



Protecting Your Agency's Reputation

Dealing with the Press in Good Times and Bad

Agenda

- Crisis prevention
- Crisis communications: do's and don'ts
- Working with the press
- Key messages
- How to stay in control

Difference between Crisis and Issue

Issue:

- Warning sign that a crisis is possible. There's time to assess and take action

Crisis:

- Destroys trust in organization, reputation and image
- Can spiral quickly, pressure for quick action
- Examples: fraud, embezzlement, death due to negligence

A crisis strips your organization of privacy and leaves it exposed to scrutiny

Taxpayer tab for Atlanta housing authority lawsuit tops \$1 million

5 DAYS A WEEK

GROW YOUR MARKET



METRO

Elderly NYCHA tenants trapped in their homes for 13 days because of elevator

By Nolan Hicks and Olivia Bensimon

July 19, 2019 | 7:48pm | Updated



TOP STORY

Six months later: 'The housing authority murdered them,' says brother of Allen Benedict Court victim



The agency – which is being overseen by a federal monitor following a series of scandals involving **lead paint**, **mold** and **heating outages** – has been without a permanent leader since former chairwoman Shola Olatoye **quit in disgrace** in April 2018.

Crisis Prevention

- Ethics training
- Checks and balances: understand budgets
- Befriend the enemy (keep your friends close and enemies even closer)
- Open communication between Board President and Executive Director
- Monitor issues that could spiral into crises

Crisis Communications: the Do's

- Key principles
 1. Be quick
 2. Be accurate
 3. Be consistent
- Use all available communication channels (social media, website, intranet, mass notification systems)
- Provide some expression of concern/safety for any victims

Crisis Communication: the Do's

- Use all available communication channels (social media, website, intranet, mass notification systems)
- Provide some expression of concern/safety for any victims

Crisis Communications: the Don'ts

- Don't wait. Communicate what happened with priority stakeholders even if incomplete information
- Don't speculate. Share the facts only.
- Don't run from news media. They will catch up.
- Don't say "no comment." More on this later.

News Media in a Crisis

- Attracted to crises – conflict “sells”
- Can amplify the crisis by reporting on how organization manages it
- Especially important to work with news media during crisis
- Can build or destroy organizational reputation

News Media Post-Crisis

- Will watch and report how your organization recovers
- Can help restore reputation
- Key questions they will ask:
 - What changes have been made?
 - What are you doing to prevent this from ever happening again?

Role of News Media

- “Watchdog” role
- Shapes public opinion
- Reaches your elected officials and other stakeholders
- Positive news can help your housing authority achieve its goals
- Can help build your H.A.’s reputation if handled well

Examples

Dennison returns to Fort Worth Housing Solutions as SVP of Development and Asset Management

Apr 4, 2019 0



Most Popular

Articles

Examples

- Fort Worth's Solution to Affordable Housing Crisis: Build Its Own

By Scott Gordon

Published May 31, 2018 at 6:03 PM | Updated at 7:01 PM CDT on May 31, 2018



Fort Worth's housing authority has come up with a solution to the affordable housing crisis - building its own apartment complexes for low-income residents. (Published Thursday, May 31, 2018)

Media Relationships

- Be proactive, not reactive
- Build goodwill
- Help them do their job
- Give them real news
- Relationships developed over time will help if and when a crisis hits

What News Media Wants

- Quick and accurate information
- Newsworthy information the viewers/readers will care about
- Access to a spokesperson (leader or expert)
 - YOU, the commissioner, can be that spokesperson

Commissioners and the Press

- In fact, if crisis implicates the top executive ...
- Board President may need to be the spokesperson

Typical Concerns

- Will the media tell our story the way we want it to be told?
- Will I choke on TV?
- How do I keep from babbling on & on?
- Off-the-record: should I ever do this?
- How do I prepare?
- How do I handle tough reporters?

Expect the Unexpected

- You just never know what can happen on camera

Basic Rules of the Road

- Respond promptly
- Set a time for the interview (you're in control)
- ALWAYS prepare for interviews
- ALWAYS tell the truth (even when it hurts)
- Avoid treating reporters like they are the enemy

How the News Media Works

- On the record vs. off the record
 - On the record means “fair game” for reporting
 - Everything you say before, during and after an interview is on the record
 - **YOU ARE ON THE RECORD AT ALL TIMES**

Reporting Techniques

- The “pregnant pause” after you answer the question
 - If you made your point, stay quiet
- Saying something to elicit a reaction (stay calm)
- Is there anything else you’d like to say?
- Is there anything I missed?
- Good opportunity to convey key messages

You have the right to:

- Set the ground rules for the interview (time limits, location, etc.)
- Audiotape the interview (great coaching tool for later)
- Ask who else the reporter is talking to
- Ask if the reporter has covered this topic before

Controlling the Interview

- Always remember, you're in control
- Establish rapport
 - How long have you been with NBC5?
 - How long have you been writing about housing?
- Don't be afraid to stop and start over
- Remain cool, calm and collected

Controlling the Interview

- Listen carefully to questions
- Answer using part of the question
- Don't say "no comment"
- Assume the audience knows very little about the subject

Three Kinds of Questions

1. GOOGLE

- What does a Google search for your organization reveal?

2. QYWLTAIOSWA (Questions you would love to answer if only someone would ask)

- Example: “Tell me about the difference Fort Worth Housing Solutions is making in our community?”

3. KILLER (if something bad happens to your organization)

- Example: “Why weren’t you more concerned about safety?”

Preparing for an Interview

- Practice answering killer questions
- Practice answering Google questions
- Practice delivering key messages that you really want people to hear
- Get someone to pretend to be a reporter

Good Answers

- Focus on your objective and key messages
- Are credible
- Are specific when appropriate
- Use “power” words: ex. “candid,” “clear,” “important,” “crucial” (see hand-out)
- Use simple language: to the point

Words Matter

- Eradicate negative language, toxic words
- Stay positive (or at least neutral)
- Suppress the jargon and acronyms
- Speak so your grandmother could understand

Key Messages

- Key message = the most important messages you want people to hear
- Extremely important to develop at least three in advance of any interviews
- Must practice saying them

Key Messages

- Prepare at least three for the interview
- Say it in 150 words or less
- 150 words = 1 minute
- 75 words = 30 seconds
- 37 words = 15 seconds
- Your interview may last 15 seconds in a TV news spot
- Make every word count.

Stand Out

- Provide examples – tell stories. Make it real.
- Be repetitious – three times and it will be included!
- Use numbers: “There are two reasons for doing it this way. First, ...”
- Use chronology, especially with complex subjects (beginning, middle, end)

Use transitions

- Two great techniques you can use to make sure you get a chance to deliver key messages:
 - Bridging
 - Flagging

Bridging

- The critical issue is ...
- Let's consider another perspective ...
- Here's an even tougher question ...
- But the facts are ...
- Here's another way to say it ...
- Yes, but ...

Flagging

- Help the reporter remember what you want them to remember
- Underscore what you think is important
- Repetition is key
- “The most exciting thing about our work is ...”
- Before I forget, let me remind you ...”

Verbal vs. NonVerbal Communication

- The way we communicate nonverbally is equally, and some MORE, important than verbal messaging
- It's not *what* we say, but *how* we say it that sometimes matters most
- *Especially* when communicating feelings and attitudes

When You're Speaking

- Speak with increased energy
- Use higher volume, range, tone and pitch than normal
- Don't be afraid to be animated
- Use inflection to make a point
- Pace yourself
- Speak slower and more succinctly
- Be aware of facial expressions, eye contact, gestures

Final Reminders

- Always answer the question you want to be asked first
- Flag to underscore what's important
- Focus on your objective
- Bridge away from trouble and to your key messages

- Margaret Ritsch, Ed.D., APR, Fellow PRSA
- mritsch@fwhs.org
- margaretritsch@gmail.com