Crisis Communications Leadership

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Disclosures

- I have no financial disclosures.

- I am an intermittent employee of the US federal government.

- All opinions are my own. Nothing should be construed as official US policy.

Crises

- Reputational
  - Illegal or immoral behavior
  - Patient accident or bad outcome
  - Quality problem
- Cyber attack or HIPPA violation
- Supply chain: shortage of drugs, etc.
- Infrastructure failure
  - No power or water
- Other events affecting operations
  - Lack of staff
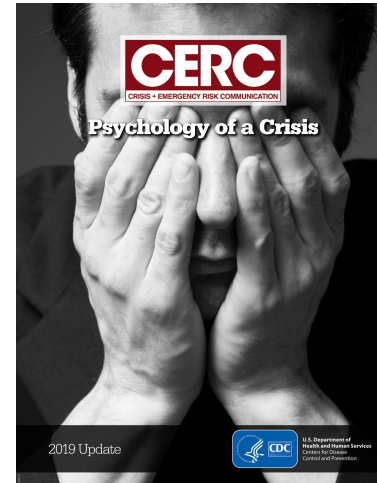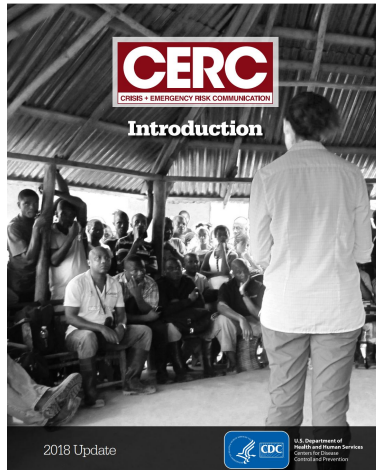 - Weather
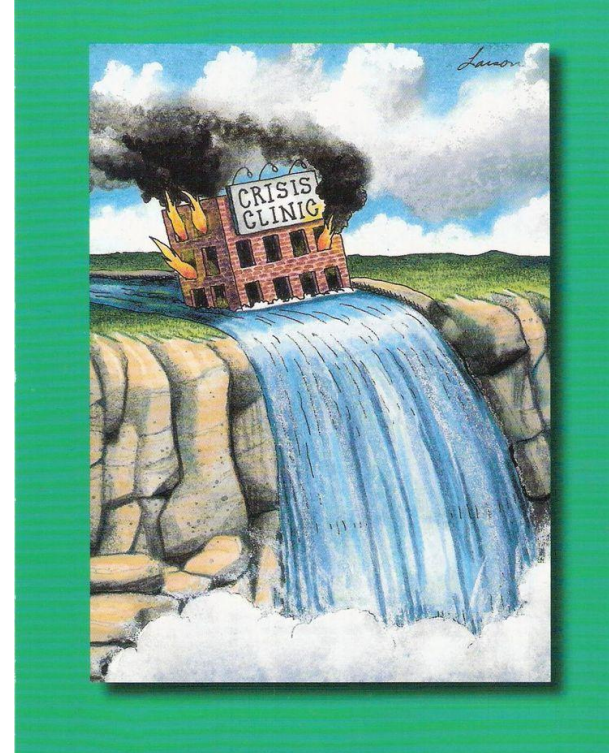
Don't be like these guys!

BOTTOM LINE

UP FRONT

CDC Crisis Manual

- [CERC Manual | Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) (cdc.gov)](#)
- https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/index.asp

Templates and Tools
Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC)

- https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/templates-tools.asp

CDC Wallet Card

CERC
CRISIS + EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

Build Trust and Credibility by Expressing:
- Empathy and caring.
- Competence and expertise.
- Honesty and openness.
- Commitment and dedication.

Top Tips:
- Consistent messages are vital.
- Don't over-reassure.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Express wishes. ("I wish I had answers.")
- Explain the process in place to find answers.
- Acknowledge people's fear.
- Give people things to do.
- Ask more of people (share risk).

As a Spokesperson:
- Know your organization's policies.
- Stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- Tell the truth. Be transparent.
- Embody your agency's identity.

Prepare to Answer These Questions:
- Are my family and I safe?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who is in charge here?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?
- Were you forewarned?
- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What does this information mean?

Stay on Message:
- "What's important is to remember…"
- "I can't answer that question, but I can tell you…"
- "Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers…"
- "Let me put that in perspective…"

Be First. Be Right. Be Credible.

CDC

The CERC Rhythm graphic below shows the four phases of a crisis. Accessible explanation of figure in *Appendix, page 12*.

The CERC Rhythm

Engage Community • Empower Decision-Making • Evaluate

Preparation
- Draft and test messages
- Develop partnerships
- Create plans
- Determine approval process

Initial
- Express empathy
- Explain risks
- Promote action
- Describe response efforts

Maintenance
- Explain ongoing risks
- Segment audiences
- Provide background information
- Address rumors

Resolution
- Motivate vigilance
- Discuss lessons learned
- Revise plan

The **Six Principles** of *CERC*

Throughout these chapters, six principles of effective emergency and risk communications are emphasized:

1 **Be First:**
Crises are time-sensitive. Communicating information quickly is crucial. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.

2 **Be Right:**
Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.

3 **Be Credible:**
Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crises.

4 **Express Empathy:**
Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.

5 **Promote Action:**
Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes some sense of control.[3]

6 **Show Respect:**
Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

Fully integrating CERC helps ensure that limited resources are managed well and can do the most good at every phase of an emergency response.

Examples of Bad Communication

1. **Chernobyl Disaster (1986**): The initial response to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the Soviet Union was characterized by a **<u>lack of transparency and accurate information</u>**. Authorities **downplayed the severity of the incident**, resulting in delayed evacuations and inadequate protection for affected individuals.

2. **Hurricane Katrina (2005**): The response to Hurricane Katrina in the United States was criticized for its **<u>slow and ineffective communication</u>**. There were instances of **conflicting information**, inadequate coordination, and a **<u>lack of empathy</u>** towards affected individuals, which led to confusion and delays in providing necessary assistance.

3. **Three Mile Island Accident (1979**): The communication surrounding the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States was marked by **<u>contradictory statements, vague information, and a failure to provide timely updates</u>** to the public. This resulted in increased anxiety and a loss of trust in the authorities.

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Stakeholders

Type of stakeholder	Characteristics	Communication Objective
Advocates	Loyal to and supportive of your organization; trust your guidance.	■ Maintain and enhance loyalty and support. ■ Engage advocates to spread your organization's prevention messages and take action, when appropriate.
Ambivalents	Do not strongly support or oppose your organization.	■ Identify specific needs and interests of ambivalents to engage them and encourage positive actions. ■ Work with spokespersons or organizations that ambivalents trust to convey key messages.
Adversaries	Do not support your organization; distrust or compete with your goals.	■ Determine whether potential adversarial activities could cause harm or prevent the successful adoption of your health messages to a wider population. ■ Address any predictable challenges by acknowledging and addressing adversaries' concerns. ■ When possible, work with spokespersons or other organizations that adversaries trust to convey key messages.

Audience Participation
EXAMPLE:

- You are CEO of a Hospital
- Who are your stakeholders?

About a Nurse

allnurses.com

"No, a patient didn't make her sick. She found out how much more a hospital CEO makes than us nurses."

Audience Participation
EXAMPLE:

- You are CEO of a Hospital

- Who are your stakeholders?
  - Public
  - Patients
  - Staff/families of staff
  - Government
  - Regulators
  - Insurance Cos. /other payors
  - Vendors

Pre-crisis phase

The communication objectives during the pre-crisis phase include the following:

- Plan and prepare.

- Foster alliances with stakeholders.

- Develop consensus recommendations.

- Develop systems and redundancies such as hotlines, joint information centers (JICs), and websites.

- Test messages.

Failing to Prepare is Preparing to Fail

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.

Benjamin Franklin

BrainyQuote®

Cross-Functional Teams During a Crisis

Responding to coronavirus: The minimum viable nerve center
March 16, 2020 | Article
By Mihir Mysore and Ophelia Usher

McKinsey Quarterly

The integrated COVID-19 nerve center is based on five cross-functional teams.
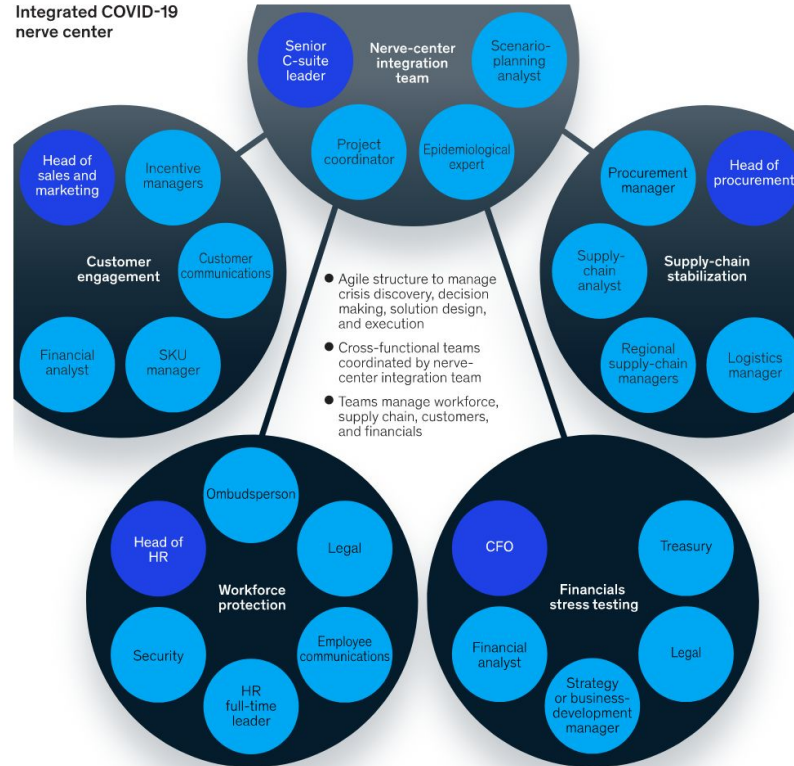
How many of you work in a hospital?

How many have participated in HICS ?
(Hospital Incident Command System training)

Threat (Hazard Vulnerability Analysis) Matrix

- Already done as part of disaster planning. Great place to start.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I

HAZARD AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL
HUMAN RELATED EVENTS
KAISER PERMANENTE.

EVENT	PROBABILITY	SEVERITY = (MAGNITUDE - MITIGATION)						RISK
		HUMAN IMPACT	PROPERTY IMPACT	BUSINESS IMPACT	PREPARED-NESS	INTERNAL RESPONSE	EXTERNAL RESPONSE	
	Likelihood this will occur	Possibility of death or injury	Physical losses and damages	Interuption of services	Preplanning	Time, effectiveness, resouces	Community/ Mutual Aid staff and supplies	Relative threat*
SCORE	0 = N/A 1 = Low 2 = Moderate 3 = High	0 = N/A 1 = Low 2 = Moderate 3 = High	0 = N/A 1 = Low 2 = Moderate 3 = High	0 = N/A 1 = Low 2 = Moderate 3 = High	0 = N/A 1 = High 2 = Moderate 3 = Low or none	0 = N/A 1 = High 2 = Moderate 3 = Low or none	0 = N/A 1 = High 2 = Moderate 3 = Low or none	0 - 100%
Mass Casualty Incident (trauma)								0%
Mass Casualty Incident (medical/infectious)								0%
Terrorism, Biological								0%
VIP Situation								0%
Infant Abduction								0%
Hostage Situation								0%
Civil Disturbance								0%
Labor Action								0%
Forensic Admission								0%

Instructions | Natural Hazards | Technological Hazards | **Human Hazards** | Hazardous Materials | Summary

CERC IMMEDIATE RESPONSE CHECKLIST

Steps to take when crisis hits:

1) Verify situation: Determine the magnitude of the event as quickly as possible. Checkpoints:
Get the facts.
What was the source of the information?
How credible is the information source?
Was information obtained from additional sources to put event into perspective?
Is the information consistent with other sources?
Is the characterization of the event plausible?
If necessary, was the information clarified through a subject information expert?
2) Conduct notifications: Contact and brief those within and outside your organization who need to know. Have the following been notified and briefed:
Appropriate persons in your organization (your core team, senior management group, communication team)?
Elected officials at all levels?
Appropriate local and county agencies?
Appropriate state agencies?
Appropriate federal agencies?
Other relevant groups (board members, clients, residents, etc.)?
3) Assess level of crisis: Determine the degree and intensity of the event to determine the communication response? Checkpoints:
Has a crisis level (A,B,C,D) been identified that corresponds to the event characteristics?
Have the hours of operation for the communication team been established?
Has jurisdiction over information been established?
Were the specific audience concerns addressed?
Will federal agencies release information? or will states?
4) Organize assignments: activate your ERC plan. Checkpoints:
Do all personnel understand their role and their immediate tasks?
Were specific assignments given to each team member?
Have all experts/spokespeople been well-informed?
Have all staff been briefed and prepared, in case they are approached by the media?

CERC IMMEDIATE RESPONSE CHECKLIST

5) Prepare information and obtain approvals: Get agreement on the information content, develop it, and get it approved for release. Checkpoints:
Have you planned for a timely release?
Has the accuracy of all information been checked?
Does the message show compassion?
Were the specific audience concerns addressed?
Does the message meet the criteria of good message development?
Have you anticipated media questions and developed answers?
Has the message been cleared for release?
6) Release info to public: Decide on the frequency of information release, how it will be done, and who will speak. Checkpoints:
Have you released information as quickly as possible?
Was the same information given to all media at the same time?
Was the information released to other groups as planned? (partners, legislators, special interest groups, etc.)
Was the information released through other channels as planned? (web, 800 #, mailings, meetings, etc.)
7) Monitor, maintain, and make adjustments for the remaining life of the crisis:
Are experts/spokespeople regularly updated and briefed?
Is media coverage being monitored (to determine what messages are still needed, what misinformation needs correcting, and to identify concerns, interests, and needs arising from the crisis as it is being reported)?
Are mechanisms in place to monitor audience feedback (e.g., public information call analysis)?
Who is providing feedback to leadership?

American Associatio

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Message Development for Communication

First, consider the following:

Audience:	Purpose of Message:	Method of delivery:
❏ Relationship to event ❏ Demographics (age, language, education, culture) ❏ Level of outrage (based on risk principles)	❏ Give facts/update ❏ Rally to action ❏ Clarify event status ❏ Address rumors ❏ Satisfy media requests	❏ Print media release ❏ Web release ❏ Through spokesperson (TV or in-person appearance) ❏ Radio ❏ Other (e.g., recorded phone message)

Six Basic Emergency Message Components:

1. **Expression of empathy:** _____

_____

2. **Clarifying facts/Call for Action:**

Who _____

What _____

Where _____

When _____

Why _____

How _____

3. **What we do not know:** _____

4. **Process to get answers:** _____

5. **Statement of commitment:** _____

6. **Referrals:** _____

For more information _____

Next scheduled update _____

Finally, check your message for the following:

Positive action steps Honest/open tone Applied risk communication principles Test for clarity Use simple words, short sentences	Avoid jargon Avoid judgmental phrases Avoid humor Avoid extreme speculation

The following questions are ones that are commonly asked by the media, stakeholders, partners, and the public during crisis events. Use them to help you prepare answers for questions you might face.

Additional tips:

- ✓ Keep your answers short (2 minutes or less).
- ✓ Use Q&A sessions as opportunities to get your key messages out.
- ✓ Use personal pronouns ("I" or "We) rather than institutional nouns ("the Department of Public Health" or "this agency").

Why did it happen?

What was the cause?

When and where did it happen?

Who is to blame?

Do you accept responsibility?

Has this ever happened before?

Is the public safe?

What are you doing to protect people?

Is anyone hurt, sick, or dead? What are their names?

What do you have to say to the victims?

Is there danger now?

Will there be inconvenience to the public?

What are you going to do about it?

Who is in charge?

Are victims being helped?

Did you see this coming?

What can we expect, right now and later?

When will we find out more?

Understand Anger in the Context of an Emergency

Communication experts and psychologists point out that anger is a defensive response to pain or the threat of pain.[4,5] Three basic circumstances can give rise to anger:

1. When people have been hurt.

2. When people feel threatened by risks not of their own making.

3. When people sense their fundamental beliefs are being challenged.

Avoid Common Mistakes

When communicating with communities, try to avoid these common mistakes:

1. **Inadequate accessibility:** There is a tendency during a crisis to engage in internal decision-making. This may make your organization seem inaccessible. Provide information openly and maintain avenues for communities to ask questions.

2. **Lack of plain language:** Officials often use jargon in high-stress situations. Unfortunately, this may make messages more difficult to understand and cause frustration.

3. **Lack of empathy in the response:** Communities need to know that response officials understand at a very human level what they are experiencing.

Common Mistakes (cont)

4. **Problems with timeliness:** Time is always critical in a response, and you won't always be able to wait to get all the facts before releasing information.

5. **Paternalistic attitudes:** Acting paternalistic means behaving as if you and your organization know what is best for others. This attitude may seem arrogant to stakeholders who already feel powerless.

6. **Lack of opportunity for input in decisions:** Those who have been most affected by a crisis want to participate in key decisions. The opportunity to provide input can help offset feelings of being powerless. Make communities part of the response process and decision-making.

Message Tips

- **Determine Your key points**
  - **3 (4 max)**
  - **Repeat them often**
- **Don't wing it. Practice!**
  - **Get coaching**
- **Be concise**
- **Stay on message**
- **Evaluate the media interview post-message**
  - **How was it perceived?**
  - **How to improve?**

Media Training
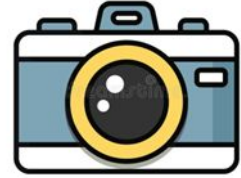
- Large institutions have PIOs who can serve as coaches for executives

- Many professional organizations have programs for media interview preparation
    - $14.95 online (6 sections • 18 lectures • 53m total length)

Example of a Well-Crafted Message

- "Community Update: We understand the devastating impact that the recent wildfire has had on our community. Our hearts go out to all those who have been affected by this tragic event. We want you to know that we are here for you, and we are committed to supporting you during this challenging time.

- Safety and Well-being: First and foremost, we want to ensure your safety and well-being. If you have been displaced from your home or are in need of immediate assistance, please contact our emergency helpline at [phone number]. We have established temporary shelters and resources to provide immediate relief and support.

- Recovery and Rebuilding: As we navigate the recovery and rebuilding process, we are actively working with local and state agencies to provide the necessary resources and support. This includes assistance with temporary housing, access to medical services, counseling services for emotional support, and assistance with insurance claims.

- Community Support: We recognize the strength and resilience of our community and the importance of coming together during times of crisis. Numerous organizations and volunteers are offering their support, providing meals, clothing, and other essential supplies. Community centers have opened their doors as safe spaces for individuals and families affected by the wildfires.

Well-crafted Message (cont)

- Emotional Support: We understand that this experience can be overwhelming, and it is natural to feel a range of emotions. If you or someone you know needs emotional support or counseling, please reach out to our dedicated helpline at [phone number]. Trained professionals are available to provide assistance and guidance.

- We will continue to provide regular updates and information through official channels, including our website and social media platforms. We are committed to transparent and timely communication as we work together to recover and rebuild our community.

- Remember, you are not alone. We are in this together, and we will emerge stronger. Please take care of yourselves and reach out for support when needed. We stand with you during this difficult time."

ChatGPT, 5-29-2023

https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/pdf/leaders.pdf
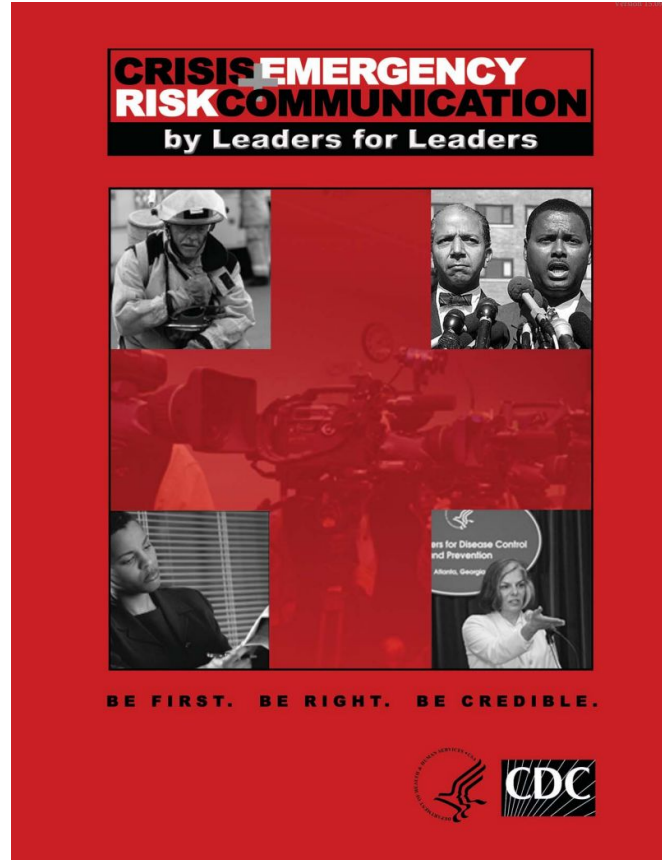
Chance favors the prepared mind.

Louis Pasteur

The best way to predict the future is to invent it

ALAN KAY

QuotesBook.com

2-6 May 2025
Tokyo, Japan
wadem.org/congress/tokyo-2025/

Tokyo Skyline and Mt. Fuji at Sunset