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TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: Five Strategies For Managing Unplanned Visibility Caused by Emergencies

No emergency is really new except for the unprepared. In fact, virtually every emergency follows patterns we have seen before. Recognition of these patterns enables us to eliminate surprise and reduce response errors. Emergency management succeeds with good strategy, a tolerance for surprise, and having answers for the questions we know will be asked. Here are five interesting and useful lessons:

Lesson #1: Think and act in terms of timelines rather than plans.

Thinking and acting in terms of timelines is a flexible approach. Plans require bureaucratic responsiveness to change. Timelines are situational and adjustable to the velocity of events and circumstances.

Tactics you can actually accomplish will dictate the strategies you can achieve. What can be accomplished in the time allowed? What is the most likely pattern of events? What needs to be done and when? What needs to be said and when?

Lesson #2: Half your energy and 25 percent of your resources will be devoted to fixing mistakes just made, tactics that didn't work, or unintended consequences.

The truth of emergency management is that we are forced to act with only partial information. Mistakes will be made that will need to be managed or fixed at the same time the emergency or crisis continues to create additional problems requiring extraordinary levels of attention.

Lesson #3: You will lose the perception battle if you let the news media drive your strategies and tactics.

The concerns of the audiences most directly affected should drive emergency management. Generally the media are only a fraction of those audiences. Focus on critical audiences and get to them directly, quickly. Then focus on the media's needs.

Lesson #4: Direct communication with your base audiences and building their support is essential to limiting the aftereffects of emergency situations.

If you rely on the news media or the jungle telegraph, the partial information transmitted will be wrong, probably sensationalized, and create unintended consequences among those who may care most about your issue, product, or problem.

Lesson #5: Different audiences have different message needs at different times. You can control the velocity and targeting of your messages during emergencies.

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