

Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

The Ammerman[®]
Experience

The Real World ▶
To Succeed - First Fail
Crisis Prep That Works

Technology and Crisis ▶
For Better and
For Worse

Quick Bites ▶ "About those mini crises..."

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Wishing people a safe, happy and prosperous New Year is something that is done all over the globe, and it is what we wish for you. As our end-of-the-year issue of *Advisor* goes to e-press, we not only wish it, but offer tips on some ways to accomplish it.

Of course safety is foremost, but bad things happen, even to the best people. That is why this issue is dedicated to crisis preparation. Will that uncommon event be simply a manageable incident or a full-blown crisis? That is where planning makes all the difference. Pre-empting a crisis or reputation-killing issue not only benefits the bottom line, it makes for a better, happier place to work. It says that you plan for the future and take charge of all that you can. Employee development sends a message to workers that they are worth investing in. Thus, crisis preparation is both a smart business strategy and a morale boost. What could be better?

Are we trying to tell you that we do good and valuable work? We are. Because of our commitment to confidentiality, we can share our success stories only in the most vague terms, but trust that we see the results and so do our clients, some of whom have been with us from the beginning, more than 30 years ago. For this and so much more, we are grateful.

Happy New Year!

The Real World To Succeed - First Fail Crisis Prep That Works

Most organizations today are shockingly unprepared to effectively manage a crisis. Surprised? We're not. We see it often, and our experience is supported by research. The Center for Crisis Management at the University of Southern California says crisis-prepared companies are in the minority: at best, 75% of them are not equipped to manage today's crises. At worst, **95% are unprepared.**

Why is this so? Sometimes organizations lack the financial or human resources. Others choose to believe that a crisis will not happen to them – a sure recipe for disaster. But the biggest problem is that they stick with outdated tools and methods that will not suffice in a 21st-century crisis.

Forward-thinking companies have used crisis drills for years. Some industries are required by law to conduct them. Initially, these drills



Quick Bites "About those mini crises..."

You've heard the horror stories; people laid off via voice-mail or text message, given 10 minutes to clean their desks under the gaze of an armed guard. Situations that are very uncomfortable have the most potential for going wrong and lay-offs are among the worst. Why should an organization care what happens to the people who are leaving? For more information, [click here](#).

What are the rules of giving business gifts in Taiwan? When is sending a greeting card expected in Italy? Do you understand the meaning of coffee in Saudi Arabian business meetings? What if your Korean client suggests meeting in a karaoke bar? Baffled? Hop on over to [Executive Planet](#). If your business links are international, this site will have you looking like a globetrotter in no time. If, on the other hand, you are strictly a domestic animal, it is still fascinating reading. Dozens of nations are listed, and there are opportunities to add your comments as well. Did you know that each country has its own specific etiquette about setting appointments and punctuality? Plus, in many nations, the rules for

focused exclusively on operations; they were designed to test a company's ability to contain a spill, a fire, a chemical release, etc. Crisis scenarios were based on *past* experience, but anticipating that which has not yet happened is the mark of excellence.

One of the best ways for an organization to succeed in a real crisis is by forcing itself to fail during a simulated one. This will expose a company's strengths and weaknesses, and provide a realism that's crucial to effective learning, but this works only if the drill pushes to the limit – and perhaps a bit beyond.

Consider the unthinkable and then test for it. Property damage and human injury are obvious crises, but what about product failure, loss of a key executive, a plummeting stock price, or the SEC at your door? Some crises require the paramedics. Others require attorneys, accountants, technical experts and a first-rate spokesperson.

Think broadly about impact. Drills generally ignore important pressure points, such as the media, the financial community, employees and their families, customers, suppliers, government officials, non-governmental organizations, victims and their lawyers. To be effective, crisis drills must test an organization's ability to respond to (or be proactive with) many different constituencies.

Assess your resources. Can your phone lines handle hundreds of calls per hour? Do you have the people to take those calls? What if the power goes out? What if cell towers are non-functional? How secure is your security? During a recent drill, our firm placed 125 calls per hour to various participants – from switchboard operators to vice presidents – and succeeded in challenging both the equipment and the people. We also breached the company's security while its guards were distracted.

Don't ignore frontline employees. Receptionists, security guards, first-line supervisors and similar employees are often excluded from crisis drills. Ironically, these people usually end up playing critical roles during a real emergency. Will they be able to respond properly to persistent and clever reporters, angry citizens, prank callers, worried employees or their families?

Upgrade often. Recognize that firefighters, police and other physical crisis experts are constantly practicing and improving their skills. Since communication, both internal and external, is so vital, shouldn't people charged with those tasks do the same?

Keep it real. Challenge people's thinking by using scenarios developed by those outside your company and industry. Familiarity diminishes effectiveness. How often we have heard the naïve claim, "But that would never happen here." Today's crisis are of unprecedented complexity, thus crisis drills need to be multi-layered; they must incorporate twists and turns and the truly unexpected. The most effective way to do that is to call in the pros.

No amount of people assigned, resources purchased or big, thick "Crisis Plan" binders will ever substitute for people who know how to do their jobs in concert with the rest of the team. **This requires practice.** If organizations practiced their crisis plans as often as school kids practice fire drills, billions of dollars would be saved and uncounted tragedies avoided.

Read more about our [crisis training](#).

[Back to top](#)

business conduct for women differ greatly from men. This is truly a don't miss tutorial for cross-cultural understanding.

For a quick check of how to address both people and envelopes in a variety of nations, head to **Business Netiquette International** (<http://www.bspage.com/address.html>). The International Business address formats and personal salutations on the site are condensed from *Merriam Webster's Guide to International Business Communications*, which discusses the various elements in greater detail.

And since we're on the topic of avoiding a faux pas, "The quickest way for a young professional to wreck a budding career is to mess up at the office Christmas party." So says the crew from the **Irish Jobs** website and their advice is dead on for this side of The Pond as well. A quick review of these essential rules ought to be useful to executives young and not so young.

[Back to top](#)

2004 Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

Effective Media Communications

January 20
February 6
March 2

Effective Presentations

January 21
March 3

Advanced Communicators

May 4 -5

Marketing EMC

May 6

EMC Refresher

March 4

The above schedule lists the Ammerman open, public workshops. For available

Technology and Crisis:

For Better and For Worse

As it has for nearly all aspects of life, the melding of personal interaction and technology has changed the way crisis situations develop and how they are managed and contained. In some situations, **technology itself is the culprit**, while in others, it can be the saving grace. Staying current on both the benefits and threats is essential. For example:

Cell phones with integrated digital cameras. These cameras can transmit images and mini-videos complete with sound to other phones and the Internet. Rules that prohibit cameras in sensitive areas, from proprietary locations to locker rooms, make good sense but fail to address the bigger picture. For instance, these cameras could be used to send photos that could create a crisis, exacerbate a sensitive situation, or raise serious legal issues.

Wireless internet/2-way messaging devices. While a fine tool to enhance security, new vulnerabilities need to be addressed. At some workplaces, e-mail attachments are secure and protected in the wireless environment, but the dialogue in the e-mail is not secure. Crisis managers must work with IT departments and wireless security pros to ensure protection and **make sure users are adequately educated about the real risks**.

Tightening wireless security is only part of the program. Perhaps more important is the creation of an environment where employees are encouraged to **report situations that could escalate** to a crisis. It is human nature to dislike being seen as a tattletale, whiner or alarmist. New technology addresses this by giving people ways to report concerns with reassuring anonymity.

New technology also has its very useful innovations. One example is QuickView (www.vmsinfo.com/QuickView/QuickView.html). This service allows almost instantaneous viewing of television news reports from any PC. We, at Ammerman, used it most recently to help a client (a major restaurant chain) better manage a situation at a restaurant in another state. It aided in faster, better decision making, and it allowed people in distant locales to have the same media at the same time.

Product ads constantly remind us of the "solutions" technology provides, and they are not wrong. But these same tools also create new anxieties and may even act as catalysts for disaster. Preemption remains the goal. 1. Evaluate your organization's preparedness with scathing honesty. 2. Do what it takes to fix the problems. 3. Repeat steps one and two. **The technology won't stop changing and neither should your crisis prevention plan.**

[Back to top](#)

dates for private (buy-out) training dates, please contact The Ammerman Experience at 1.800.866.2026.

The Ammerman Experience open workshops are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and are available to a limited number of attendees to ensure maximum personalized attention. To register for a course, contact our office at 1.800.866.2026.

Our firm is a pioneer in understanding the link between effective communication and professional success. What we've learned and what we teach can improve your performance . . . and that of others in your organization.

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