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## **\*\*CRISIS MANAGER\*\***

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For Those Who Are Crisis Managers, Whether They Want to Be or Not"

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### **>>CRISIS MANAGER UNIVERSITY<<**

[**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the longest issue of "Crisis Manager" that I have ever published. Ezine format doesn't easily accommodate lengthy items. BUT, I could not resist the opportunity to review a superb publication by the renowned Jim Lukaszewski, conduct an email interview with Jim, AND bring you a long book excerpt that you will – I predict – save and use again and again. So please, read on!]

#### **REVIEW: CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN COMPONENTS AND MODELS, CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT READINESS**

"Crisis Communication Plan Components and Models, Crisis Communication Management Readiness," by renowned lecturer and consultant Jim Lukaszewski, is the single most useful publication on crisis planning that I have ever read. I have been involved in the crisis management field for more than 20 years, and immediately found information in this book that I will be able to use to better serve my clients. I also found information, such as the excerpt I have been given permission to reprint, below, that will be of immeasurable value in the never-easy task of persuading decision-makers that they are at constant risk and need to engage in crisis planning.

If you are a total novice to the subject of crisis management, you might find the size and scope of the 323-page manual-format publication to be a bit intimidating, but at \$195 it is, in every sense of the word, a bargain. Want crisis communications theory laid out nice and easily, on pages you could use for training staff or influencing decision-makers? Want specific examples of how to create a crisis communications team, write a crisis communications plan, and conduct crisis simulations? How about templates for what everybody on a crisis communications team should do in the event of a crisis?

Jim's lifetime of educating his peers and clients is evident in the design, layout and verbiage of the book. Despite its size, it is simple to quickly go to the pages you need when you need them. Concepts are explained clearly. Templates would be easy to adapt to your own organization.

"Crisis Communication Plan Components and Models, Crisis Communication Management Readiness," (that's a real mouthful of a title, huh?) is actually part of a series, as explained below in my interview with the author. I haven't yet read others in the series, but suspect that investing in any of them would be one of your organization's wisest decisions.

The book is published jointly with the Public Relations Society of America, [www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org). If you are a PRSA member, you can acquire the publication through its online store. It is also sold at Amazon.com, as are Jim's other publications.

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### **EXCERPT: CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN COMPONENTS AND MODELS, CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT READINESS**

[Editor's Note: This excerpt is from "Key Concepts", the book's first chapter. I have long used what I call "oh sh++" lists of potential crises to impress CEOs with the need for proactive crisis preparedness. I think you'll agree that Jim's list epitomizes that concept!]

#### ***F. Crisis Category Examples***

You can expect five general categories of crisis:

- Local events of sufficient magnitude to involve corporate Headquarters. (All crises begin locally.)
- Corporate operating crises that arise from our day-to-day business activities.
- Non-operating crises, those crises not directly the result of a manufacturing or operating process or daily work routine.
- Combinations of number one, two, and three above.
- Web-based attacks/incidents.

Managers can rank all of these categories in terms of their potential severity and likelihood. Crises with the highest probabilities and highest potential impact require a crisis response plan.

1. ***Local events***, which would draw attention to your organization as a whole, could include:

- Activist action
- Any item from the *Call Headquarters If* list (see Chapter 4)
- Arrest of plant manager or other senior executive
- Bomb threat
- Boycott by contractors
- Community confrontation
- Customer complaints
- Drug activity or drug raid

- Employee complaints
- Employee violence
- Indictment of local employees and managers
- Job actions
- Local labor problem gaining national attention
- Major accident or disaster
- Major negative news stories
- Outage situations
- Product boycotts
- Rumors
- Violence in the workplace
- Whistle-blowers
- Work stoppage

2. *Operating crises*, which would draw attention to your organization as a whole, could include:

- Adverse international event
- Billing, bookkeeping, or collection errors (massive)
- Business loss (Wall Street is surprised and issues a “sell” recommendation)
- Civil or criminal litigation
- Competitor allegations
- Computer and data theft
- Computer failure
- Computer security breach
- Computer virus affecting your organization’s data processing or manufacturing capabilities
- Congressional action
- Continuous deterioration of the business
- Decapitation (sudden loss of key executives, usually through accident or conflict)
- Ethics problem
- Extended loss of production capacity
- Extortion
- Financial
- Government investigations
- Hazardous material team activation
- Hostile takeovers
- Incident or disaster that gains substantial government attention
- Major chemical explosion or leak
- Major fire
- Major operations interruption
- Major power outage
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Product contamination
- Product liabilities
- Reorganizations
- Rumors that disrupt the business
- Sabotage or acts of vandalism
- Sarbanes-Oxley investigations

- Serious accident or incident involving the death of employee on the job or people in the vicinity
  - Subpoenas or class action suits
  - Sudden death or injury to one or more of the company's senior executives
  - Sudden drop in stock price
  - Transportation emergency involving a chemical leak or major health and safety threat
  - Transportation emergency involving imported products
  - Wall Street surprises
  - Whistle-blowers
3. *Non-operating crises*, which would draw attention to your organization as a whole, often elicit extreme emotions and are the most dangerous and difficult to deal with. Examples include:
- Activist action or threats
  - Alleged liability or negligence implicating a company employee
  - Berserk employee acting alone against the company
  - Bomb threat/bombing
  - Chronic safety and environmental problems
  - Civil and criminal investigations
  - Confrontation
  - Customers
  - Deranged employee taking action against other employees, or the company
  - Disgruntled employees
  - Emergence of credible information challenging the safety or efficacy of a company product, service, or practice
  - Environmental spills, accidents, fears
  - Facility closings and employee layoffs
  - Government actions
  - Health loss/prevention
  - Incapacitation of many employees
  - Industrial accidents
  - Investigation or indictment of the company, its employees, or former employees for alleged improprieties on or off the job
  - Kidnapping
  - Labor relations
  - Litigation
  - Major crimes
  - Major negative business decisions
  - Major negative criminal or civil allegations
  - Major theft
  - Malevolence
  - Malfeasance
  - Market shifts
  - Organized opposition
  - Outsider intervention
  - Product failures
  - Public attacks

- Recycling/environmental issues
- Regulation
- Rumors
- Scandal
- Sexual harassment
- Terrorist actions
- Whistleblowers
- Wildcat strikes
- Workplace violence

4. *Operating/non-operating combination events*, which typically produce apparent victims and draw attention to your organization as a whole, could include:

- Arson
- Bomb threat
- Boycott by vendors
- Boycott of contractors
- Competitor allegations
- Congressional action
- Contamination affecting major sections of the nation or populations
- Coordinated terrorist action
- Financial dislocations
- Incident or disaster that gains substantial government attention
- Labor relations
- Potential for government action
- Reorganizations
- Subpoenas or class action suits
- Toxic substance release under the U.S. and other national and local laws, rules, or regulations

5. *Web-based attacks and competitive targeting*, which would draw attention to your organization as a whole, could include:

- Activist opposition
- Angry customers
- Attack sites
- Boycotts
- CEO and senior executive targeting
- Data theft and misuse
- Distortions
- E-mail attacks
- Extortion
- Lies
- Organized opposition
- Personal attacks
- Product attacks
- Rumors
- Sexual harassment

- Short sales
- Single product targets
- Spamming
- “Sucks” sites
- Terrorism

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**AUTHOR INTERVIEW:  
CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN COMPONENTS AND MODELS,  
CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT READINESS**

**Q:** Who is your target audience for, and primary purpose of, this publication? Does it require some existing understanding of crisis management to be fully appreciated? Does it need to be accompanied by training?

**JEL:** This book targets those actively engaged in some element of crisis preparation, planning, recovery, readiness, or business continuation. But its central purpose is to provide unique, useful things to talk about with senior management – things, in fact, that senior management does not already know. Most crisis management counseling spends far too much time talking about the news media rather than other issues. In relation to operations, senior managers are far better informed than their PR advisors.

The contents of this book can easily be integrated into existing training and coaching programs. My goal was to provide many models and templates as entry points, start-up ideas, and important thinking to help move the process of crisis planning and readiness along.

**Q:** Have you found that anyone is intimidated by the sheer volume of information you make available, which is not unusual for a Lukaszewski publication?

**JEL:** We have yet to hear of anyone being intimidated, but I suspect that those who are intimidated won't call. Remember, too, there are three additional volumes in this crisis series, each covering other specific and strategically important areas of crisis planning and readiness. When taken together, these books provide a complete road map for crisis preparation, planning, recovery, readiness, and business continuation:

"War Stories and Crisis Communication Strategies, A Crisis Communication Management Anthology" contains the theory, insight, and background information that sets the stage for beginning and maintaining a crisis plan

"Crisis Communication Planning Strategies, A Crisis Communication Management Workbook" walks the reader through the development of a crisis plan: threat identification, scenario development, message development, the elements of corporate and branch plans, creating crucial contact lists, and incident recap procedures.

"Media Relations Strategies During Emergencies, A Crisis Communication Management Guide" walks through an overall crisis media relations strategy: managing the media, understanding journalists, preparing spokespersons, question identification and developing answers, the crisis news conference, and managing the massive event.

The most common comments I've received are that the material is "sensible, usable, important, and solid stuff." There are some great reviews on Amazon. COM.

**Q:** Say I'm a director of corporate communications and I've read the whole book. I know I can't get my CEO to read it. How do I get the most important principles across to him?

**JEL:** The content is designed to empower the advisor or counselor to bring key strategic issues and topics to the attention of operating managers. As such, much of the content appears as lists, processes, steps, and phases. In other words, I've taken a process approach to the content simply because most operating managers are trained to think in a process or linear fashion. If advice simply comes in bursts of interesting ideas, executives will roll their eyes, take a breath, and walk away.

Nine out of 10 crisis plans started are never finished. Corporations and organizations tire quickly of meetings and discussions about failure, mistakes, and organizational stupidity. Few, if any, executives are compensated for crisis readiness very easily penalized for being unready when something bad happens. Good crisis planning, even if a plan is never finished, is good for the organization. One comment I often hear is that, "We can't prepare for everything." The truth, however, is that you can prepare for the most crucial things.

Organizations that do some planning and preparation work are far better prepared overall.

**Q:** You are, as am I, a proponent of scenario-centered crisis communications plans. Others think that using scenarios to prepare gives organizations a false sense of security that they're ready for anything. Comments on that?

**JEL:** It is over-optimism. One of the top two reasons CEOs lose their jobs is because they are overly optimistic in their projections, reports, assumptions, expectations, and accomplishments.

Since 95 percent of all crises are operational in nature – that is, a part of whatever a particular organization does everyday, a lot of resident expertise is in place to manage these problems. So, some optimism is justified.

But, it's those pesky non-operating problems like injuring customers, sexual harassment, criminal activity, and fraud that cause 95 percent of the harm and reputational damage, and are unmanageable due to their emotional nature. Then, there's management's lack of familiarity or simple denial that such terrible things could occur within the organization. The more scenarios you can develop and rehearse, the better prepared you are going to be.

**Q:** Recognizing this may be challenging, but what do you think is the single most important section of your book, perhaps information that you know few others understand very well?

**JEL:** The chapter on managing the victim dimension is absolutely the most essential section and thought process in this book. Victimization is perhaps the most highly emotionalized human state, yet managers are not trained in it; and lawyers, like business people, are trained to discount emotion, ignore it, and insult or vilify it. In reality, it's the victimization factor that drives the impact of all crises.

In a crisis, public relations people spend far too much time providing advice about the news media and reporters. Most operational people could care less about the media. What they do care about are their careers, which may be at stake.

If management "gets" the victim dimension, they will deal much more smartly, honorably, and promptly when exposed to or engaged in a crisis.

In my coaching of senior management teams in crisis, when I present the concept of victimization, there are epiphanies all around, including general counsels and the heads of corporate security.

[**James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA**, has spent much of his career generously sharing those things he learns on the front lines of crisis management. His name recently appeared in Corporate Legal Times as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in PR Week as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis." Jim is a prolific author and internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. Visit his substantive Web site at [www.e911.com](http://www.e911.com). Contact Jim at [jel@e911.com](mailto:jel@e911.com) or 914.681.0000.]

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**>>ABOUT THE EDITOR & PUBLISHER<<**

Jonathan Bernstein is president of Bernstein Crisis Management LLC, <http://www.bernsteincrisismanagement.com>, a national crisis management public relations agency providing 24/7 access to crisis response professionals. The agency engages in the full spectrum of crisis management services: crisis prevention, response, planning & training. He has been in the public relations field for 23 years, following five-year stints in both military intelligence and investigative reporting. Write to [jonathan@bernsteincrisismanagement.com](mailto:jonathan@bernsteincrisismanagement.com).

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