Group

Research conducted by Susan Santos provides some surprising facts about the components of credibility:

- Empathy/caring accounts for half of a person's credibility, and is assessed in the first 30 seconds.
- Other components (competence/expertise, honesty/openness, commitment/dedication) account for 15-20 percent each.
- Technical training tends to drive out empathy/caring.
- Women are automatically perceived as having a high degree of empathy/caring, but they need to work on projecting expertise.
- Men are automatically perceived as having a high degree of competence/expertise, but male communication patterns generally don't exhibit empathy/caring.

Tips for Communicating Empathy During a Crisis

- Don't wait too long to communicate. The public often perceives silence or a delayed response as indifference. Even if you have very little information, quickly issue a press statement or conduct a press briefing (it could be as short as a minute or two), if only to express concern and share the few details you have at that point.

What the Airlines Can Teach You About Helping Employees Cope with Tragedy

The terrorist attacks on U.S. soil have exacted a heavy toll: Some 4,000 people are dead or missing. (One firm, Cantor Fitzgerald, lost more than 600 employees – nearly a third of its total workforce.) The dollar costs of the tragedy could run \$40 billion or more, and a recession now is all but certain. America is at war – a war that will likely result in additional terrorist attacks. (At this writing, an anthrax scare is sweeping the nation.) In short, people are shocked and frightened. Understandably, they will bring these emotions to the workplace.

To learn how employers can help their employees get through tragic or stressful events, we took a look at one of the industries that's a leader in helping people cope with tragedy. By most accounts, the airline industry uses "best practices" when dealing with employees and others who've been impacted by a tragic event.

One person who helped develop those "best practices" is Carolyn Coarsey, Ph.D., an independent consultant whose airline industry clients include Delta, American, Southwest and Alaska. Coarsey is a pioneer in the field of human services response (a term she coined while doing research in the 1980s). In an interview with *Advisor*, she offered this interesting and different perspective on what organizations can do to help employees cope with tragedy.

Q. Define human services response.

A. It's a new discipline that focuses on helping people who have suffered serious injury (whether psychological or physical) or the death of a loved one. People in these situations have a variety of emotional and other needs. Human services response is a comprehensive, supportive approach to providing for those needs.

Q. We've heard a lot about grief counseling in conjunction with the September 11 tragedy and in conjunction with school violence. Is grief counseling one of those needs?

A. It could be. In grief counseling, a professional with a clinical background works with someone in a one-on-one or group setting. But not everyone wants or needs to talk with a counselor. From our interviews and surveys with airline passengers, their family members and victims of terrorism, we found that in the first 24-48 hours, and sometimes even in the first few weeks, most people don't want counseling. They want other needs met.

Q. What kind of needs?

A. For example, a company that insures more than 170 airlines lost about 500 employees in the collapse of the World Trade Center. The company connected the victims' family members with grief counselors, but after two or three days, the family members were again calling the company. They wanted information. My surveys of family members who have lost loved ones in a major disaster show that the number one thing they want is information about those loved ones: Was my loved one on the plane or in the accident? If so, is he in a hospital or is he dead? How soon can you get me to where my loved one is so I can see him? If he died, can I come to the site and see where it happened and be with other people? If not, will you bring other people in my family to be with me so we can grieve together? These are the things people want more than they want a stranger.

Q. So human services response is about meeting people's basic needs.

A. Exactly. Long before there were mental health professionals, people supported and nurtured each other during difficult times. For example, when someone died, relatives and friends ran errands or did chores. My dad died when I was eleven. I remember that in the first 24 hours, our house filled up with more food than I'd ever seen. When people are involved in a crisis, what we need to do is bolster their natural support system . . . and that natural support system includes family, friends and the people they work with. Think of Maslow's hierarchy. What's at the base of the pyramid?

Maslow's Need Hierarchy



Source: Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, Vol. 50, 1943.

In the 1940s, Abraham H. Maslow advanced a concept that assumes people are motivated to satisfy various needs, and that those needs are arranged in a hierarchy of importance. There are five levels of needs in Maslow's hierarchy:

The *physiological needs* for such things as food, sex and air represent basic issues of survival and biological function.

Next are the *safety needs* for a secure physical and emotional environment.

Examples include the desire for adequate housing and clothing, and the

AIRLINES continued from page 3

need to be free from worry about money and job security.

Belongingness needs are related to social processes, and include the need for love and affection and the need to be accepted by one's peers.

Esteem needs comprise the need for a positive self-image and self-respect, and the need for recognition and respect from others.

At the top of the hierarchy are what Maslow calls the *self-actualization needs*. They involve realizing one's potential for continued growth.

Q. The airline industry generally gets high marks for its sensitivity in dealing with people following a crisis. Is that reputation deserved?

A. Yes, but it wasn't always. When I started my work in the late 80s, most airline crisis plans were incomplete. The plan for one major airline, for example, said, "If there's an accident, call clergy." Also, I've heard airline presidents say, "Look, it's not our fault; we didn't mean for it to happen." Or I've seen them come before families within 24 hours of a crash and make statements like, "We want to assure our stockholders that financially we're going to be fine." What a horrible and offensive thing to say! Because it's not a business-as-usual climate.

Fortunately, most of that has changed over the last few years.

Q. So what are the airlines doing right?

A. They've learned from what families have taught us – and that is, first, look to see what it is families want, and then provide the things that allow them to feel normal: access to family, friends and people they work with.

Airlines are not always at fault when there's a crash. (Delta didn't cause the wind shear that brought down its plane in Dallas in 1985.) But the public sees the airline as responsible for the people who trusted them and

bought tickets. Most airline officials understand that today. That's why they're more likely to come right out and say, "We're terribly sorry and we're going to take care of you in every way we know will be helpful."

Data show that when people have a positive perception of the airline, they do better in terms of traumatic stress symptoms, major depression, all the disorders associated with trauma. Also, they are more willing to settle sooner and get on with their lives.

Q. What can other organizations learn from the airlines, particularly as they relate to dealing with employees?

A. We've learned a lot beyond how to handle the public in a crisis. We've learned that when companies rally around their employees and acknowledge that there's been a horrible loss, tremendous bonding occurs within the organization.

Those of us who study the brain know that in a crisis, people operate much more in a "feeling" state than in a cognitive or "thinking" state. So if your CEO or your boss wants to continue with business as usual, two things happen: One, he or she misses a great opportunity to create a sense of connection with people. And two, and more importantly, he misses a great opportunity to demonstrate his humanity.

When people are in crisis, we need to bolster their natural support systems.

Like some other industries, airlines are technologically advanced. So most of the time, their people think in terms of technology – airplanes, computers, reservations, etc. But

when an accident happens, that's the time a company must come forward and show its humanity. In a crisis, employees are turned off by a "heady" response. It's very hard to connect with a "talking head" when your heart's broken. But once people again feel connected, they can move back into their cognitive state.

Q. And you're saying that an organization plays a critical role in moving people through the recovery process?

A. Absolutely. Empower people to help each other. Look to see what it is the person needs at that time, instead of assuming they need help from the outside. Because often it's from the inside.

In the Columbine tragedy, people came from all over into that community, and there were people right there within the community who knew some of what to do. But sometimes the resources within are pushed out. I've seen airline disasters where people would be spread apart. Someone would come in and get between children and their families, and that's wrong! We need to support and bolster that unit – whether it's the family unit, the workplace unit, the school. Those of us from the outside who want to help need to guard against thinking, "Because I have a Ph.D., I know more than they do." I may not. I may not know more about how to help that stranded survivor than the reservation agent who's on the phone with him.

As a professional, I'm always looking to see how I can bolster that natural support system, because long term, that's whose going to be there when I'm gone.

AIRLINES continued from page 4


Q. What advice do you have for companies that want to learn how to incorporate human services response into their crisis management plans and activities?

A. A good first step would be to take advantage of educational opportunities. Perhaps send an HR person to attend a training session so he or she could bring information back to the organization. (The Family

Assistance Foundation is holding a symposium in Atlanta on January 8-9, 2002, focusing on how employers can better support employees who've been traumatized in the workplace.)

As far as finding someone to work with, I'd look for someone who's able to think outside the box – someone who's able to think about practical needs, someone who understands the clinical side (i.e., counseling), but isn't

necessarily locked into that model. I would look for someone who understands the community psychology approach, not just the clinical psychology approach.

For more information about human services response, contact Carolyn Coarsey at carolyn@higherresources.com, or at 770-997-4141. 

Communicating with Employees: Priority One in a Crisis

It's happened to us all . . . at the airport gate or maybe even on the plane. There's a delay. You're waiting for an update – expecting to get some word of when the flight will leave. But no one provides any information. Or else long periods elapse between updates. You're frustrated. But your frustration stems more from the lack of communication than it does from the flight delay.

Forward-thinking organizations know that communicating – and doing so effectively – is important in the best of times. In the worst of times, it's absolutely critical, as the events of the last few months have shown. And a company may have no more important audience to communicate with than its employees. Yet, ask employees to characterize their firm's effectiveness at internal communications, and many will probably respond with a line from the movie *Cool Hand Luke*: "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

In times such as these, it's worth reviewing the basics of effective

employee communication during a crisis:

1. First and foremost, communicate.

Today's employees are intelligent and sophisticated. They have a keen interest in all matters affecting their company. After all, they've invested their future in the firm. They want substantive information. In the absence of it, the

rumor mill will shift into overdrive. What's more, they are amazingly capable of handling bad news. (Remember the first rule of effective supervision? Provide your subordinates with feedback. Even negative feedback is preferable to no feedback at all.) Also, in a crisis, your employees can help you disseminate accurate

information to a variety of external audiences, including customers and the community – but only if you keep them informed.

2. Increase the frequency of your communications.

In a crisis, developments occur rapidly. As a result, employees want and need more frequent communication. Yet, many organizations maintain their normal patterns of

communication, or may even scale back because management is preoccupied with the crisis. During the early moments of September 11, new developments were occurring as frequently as hourly. Thereafter, new information emerged daily. Employees have come to expect timely information from the news media. They expect nothing less from their employers.

3. Be able to reach all your employees – quickly. Employees today are rarely found in one central location. They are traveling, working from home or located in distant places. Be sure you have systems such as E-mail, voice mail and the Intranet in place to reach them.

4. Address employees' concerns – real or perceived. Regardless of the issue or situation you're dealing with, remember that employees ultimately want to know how it affects them personally. Your focus or perspective may not be theirs, so be sure to consider the issue's implications for employees, and address them in your communications. For example, when a firm's bond rating is lowered, management communications typically focus on reassuring investors and analysts. But employees too need reassuring – that their company is still financially sound, that their jobs are secure, etc.

Employees have come to expect timely information from the news media. They expect nothing less from their employers.

The Security Paradigm Shift: From Necessary Evil to Necessity

After September 11, security instantly became one of the hottest topics in corporate America. Fearing for their own safety, employees are expressing concern about security issues on the job. Some employees have asked whether they could work from home. Some would not open their mail. The head of investor relations at one firm refused to travel. These and other responses have led corporations to elevate security to a more prominent position on their list of priorities. According to Kevin Swailes, chairman and CEO of Swailes & Company, a security consulting firm, this increased attention to security is a positive development. But only if organizations establish, communicate and follow effective security policies and procedures. Swailes spoke with *Advisor* to share his thoughts about security, including the role communication plays in facilitating effective security.

As someone who provides security consulting to corporations, what security-related developments have you seen post September 11?

What we're seeing is nothing less than a security paradigm shift. The entire model and mindset have changed. Prior to the 11th, security was seen as a necessary evil. Today, it's clear that evil has necessitated security. Some corporations have always recognized the importance of protecting their employees as well as their physical and intellectual property. But those firms were the exception rather than the rule. It used to be that you had to sell most companies on the concept of security first, and then offer them viable recommendations and programs. Today, you still must offer them effective solutions, but you no longer have to sell the concept.

Have employees also changed their perspective on security?

Absolutely. Think about the airline situation. Prior to September 11, anyone flying – even casual observers – knew that airport security was lacking. Yet, nobody was willing to allow that security to be upgraded – especially if it meant impeding travel or being inconvenienced. But today, when I go into buildings and ask people how they feel about greater security – guards, police officers, photo IDs, long queues – 100 percent of them say they appreciate knowing that there really is security in their building.

Prior to September 11, security was seen as a necessary evil. Today, it's clear that evil has necessitated security.

So, even the rank and file are responding differently.

They're actually leading on this issue. They're out in front.

In what way?

Here's an example. I'm wearing an alpha-numeric pager that goes off every time there's breaking news. Our technical division constantly monitors the news wires and major media outlets in order to stay on top of issues. Well, a lot of employees have access to the same technologies: pagers, Palm Pilots, 24-hour Internet access, 24-hour TV news coverage. So everybody's getting this

information feed, and most of the news is bad. And this isn't something that affects just a few organizations; it hits small, mid-size and large organizations alike. So it's important for CEOs to balance out this information within the employee population.

How does a CEO provide that balance?

The only way is to be informed on the issues yourself in a timely manner – as quick as, or quicker than, your employees. Then you have to put together a viable message to let employees know that the company knows what's going on, and that they're doing something about it. Things then have a tendency to start calming down.

Are most companies communicating an effective security message?

No. Many organizations are lacking in comprehensive security information and solutions, primarily because security has not been a major focus. They've always felt like their problem was in South America or North Africa or somewhere else – not back here in the United States. Now they're beginning to realize that their risk is in every location where they operate. CEOs and other corporate executives are also beginning to realize how powerful it is when they are the ones who are communicating the security message to their employees.

Specifically, what security messages should be communicated?

What needs to be communicated first is what the employee sees or perceives with regard to security. Employees have their own perception of a facility's security. So management has to communicate a clear message of effective security to their employees, and that is done when employees first

SECURITY - continued on page 7

SECURITY continued from page 6

come through the facilities. If they see that people can just walk right in or that back doors are left open, what message does that send? There's something worse than no security within an organization, and that's a false sense of security.

Then management needs to start looking at all the things employees don't readily see, such as the fact that the CEO is staying abreast of the current situation – constantly. There's nothing worse than for a CEO to be blindsided, particularly by his own employees who are surfing the Internet on a particular issue.

Then it's important for the CEO to start communicating to his employees what the company is doing given the current situation.

What are some ways to accomplish this?

Through newsletters. In them you might talk about the person who handles security for your firm. Identify some of the things you've done and how you're constantly looking for ways to enhance security. Also, the Intranet, E-mails to department heads. Meetings with department heads are very beneficial because employees come to them with questions such as, "What are we doing in our mailroom? What have we done to protect our air supply? What have we done to protect our building from a suicide bomber? What have we done with regard to emergency evacuation?" Senior management must keep department heads in the loop so these questions can be addressed – preferably before employees start asking.

What role do employees play in ensuring a safe and secure workplace?

A critical role. Whatever the security issue is, employees can spot things that security doesn't. When you have an

employee population that's been provided with information, you start learning about the vulnerabilities of the company, because who best knows about those vulnerabilities than the employees? They know how to respond to certain situations. For example, walking up to someone and offering a friendly challenge – saying, "Hi, can I help you find someone?" What this is doing is turning the entire organization into the eyes and ears of security.

Is there a common security mistake you see organizations make, and how can it be corrected?

Most organizations react to problems with a knee-jerk. They do things such as adding more security guards, more cameras – things that may not really increase their security, but waste money. The important thing today is that companies assess their risk, allocate their assets according to that risk, and then immediately start communicating to their employee population.

For more information, contact Kevin Swailes directly at 713-361-6300 or by E-mail at kevinswailes@swailes.com. Or visit his firm's Web site, www.swailes.com. 


Advisor is a quarterly newsletter of The Ammerman Experience. The mission of our firm is to help clients succeed in the communications arena. The mission of this publication is to provide thoughtful, useful, state-of-the-art information to help you do that. Your comments and content suggestions are welcome. Contact Ken Haseley at 1-800-866-2026 or by E-mail at kenhaseley@compuserve.com. This issue and previous issues of *Advisor* can be found on our Web site: www.AmmermanExperience.com.

PRIORITY ONE continued from page 5

5. Coordinate your internal and external communications. Make sure employees do not first learn of important developments through the news media. Employees, not the media, are your first communications priority, so be sure to coordinate the timing of your internal and external communications. A good practice to follow is to release information to your general employee population approximately 15 minutes before doing so externally.

6. Use employees' preferred sources of information. Most employees prefer to get information from their immediate supervisors, senior executives and small-group meetings – in that order.

7. Be sure your communications are two-way. The best kind of communication is two-way. Be sure information is flowing in both directions – to your employees and from them. Soliciting input from employees enables you to learn what they are thinking so you can address their concerns. It also lets you know whether employees are listening to, hearing, and understanding your messages.

8. Tap the expertise of employee communications specialists. If your firm employs communications professionals, be sure to tap their expertise when developing employee communications strategies and tactics. Allow these experts to write and/or review the communications you plan to issue. Their input can be as valuable as that provided by your attorneys. If your firm doesn't have professional communicators, seek help from a PR firm – especially one with expertise in employee communications. 

CRISIS continued from page 2


- If your crisis involves the loss of life, describe it as a "tragedy," not as an "unfortunate incident."

- Avoid talking about the economic consequences of the crisis in tandem with comments about injuries or deaths. Or at least don't lead with a discussion of damage costs, impact on sales or profits, or adequate inventory levels; treat such items as a footnote to your primary statement.

- Expressing empathy, caring or concern does not imply accepting liability. There is a difference between accepting responsibility and accepting blame.

- Put a human face on your organization. Issuing a press release is preferable to saying nothing, but having a real person talking on camera is the best way to make your communication personal. Also, avoid words such as "the corporation," or "the company." Instead, use your company's name in conjunction with "our company" or "we."

- When reading from a prepared statement, look up at the reporter or the camera at the point when you express concern. Speak those words from your heart rather than read them verbatim.

- Although expressing concern or showing emotion is acceptable, losing composure (e.g., crying) is not. In a crisis, your role often requires you to communicate strength. Spokespeople who cry don't inspire confidence. (In President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress shortly after the terrorist attacks, his eyes teared briefly, but he never cried.) If, during a tragic event, you have responsibility for speaking to the media, assess your ability to keep your composure. If necessary, take a few moments before you speak, or consider having someone else do it (make sure they've had media training). 

Back to the Drawing Board: Most Likely, Your Crisis Management Plan Is in Need of Review, if Not Revision

Experts will tell you that the key to successful crisis management is planning. Without a plan – a good one – an organization involved in a crisis is less likely to recover quickly, and may not recover at all. The events of September 11 have underscored – more than anything in recent memory, including Y2K – the need for **all** organizations to have an up-to-date, comprehensive crisis management plan.

Across the country, many firms were well prepared – with crisis management plans and teams in place to respond to a variety of issues. But this was a new kind of crisis. Though not the target of the attacks, companies were impacted by them. Managers found themselves having to deal with an emotionally drained workforce as well as the challenges caused by closed financial markets, suspended travel and heightened security. It quickly became apparent that many of the existing models of crisis management and communication needed to be reexamined.

Today, what constitutes good crisis preparation differs from yesterday's model. (What firm could have envisioned losing a third of its entire workforce?) In light of 9-11-01, every forward-thinking organization should pull its crisis management plan off the shelf, dust it off, review it cover to cover, and if need be, revise it.

Among the questions to ask:

1. How prepared is your crisis management team? In a crisis, trained people with assigned responsibilities will carry the day. Because of promotions and other factors, members of most crisis management teams come and go. Is your team fully staffed? (Is every position on the team filled?) Do you have adequate backup through alternates, in case someone is unavailable or the crisis lasts for a sustained period, as was the case in September? When was the last time your team met, trained, rehearsed? Does someone always know where they are and how they can be reached (i.e., business/home phone, business/home E-mail, mobile phone, pager)? Think of your crisis management team as you would any other piece of critical equipment that must

In light of 9-11-01, every forward-thinking organization should pull its crisis management plan off the shelf, dust it off, review it, and if need be, revise it.

work perfectly in an emergency.

2. Are you prepared to meet the press? Being unprepared to deal with the media results in a strong desire to remain silent. Does your management understand the role of the media in a crisis? More importantly, are they willing and trained to speak with reporters? When did they last have refresher media training? Would they know what to do if they were ambushed by an aggressive reporter? What if circumstances prevent you from conducting a press briefing at your location; do you have an alternate site (e.g., hotel conference room) in mind? Cooperating with the media is second in

**DRAWING BOARD -
continued from page 8**

importance only to employee and community safety and effective emergency response.


3. Can you quickly communicate with employees? Among the most important people who must receive information during a crisis are your employees. How effectively does information pass from managers to supervisors to employees – and then back up this chain? Do you have a variety of tools in place that let you make timely contact with your employees? If the company newsletter and bulletin board are your primary or exclusive vehicles, you are operating in yesterday's world. E-mail, voicemail and Intranet capability should be in place. In today's world, it's also critical for employees to have a way to "check in" with you.

4. Have you anticipated worst-case scenarios? Although you cannot anticipate every potential problem, you can ferret out problems that could contribute to or exacerbate a crisis. Do

you have backup computer systems to protect against the loss of centralized data? Take a hard look at phone systems that may become seriously overloaded during an emergency. (If the emergency affects the community, expect to receive hundreds of calls an hour from surrounding residents.) You need lines dedicated to handling communication with authorities, families, neighbors and media. What would your company do if it lost its physical location? Do you have immediate access to an alternate site? Do you have an ongoing relationship with a commercial realtor? Have you prepared for the possibility of losing multiple members of executive management?

A crisis is always an opportunity for critics and opponents. But it is also an opportunity for companies – to show employees and the public that it is responsive and has its priorities straight. Without preparation, training and drills,

many companies found themselves ill-prepared to deal with the events of September 11. Those who were prepared were able to get beyond the debilitating factors of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, and focus their attention on preventing or minimizing disruptions in their business.

The Ammerman Experience approach to crisis management is to prepare crisis management teams to assess points of vulnerability, while managing the human factors of a crisis. It's a method that is not highly dependent on previous experiences with crisis events, but rather a straightforward thought process designed to prepare managers to assess each aspect of a crisis and respond accordingly. Emphasis is placed on anticipating "touch points," and responding in a way to prevent further damage, while maintaining open communication with internal and external constituencies. 

Will Your Front-line Employees Be an Asset or a Liability in a Crisis?

Does your organization have a crisis management plan? Is there a crisis management team in place, and does each member know his or her assigned responsibilities? Have you anticipated and analyzed potential problems facing your organization? Are top management and your company spokesperson prepared to deal with the media? Have you rehearsed your plan by holding regular drills?

If your answer to each of these questions is, "Yes," your organization probably is well prepared for a crisis. Or is it? If you've ignored or misjudged the critical role front-line employees can play in helping an organization steer clear of, or successfully navigate through, a crisis, you may be less prepared than you think.

Despite an organization's best efforts, accidents and incidents happen, and difficult issues arise. If they are handled well, the organization can demonstrate that it is responsible, caring and competent. If they are mishandled, the organization may be perceived as inept, callous or arrogant. During a crisis, the image of an organization – hero or villain – often depends on how well it communicates with employees and their families, the media, neighbors, and appropriate authorities and agencies. And often, the first communicators are front-line employees.

Unfortunately, few of them are receiving training commensurate with the increasingly important and complex role they are being asked to play in a

crisis or potential crisis. Even in forward-thinking organizations, most of the time, effort and other resources being invested to equip employees to manage crises successfully are directed toward specialists and select members of management. Front-line employees – who can be either an asset or a liability – are largely ignored.

Management

One of the most important components of crisis management is an organization's ability to spot a potential crisis. Most crises send out early warning signals. If these signals are detected, reported and acted upon, the crisis may be prevented or its negative effects minimized. Front-line employees are frequently in a position to serve as

FRONT LINE - continued from page 9

signal detectors. But they must clearly understand the why and how of signal detection.

Quick Audit:

- Are your front-line employees empowered to identify and report problems – large and small – that might escalate into crises?
- What training have they had in recognizing potential crises?
- Do they feel comfortable in reporting information to their supervisors?
- After receiving information, do their supervisors follow up with them?

The media

In a crisis, frequently the media will seek information and comment from employees – not necessarily those who are authorized to speak. Security guards, receptionists, switchboard operators and secretaries are usually among the first to come in contact with reporters.

According to Jeff Braun, vice president and general manager at The Ammerman Experience, "When I was a reporter, security guards were a favorite target of mine. I'd turn on the charm and try to get them to trust me. I was usually able to get valuable information that way. And if they wouldn't talk, sometimes they'd get confrontational, and that played well on TV."

Security guards – some of whom have military or law enforcement backgrounds – may have been taught the "antithesis of good communication," says Leonard Steinhorn, professor of communications at American University in Washington, D.C. When they communicate, these individuals tend to be abrupt, and often come across as cold or unfeeling – not the image a caring organization wants to convey.

Most organizations have spokespersons who are well qualified and trained, and are readily available to deal with the media during normal business hours. But it's during nights, weekends and holidays when organizations are most vulnerable. For that reason, shift supervisors and other front-line employees should also be trained. They need to know how to properly greet the media and escort them to a designated briefing area. And although it is unlikely that you'll ask front-line employees to take on the role of primary spokesperson (i.e., conducting a news conference and fielding questions), they may need to deliver a brief statement until your primary spokesperson arrives.

Quick Audit:

- Are your front-line employees familiar with your media policy?
- Do they know what to do and say if a reporter arrives or calls?
- Do they know how to politely decline an interview?
- Are they familiar with the tactics reporters will use to obtain information?
- Do they know not to be confrontational with the media, and not to touch a reporter or his equipment?
- If called upon, can they confidently and competently deliver a brief statement to the media?

The public

In addition to having to deal with the media, in times of crisis, organizations often must interact with other members

of the public:

- Government authorities at all levels (agencies and elected/appointed officials), including local authorities, such as medical, fire and rescue, law enforcement
- Community – such as fenceline neighbors, residents, leaders, activists
- Customers and suppliers
- Employees and their families

Much of this interaction takes place by phone. For example, in cases of public concern about service or product safety issues, a company may be inundated with hundreds of calls an hour from people in search of information or a target on which to vent their frustration.

Then there's the phone call that's out of the ordinary – the threat, the extortion, the vindictive or the prank. A company's ability to assuage public fear or concern may depend on the skills of a variety of employees, including switchboard operators, receptionists, customer service personnel, secretaries and others who may rarely, if ever, deal with a concerned or angry public.

Quick Audit:

- Do your front-line employees know how to respond to threatening, hostile or other sensitive phone calls?
- Do they know the importance of treating every call seriously?
- Do they know how to listen actively?
- When necessary, do they know how to keep someone on the line and talking?
- Do they know how to obtain information, while being careful about what they say in return?
- Can they handle customer complaints diplomatically?

Rudolph Giuliani: Consummate Crisis Communicator

For students of effective communication, the September 11 tragedy has unearthed a number of savvy communicators worth studying. One is New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. His performance in the aftermath of his city's worst crisis has been nothing short of remarkable.

Every crisis has two inseparable aspects; one cannot be separated from the other without seriously jeopardizing the success of your crisis management. First, you must take immediate, corrective action to remedy the problem. Second, you must communicate with a variety of external and internal audiences. Giuliani did both.

Clearly, he understands the role effective communication plays in helping to manage a crisis. His skillful handling of various communication challenges and opportunities was a direct result of the following:

- **He was accessible.** In a crisis, some people run and hide from the news media. But less than an hour after the attack on the World Trade Center, Giuliani was at the scene talking to reporters. To people across the country, he became a familiar image on CNN and the networks – conducting walking media briefings as well as participating in more traditional press conferences. He used the media to convey important information to New Yorkers, including information about evacuating parts of Manhattan, donating blood, and volunteering. He also told them how to obtain information about their loved ones.

In a crisis, one communication rule of thumb is this: communicate as quickly as possible and as frequently as is appropriate. Once again, Giuliani did both.

- **He was candid.** In a phone interview with FOX News, minutes after the disaster, he was forthright: "We don't know the number of casualties. We know it's going to be a large, large number of people who were injured and who died. At this point there's no way of knowing or even focusing on that . . ."

A week later, Giuliani acknowledged that only dead bodies would be recovered. "The chances of recovering any live human beings are very, very small," he said.


- **He was visible.** Like Winston Churchill during the London Blitz, Giuliani understood the importance of being seen – among ordinary people. (*The Washington Post* called him "Winston Churchill in a Yankees cap.") He toured the wreckage, playing host to President Bush and more than 100 members of Congress. He showed up at stock exchanges, firehouses, hospitals and churches. On October 1, he became the first U.S. mayor since 1952 to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. He was present at President Bush's address to the joint session of Congress. He even appeared on the season premiere of *Saturday Night Live*.

- **He was compassionate.** He hugged grieving family members. He sympathized with bond traders who lost co-workers, and clasped hands with dusty rescue workers at "ground zero." He made an unannounced stop at Engine 54, a midtown firehouse that lost 15 firefighters. There he signed a message book, writing, "To my heroes: The men who protect us and keep us safe. God bless you. With love and admiration, Rudy Giuliani."

- **He showed leadership.** He was calm, and instructed people to walk calmly out of southern Manhattan. Later, he urged New Yorkers to return to work, and tourists to visit the city and to spend money – to go to a play or a restaurant – to show that "terrorism can't stop us." Energetic, decisive, fearless and tough, he inspired confidence among New Yorkers and indeed all Americans.

- **He spoke plainly.** He was both articulate and easy to understand. His conversational style of communicating – devoid of jargon and pretense – is one all people can relate to.

After September 11, we frequently saw Rudy Giuliani wearing an "NYPD" or "FDNY" cap. But an equally important hat he wore was that of chief communicator.


In a crisis, think of emergency response activities and communications as two hats. Be sure to wear them both. 

FRONT LINE - continued from page 10

It is the safest of assumptions that a crisis can happen to any organization – large or small, public or private. One component of successful crisis management is timely, effective

There have been many instances where an organization did an excellent job of responding to a crisis, but failed to communicate or communicate effectively at the outset.

communication. There have been many instances where an organization did an excellent job of responding to a problem or crisis, but failed to communicate or communicate effectively at the outset. You can avoid joining those ranks by taking some precautionary steps to work with employees on the front line.

The Ammerman Experience offers several training sessions designed to prepare front-line employees to assist in a crisis. (See list on page 12) 

We're Here to Help

The Ammerman Experience has veteran status in preparing people to manage a crisis, and to communicate effectively during crisis situations. Our firm is known for its ability to customize its existing workshops and to create new sessions to meet the specific needs of clients. We can prepare executives to communicate financial information, show first-line supervisors how to communicate effectively with employees under their supervision, and much more. We ask people to change the way they think about communicating, and show them how to eliminate comfortable, but outdated and self-defeating, communication patterns. Here are some of the sessions we offer:

Effective Media Communications

A one-day workshop that develops the skills needed for a successful encounter with the news media. Participants face tough, experienced journalists during multiple, videotaped, interview simulations, followed by extensive critiques. Crisis interviews are an important part of this highly interactive session. Skills learned in this session can also prove invaluable in a variety of other communication situations, including speaking to employees, customers, analysts and the public.

Crisis Communications Team Training

A one-day, highly customized session designed to test how well members of your crisis communications management team work together and make decisions, and how proficient they are in communicating to a variety of external and internal audiences during a crisis. Problem solving is a key ingredient of this training. Using an evolving

crisis scenario developed with the client's help, team members learn how their decisions during a crisis can impact the sequence of events to follow.

Emergency Response Drills

Organizations that rehearse their crisis plans and train their crisis management teams are far more successful when the crisis is real. As in any rehearsal, the value directly parallels the degree of realism. Using experienced, aggressive reporters, we test your organization's ability to handle the media during an emergency. The scenarios we use are also designed to assess your organization's ability to communicate effectively with all impacted populations.

Effective Telephone Communications

A half-day workshop that addresses the specialized training needs of employees who regularly, or on a back-up basis, handle incoming telephone calls in crisis or other emergency situations. The session sensitizes employees to the stress of the phone call that is out of the ordinary – the threat, the extortion, the vindictive or the prank. Participants – typically, switchboard operators, receptionists, customer service personnel, secretaries and security guards – learn the importance of remaining calm and gathering accurate information that can aid management in preventing or resolving a crisis.

First Response Media Training

A half-day workshop that provides guidance to those who may come in contact with the media, but are not primary spokespersons. This training also prepares supervisory personnel to detect potential crises before they happen.

Individuals who undergo this training will also be prepared to serve in a variety of functions to support a crisis communications effort. Typical session participants include: security guards, secretaries or other administrative personnel, receptionists, switchboard operators, first-line or shift supervisors, or other personnel who may have to interact briefly with the news media. Focus of the training is on politely declining an interview request, or providing limited, authorized information.

Dealing with Public Anger: New Approaches to an Old Problem

Public anger is more common and more challenging than it used to be. It is also more manageable. Much has been learned about what causes public anger, and what works and what doesn't when trying to defuse it. This customized session offers practical guidance for reducing anger when dealing with an angry public.

Crisis/Media Communications Training for Educators

A one-day workshop that addresses the increasingly important crisis and media training needs of those in the education field. The session provides superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals, public information officers, school board members and others with the confidence and competence needed to properly handle the communications aspect of a crisis.

For more information, contact us at 1-800-866-2026, or visit our Web site: www.ammermanexperience.com.



4800 Sugar Grove Blvd., Suite 400, Stafford, Texas 77477

Presorted
Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Houston, TX
Permit No. 553