



Why Should the Boss Listen to You?

Management Participation in Readiness Exercises

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Question: How do I get the boss to participate seriously in a crisis readiness exercise?

Answer: All crises are management problems first. Pre-planning executive actions can avoid career-defining (and limiting) moments. Include very specific executive instructions in all plans and response scenarios.

To be successful, every crisis response process requires planned response elements devoted exclusively to senior management roles and responsibilities:

- Have a plan for what the boss should do in a crisis.
- Set the tone and the goals of the response – any, and every, response.

1. HAVE A PLAN:

WHAT THE BOSS SHOULD REALLY DO IN A CRISIS

One of the more dangerous weaknesses in crisis response is the lack of specific roles and assignments for top management. This defect in crisis management planning occurs all too frequently and can result in mismanagement, lack of management, and even organizational paralysis. Prompt and effective response depends on carefully spelling out essential CEO responsibilities in your crisis response plan.

The CEO or surviving leader must:

Assert the moral authority expected of ethical leadership. Even the most devastating or catastrophic crisis will be forgiven in most cultures. Forgiveness is possible – provided the organization, through early behaviors and leadership, takes appropriate and expected steps to deal with critical issues. The behaviors, briefly and in order, are:

- Candor and disclosure (acknowledge something adverse has or is happening)
- Explanation and revelation about the nature of the problem (analyze early)
- Commitment to communicate throughout the process (even if critics abound)
- Empathy (commit intentional acts of helpfulness, kindness, and compassion)
- Oversight (invite outsiders, even victims, to look over your shoulders)
- Commitment to zero (find ways to prevent any similar event from occurring again)
- Restitution or penance (pay the price – do more than would be expected, asked for, or required)

Take responsibility for the care of victims. The single most crucial element in any crisis – aside from ending the victim-causing event – is managing the victim dimension. Management must see that appropriate steps are taken to care for victims' needs. These steps are both reputation preservation and litigation reduction activities. Most devastating responses to crises occur when victims are left to their own devices; when victims' needs go unfulfilled; or – for whatever reasons (usually legal) – the organization that created the victims refuses to take even the simplest of humane steps to ease the pain, suffering, and victimization of those afflicted. Out of all of the CEO's essential responsibilities, taking a personal interest and an active role in the care of victims is the most important. Maintain a positive, constructive pressure to get victim issues resolved promptly.

Set the appropriate "tone" for the organizational response. Tone refers to internal management behavior that helps the organization meet the expectations triggered by a crucial, critical, or catastrophic situation. When senior management assumes the posture of victimization, of being under attack, the entire organization will react in the same way. Rarely are large organizations and institutions considered victims. They are generally considered to be the perpetrators at worst, or arrogant bystanders at best.

Top executives need to set a constructive tone that encourages positive attitudes and language, and prompt responses. This approach protects the organization's relationships with various constituents during the response and recovery period, shows respect for victims, and reduces the threat of trust or reputation damage.

Set the organization's voice. Put a face and a voice on the organization or institution as it moves through the crisis. This action is directed towards the external world – how we describe ourselves, what we are doing, how the response is going, what responsibili-

ties we are taking, what outside scrutiny we are inviting, etc.

Commit acts of leadership at every level. Acting like a leader has significance during urgent situations. Literally walk around and talk to people. Encourage, suggest, knock down barriers, and help everyone stay focused on the ultimate response process goals. Random acts of leadership are always welcome in any environment, but especially during crisis. Rather than huddling in the executive suite while trying to determine what steps should be taken to resolve the situation, 90 percent of senior executive activity should involve being out-and-about – leading, motivating, and sharing empathy.

2. SET TONE AND RESPONSE GOALS

Setting the tone means establishing clear, simple, verbal and written goals and achievement statements that guide the organization's behavior. Here is one example.

Our Crisis Communication Goal:

Simple, Sensible, Positive, Empathetic Responses at Lightning Speed

A) Define specific responsibilities:

- Be available; be helpful, as required by the response plan.
- Know what to do; when to do it.
- Know what to say; when to say it.
- Know what to delegate and to whom.
- Inspire rapid recovery as the crisis atmosphere subsides.

B) Establish a policy base for crisis response inside the organization.

Avoid negative behaviors, language, and decisions. They only slow response time, distract those with response assignments, and endanger the organization's reputation and executive careers.

CONCLUSION

Having specific responsibilities for bosses keeps them away from the Command Center and in the field – where they really belong – where they can motivate, help overcome barriers, and re-allocate resources on the spot. We will elaborate on this last point in more detail next month.

About the Author

*Have a question for Jim Lukaszewski? E-mail him at crisismaster@e911.com. Make your subject line "CPM Questions." Include your full contact information, including a telephone number and e-mail address. If your need is urgent, please clearly say so. If you'd like your questions answered in this column, please say so. Jim Lukaszewski's new book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You*, published by Jossey-Bass, is available in bookstores. (The book can also be purchased at www.barnesandnoble.com and www.Amazon.com. Bulk orders are available at www.800CEORead.com.) Contact Jim at (914) 681-0000, or via his website at www.e911.com. All questions and answers used in these columns become the property of the CPM Group and may be used in other media and products.*