



# Crisis Communications: Being Prepared is Key

EXECUTIVE FARM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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# What is Crisis Communications?



A crisis is a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly, generally resulting in:

- ▶ Financial loss
- ▶ Reputation loss
- ▶ Public safety

Source: [InstituteForPR.org/crisis management and communications](http://InstituteForPR.org/crisis-management-and-communications)

# Tylenol Crisis: The Media May Know Before You Do

## Johnson & Johnson – Tylenol Crisis

*Robert Andrews, J&J's Assistant PR Director recalled how "We got a call from a Chicago news reporter. He told us that the medical examiner there had just given a press conference - people were dying from poisoned Tylenol. He wanted our comment. As it was the first knowledge we had here in this department, we told him we knew nothing about it. In that first call we learned more from the reporter than he did from us."*

-PR Week, October 2015





# "Chipotle Attempts to Recover From E-Coli PR Disaster: A Case Study"

-Medium, August 3, 2017



## "Troubled Chipotle Replaces Its C.E.O. Founder Steve Ells"

-New York Times, November 20, 2017

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Oct 31, 2015 | Chipotle temporarily closes 43 restaurants in Washington and Oregon after reports of an E. Coli outbreak.      |
| Nov 4, 2015  | CDC issues report linking E. Coli to Chipotle restaurants. Chipotle commits to becoming leader in food safety. |
| Nov 20, 2015 | CDC reports more Chipotle E. Coli cases.   |
| Dec 10, 2015 | Chipotle Founder and CEO Steve Ells apologizes live on the Today Show.   |
| Dec 23, 2015 | Chipotle announces implementation of new cooking methods directed at preventing foodborne illnesses.           |
| Jan 19, 2016 | Chipotle posts press release with details of an improved food safety program.                                  |
| Feb 1, 2016  | CDC announces the completion of Chipotle investigation.  |
| Feb 2, 2016  | Chipotle reports 4th quarter results and Steve Ells says it was most challenging quarter in company history.   |
| Feb 8, 2016  | All Chipotle stores are closed for a national meeting to emphasize the company's commitment to food safety.    |

# Are You Ready?

- ▶ Do you have a crisis communication plan?
- ▶ Is it updated annually?
- ▶ Do you have dedicated team members to handle crisis communications/risk management?
- ▶ Has anyone on your team received media training?

# Let's Get Started

- ▶ What is included in a crisis communication plan?
  - ▶ Mission, Vision, Values, Purpose
  - ▶ Objectives and Strategies
  - ▶ Roles and Responsibilities
  - ▶ Activation Plan
  - ▶ Resource Inventory
  - ▶ Templates and Tools to get you Started

# What Makes a Crisis Communications Plan Successful?



Prevention and Planning



Agility and Responsiveness



Expertise/Resources



Messages that reinforce and align your company's mission, vision, values and purpose



The Right Spokesperson(s)



Transparency and Accountability

# Prevention and Planning

## Proactive Assessment



- ▶ Do your employees know your company's mission/purpose? Values?
- ▶ How would you define your culture?
  - ▶ Would your employees report things they see?
  - ▶ Do they feel safe speaking up?
  - ▶ Do they feel a sense of ownership in your company?
- ▶ What can go wrong?
- ▶ How likely will it happen?
- ▶ What damage can result?



# Agility and Responsiveness

- ▶ Why is it important to be responsive during a crisis communication?
  - ▶ If you don't tell your story, someone will tell it for you
    - ▶ 24/7 real-time news cycle
    - ▶ Social Media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat, LinkedIn and more
    - ▶ Online news channels
    - ▶ Smart phones with cameras and videos
    - ▶ Apps



# Expertise & Resources



- ▶ Do you have the resources and expertise to handle this crisis/issue internally?
- ▶ Do you need outside assistance? If so, do you know who to call?
- ▶ Who in your company is the expert on the matter at hand?
- ▶ Do you have your Mission, Vision and Values articulated? What is your brand promise?
- ▶ Who in your organization has experience talking to the media?

Messaging  
that aligns with  
your mission,  
vision, values  
and brand



# Messaging that aligns with your mission, vision, values and brand

Whose responsibility  
is the reputation of  
your company?

- It starts with leadership
- It is everyone's responsibility

As a leader, what  
can you do?

- Set a clear company mission, vision and values
- Create a culture of safety: are your employees willing to report things they see? Do they feel safe speaking up?
- Define and communicate stakeholder expectations



# Choosing the Right Spokesperson

- ▶ Ideally, someone who has been trained as a spokesperson or who has had media training.
- ▶ Other questions to consider:
  - ▶ Is this person an expert on the matter?
  - ▶ Does this crisis require the head of the organization to respond or would it be better to have a subject-matter expert?
  - ▶ Can this person speak on behalf of our company?



# Spokesperson Best Practices



Tell your company's story in succinct sound bites



Make sure the spokesperson is fully briefed on three key messages and aware of the latest developments



Avoid using the phrase "no comment"



Avoid using jargon that the public will not understand



Have strong eye contact



Avoid saying "uhms" and be aware of other nervous gestures

# Transparency and Accountability



Tell the truth like your reputation depends on it, because it does



Tell your story in a manner that is compelling and personal



Take accountability at the top of the organization

# Preparing for an Unexpected Crisis

Take

When something unexpected goes wrong, take a deep breath, step back and pause long enough to see what is happening

Be

Be open to re-evaluating your plan in light of new info

- Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, Facebook IPO
- Praise the person who reports a mistake

Do

Do, monitor, diagnose, repeat

Avoid

Avoid silo thinking: know something about everyone else's job, understand how various tasks fit together and how they fit into the big picture



# Choose to be Proactive vs. Reactive

The Secret to Successful Crisis Management in the 21st Century  
- Melissa Agnes TEDx Talk

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQGEPEaEWtg>

# Workshops

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Questions?