

How to Prepare for and Recover from Community Crisis

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Headlines are filled with towns dealing with crisis. Crises, man-made or natural, can strike at any time, and we are generally unprepared when they do, lacking comprehensive crisis plans to deal with them.

Moderators and Speakers

Panelist: Pamela Hylton, Assistant City Manager,
City of Richmond City Heights, Richmond
Heights, MO.

Panelist: Jerry Newfarmer, President and CEO,
Management Partners

Session Leader: Joyce Stille, Administrative
Officer, Town of Bolton, Bolton, CT.



WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Any situation that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupt operations, damage reputation and/or negatively impact the organization.



Types of crisis:

Natural disaster
Confrontation
Organizational misdeeds
Terrorist attack/man-made disaster

Technology disaster
Malevolence
Workplace violence
Rumors



Three elements common to crisis:

A threat to the organization

The element of surprise

A short decision time

Session will look at how we can be:

Well prepared for crisis

Ensure a rapid and adequate response to the crisis

Maintain clear lines of reporting and communication in the event of a crisis

Agreeing to rules for crisis termination

Able to respond to both the reality and perception of crisis



The Incident

- **Police shooting on August 9, 2014**
- **My role prior to incident:** Typical ACM duties - managed PR, HR, IT and Planning functions.
- **Crisis experience prior to incident:** Two tornadoes in Ferguson on 4/22/11 & 5/31/13. Both resulted in significant damage.

The Crisis

- Most crisis planning centered around natural disasters.
- During a natural disaster, people rush to help. In a man-made disaster, people rush to judgement.
- In the days following the incident, political figures at the local, state and federal level made statements highly critical of the City.

San Jose Bond Loss Episode

- Something might be wrong. Oops, it is.
- Reached out for help. Need for quick judgment of who's right, useful.
- Strategy for resolution.
- Going public – anticipate reactions/questions – get ready before you Go!
- Recriminations – who's responsible? Who gets disciplined? When?
- The inevitable Blue Ribbon Committee
- Working toward a long-term solution – the political/public sense that things are “fixed” so “it can never happen again.”

Crisis communications:

Anticipate crisis (vulnerability audit)

Have a plan

Identify crisis communications team

Identify and train spokesperson

Establish notification and monitoring systems

Identify and know our stakeholders (public/media, etc.)

Keep employees informed

Communicate with the public and media



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Develop a holding statement:

We have implemented our crisis plan, which places the highest priority on health and safety of our residents.

Our hearts and minds are with those who are in harms way, and hope that all are well.

We will be supplying additional information when it is available and posting it on our website.

Assess the crisis situation

Finalize and adopt key messages

Update early and often

Remember social media

Post-crisis analysis



Communicate with residents and business owners quickly, often, and in multiple ways.

- Traditional ways of communicating can quickly become disabled.
- Facebook and Twitter posts are useful but can be overwhelmed by trolls.
- Utilize robo-calling but need to get residents signed up prior to a crisis.
- Encourage residents and business owners to register on your website to receive alerts via e-mail or text.

Don't forget to keep your employees informed and make them feel safe.

- Keep an up-to-date after hours contact list for your employees.
- Tell them what's happening. They should not hear it on the news first.
- Walk around. Talk to them face to face.
- Make sure an employee assistance program is available for your employees and encourage them to use the resources available.

Keys to Coping

- Manage the message – communication is basic
- Anticipate the reactions of key audiences
- Anticipate what's coming next in the crisis
- Pay attention to the consequences organizationally

Ensure that you have ways to access important City information from outside City Hall.

- Have a backup plan for paying bills and payroll.
- Make sure network files are routinely backed up and stored off site.
- Consider using cloud-based applications and know how to access them from remote computers.

Hire an experienced public relations firm immediately.

- Onslaught of international media is overwhelming for small city staff.
- Choose one spokesperson who will stay on message.
- Recognize that media are more savvy than us.
- The lifespan of a story can and must be controlled.
- Communicate information about the incident as quickly as possible. Get the facts out there!

Don't underestimate the power of social media.

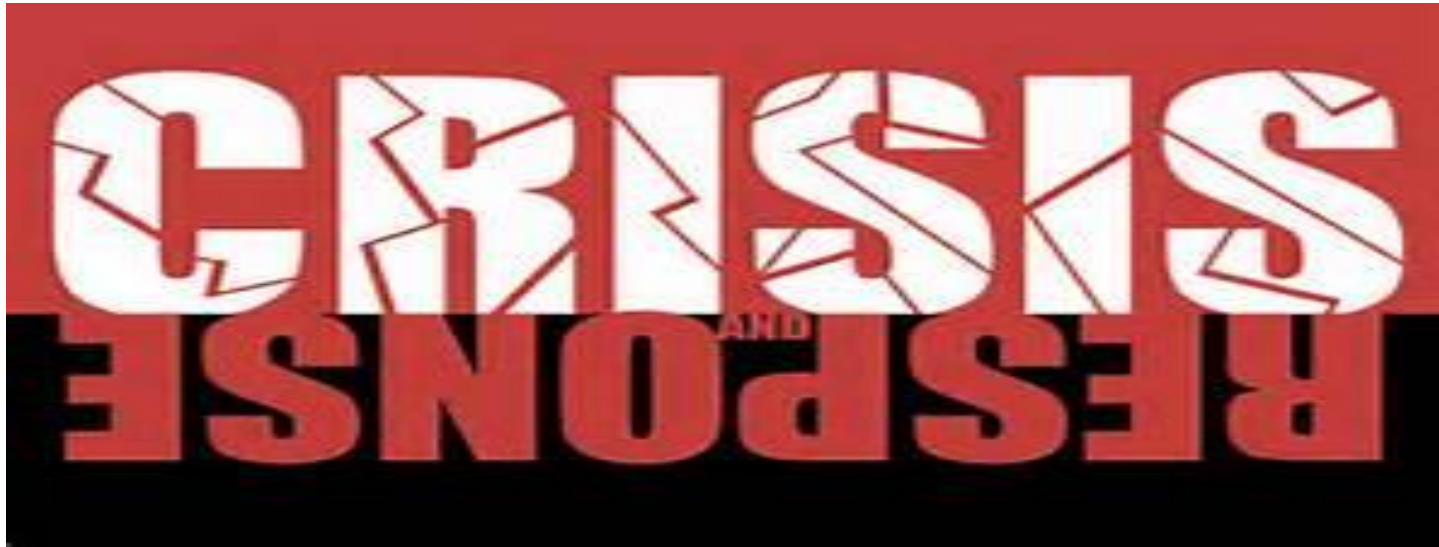
- You cannot control or respond to everything that is being said about the crisis on social media.
- You also cannot rely on social media alone to communicate your message.
- Rumors became fact and livestreamers were everywhere.
- Social media does not follow the rules of ethical journalism.

The City Manager cannot do everything.

- A crisis is too big for one person to solve. Communicate with your staff.
- Keep your ACM in the loop because you will need a break.
- Take care of yourself physically and emotionally.
- Seek help from EAP, clergy, and/or medical professionals.
- Remember that your family is experiencing the crisis along with you.



No organization is immune from crisis so we must all do our best to prepare.



Response actions include:

Crisis prevention	Crisis assessment
Crisis handling	Crisis termination

- *Needs to be quick (response 1st hour)

- *Needs to be accurate

- *Needs to be consistent

Stages of a Crisis

- It's like a runaway stagecoach ... out of control
- Four stages:
 - Problem Identification (prodromal stage)
 - Accute Crisis (OMG stage)
 - Chronic Crisis (the it won't go away stage)
 - Crisis Resolution (we're finally back to normal stage)

Crisis Prevention

- Risk Assessment
 - External sources of crisis
 - Internal sources of crisis
- Steps to consider
 - Create risk assessment team
 - Do your own operational scan

Summary

- The Upside: Every crisis contains the seeds of opportunities for improvement
- A crisis is the ultimate test of leadership. Get ready!

Questions/Comments?

Additional Information...





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