

Crisis Management Communication

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In the fasted paced world of business today, where information is able to be transmitted across the world in real time as events unfold, it is more important than ever to have a proper crisis management plan and risk assessment. In the wake of a crisis, it is already too late for a company to begin damage control, when every second counts and inadequate responses can be the difference between corporate extinction and rebounding stronger than before. This is why it is critical for a company to invest in drawing up plans of action for crisis scenarios, despite the unlikely event of those scenarios transpiring. Through this paper I will showcase just why proper crisis planning and public communication is so important and how I will use my research to augment my future career goals in crisis management.

Crisis management is a companies or individual's ability and plan of action to recover from a major crisis situation by attempting to minimize loss of reputation, financial losses and further damage (Crisis managment). Koerber (2014) stated that crisis is an event where people attempt to seek cause and make attributions, it is a disruption from the normal everyday operations and non-routine in nature. Van der Meer and Verhoven Joost (2014) suggested that transparency and showing signs of shame and regret have positive impacts in regards to a party's reputation. It is important to ensure that a company's response fits the current situation and similarly "fight fire with fire" by making sure to mirror and convey the same emotions the event is causing. Being overly positive when an event is overwhelmingly negative will be seen as inappropriate whereas mimicking the emotional context of the situation will be seen as sympathetic and remorseful. Effectively communicating with the public is what will make or break an organization and is of the utmost importance.

In 1982, Tylenol's communication with the public was put to the test in a crisis that would have ruined most other companies. Due to quick actions and a well-developed crisis

control plan, Tylenol was able to respond nationwide giving transparency to the public as the crisis unfolded (Pauly & Hutchison, 2005). Their incredible management of the situation is what led to them becoming a textbook example of proper management practices. In contrast, the Exxon oil spill has become known as what not to do during a crisis situation namely improper planning and corporate secrecy. The poor management of the crisis, among other events, is partly why the organization is continued to be viewed in a negative light (Pauly & Hutchison, 2005).

Effective communication would also suggest that in the event of catastrophe, certain situational events will enable a company to capitalize positively on a crisis situation that is only possible if crisis communication is well understood. In the 1996 Odwalla crisis, an infant died and numerous others became ill during an E.coli outbreak. Odwalla's PR department was able to effectively handle the crisis situation and able to capitalize on the media spotlight by showcasing the companies good nature and ensuring that the public was educated about the company in the process, moving attention away from the outbreak, and refocusing on the companies values, triple bottom line, which is their dedication to people, profits, and the planet, and corporate strengths (Thomsen & Rawson. 1998). Odwalla was able to handle that crisis so elegantly that it has now become a text book example of effective crisis management. If I wish to develop the necessary competencies to be able to handle a crisis that effectively, being able to effectively communicate will rely heavily on the courses I study during my college career and the specific skill sets I learn in each class.

To further compliment what I have already learned and to add greater breadth to my existing skill set, I am enrolled in a variety of classes from different concentrations within communication studies. One class I am particularly excited about is the new responsive web design course offered by the College of Communication and Information. The class is very

different from the courses in my public communication concentration and will help me to stand out in the job market. Responsive web design is the new standard for websites that allows developers to have one website that scales to the users device, whether it is a mobile phone, tablet or desktop. This is a major improvement from the past where businesses had to have multiple websites, one for each device, to ensure their content could be accessed and made subsequent updates difficult to manage (Marcotte, 2010). I already have a background in web design and responsive standards and I feel that this course would help me to sharpen and master my already existing skills. In my search for summer internships, I was surprised to find out how many employers were interested to find out I had a background in web development. I am confident that this class will further help me in the job market.

A career in public relations is going to require me to maintain a high level of media literacy and ensure I am knowledgeable in issues such as media portrayals, political campaigns and communication technologies to be successful. The course Media Use and Effects will adequately prepare me to critically analyze the media and then use my understanding to effectively craft a crisis management campaign for my clients based on current trends and help them to recover from a public relations disaster (Communication studies).

Another class that will significantly aid in my communication competency will be the course Communication and Influence. This course will help me to critique influential communication practices including interpersonal persuasion, product and service advertisements, and political messages (Communication studies). This class will cause me to look at the ways social influence is used in modern society, which will be helpful in my later career when it is crucial that I am able to effectively get my message across.

One of the most notable classes for seniors is their Senior Seminar course. This class focuses on helping us to consolidate major coursework, examine ethics and issues in communication and create a portfolio of achievements. This class is going to help prepare me to graduate college and to develop skills needed to enter the job market. Having a portfolio will help to showcase significant accomplishments and milestones that I have made throughout my college career and will hopefully help me to stand out from other prospects. In addition to that, the increased expectation from my professor to perform and think at a senior level will push me to submit my best work and to develop the knowledge I'm going to need in the real world where your employers, clients and those you interact with expect a certain degree of competency and demand that everything you do is done to the best of your abilities.

Crisis management communication is a vital skill to develop and practice as it is crucial for all organizations to have effective plans in place. No organization is safe from crisis, and as history shows, those without an ability to respond properly will cease to exist, or at least suffer heavily for their neglect. As a communication studies major with a public communication concentration, it is important that I am able to learn and study the proper communication techniques needed when communicating messages to the masses. Understanding how people react to messages and the context of the situations will help me succeed in a public relations career, but what I learn before I enter the workforce is even more important. The skills I learn and develop in college will help shape the rest of my life and dictate the success I will come to enjoy as a result of hard work and dedication, two skills college teaches exceptionally well. I have shown how responsive web design is going to help me develop a complimentary skill set to set me apart from others and how Communication and Influence and Media Use and Effects will

help me to deal with day to day issues I encounter in my future career. Finally, Senior Seminar will help to organize my skills and accomplishments and prepare me for life after graduation.

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