

THE CRISIS BRIEF

Crisis communications documents can be lengthy. I found it helpful to distill the lengthy document into a brief one page and post it electronically and on phones for portability.

I. *What's our first move?*

Before initiating crisis posture, determine whether there is an actual crisis and which type of crisis:

1. Threat to life/nature: natural and human made disasters
2. Threat to corporation (entity) when the current situation endangers brand, affects how the entity serves customers and works with staff, suppliers, etc.

A threat to life crisis is also a threat to the entity; where as a threat to the entity doesn't often result in a threat to life.

II. *Whom do we call first?*

This depends upon the nature of the crisis. If the crisis is a threat to life and time to act is critical then begin by calling emergency services before contacting individuals within the company.

The threat to entity crisis is less time sensitive, contact your department head who will determine the timeline for contacting others within entity.

Your list of "in order of persons to contact" names and their contact numbers includes codes.

III. *What is the crisis?*

Describe the situation using the briefing or information note style.

This summary of the current situation begins with a brief background (especially useful if ongoing or a repeating situation) then answer the "W5+" "who, what, where, when, why and how it happened /how to solve.

Brevity is key – just relevant facts – don't superimpose emotions (depending upon the nature of the crisis, there will be plenty of emotion – don't add to it)

IV. *Who is primary contact for the media? Who speaks about the crisis?*

The designated media spokesperson depends upon the nature of the crisis.

Usually the communications department has a primary spokesperson. However, the more probable the loss of life, the broader the impact, the higher up the leadership chain in the entity. Media training for all seniors executives is key.

V. *What to do about the crisis?*

Not every crisis requires a public response. Not every entity wants to make a crisis public. Which direction to take will depend upon the entity's corporate culture and the type of crisis.

My professional stance is to get in front of situations. A thoughtful, well-written media release, tweet, posting on the website and Facebook page are always good choices.

VI. *What is the message?*

The message depends upon the crisis.

For Threat to life, voicing concern without culpability requires advanced preparation and tact. This is where advance crisis communications planning pays dividends. In the heat of a crisis, a few well-worded, sincere phrases may lessen post crisis damage. Conversely, thoughtless or reckless words can lengthen the crisis and increase post crisis litigation and damage.

A well-prepared, well thought out crisis communications plan includes phrasing guidelines for all types of crisis and provides media training for all senior executives.