

Nine Crucial Crisis Communications Tips

Every organization faces crises. Not all are as high profile as an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico or an unexpected multi-billion dollar loss from a risky business practice. Your crisis may come in the form of the death or departure of a key executive, an ill-advised quote in the press from one of your employees, or failure of your product to perform as promised. No matter what type of crisis you face, keep these top tips in mind as you work through your calamity:

1. **Realize that you will not have perfect knowledge.** You may have little information initially, and random details may emerge in a flood or a drip.
2. **Always tell the truth.** Be prepared for the fact that you may need to disseminate news that doesn't place you in the best light.
3. **Never speculate.** Do tell reporters and the public that you will get back to them as events unfold and you obtain solid facts.
4. **Demonstrate empathy.** This does not necessarily imply an apology as that can have legal consequences.
5. **Work closely with your legal team.** They are the experts in knowing how much legal exposure you might face. Just remember that you, as chief communicator, are the expert when it comes to shaping and delivering your message. Never back down from that responsibility.
6. **Prepare a crisis communications plan in advance.** Identify your spokespeople and steel them for dealings with a skeptical media and a potentially hostile public. Make sure to do this before storm clouds arrive.
7. **Refuse to let others fill the news vacuum.** Some organizations go into ostrich mode. If you don't furnish the news as you know it at the moment, the media will turn to other—perhaps antagonistic—sources.
8. **Seek out non-media channels to communicate with your public.** This can include various social media outlets.
9. **Explain what next steps you are taking.** You need to do more than clarify what happened. You need to provide a vision for how you intend to solve the problem and avoid its recurrence.

*Ed Barks leads media training workshops for executives who want to enhance their reputations, and for organizations that want to achieve their long-term business goals. He is the author of *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations and Face the Press with Confidence: The Media Interview Companion*. He is also community leader at [The Media Traning Blog](http://TheMediaTraningBlog.com). Learn more at www.barkscomm.com. Contact Ed at (540) 955-0600 or ebarks@barkscomm.com.*