

January/February/March 1994

TO: Executive Addressed

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RE: Crisis Prevention, Part I --Keeping Your Crisis Communication Management Plans Current

One of the most common questions asked of crisis consultants is, "Can't you do something to help us prevent crises from occurring?" The answer is yes, if there is a willingness to pay attention to readiness and the benefits that ongoing preparation provide. There is no "silver bullet" when it comes to prevention other than working to stay ready for those vulnerabilities and key issues which, even though remote, would have substantial impact were they to occur. Crisis prevention and readiness begin with recognizing the realities of crisis planning.

Reality #1: *The useful life of a crisis plan is about four years.* Personnel changes, business structuring and re-direction can overtake even the best updating process.

Reality #2: *Spokespeople change; corporate leaders change.* This means their replacements often require additional help to get up to speed. That's one reason why we suggest intensive, annual, video-based simulations. The technique brings newcomers up-to-speed in a matter of hours.

Reality #3: *The greatest single weakness of most crisis plans is the lack of defined roles for top management (and those management trusts).* Plans designed by low-level insiders without the boss' input will not be implemented if the reputations, careers or futures of high level insiders will be defined by the crisis at hand. If the boss doesn't buy it or hasn't bought in, he/she and those he/she trusts will do something else when problems occur.

Reality #4: *The fallacy of the single spokesperson still reigns supreme.* What happens if your single spokesperson doesn't survive the incident? What happens if your single spokesperson has the flu? What happens if your single spokesperson knows virtually nothing about the problem or issue causing the crisis? What if your single spokesperson is among those indicted?

More current theory says that while there may be a chief spokesperson, there are back-ups, subject matter experts, and more importantly, incident management specialists (IMS's) conversant with specific organizational threats such as kidnap, extortion, natural disasters, sabotage and employee violence. The IMS's are empowered and ready to respond with special expertise, credibility and the resources necessary.

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