CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

Produce Marketing Association
Member Tool Kit

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Understanding the Basics

FOR PMA MEMBERS

If you already have crisis communications plan, use this toolkit to refine it. If you don't have a plan, use this toolkit to organize how your company will deal with a crisis situation — *before you are immersed in that crisis.*

And remember: Produce Marketing Association is here to help. We're an essential resource for members in crisis by providing, information, guidance and access to our in-house crisis management experts. Contact us if we can assist in your crisis communication planning or to help you manage your way through an actual crisis.

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BENEFITS OF PLANNING

There are two stories to every crisis:

1) The actual problem, and 2) how the company in crisis managed it.

Rather than putting your company's character in question with a slow or inept response to the problem, planning in advance for crisis situations will ensure it will be in the strongest possible position to handle a crisis and increase the odds that one component of the story about the crisis is about how well your company managed the difficult situation.

All organizations, no matter how truly noble their cause, eventually find themselves attacked. Yet there is a common misconception—often referred to as the "fairness fallacy"— that good deeds alone will safeguard a company from scrutiny.

Decision makers who align with the fairness fallacy often believe crisis communication planning is a waste of time; they feel their codes of conduct shield them from the crisis in the first place. Some even believe the vary act of developing a crisis plan implies some hidden wrongdoing. The biggest problem with this belief is that it often leaves companies unprepared or unable to effectively respond in times of crisis.

The benefits of having a crisis plan include:

- Potential crisis are addressed as soon as they become known.
- Where and when possible, problems are resolved before they grow into full-blown crises.
- Negative stakeholder (customers, consumers, investors, regulators) impacts are minimized.
- Your handling of the crisis is perceived to be swift, responsive, caring and professional.
- Closure is achieved as soon as possible.
- Reputation repair begins on a timely basis, and your company's good reputation is intact when the crisis subsides.
- Current and future employees remain proud to work at your company.

Plan Elements

There's no exclusively "right way" to prepare a crisis plan. Every company and organization is different, as are the challenges they face; however, there are core elements every plan should include:

- Crisis Team – Members, roles, responsibilities , contact information
- Crisis and Media Protocols – How the team will function, and how the company will interact with the press
- Crisis Scenarios and Responses – How your organization will respond to its most plausible and pressing potential crisis
- Communications Plans – Knowing how to quickly reach employees, suppliers, news media, government officials, allies, experts, the local community and other critical audiences.
- Resources: Fact sheets, press releases, Q&A, dark website, and other communication vehicles.

Crisis Communication Triggers

A fatal foodborne disease outbreak is traced back to your company's produce….

A hurricane devastates your suppliers…

Anti-GMO activists picket your stores…

Employees allege discrimination in the workplace…

Run-off from your pesticide applications are blamed for groundwater contamination…

A government regulator's inspection report is leaked to the press…

Your receptionist reports a called-in bomb scare…

These crises are clear examples, but crises come in all shapes and sizes and can grow quickly and out of control if not addressed. What started as a minor customer service issue can escalate and turn into a full blown, five-alarm crisis.

Watch out for these crisis communication triggers:

- Lawsuit (i.e., sexual harassment, wrongful termination, non-compete violations, etc.)
- Damaging Social Media Activity (i.e., in response to company initiatives, advocacy positions, etc.)
- Organized Events Led by Activists (i.e., picketing outside of the company headquarters)
- Public Criticism from Peer and/or Partner Organizations
- Leaked Internal Memo/Email (i.e., written by staff with damaging content)
- Disgruntled and Angry Employee
- Upset Customer and Accusations of Wrongdoing

Imagine for a minute that one customer takes their complaint to the top and enlists supporters along the way. But they don't stop there. They take the complaint to the media and now the media are calling you to comment.

Your customer service issue just morphed into a crisis.

Planning in Advance

ASSEMBLE A CRISIS TEAM

Definition and role of the team

Establishing a Crisis Team is an important task for any organization. The team will convene when a crisis situation occurs and is critical to managing and resolving the situation quickly and responsibly.

By creating a Crisis Team that has the authority to respond on behalf of the management, the board, etc., the approval process is streamlined; ensuring unified messaging and reducing response times. This helps prevent a situation from gaining momentum and unfolding in the public eye. Ideally, you will want to assemble your team far ahead of an actual crisis, so you are fully organized in advance and can be prepared to quickly determine a course of action, should one occur.

Assemble your team

Your Crisis Team should include senior staff members, representing the functions and responsibilities critical to managing a crisis, who are able to work quickly and can craft strategy and responses without the need for approval.

Consider including the following people on your team:

- CEO/President – If the CEO/President is not on the Crisis Team, your company will need to be explicit about when and how crisis decisions are escalated to senior management.
- Marketing Team Member
- Public Relations (PR) Team Member
- Legal Team Member
- Human Resources Team Member
- Spokesperson (who will be charged with speaking to the media)
- Crisis Communication Consultant
- Board Liaison (if appropriate and in-line with your current staff and board leadership structure)

Add "subject-matter experts" as needed

Not everyone who has a role or contribution to make in addressing a crisis needs to become a member of the Crisis Team. Depending on the situation, you may want to enlist individuals (or groups) that have a specialized knowledge or skill. It is useful to identify subject-matter experts in advance, relative to your company and the potential risks you face. Potential subject-matter experts include:

- Scientific/technical experts
- Grief counselors
- Regulatory affairs professionals
- Lobbyists
- Labor negotiation experts
- Security professionals
- IT professionals/forensic IT experts
- Communications/public relations consultants

Define roles of the team members

Once the team is formed, the group will need to identify a team leader and discuss ways to define roles, particularly as it relates to communicating with internal and external stakeholders. Your PR member on the team should take the lead on developing materials and messages in response to particular crisis situations, vetting media requests and presenting specific PR and media strategies. The other members of the group will be instrumental in providing feedback, answering operational issues and distributing the information to internal audiences such as staff, members, management, customers and other stakeholders.

Hold regular meetings

The Crisis Team should meet once a quarter to discuss upcoming events and other instances in which a crisis could occur. The group should discuss how the various situations could unfold, be interpreted and then resolved. This meeting will also include an update on incidents, events and media mentions that did not escalate to a crisis but were being monitored by the group.

Gather contact information

Crises can occur at any time, day or night, weekdays or weekends. It's important that you all have each other's contact information for both work and home in the event that the team needs to be quickly activated.

Crisis Team Contact List

It's critical to activate your Crisis Team rapidly. Once you've identified those key players in a crisis response strategy, it's important to have their contact information easily accessible.

Name____

Title____

Work phone____

Cell phone____

Home phone____

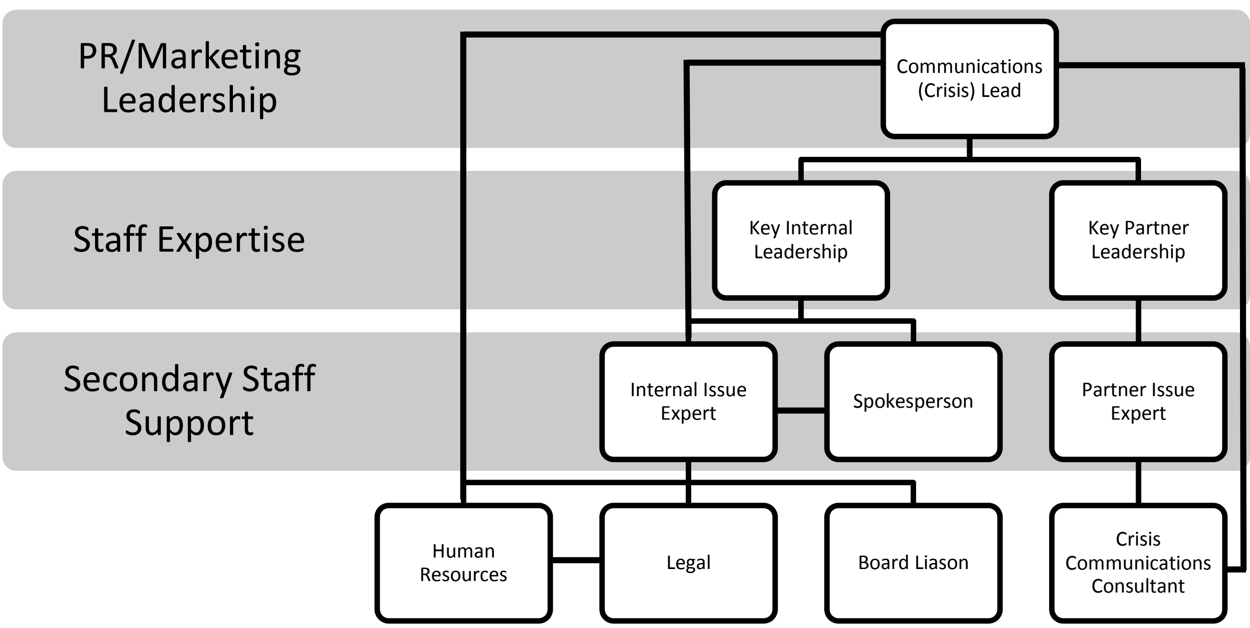
Work E-mail____

Personal E-mail____

Response Role: ____

Contact Matrix

Be sure to make clear team-member roles and lines of communication during a crisis alert. Determine a point person —often the PR or Marketing team member — who convenes the team, provides the agenda and facilitates meetings.



Conduct crisis drills

Conduct crisis drills on a regular basis to ensure your team is familiar with the process and ensure that it is running well. This will keep everyone on the team well prepared and guarantee that you're ready to go when a crisis arises.

MAP YOUR ISSUES

The best managed crisis is the one that never happens. It is either avoided altogether (thanks to advance planning and preemptive action) or is swiftly resolved in its earliest stages and never develops into a full-blown crisis. There are three main steps to crisis mitigation:

- Issue identification – Brainstorm potential issues, controversies and crisis directly relevant to the produce industry and your company
- Issue prioritization - Prioritize the issues identified and focus your efforts on the top 5 to 10 that matter most. Each issue should be rated Low, Medium or High on both Impact and Urgency.
- Strategy development and action planning – With potential crisis identified, the next step is to plan for them by:
    - Thinking through highest priority, immediate actions
    - Identifying the fact-finding steps and how you will confirm these reports
    - Identifying needed expertise or resources you may not currently have
    - Understanding the types of messages you will need to develop
    - Identifying priority audiences, who will reach them and how

Communication/Audience Matrix

A useful tool to use during strategy development, as well as during an actual crisis, is the following Communications/Audience Matrix. While not complex, this tool doe expedite the basic process by making sure you are reaching out to all the key people, with the right message, and in the best format. It can also be used during a crisis to track progress and reference when reporting back to the Crisis Team and senior management.

Audience	Key Messages	Tool/Means	Responsibility	Status
Consumers				
Customers				
Regulators				
News Media				
Employees				
Community				
Suppliers				
Investors				

Other stores/outlets				
Trade Associations				

Issues Management Matrix

You can also utilize an Issues Management Matrix to identify which of the four broad actions you can take (ignore, react, participate or initiate), and you can develop the appropriate response for each issue.

URGENCY ↑ / IMPACT →	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
HIGH	Participate	Participate/ Initiate	Initiate
MEDIUM	React	Participate	Participate/ Initiate
LOW	Ignore	React	Participate

Low Priority | Medium Priority | High Priority

MAP YOUR AUDIENCES

In any crisis situation, communication is the cornerstone and foundation of resolving the issue. Stakeholders need to be informed of crisis developments to prevent unnecessary panic and the spread of misinformation. Identifying various audiences ahead of time will ensure successful distribution of a consistent message.

The make-up and nature of the audience will help dictate the varied platform by which you will deliver the communication message. It is important to note that to be successful, multiple communication vehicles must be utilized.

Internal Audiences

- ✓ Staff

- ✓ Board of Directors
- ✓ Select Leadership and Committees
- ✓ Foundation Staff, Leadership and Volunteers
- ✓ Member Companies
- ✓ Sponsors
- ✓ Partner Organizations
- ✓ Brand Advocates
- ✓ Third-Party Experts

External Audiences

- ✓ Media
- ✓ Public (i.e., consumers)
- ✓ Peer Organizations
- ✓ Government Regulatory Agencies (federal, state, county, local, territorial & tribal)
- ✓ Elected Officials

Make a list of your audiences ahead of time. Break them into internal and external. How you respond to each will be different.

DEVELOP A DARK WEBSITE

A "dark site" is a website or series of web pages that have been prepared in advance and are ready to be published quickly to the internet in the event of a crisis. Their main purpose is to keep various audiences and stakeholders informed and become the hub for all official communications related to a crisis. The site will remain "dark" and unavailable to the public until appropriate.

The way in which the crisis situation unfolds will ultimately determine the type and variety of resources that will be added to the site; however, you can anticipate many basic questions that the consumers and media will want answered.

Top 10 resources for any dark site

1. **Instructions**: Instructions to everyone affected by the crisis clearly articulating what they should or should not do. On **the technical side,** this includes putting a system in place that allows you to quickly and easily keep the site up-to-date without the need to get your agency or IT department involved.

2. **Timeline**: Description accompanied by a visual timeline of the specific steps that are being taken to get the situation back to normal.

3. **Backgrounders**: Background information that helps promote clear understanding of the situation (e.g., cause, nature, likely impact and what is being done to eradicate or deal with the matter at hand.)

4. **Media Statements**: Official, public, media statement(s) describing the crisis event and the response (a video message may be appropriate).

5. **Facts and Statistics**: General information about food safety, recalls, food science, GMOs, etc. This information can be utilized by members of the media during the heat of the crisis issue.

6. **Media Contact Information**: Contact information for the media point person for all inquiries. Streamlining the requests to one contact will ensure consistency and maximize responsiveness.

7. **Contact Information for Spokespeople**: If appropriate, list contact information for additional experts and organizations that can be contacted for comment and/or industry perspective.

8. **Regular Updates**: Reserve an area within the dark site for regular updates, so the public can see the responsiveness over time. Consider creating an RSS feed, email subscription services or micro-blogging channels (Twitter) where the public and members of the media can be informed of updates on a regular basis.

9. **General Information and Basic Q&A**: To address the misperceptions of the produce industry and/or your company upfront, craft language in question-answer format that succinctly addresses the issue at hand in layman's terms.

10. **Reports and Important Links**: Compiling a list of reports from third parties (e.g., industry research) and links that are also accessible to the public will show that the company is informed and is a resource for consumers.

Other resources to consider as the crisis develops include:

a. **Infographic:** An infographic that visually represents the company, its products and its benefit to families is shareable across social media networks. It is also much more appealing and more widely read than words on a screen.

b. **Video Address**: A personal video address may be necessary should the situation escalate. This shows the company is personally involved and concerned about the matter at hand and is doing all that it can to resolve the issue.

c. **Myth vs. Fact**: To ensure the media are reporting accurately on the crisis, a myth vs. fact section is a valuable resource to debunk rumors and misperceptions.

d. **Launch a Pay-Per-Click Campaign**: Consider a keyword strategy and even PPC (pay-per-click) campaign to push people to the dark site from search engines (if possible develop a list of search keywords before a crisis hits).

Whatever information you decide to include – it should always be focused on the essential facts and could consist of a couple of web pages. The design should be clean and simple, so the sole focus is on the information and is not seen as a marketing piece.

IDENTIFY RESPONSE TACTICS

The Crisis Team will convene during any crisis to determine the level of response, the message and how to deliver it, all which will vary depending upon the crisis. Knowing the various options and communication strategies ahead of time will allow the group to work quickly. Internal and external communication efforts will need to be aligned and synchronized.

Below are samples of internal and external crisis communication strategies:

Internal strategies

- Emergency all staff meeting/training
- Emergency board of directors meeting/training
- Written message/letter to members
- Video address to members
- WebEx online meeting/video conference with members
- Staff Q&A document and script
- Board Q&A document and script
- Resend media policies to all staff

External strategies

- Media interviews (e.g. TV, radio, remote, etc.)
- Issue a statement
- Issue a press release
- Create a video address
- Arrange a press conference
- Offer a media exclusive

- Place an op-ed
- Host virtual and/or in person town halls
- Partner with partner organization on announcement
- Engage and activate brand advocates and third-party expert network
- Social media channel-specific approach and response
- Brand listening strategy and response
- Activate dark website (include Q&A, real-time developments, press release, messages, etc.)

CONSIDER SOCIAL MEDIA

While social media continues to evolve and grow, basic crisis communications practices apply the same to these modern communications platforms. Nonetheless, social media's real-time nature and ability to widely reach audiences earns your company's social media team a key roles in your crisis communications. It's important to remember that social media has the power to fan the flames of crisis or douse them on the spot.

- **Be careful.** Social media can easily fuel the fire. If it weren't for social platforms that allow us to record our every thought and every little thing that happens, many crises would be averted in the first place. Be sure to have clear employee rules and training for social media engagement.

- **A place on the Crisis Team**. Due to the real-time nature of social media, your social media manager is highly likely to be the person who spots the crisis on the horizon. If not a team member, educate your social media manager about what constitutes a crisis, what your company's top potential crisis are, and the proper protocol for alerting the Crisis Team of possible concerns.

- **Supporting role.** Social media is not the lead communication channel during a crisis, but instead plays a supporting role to PR and corporate communications. Social media's main jobs are sounding the alarm, informing the communications strategy, and then informing the community with that message.

- **Be relevant and be where your crisis is.** If the crisis initiated on Facebook, respond first on Facebook before sending out a press release. If something is happening on Twitter, respond via Twitter first before circling back to other platforms.

- **Establish proper tone.** Craft platform-appropriate messages.

- **Identify influencers.** All people on social media are not the same. Make sure you identify which users are most likely to impact the conversation. The majority of journalists, for example, get news from Twitter before verifying the source of their stories.

- **Don't react impulsively.** While social media normally encourages people to contact or talk about your company, in crisis situations it's more about delivering a strategic, broadcasted message than it is about encouraging dialogue. Be careful not to respond off the cuff to negative or misinformation. Instead, stick to the crisis plan and key messages, and consult the Crisis Team whenever the strategic response is unclear. It's also a good idea to stop any automated messages normally scheduled.

- **Be expeditious.** Crisis in social media can metastasized fast, so act quickly and strategically instead of waiting and seeing what will transpire.

- **Don't argue or delete comments.** During a crisis, people inevitably get fired up. Handling negative comments poorly will only do further damage at a time when your company's reputation is already vulnerable.

- **Listen.** Faithfully monitor social media during a crisis. Because social media platforms are much like pressure relief valves — they allow people to vent in a space that you control. Social media allows you to track the conversations about the crisis and also serves as an early detection system for new developments of the crisis. Sometimes your social platforms even allow customers an official place to come to your defense.

- **Be honest and transparent.** Once you lose the credibility it is really tough to get it back.

Social Media Checklist

If you answer NO to any of the following, you may need to review your social media strategies.

1. *Do you have a company-wide social media policy?*
2. *Do employees pledge to adhere to the social media policy?*
3. *Do you have an employee monitoring social media in real time?*
4. *Do you have an employee/agency monitoring social media during off hours?*
5. *Do you have protocol for responding to social media posts? Both positive and negative?*
6. *Do you ensure your company's social media efforts are not operating in a vacuum?*
7. *Is social media included in all conversations related to communication strategy?*
8. *Are all social media inquiries (posts related to customer service) answered within 24 hours?*

Managing a Crisis

THE FIRST STEPS IN ANY CRISIS

No matter how big or small the crisis is, following these steps will help you control the process and be certain your addressing priorities and not missing the basics that may be easy to overlook amid the urgency.

1. **Convene the Crisis Team and alert senior management.** Inform and assemble the Crisis Team, including necessary subject-matter experts, as quickly as possible. Alert senior management.

2. **Get the facts**. Although it may sound simple, the answers to Who, What, When, Why and Where will give you the foundation for creating your response strategy.

3. **Determine impact.** After gathering the facts, determine if the situation fits the definition of a crisis – will someone or something be harmed?

4. **Immediately address safety and security issues.** Take the appropriate actions necessary to protect the safety and well-being of your employees, consumers and guests — secure or evacuate the facility, cease shipping or selling of product, contact law enforcement or other appropriate emergency-response officials.

5. **Inform internal, employee audiences.** Don't neglect employees. Make sure they're informed and understand the company's commitment to corporate responsibility.

6. **Call a time-out.** When a crisis hits, it's easy to get overwhelmed and inadvertently convey a sense of chaos. Calling a time-out is sometimes necessary to ensure the information you are providing is as accurate as it is timely. It requires a statement in the form of asking media (online and off) for the courtesy of more time to ensure that they get the information they need.

7. **Commit to a schedule.** Be willing to also offer specific times when more information will be available. For example: "In light of the recent events, our team requests a brief opportunity to gather the appropriate information. We will have more to share by [date/time]."

    This request does two things:

    It allows your audiences to know that you acknowledge the issue at hand and are working to resolve it.

It gives you until that time to develop additional information, build internal consensus on a response strategy, and prove your desire to remain transparent.

Be sure to stick to whatever time frame you provide. If you do, that could be what people report as so-called progress.

8. **Create response strategy.** Align and synchronize internal and external communication efforts.

9. **Create communications.** Develop and approve messaging and other communications; determine communication channels.

10. **Distribute messaging and other materials.**

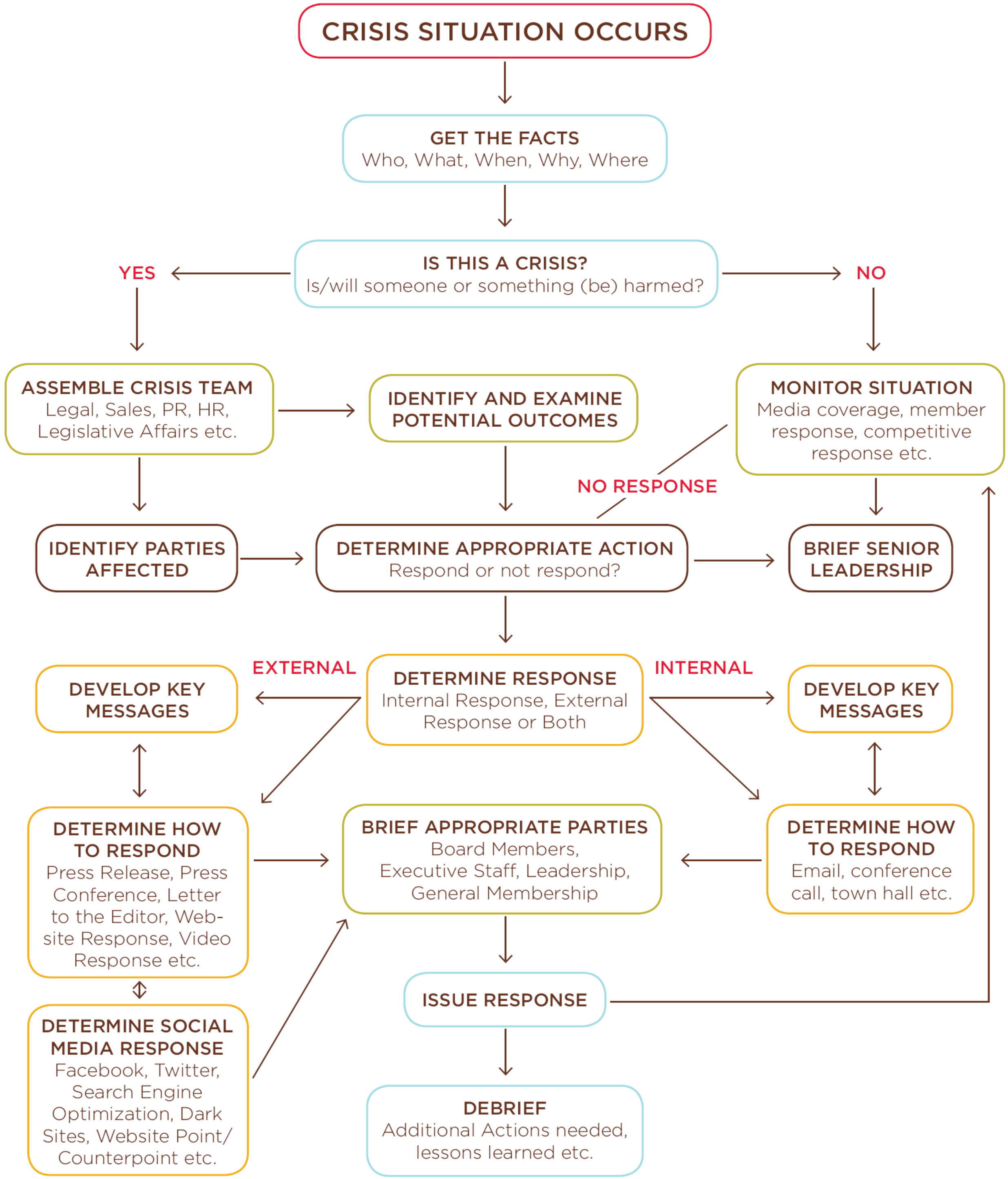
11. **Consider prompt outreach to appropriate government officials.** The decision whether to contact state or federal officials (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) can be complex and nuanced. It is important to include your attorney or other highly experienced person in the process. However, from a crisis management standpoint, it is almost always better to take the initiative and immediately put the public's welfare above all else.

12. **Respond to the media**. Determine whether proactive or reactive media relations are the best approach. This may change over time. Manage media calls and interviews. Develop a list of all reporters who contact you. Return calls on a priority basis, and/or at least provide your statement. Do not verbally depart from your initial statement. Ensure that spokespersons are adequately prepared to do media interviews.

13. **Monitor and monitor.** Remember, while you build a response, you should continue to have your staff or team monitoring online chatter, blogs and social media channels. Update and release information on all channels, so it is visible. Do not allow harmful misinformation reported by the media or communicated by credible individuals go unchallenged.

14. **Debrief/analysis.** Learn from the experience in order to be better prepared to handle the next crisis and potentially avoid future crises.

Crisis Flow Chart



Internal Crisis Checklist

1. Get the facts – Who, what, when, why, where ☐
2. Determine if this is a crisis ☐
3. Gather necessary materials ☐
    a. Emergency contact list
    b. Definition of responsibilities
    c. Corporate information
4. Convene the Rapid Response Team ☐
5. Create response strategy (internal and external) ☐
6. Develop and approve messaging and other materials ☐
7. Determine communication channels ☐
10. Distribute messaging and other materials ☐
11. Respond to media interviews ☐
12. Send updated information to audiences as necessary ☐
13. Monitor media ☐
14. Debrief/analysis ☐

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO MEDIA

A disciplined approach to managing the news media is critical to crisis-management success. Here are tips for interfacing with media during a crisis.

- **Corral inquires.** All media calls or emails, no exceptions, are managed through your PR office or designated spokesperson(s). Anyone else receiving a media inquiry must send that call or e-mail to your PR office or designated spokesperson(s). Be sure all company employees, especially those interfacing with the public and answering phones, are instructed to refer all media calls to the designated spokesperson.

- **Document.** Every call or media inquiry should be recorded in a log-entry that documents:
    - Date and time
    - Reporter's name, affiliation and contact information
    - Story, story angle, questions and requests
    - Deadline
    - Who the inquiry was referred to or handled by
    - Comments

- **Always respond.** Regardless of how credible your company is or blown out of proportion you think the issue is, crisis situations are not the time to ignore the media. While not all aspects can be controlled, tell your story and have a say in how your company is portrayed.

- **Respond promptly.** All media calls should be returned promptly—both trade and consumer—although you do not have to take the call until you are prepared. Get the questions and take some time to prepare your answers. Call the media back at an agreed-upon time.

- **Know who you're dealing with.** If you don't know the reporter, make sure you first find out who they are and what publication/outlet they work for, and determine the nature of their call before answering their questions.

- **Follow the plan.** During the interview, the spokesperson should stick closely to the key messages and "agreed-to" answers, even if they become repetitive. The spokesperson will not speculate, will not make up answers, and will not go "off the record." If they don't have the answers to the question, they will say so and promise to call the reporter back.

- **Stick to your expertise.** Do not venture into areas where you do not have expertise. Never guess or speculate.

- **Avoid debates.** If the format is a talk show or in-studio interview, make sure to have assurances that you will not be confronted by activists or have to debate someone.

- **Conduct an off-camera briefing.** If it is a television reporter, you may want to brief them off-camera to educate them on the key facts prior to being interviewed on camera.

- **Do not accept or agree to review photos, documents or videotapes while you are on camera or being interviewed.** Gain assurances this will not happen before you grant an interview. Ask in advance if there's anything that you will be asked to respond to.

- **Set time limits.** Only by setting and insisting on time-limits to an interview is it possible to deliver key messages and avoid problems. Fifteen to 20 minutes is plenty of time to provide to a reporter in a crisis situation.

- **Control press access to the facility.** Be very specific and authoritative in indicating what television crews can and cannot videotape.

- **Have an intermediary with you.** Bring a colleague with you who is assertive and knowledgeable of the news media who can intervene if the reporter attempts to deviate from the agreed-to ground rules.

DEVELOPING GOOD MESSAGES

Knowing how to communicate effectively during a crisis requires a good understanding of the news media, a bit of human psychology and a lot of common sense. The following guidelines offer tips for developing good messages.

- **Keep it brief.** Avoid excessive explanations and lengthy detail. Be succinct and concrete in addressing the public's concerns immediately.

- **Show compassion.** If people have been harmed or inconvenienced, show that you have a heart and care about others.

- **Demonstrate progress, be solution-oriented.** Most people can forgive a mistake or a situation that was beyond your control, but they'll become outraged if you appear to be defensive, stonewalling or too slow to respond. Let them know you're in control of the situation and share the basics of how you are trying to resolve the issue.

- **Look for ways to give consumers some control over the situation.** The greater the sense of control people have over a situation the less alarmed and outraged they will be. For example, the public is less concerned about pesticide residues if they know that simply rinsing with water helps to remove whatever minute levels of residue remain on the produce.

- **Identify product.** If it is a product recall, provide product identification numbers or expiration dates so the consumers can check for themselves to see if their products at home are affected.

- **Never speculate.** Never guess about the outcome of a situation or engage in hypothetical discussions about the future. Stick with what you are certain of right now.

- **Don't over-promise.** Don't lose credibility by publicly promising that "everything is under control" or "we're confident that no one was injured," unless you are absolutely, 100 percent sure.

- **Don't repeat or introduce a negative.** Don't say, "This product won't cause cancer." Instead say, "The product is safe and healthful."

- **Never attach another company to your crisis.** Do not try to implicate other companies in your crisis.

- **Challenge misinformation.** Too often the corporate tendency is not to further drive the story by responding to misinformation. While it is a judgement call, do not allow false and incendiary claims, especially in news articles, go unchallenged. Set the record straight. Debunk phony allegations and inaccuracies.

- **Skip jargon and speak plainly.** Be mindful to avoid technical and industry jargon, as well as acronyms that the lay public will not understand. For example, don't tell people about your HAACP policies and systems; tell them you have practices in place to prevent problems before they occur.

- **Recognize vulnerable audiences.** The news media, activists and the public will play up any problem that may be especially harmful to children, pregnant women, the elderly, and the ill or disabled. Be sure to accommodate those audiences as best as possible and address them in your messages as appropriate.

- **Stress benefits.** The public is often willing to accept some risk if they understand there are important benefits associated with the product, service or situation. For example, while tiny trace-residues of pesticides pose an extremely small, theoretical health risk, the cancer-deterring benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables are far more significant.

- **Cite credible experts and references.** It's often good to back up your claims and facts with references to credible, independent sources like the Food and Drug Administration, American Medical Society, local police or a respected scientist.

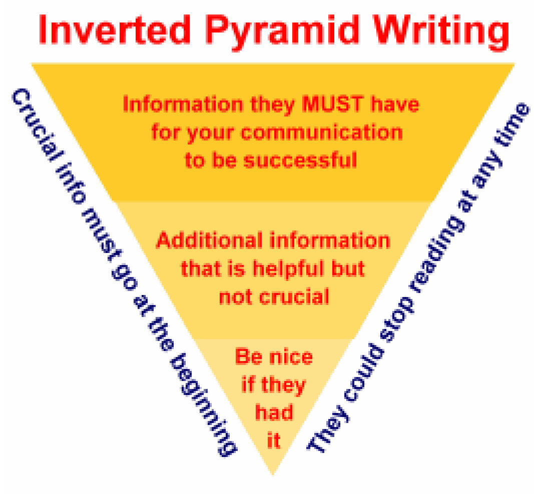
- **Apologize and take responsibility without caveat.** Apologizing for a crisis situation can be extremely powerful and is sometimes a necessity. But it should be done only when you are clearly at fault and in careful consultation with your legal team. If you do decide a public apology is in order, don't overly qualify, parse your statement or it will come across as half-hearted and may even inflame the situation. Keep it simple, pure and genuine. Then focus on the solution.

- **"For more information…"** In many crisis situations you'll want to be the primary source of information. In others, you will want to direct people to other trusted sources. Your messages should include instructions of where people can go if they want to learn more or stay abreast of the situation. If there are health risks or exposures involved, it's usually best to refer concerned individuals to their doctor.

PRESS RELEASE 101

Inverted Pyramid Style

Basic journalism teaches us that when writing a news article, the most important information should go at the beginning of the story and is subsequently followed up by less critical information. This is known as Inverted Pyramid Style writing. It's a fantastic guide for how to structure information in your press releases.



Elements to a press release

When drafting a press release response for a media inquiry there are several important elements to consider:

1. **Proximity -** Does the story involve or impact the local community? Does it involve the entire nation? Knowing exactly who your press release is targeted to can help you craft a tighter response.

2. **Impact -** What is the consequence? Transparency and honesty are the best policy in a crisis situation. If there will be a large impact, address it – don't tip toe around it.

3. **Prominence –** Just how far does your crisis reach within your industry network? Could you include statements and information from partners in your value chain to better address the crisis at hand? Communicating that you and your partners are working together toward a solution provides a united front and shows commitment toward a resolution that is best for everyone, not just your own interests.

4. **Solution –** Emphasize your plans for working toward a resolution to the issue and share that with your audience. Promise to provide updates as they are available.

5. **Emotion –** Be human in your response. Understand and be sensitive to the emotions that are involved with the crisis at hand.

Sample Press Release Structure

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Media Contact
Organization
Phone
Email

CITY, STATE (Month, DD, YYYY) – Compelling lead that points to the subject of the press release. Who, What, where, when and how.

Quote or statement from leadership regarding the issue that addresses human element and provides solution.

Additional facts.

Planned follow up

Other resources for more information

Boilerplate on your organization

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