

The Four Rs of Crisis Communication

By John J. Moscatelli, APR, Fellow PRSA

The Chinese term for crisis — *weiji* — translates loosely as “risk-opportunity.” Most people tackle crises in a risk-avoidance or risk-reduction state.

Opportunities embedded in a crisis are easier to unearth when we are prepared, and preparation requires reliance on the four Rs of crisis communication: Recognition, Rehearsal, Response and Recovery.

Recognition

Recognition takes place on several levels. Exercising constant vigilance, PR professionals monitor the environment in which their organizations operate: assessing industry trends, listening for stakeholder criticism or concerns, evaluating and prioritizing reality-based scenarios and translating their learnings into informed communication sections of crisis response and business continuity plans.

Rehearsal

Having analyzed the risks and created a plan, the next phase is rehearsal. Employing a combination of training sessions, tabletop drills and the more complex field

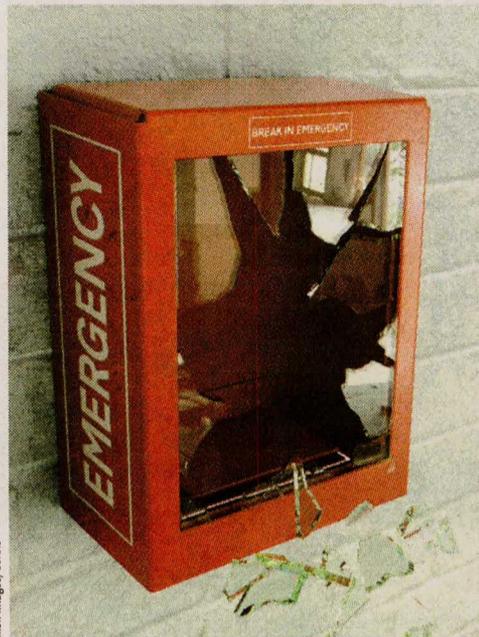
exercises, we test, poke and prod our plans to see how well they work and, more important, where they might fail. We also accustom the rest of the organization to realizing the criticality of timely, transparent communication.

By making communication integral to the crisis training regimen, we ensure that senior leadership understands the stress and special needs imposed by the news media and the public. As they work to manage the operational, fiscal and legal aspects of the situation, they also must realize the importance of identifying and training a spokesman or spokeswoman.

Response

Effective rehearsal leads to effective response. With fully vetted crisis communication plans and staff, the response to a crisis will be faster and more comprehensive.

Through the planning process, PR practitioners know the types of crises they might face, understand how and why the organization will respond the way it does and stand at the ready with fill-in-the-blank statements, pre-approved by the CEO, legal and



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other relevant key executives.

Faced with instant and intense media interest — whether traditional or social — organizations must be ready to deliver their own statements before the media finds some other, more accessible source.

Response connotes positive, active, controlled attention, focused on resolving the crisis as satisfactorily as possible, whereas

reacting to a crisis reveals an organization controlled by the crisis, tossed about by the gale, struggling to stay afloat. Response speaks to a plan and to a prepared and confident team. An organization simply reacting to whatever may happen next is adrift, with every chance of making its situation worse.

Recovery

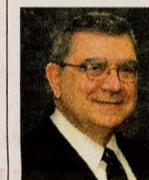
As the crisis winds down, recovery is the time to consider what lasting damage may have been done and what short- and long-term communication and outreach efforts may be needed to repair reputations, meet the needs of victims or defend against potential lawsuits. Recovery is the time to start reconstituting the resources needed to cope with the next crisis, and to also thank those who helped weather the crisis (an often overlooked task).

As we recover, we need to cap-

ture lessons learned and determine where our planning could have been better. This leads us right back into the recognition phase, because crisis management and crisis communication are never finished; it's just a matter of where you are in the cycle.

A final thought about crisis response formulas: Organizations often face more than one crisis at a time, in various stages of the crisis cycle. Resources are spread thin. Stress and lack of rest may make professionals sluggish or mistake-prone. A successful response to one form of crisis does not guarantee success in a different form.

Nonetheless, by focusing on the inherent opportunities and adopting the four Rs approach to crisis communication, we can seize the day and play to win. **T**



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The Art of Managing Workplace Conflict

By M.J. Clark, M.A., APR

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared on May 1 on PRSA's ComPREhension blog.

Have you ever watched a conflict between two other people at work and were reluctant to step in? Why? There are many possible reasons:

- You don't want to get in the middle of it.
- You're unsure of what to say.
- You don't want anyone to be upset with you.
- You're not a supervisor to either of them.
- You're afraid your approach will be too tough.

People may say they don't want to step in because they are afraid of how those in the conflict will respond. It is more often our lack of confidence in our ability to handle their response that we find uncomfortable.

We often think of conflict in negative terms, but conflict can be healthy. It can help us address problems before they escalate and benefit from the differences among

team members. The best place to start when managing conflict is with self-awareness, which leads to emotional intelligence. It is useful to ask yourself:

- How do I feel when I witness or engage in conflict — anxious, dismissive, angry, frustrated, terrified or avoidant?
- Am I open to thinking about conflict in a more productive way — as vital to forming and keeping healthy relationships?

- How do I currently handle conflict? Do I avoid it, try to control others, lecture people, say what I think others want to hear, judge or criticize others? Are there more productive ways for me to behave in conflict?

How we manage conflict has

to do with our preference for passive, assertive or aggressive behavior. Most people tend to be more comfortable with pas-

sive or aggressive behavior than assertive behavior.

Practicing assertive behavior over time will help us become better at managing conflict.

When we are under stress, we tend to fall back into the (unhelpful) behavior that we prefer. During these times, emotional intelligence becomes even more important. By learning techniques to harness the power of our thoughts and emotions, we can effectively navigate conflict.

Once you identify your current thoughts and behaviors, you may want to try more productive ones. To handle conflict effectively, challenge yourself to think in new ways that are just outside your comfort zone.

• Instead of feeling angry in a situation, think about feeling ener-

gized to take action.

• Instead of avoiding conflict, see it as healthy communication. You may decide to practice in a small way, such as telling someone in your family that you disagree with them and why. Slowly challenge yourself to say how you feel or what you think in a given situation, until you are comfortable practicing this in small ways at work too.

• If you are prone to lecturing, controlling or criticizing others in conflict, think about and show empathy, understanding and acceptance of other people's feelings. You may practice this by making an effort to listen more attentively to others before speaking.

• After each conflict, think about what you did well and what you would have done differently if you could do it over again. **T**



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