

MANAGING THE BOSS AND THE BOSSES DURING CRISES: AVOID DEFICITS IN RESPONSE PLANNING QUESTIONS

Probably the greatest deficit in response planning for emergency situations is having scenario specific, situationally productive, pre-approved, and understood instructions for what the bosses need to be doing, and when they should be doing it.

You've probably wondered why it's so very quiet when you're in "executive country." You could say it's because the executives are safely in their silos where just a few essential decisions need to be made. You see, every decision these executives do make tends to shake some part of the organization. Too many decisions and the entire organization shakes. No one down below gets anything done because they're all waiting for the next disruptive directive to arrive.

A crisis or emergency situation gives top executives something important to do – immediately – together or separately. Bosses dive in willingly and apply all of their intellectual power, experience, and intuition. The unintended consequence is that all of your conscientious planning, preparation, rehearsal, and simulation may be for naught since top management will start from the very beginning and spend hours trying to figure out what they and everyone else should be doing. They may spend lot of time covering bases that don't immediately matter, like, embarrassment-avoidance, self-forgiveness, searching for the guilty, or just self-talk. Meanwhile, the situation continues to leak, foam, stink, burn, and, perhaps, even kill or maim.

Crisis Reality No. 1 Involve management early on

For effective crisis, emergency, and big issue response to occur successfully, the boss or someone the boss deeply trusts must be involved from the very beginning. Many crisis response processes fail because the first time the boss finds out there is a plan and people to take action is when the crisis occurs.

When crises occur the boss or bosses go to the same room and "clump." Since they're all in one clump, response processes, especially communication, will be frozen until they decide to decide, or decide not to decide.

The kinds of crises that generally tend to attract management attention are show-stopping, people-stopping, product-stopping, reputationally defining events that create victims and/or explosive visibility, and career defining moments.



PRODUCT DETAILS

Newsletter: 4 pages

Language: English

Price: \$5.00 U.S.

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James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name 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."