



Crisis Communications

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CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS 101

Many small businesses don't have a plan for handling crisis communication. At MPWRSource, we are planners. [Our plans have plans](#). But how do you plan for the unexpected? Is there a team in place to react to a crisis event? It won't always be Covid-19, but we have hurricanes and other disasters that occur with greater frequency. It is a guarantee that more hardships will happen. (Of course, let us hope on a much smaller scale.) Through this crisis, we are learning what to do in future crises. With that in mind, it is important to ask,

“What can we do to be better prepared?”

There are three important things we want to highlight in terms of crisis communication.

1. Communicate clearly, frequently, and authentically.

Transparency and honesty are always key. In a crisis, everyone looks for a leader who can communicate effectively, honestly, and with humble authority.

In light of this, make sure when you are communicating to your internal staff, customers, patients, or clients, that you do not try to portray to know everything. Do not feel like you must be the expert in everything. You are not! None of us are. And people know this. Pretending to have all the answers will build distrust. After all, a jack of all trades is a master at nothing.

2. Communicate your purpose.

This enables everyone to know what they are to be doing throughout the crisis with well-defined goals. It not only empowers you and your employees, but those you serve as well.

In a crisis, things feel chaotic. The struggle is that everyone wants to gain a little bit of control. People want to feel like they have control over something. That is why we have [no more toilet paper](#)! Because we will CONTROL THE HECK OUT OF OUR BATHROOMS!!!

As an effective leader, we need to give those we work with their control. Helping those you work with define their purpose within a crisis will bring peace of mind. Of course, there is going to be stress and depression, but a small sense of control will ease that stress a bit.

“Helping those you work with define their purpose within a crisis will bring peace of mind.”

3. Take this opportunity to build tomorrow's leaders today.

Through a crisis, you will see how people react in the face of adversity. You will see within your ranks who rises to the occasion—take advantage of that moment. This is your time to really see who your true leaders are. Empower your team members to use their gifts in arenas they may not have had access to earlier. Remember when we spoke about granting control? This is a time to extend control to those who have risen to the occasion. This is not a time for micromanaging.

By authentically addressing problems, defining roles, and empowering team members to use their gifts effectively, you will be able to meet any crisis head on. It is also important to carry these lessons learned with you once stasis has returned. Crisis communication is difficult, but it is also an extraordinary opportunity that truly allows everyone to be their best selves. It is during a crisis that we [discover there have superheroes among us all along.](#)

CHAPTER ONE: HAVE A PLAN

The main objective of crisis communications is to respond appropriately and promptly to maintain confidence and minimize damage.

During the Coronavirus Crisis, when you thought of crisis communications, who did you think of? Did you think of the U.S. President or your state governor giving updates on COVID-19 and stay in place orders? Why do you think the communications from these offices were frequent? Did you think the communications were necessary? Did you think that they were “winging it”?

By communicating daily updates about the COVID-19 crisis and stay at home orders, our government officials were attempting to maintain confidence that the government is doing all it can to assist us. Additionally, by communicating frequently the conditions of the stay at home orders, they were trying to minimize the damage of the crisis, and, in turn, minimize the amount of fatalities.

To fully understand effective communication during a crisis, let us first examine the meaning of the word crisis.

What is a crisis?

A crisis usually entails an unpredictable event that can cause undesirable results or damage. The COVID-19 global pandemic certainly fits the definition of a crisis. Anything that disrupts operations of a business, organization, or government qualifies as a crisis—be it a natural disaster or of a financial, personnel, organizational, or technological nature.

“A crisis usually entails an unpredictable event that can cause undesirable results or damage.”

What is the main objective of crisis communications?

Frequent communication creates trust. We have all been in a relationship where the other party just will not open up about a problem. When that happens, we create our own narrative as to what the problem is. And let's be honest, that narrative is usually far worse than the real issue. Therefore, you want to control the narrative, disallowing others to come up with their own narrative—like conspiracy theories. It is best to communicate the facts that you know as you know them. This establishes trust.

What is a crisis communications plan?

According to [Deloitte research](#), “80% of organizations worldwide have had to mobilize their crisis management teams at least once in the past two years. In particular, cyber and safety incidents have topped companies' crises (46 and 45%, respectively).”

We know that most businesses will face a crisis within the next two years, outside of COVID-19. Knowing that the odds are great that a crisis will occur within every two years, it is alarming that only one in four businesses have a crisis communications plan. You will not know what crises you will face. And face them you will. However, you can prepare for one when inevitably one strikes.

“Only one in four businesses have a crisis communications plan.”

A crisis communications strategy entails:

- **Assembling a Crisis Communications Team**
- **Identifying Key Spokespeople**
- **Identify Stakeholders**
- **Identify Potential Crises in Advance**
- **A Crisis Response Plan**
- **Notification Systems**
- **Monitoring Programs**
- **Developing “Holding Messages” and Scripts**
- **An opportunity to learn for future crises**

Assembling a Crisis Communications Team

A Crisis Communications Team is usually led by the CEO, a public relations executive, and legal counsel. Senior executives, which are division leaders, also comprise the Crisis Communications Team.

Identify Key Spokespeople

You should identify potential spokespeople for your business. You can identify potential spokespeople in your organization by determining the subject matter experts. You may categorize subject matter experts based on the divisions of your organization. These spokespeople should be trained in advance. They should be aware of all the different channels of communications, both internal and external, that you need to use.

Identify Stakeholders

Make sure you have a complete and up to date database of internal and external stakeholders. During a crisis, you need to make sure that you can communicate the exact messages that you want them to hear and potentially repeat to other individuals and media outlets.

Identify Potential Crises in Advance

The Crisis Communications Team should identify potential threats based on an organization's vulnerabilities. By identifying these threats, some crises may be avoidable. If not, consider possible responses and best and worst case scenarios. For example, some possible crisis scenarios can include security breach, product failure, natural disaster, financial crisis, workplace violence, and environmental crises. Addressing possible crises, the next step is to evaluate some possible scenarios with your team and record them in a document.

“The Crisis Communications Team should identify potential threats based on an organization’s vulnerabilities.”

Crisis Response Plan

A Crisis Communication Response Plan is a plan you can follow when a crisis occurs. This plan should include the following:

- Event name
- Communication goal
- Target audiences
- What happened?
- Which credible information sources confirmed?
- What additional facts are needed about the event, for perspective?
- When did it occur?
- Who is/was involved?
- How did it happen?
- What is currently being done.

Notification Systems

Establish the best channels of communication that you will use to reach your stakeholder. Text? Email? Phone Calls? This is not your mom's first grade call tree. Know which communication channels are best used for each stakeholder. Additionally, there are emergency notification systems you can purchase or subscribe to that will automatically contact pre-established databases. If you are not using an automated emergency notification system, you must appoint people within your organization who will be responsible for notifying stakeholders.

Monitoring Programs

Monitor what is being said about your organization. Use social media, review sites, Google Alerts, and marketing automation software, like [HubSpot](#), to help monitor what people are saying about your organization.

Remember that receptionists and customer service representative often have a pulse on what is being said about an organization. They should be trained to report any possible issues to the Crisis Communications Team.

"Holding Messages" and Scripts

In a crisis, it takes time to identify and verify the facts of the event. It is imperative to derive some pre-determined "holding messages" that will give you some time and space to work on the matter. Some sample "holding messages" include: "Please check our website, LinkedIn and Facebook for updates on this matter" or "Our CEO will be making a statement within two hours."

**"Monitor what is
being said about
your
organization."**

Develop three crisis-specific messages for all stakeholders. These can be modified based on the actual crisis. However, be aware that messaging must be adapted to accommodate different forms of media. For example, a healthcare practice's key message may be, "As a primary care healthcare practice, our promise remains to consistently deliver quality patient care affordably."

An opportunity to learn for future crises

Once a crisis has passed, it is imperative to conduct a formal review with the Crisis Communications Team. Review what worked, what did not, and what was problematic.

Now that you know what a Crisis Communications Plan entails, now is the time to put things in motion.

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**“More than half
of all
Americans get
their news via
social media.”**

2020 has shown us that effective social media strategy is important. From sharing memes about Tiger King to COVID-19 statistics from the WHO, to updates on peaceful protests in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, the Pew Research Center reports that [more than half of all Americans get their news via social media](#). There are pros and cons to this to be certain as it is often difficult to parse fact from fiction. And for a business trying to navigate these waters, it can be difficult.

Before even coming up with a strategy by which your company can handle crises that it comes across, it is first important to make sure that your business has all its ducks in a row with effective guidelines and social media policies.

If your employees are using social media, how do they discuss your brand? Are there things they are not allowed to say? While each company has different needs and goals and leadership views on social media, your business should have a plan on how company employees should interact with social media.

A social media policy for your company helps to protect your reputation by providing guidelines and best practices for professional conduct for employees. A policy can range from a list of best practices for conduct to the legal ramifications of social media actions. A social media policy acts as a type of contract between employees and the company about what types of interactions can and should take place online.

As your company develops social media policies, ask the following questions:

- **Are employees aware that while their profiles may be set to “private,” they are not really private?**
- **Do employees know the associated risks associated with what they post online and how it may be perceived by others?**
- **Do employees understand that posts and updates serve as a first impression not only to them but to the brand as well?**

Social media policies can help safeguard companies against legal and security risks. Having guidelines in place also helps to ensure that your brand can speak with one voice.

Employee engagement in your social media efforts are good. Each employee interacting with your brand humanizes your efforts and can gain you trust in your target market. People yearn for authentic engagement and your company attitude and policies regarding social media can bolster this authenticity.

Make sure to include the following in your social media policies and guidelines:

- **Who is your company spokesperson?**
- **How will you address company complaints?**
- **How will you handle media inquiries?**

With these social media policies in place, you will be best able to address crises as they arise.

But what exactly is a crisis?

A crisis is defined as events that either cause harm or have the potential to cause harm to an individual or organization. These crises can occur online or offline, but HubSpot tells us that 80% of customers will use social media to engage with a brand. Rest assured, having an action plan in place for Social Media Crisis Management will serve you well.

The tricky thing about social media crises is that can spread like wildfire on various social media platforms and then evolve into a more traditional news story. How your company engages with its clients on its social media platforms can truly make or break a company's reputation.

Varying types of social media crises happen on a daily basis.

“80% of customers will use social media to engage with a brand.”

The following list examples of social media crises that you may come across:

- The hacking of social media accounts.
- The call for boycotts on advertisers
- Live video—who knows what will happen?
- Fake news and rumors.
- Employees going rogue.
- Trend jacking during a sensitive situation.
- Widespread public outrage to a post.

So, what should you do in the event of a social media crisis?

First off, DO NOT PANIC. Ask yourself, “Is this a real crisis?” Did you or a member of your company make a gaff? If so, OWN IT and take responsibility for your actions. Be authentic. Be humble. Be human.

Many crises can be mitigated with adequate preparation. Before a crisis even occurs. As with many things, having strategies and plans in place will always help you be proactive when a crisis occurs. In fact, *there are three stages to a crisis: preparation, response, and recovery.*

**“Be authentic.
Be humble. Be
human.”**

Preparation for a social media crisis can look like:

- Investing in a proactive monitoring system.
- Training team members in crisis communication.
- Creating a list of possible crises and coming up with response plans.
- Actively building healthy and positive relationships through social media with your target market.

During the response stage of a crisis, your social media manager should:

- Respond quickly with compassion and authority.
- Speak clearly and provide examples of follow up actions that are being taken.
- Understand the emotions that are being shared on social media.
- Pay attention and address comments, feedback, and false information that could be spreading.
- Integrate messages on the appropriate social media channels for the appropriate audiences.

- Integrate responses into crisis plan strategy.
- Embrace the opportunity to grow as an organization.

Once the crisis has been resolved, the recovery phase looks like:

- Evaluating the overall sentiment of the messages.
- Analyze data to see what lessons can be learned.
- Evaluate team members' responses and strategies that came into play.
- Determine best practices with which to move forward.

A well thought out crisis plan will garner input from many stakeholders such as the executive team, PR professionals, HR professionals, and have legal input. It should also consider the risks associated with various risks, scenarios, and stakeholders.

Here are more tips to utilize amid a social media crisis:

- **Pause all scheduled social media posts.**
- **Pause paid ads on social media channels.**
- **Pause marketing emails.**
- **Assess the planned email and blogging campaigns for appropriateness.**
- **Create a blog post to address the situation as needed.**
- **Provide talking points for executives as needed.**
- **Check all content for relevant references that could be perceived as offensive or rude in light of the event.**
- **Create a plan for employee communications as needed.**
- **Do not reply, “No comment.” If you need further time to gather information and formulate an appropriate response, say just that.**
- **Do not take the bait of trolls. Your trusted audience will take care of the trolls for you.**

Even though social media is an ever-changing entity, preparation and planning is still your best bet for effective social media management. You should be prepared for events and situations that could have a negative impact on your business. Listening and monitoring your social media channels for these events and situations should be part of the daily job of a social media management professional.

Eventually, your small business will encounter a social media crisis if it has not already. Get ahead of the crisis by preparing today. Don't fear; more times than not, a business can and will bounce back from a social media crisis, especially when managed well.

“Get ahead of the crisis by preparing today.”

CHAPTER THREE: WHEN YOUR BRANDING IS THE CRISIS (Why Aunt Jemima Matters)

This morning I made my daughter blueberry waffles. As she plopped down to the kitchen table, yawning, I reached into the pantry and pulled out the familiar womanly shaped bottle of syrup that was on my pantry shelf. In truth, I don't normally buy this brand of syrup precisely because I don't like its current brand message, but lockdown has made trips to the store less frequent and I bought what my local market had on hand, valuing my kids not complaining over racial equity (let's just be honest here). And it struck me that this may be one of the last few of this type of bottle.

My Facebook feed is a flurry about the rebranding of Aunt Jemima, Mrs. Butterworth, Cream of Wheat, and Uncle Ben. Apparently, the collective avuncular quartet of happily smiling faces in our kitchens has tapped into something deeper.

And as someone who has only been alive and paying attention for the refreshed version of these icons that make them appear as though they could be my neighbors or co-workers, I will be the first to admit that the images they evoke are what I imagine the brand intends for them to evoke: Aunt Jemima is just my loving and fleshy grandma serving me up some hot breakfast with a side of love.

But folks, that is not who she was originally created to be.

Make no mistake, Jemima was originally a house slave. Then she got promoted to a Mammy, complete with headscarf and apron. In fact, Michele L. Norris, of the Washington Post, [writes about her grandmother](#) having once served as a brand spokeswoman for the company, touring the country “often treated like a celebrity in small towns, but could not stay in local hotels...You see, in those days Aunt Jemima didn’t look like the lady you see on the box today. She was a slave woman, and lone (her grandmother) was expected to act and talk like a slave woman...” In the 60s, Jemima’s headscarf was replaced with a headband and in 1989, her rebrand graduated her from the help to the suburban housewife with pearl earrings and lipstick. So, Jemima is no longer White America’s servant, more like our token Black friend we all mention when explaining why we aren’t racist. Heck, I might even mention to you my own great-grandmother was actually named Jemima, and my Black children notwithstanding, I am White.

And to be clear, we love our Aunt Jemima pancakes, our Mrs. Butterworth syrup, and Uncle Ben’s rice. What is not to love about their convenient carby goodness? The products themselves are not the issue; the messaging of the branding is. And there is a [long history of marketing that promotes racist imagery](#). From Jemima to Chiquita to my friend Mike’s favorite NFL team, we marketers know how to wield images to evoke emotion, build trust, and promote brand loyalty. It is not happenstance. It is strategy. Marketers are nothing if not strategists.

**“It is not
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Why does this matter?

What exactly goes into branding?

A brand is a succinct message to your target market about who your company is, why it does what it does, and why your target market should even care to choose your brand over another. A good brand not only speaks to what a company is, but its why, its purpose. It considers the wants and needs of the market.

(Ahem. We don't need house slaves, people.)

When building a brand, a marketer will ask the following questions:

- Why does your company exist?
- What is your unique selling proposition?
- What does your company value?
- What “personality” does your brand have? Serious? Nerdy? Trustworthy? Playful?

- How do you want your customers to feel when they interact with your company?
- What does your company stand for?

Effective branding is authentic, consistent, and communicates the answers to all of those questions, and it is most identifiable in a logo. A well-developed logo is the by-product of months of conversations, meetings, sketches, and presentations and is part of a larger brand strategy. A brand's strategy encompasses the who, what, when, where, why and how a company plans on communicating its messages. And these messages can afford to be bold.

**“These messages
can afford to be
bold.”**

MPWRSource Graphic and Digital Designer, Matthew McPartland states, “Brands need to be true to themselves. Brands have always stayed away from politics in fear of hurting their business, but that doesn’t need to be the case. Brands are in a position to make a difference; they have a powerful voice. They need to stay true to themselves. Having strong values, being transparent and making a difference can give you a competitive edge and makes you who you are.”

Good branding can add value causing consumers to choose the fancy packaging over the similarly created unbranded version that is less expensive.

We buy good branding. And folks, we have been buying the trope that minorities are here to serve and entertain us for far too long.

**“Good branding
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CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNICATING INCLUSIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

It is not only what you say but how you say it that matters. Just ask anyone who has ever had an argument with their spouse. Tone matters. Words matter. Volume matters.

According to UCLA Professor [Mehrabian's Communication Theory](#), 55% of our communication is body language, 38% is tone of voice, and only 7% is verbal. Therefore, everything we say or do as a company reflects our values and our brand's missions—from our logo and tagline right on down to our company handbook.

Wait? Word Girl, are you saying that words matter? Yes, trusty reader. I am. I am also saying the way in which you use them matters.

The words we use comprise our stories. And our stories shape who we are, what we care about, and where we are headed next. It is the human condition and what marketers tap into when they tell you the best part of waking up is some type of coffee in your cup.

(See how I did that? I didn't just sell you coffee. I sold you on sleeping in and someone attractive bringing your favorite mug and you are surrounded by infinite comfort items and the sun is a golden glow through the windowsill upon which there is a rooster. Also, you are skinny and your hair looks amazing. You are welcome.)

**“You are skinny
and your hair
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welcome.”**

Words are the medium through which behavior, attitudes, and values are shaped and conveyed. They can build or dismantle, help or heal, unite or divide. As we can plainly see in today's divisive political climate, words can be weaponized. But words can also be a balm and an invitation.

Inclusive language is defined by the [Linguistic Society of America](#) as language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities. Marketing giant [HubSpot](#) defines inclusive language as language that “avoids biases, slang, or expressions that discriminate against groups of people based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Inclusive language allows you to resonate with more audiences by speaking and writing in more impartial ways.”

Does your company have an inclusive language lexicon? This goes beyond making sure there are policies in place for employees to confront that one guy who says that insensitive thing all the time.

Having an inclusive language toolkit from which your company pulls as it crafts all messaging will set the tone of how employees are to relate to one another and foster a culture of respect. Your employee handbook, branding, marketing materials, internal communications, and editorial processes will all set the expectation of inclusivity.

“Inclusive language allows you to resonate with more audiences by speaking and writing in more impartial ways.”

Inclusion toolkits often include a list of “Do’s and Don’ts”. For example:

- **Gender and Pronouns:** Don’t use binary he/she pronouns exclusively; do say they. (Did you know that they used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun was Merriam Webster’s word of the year for 2019?) And while we are talking gender, probably best not to accuse that female executive of being overly emotional when she is not backing down. And for goodness sakes, do NOT tell her to just go sit over there and look pretty when you don’t like her idea.
- **Race and ethnicity:** Don’t say powwow or peanut gallery or, what should be obvious, jew down.
- **Socio-economic:** Don’t say thug, ghetto, trailer trash.
- **Mental health and physical abilities:** Don’t say lame or crazy. And if an employee has a known peanut allergy, don’t joke about wielding nuts to keep them away. (Probably best to avoid all discussion of nut wielding, actually.)
- **Other categories include nationality, age, and religion or categories that play into power dynamics and otherness.**
- **Follow @APStylebook on Twitter for ever-evolving language updates.**

If you receive backlash for implementing these policies, inclusion of your why will help. Many times, if given the opportunity, you will have employees in your midst who can speak to how everyday language has excluded them or made them uncomfortable in the workplace. Also be prepared to implement your toolkit in all your communication channels, as well as provide training that will set expectations of inclusivity and highlight ongoing accountability.

Work with your HR department to see how these tools will be factored into day-to-day work life such as management, feedback sessions, team meetings, as well as recognition and reward systems. By being intentional with your language, you will also free up your employees to come forward when harmful language occurs. You want that woman who has been told to sit over there and look pretty to feel free to say, “Thanks for saying I am pretty, but I am certain that has nothing to do with the fact that my opinion has merit.”

“When you know better, do better.”

Be up front with these expectations in your hiring and employee onboarding processes. Trust that this will reap benefits for your company that are more than just words. Employees who feel safe, included, engaged, valued, and happy [will be more productive and creative.](#)

As with most things, our intentions matter. By choosing to be intentionally inclusive with our language, we will foster an environment that is intentionally inclusive as well. It is guaranteed you will have missteps, but if you are humble and maintain your intentionality, you should still find your company tripping forward into the world we all want to see. Because in the words of Maya Angelou, “When you know better, do better.”

CHAPTER FIVE: WHEN INCLUSIVITY GOES WRONG

Inclusivity is not just in the words we use. In fact, if our actions are not inclusive, then even the most stringent [inclusive lexicon](#) is just lip service. For an organization to be fully inclusive, it should be intentionally so in its hiring, rewarding, teambuilding, and working practices. The aim is not just for corporate lingo to be inclusive, but its culture as well.

It also means your organization should create a feeling of openness so that when slip ups happen (because they will), they can be addressed and dealt with graciously. To that end, I humbly submit to you my most recent blunder. Yep. I am going to open the kimono and tell you of the time that I, Word Girl, was not inclusive. You'll see my fumble and I'll also show you the reconciliation that came from its being addressed.

I share this not only to affirm that things will happen, but also to hopefully spread light on how we can address how best to include members of our team who may be at a heightened risk to Covid-19. Because we are all in new territory here.

Recently, we had a new member join our creative team. (Shout out to the impeccably talented Web Designer, [Jack Stob](#)). We were holding a creative team meeting and not only were myself, our graphic and digital designer Matt (The Knife) and Jack (yet to be named) in attendance, but so was our boss, Tiffany. That's right—the creative team and our Chief Growth Officer. You may call that person the Big Kahuna in your organization. In this superhero lair, she goes by the name Manic Maple.

**“We are all in
new territory
here.”**

As these meetings tend to go as of late, it was a video conference call. Relaxed and laughing, we each were sussing out one another's personalities and talents, introducing ourselves and discussing work and life and pets and kids and what we like to do in our free time. It became apparent that all of us on the creative team enjoy hanging out at the many breweries here in RVA. So, I suggested that at some point, we hold a creative meeting over a pint at a brewery.

Then suddenly it got quiet. Because back up, what I said was, "The three of us should have a meeting over a pint."

But there were four people in the meeting.

And as soon as I said it, I paused. My mind began to scramble. I thought, "Ack. I want to have a meeting without the boss, but how do I word it?"

Well, in the immortal words of comedian Mike Burbiglia, "What I should've said...was nothing."

"In the immortal words of comedian Mike Burbiglia, What I should've said...was nothing."

But I am Word Girl, so I said words. And lots of them.

My thoughts were thus: *Dang it.* How do I say I don't want the boss to come and give us more tasks and let us just bond and brainstorm and be a creative team. I can't just say, "you're the boss" that sounds too much like "Cool kids only." Then I remembered that Manic Maple doesn't drink. But she could technically have water or tea and Cool kids notwithstanding, not drinking is perfectly acceptable and nothing someone should be excluded for. So what?

Oh, I know! Covid! Tiffany has severe asthma and really ought to just stay home until a vaccine is ready.

Do you see where my mind was going with this?

Again, what I should have said...was nothing.

What did I say?

“Oh, I just mean the Creative Team. Tiffany, you shouldn’t come because, you know, you’d get sick.”

Y’all. Y’all.

First, and foremost, I made two blunders. The first of which was extending an invitation in front of someone for whom it was not intended. And we have known that this sort of thing is rude since birthday party invitations were first handed out in elementary school. It gets tricky here because in normal circumstances (read: pre-Covid-19) this meeting would’ve occurred in the office and I could’ve invited the team out for drinks as we were leaving the welcome meeting or gathering around the snacks.

So, we will cut myself a tad bit of slack because all of this is new and video chats are weird. What I should have done was simply post meeting reached out to Jack and Matt via Teams and said “BREWEEEEEEERY! Who’s in?”

But the second blunder is what is the real problem.

I excluded Tiffany not because she was the boss (which is a totally valid reason), but I “othered” her in her disability. I basically said “Seat Taken” to the kid who was differently abled. I made her asthma the thing that excludes her. And let me be clear here: to exclude someone from an activity based upon their health or able-bodiedness is wrong.

**“To exclude
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I could and should have course corrected. I should have said, “What I mean is that it would be great for the Creative Team to gather together in a relaxed environment so that we can bond and brainstorm. Tiffany, would you be okay with us doing that? You have many great ideas, but I think we’d be more free without our boss around, Mice will play when the cat’s away, and all that jazz.”

We are facing a bit of a dilemma here considering there may be team members for whom re-opening and more opportunities to get out and about is not an option. Employees for whom working from home is their only safe option. So, what do we do?

For starters, always invite. Always. Even if you know the invitation will be rejected, invite.

Second, in as much as it is in your power to do so, make accommodations so that your employees can be included safely. Have team members with peanut allergies? Don’t order the Pad Thai with peanut satay sauce for the corporate Christmas party.

“We are facing a bit of a dilemma here considering there may be team members for whom re-opening and more opportunities to get out and about is not an option.”

Be aware of the needs of your teammates and make sure that all can attend work events safely.

Third, when an in-person meeting is required, make virtual attendance an option utilizing Face Time or Teams or Zoom. If the meeting is a social one, make sure that if someone cannot attend for safety reasons, face time them to let them know you miss them and DO NOT CONDUCT BUSINESS in their absence. To exclude someone from a social event is not a problem. These things happen, but you cannot make work unsafe.

Fourth, when someone messes up, hopefully you have cultivated an inclusive culture that allows for humanity.

Tiffany later reached out to me, laughing. She said, “Elizabeth, yesterday when you told me I couldn’t come to the Creative Meeting because I am sickly, I felt really othered.” I

apologized and we laughed at my internal dialogue that even included me knowing the right answer but choosing the wrong one. We chatted about how the lack of water cooler

conversations and how virtual meetings DO make the necessary bonding between employees wonky. She forgave me. Affirmed that it was appropriate for us to have our own meetings without her and that mistakes were okay and happen. Then I joked about how I should just probably write about the whole blunder to give some teeth to what inclusivity really looks like in the workplace. And she said, “INCLUDE IT.”

**“The lack of
water cooler
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and virtual
meetings DO
make the
necessary
bonding between
employees
wonky.”**

CHAPTER SIX: EFFECTIVE INTERNAL COMMS STRATEGY

Effective internal communications are foundational to any well-run organization. Most companies understand that their external communications to clients and prospects needs to be strategic, but few take the same level of care when considering internal communications. However, this is an oversight. Effective internal communications are not just about disseminating information from the top down so that employees know policies (thought it DOES include that), rather, good internal communications foster two-way communication where all parties are heard and valued. In fact, employees who feel heard by their managers [are 5 times more likely to be enthusiastic](#) about their jobs and 21 times more loyal to their employers. Corporate culture can blossom and empower employees

through internal communications, thereby creating brand ambassadors.

Effective internal communications are transparent.

Employees appreciate openness and honesty. Cindy Farmer, Internal Communications Manager of MCH Concepts says, “By being transparent, employees will appreciate the openness and it gives them a more holistic view of the organization. By helping employees understand how the information being provided affects their jobs, trust in managements’ objectives is achieved. Lastly, companies that provide regular employee feedback and good internal communications experience higher productivity and profits.”

“We want to work with and for organizations that have happy employees.”

Effective internal communications improve the overall employee experience.

We all want to know that the work we do matters. Employees want to be informed and valued. An internal communications strategy that seeks to not only inform but engage employees bolsters its employees and promotes them to brand ambassadors. Brand ambassadors are far more likely to take advantage of social media platforms to brag about themselves and their achievements at work, and this can be an effective marketing and recruiting tool. We want to work with and for organizations that have happy employees. It also helps with employee retention.

Effective internal communications keep employees in the loop.

Internal communications should keep all employees informed of company news, changes and future goals, upcoming events, and future initiatives. [80% of employees want their employer to keep them updated about company news—](#)

77% said it would help them at their job and 66% said it helps them build better relationships with their colleagues.

Effective internal communications are intentional and increase productivity.

Especially as we see a shift to working remotely, internal communications can make or break a team. With everyone off in their own little bubble, working in their soft pants from their dining rooms, there is no more water cooler chatter where tips are shared off hand and collaboration naturally occurs in the break room. When a team is spread out like this, internal communications are even more vital to keeping a project afloat. It is important to provide clear, consistent and frequent communications with your team members. By providing a method or platform for feedback, employees will feel empowered to not only offer suggestions but voice concerns without fear of retribution.

Two-way communication, along with an open-door policy and frequent check-ins, establishes an atmosphere of trust, employee appreciation and connectedness.

Tools such as [Microsoft Office's 365](#) can be game changers for organizations that utilize telework. Products like One Drive and Share Point make documents easy to share. Microsoft Teams makes it easy to chat both via text and video conferencing, enabling [productive collaboration](#). Additionally, CRM's such as ConnectWise and HubSpot also further promote effective internal communications.

[Effective internal communications provide calm in a time of crisis.](#)

Have we ever had a year in which the need for calm amidst of a storm was ever more necessary? But somewhere between a global pandemic and meth-gators, we have all needed a voice that set the tone for clarity, vision, and peace of mind. Your internal communications probably won't be able to make sense of Tiger King, but an effective internal communications strategy does include making sure that employees know who to turn to in times of crisis.

Who do we contact if there is a power outage? How will we know if we need a mask to go to work? What do I do if the media contacts me about [something someone said on social media](#)?

Effective internal communications strategy makes sure that each and every employee knows they have support and from where that support is coming.

Many times a crisis entails delivering bad news. In these instances, it is always best to remember that effective communication always prioritizes the needs the audience. To quote MPWRSource CGO, Tiffany Joy Greene (aka Manic Maple), "Effective internal communications is not about the business, but the people."

“Effective internal communications is not about the business, but the people.”

We know of a large corporation that had to tell its employees that it was shutting down operations, but that this shutdown would happen slowly. There were external communications to this announcement because this manufacturer was one of the largest employers in this small town. But internally, the goal of the communication was to a) convey to the employees that their time at the corporation was valued and that their future success mattered to the corporation and community, and b) keep people motivated to produce quality products despite upcoming closures.

This company accomplished these goals by including all employees and listening to them in monthly town halls where each were given time to speak and ask questions. When it was discovered that written communications weren't really being received, the company stepped up its content game with videos that were both informative and humorous. The company created a forum where the employees could direct things

and communicate to corporate what it needed for a successful future.

By allowing employees to be contributing stakeholders, this kept what could have been a catastrophic crisis into a source of growth for all parties. Internal communications gave people open channels of dialogue, so that they could grasp a small amount of control during the crisis. Let's face it. We all want some control, even when most of the control is not in our hands.

Effective internal communications are always improving.

In the above example, when the communications team discovered that its emails weren't hitting the mark with employees, they switched gears to town halls and videos. The injected humor increased the authenticity and humanity. After all, being authentic and human are always goals of any communications strategy.

Internal communications should be user friendly and consider the context in which employees are working. What spheres are your employees already talking? Are there community building activities you can do to bolster teamwork such as social events?

When internal communications are as intentional as external communications, it tells employees that they matter and ensures that all stakeholders are on the same page. And when all can cohesively move as a unit, it makes for a more productive organization ready to pivot and grow as the market demands. Internal communications drives trust and loyalty. Who doesn't want that?

“After all, being authentic and human are always goals of any communications strategy.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: USING OUR CRISIS COMMS TEMPLATE

In the event of a crisis, your organization needs to have its [crisis communication plan](#) in place so that it can address the situation in a timely manner. Your organization should always seek to speak with a unified voice and have a decided upon “front” person to whom the media or other stakeholders can direct their questions. This person may be your top public relations person or someone else in the C-Suite. From time to time, this person may also want to receive guidance or pass the baton to another subject matter expert, depending upon the context of the crisis. With this in mind, it is important for all of your employees to know who these spokespeople are and for those spokespeople to have the tools at hand with which to create peace of mind in the event of the storm of crisis management.

This is best handled by having a boilerplate script and making sure that all involved have immediate access to the appropriate communications channels.

We have devised a Crisis Communications Template your organization can fill out and disperse so that everyone knows what steps to take prior to having to take them. As you fill out this information, consider the following questions.

**“Your
organization
should always
seek to speak
with a unified
voice”**

Official Company
Spokespeople:

- Who are the executives at the C-Suite level that are the subject matter experts in their fields?
- Who can make sure that all replies are in line with your company's goals, vision, and branding?
- Make sure that employees know whom to contact in the event they are asked questions by clients and/or the outside media.

When thinking about a crisis, it is important to not only address who will speak on behalf of the company to the outside world, but also to address how a crisis will be handled internally.

Who will be in charge of making sure that employees know what is going on? This too should be a top down unified effort.

Employees should be kept abreast of situations and it is critical that a plan is in place to disseminate accurate information in a timely manner. For example, in the event of a natural disaster such as a hurricane, the Head of PR may alert the media as to whatever closings or outages your company is facing, while the Head of HR makes sure that employees are aware of those same outings and whatever policies that should be followed. Make sure that this person is also aware of the appropriate means of communication with employees—perhaps this is Microsoft Teams, Slack, Email or Text messaging. This person needs quick access to the employee directory.

**“By being
transparent, you
will build trust.”**

Channels of Communication:

Your first task will be to let your clients know that you are aware of the crisis and that you are in the process of handling it. Do not wait until you have all the answers to communicate with your clients. You can buy yourself time to figure out all the answers through a thorough investigation by letting stakeholders know that you are addressing the crisis. By being transparent, you will build trust. Don't forget to update other company forms of communications such as your website and outgoing voicemails, if appropriate.

If you have a social media manager, your head spokesperson should work with him or her to craft contextually appropriate messages to disperse across all your organization's social media platforms. Remember, the audience for each channel is different, so while the tone of each message should be different, the voice should be cohesive.

Script

Make sure that your company's mission and vision is ever before you as you craft your message when responding to client and media inquiries during a time of crisis, including tone and language. It may be helpful to also have boilerplate messages crafted for more predictable crises such as natural disasters or a disgruntled customer.

By customizing this template for your business or organization and [communications best practices](#), you should be able to pivot confidently in the event of a crisis. Remember, above all else, your communication should be honest, human, and timely.

**“Remember,
above all else,
your
communication
should be honest,
human, and
timely.”**



Crisis Communications Plan Template



Official Company Spokespeople:

List Name, Phone, and Email contact information

Head of PR: _____

Legal: _____

IT: _____

HR: _____

Logistics: _____

Security: _____

Internal Communications: _____



Channels of Communication:

These channels should have contextual messaging but be unified in their message

- ☐ Email/Phone/Text Clients
- ☐ Website Update
- ☐ Update Outgoing Voice Mail
- ☐ FB:
- ☐ Twitter:
- ☐ LinkedIn:
- ☐ Instagram:
- ☐ TikTok:
- ☐ Pinterest:
- ☐ CBS:
- ☐ NBC:
- ☐ ABC:
- ☐ Local Newspaper:
- ☐ Other:

Script:



(DO NOT SAY "NO COMMENT"!)

"We are aware there *may* be a problem and we are investigating the situation with the appropriate parties. We intend on making more details available within the next 24 hours."

But remember: if you are not the appointed spokesperson for the company and have not been asked to speak on behalf of the company, you are not to do so.

