

Mastering Crisis Communications: A Blueprint for Effective Response

Tom Ormsby, APR

In today's fast-paced world, organizations must be prepared for unexpected crises that can impact operations, reputation, and stakeholder trust. A strong crisis communication plan is essential to navigating these challenges effectively. Success begins with a deep understanding of the organization, from operational processes and financial performance to governance, employee well-being, and stakeholder management. Organizational history, including past crises, also plays a critical role in shaping effective response strategies.

A well-integrated and tested crisis communication plan ensures that organizations are ready to act decisively. This plan should outline how crisis management aligns with corporate emergency response procedures, define mitigation strategies for potential scenarios, and establish clear roles for leadership, including the CEO, communications team, and stakeholder engagement lead. Effective execution requires an organized team responsible for internal and external communication, media relations, monitoring public sentiment, and ensuring compliance with legal considerations.

During a crisis, communication must prioritize those directly impacted, including employees, customers, business partners, and the surrounding community. Maintaining transparency and proactive engagement fosters trust and supports a coordinated response. Leadership also plays a crucial role in shaping public perception. When executives take charge in crisis communication, it signals accountability and reassures stakeholders. However, once a leader speaks publicly, they must be prepared to maintain consistent engagement and provide timely updates.

Once a crisis has been resolved, a thorough review should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the response. Organizations must analyze media and stakeholder perceptions, identify residual impacts, and refine their crisis communication strategy for future preparedness. Lessons learned should be documented, and necessary updates to protocols should be implemented to enhance resilience.

A strong crisis communication strategy is built on preparation, clarity, and decisive action. By proactively developing a plan, training leadership and employees, and prioritizing transparency, organizations can mitigate damage and maintain stakeholder trust. Crisis response is not just about managing the moment; it is about demonstrating organizational values through action. Planning ahead, communicating effectively, and adapting as necessary are the keys to successfully navigating any crisis.

--

The Canadian Farm Writers Federation and the Alberta Farm Writers' Association recently hosted a professional development session on Leading Communication in a Crisis. Tom Ormsby, APR (Accredited Public Relations) is a national and international award winner in communication and issues/crisis management. His career includes media, government, mining, defence contracting, and consulting, including almost 15 years with the iconic brand De Beers. Tom has also developed and delivered workshops on crisis management, crisis communications, and media training.

Throughout Tom's mining career, issue and reputation management was a critical skill called upon numerous times for the organization as they navigated global recessions, mass layoffs, road blockades,

community protests, wildfires threatening remote mine sites, corporate restructuring, and mine closures. While challenging, the resilience shown by the organization was founded in strong leadership prepared for difficult decisions and difficult conversations.

Tom is the Principal of Tom Ormsby Public Relations. He is also a Senior Advisor to Wesben Global, a consulting consortium that brings years of experience managing risk, strategy development, and impactful stakeholder relations across domestic and international markets for some of the largest companies and social-profit organizations around the world.