

# Lukaszewski's 12 Axioms of Crisis Survival (2014 Edition)

By James E. Lukaszewski,  
*ABC, Fellow IABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, BEPS Emeritus*

Managing emergencies, crises, and disasters successfully means recognizing patterns of success and avoiding patterns of failure, and defeat. Understanding these patterns enables us to coach and prepare management's actions, emotions, and expectations before and during emergency situations. Here's what I've learned:

1. Neither the media, your toughest opponents, smartest critics, nor the government knows enough to defeat you. Defeat is almost always the work of uninformed or over confident, overly optimistic bosses, co-workers and associates; well-meaning but uninformed friends, relatives, or from dysfunction in an organization.
2. All crises are local, at the beginning. Keeping the issues and focus tight and small will help you solve your problems and move forward. Your "industry," outsiders, or the media cannot solve your problems (they don't care), nor can you solve theirs. You must solve your own. It's your destiny. Manage it or someone else will.
3. Disasters and problems rarely kill products, brands or companies unless you let them. It is your silence, negative communication and attitude that cause tough questions, bad stories, and real damage. Silence is the most toxic strategy of all.
4. Colorful and memorable language creates headlines that last forever, are impossible to live down and is among the most frequent causes for top executive dismissal during a crisis. Bad news always ripens badly.
5. Twenty-five percent of your resources and fifty percent of your energy during emergencies go toward fixing yesterday's mistakes. Crises are messy, sloppy, imprecise situations. Everything gets worse before most anything gets better.
6. Positive, aggressive, assertive communication limits follow-up questions, focuses on the most important aspects of the problem, and moves the entire process forward to resolution despite a negative environment, an antagonistic news media or contentious social media, angry victims and survivors. Positive, constructive, compassionate actions always speak louder than words.

# Lukaszewski's 12 Axioms of Crisis Survival

---

7. There is no question you can be asked about your situation that will surprise you. You may get irritated, agitated or humiliated because a really tough or touchy subject is raised, but you aren't surprised. Promptly answering every question is your ongoing opportunity to get your messages out, and calm things down.
8. Preparation, rehearsal, and a certain amount of luck will keep you going and help you win.
9. Luck is limited.
10. The general public does not care about your problems until you make them care. Fifty percent have no reason to care;
  - Twenty-five percent probably have troubles worse than yours, from their perspective, anyway; and
  - If you get the attention of those remaining, they will probably be glad you have the trouble you have.
11. Leadership that shows compassion, community sensitivity and ethical response strategies moves companies to victory and out of harm's way. Timidity, hesitation, confusion and arrogance bring defeat and long term trust damage. Keep the positive pressure on to win.
12. Destructive management communication behavior and language often leads to similar troubling behavior at many levels within an organization. Leadership has three principal responsibilities in crisis: Stopping the production of victims, managing the victim dimension, and setting the moral tone for the response.

\*\*\*\*\*

James E. Lukaszewski, *ABC, Fellow IABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, BEPS Emeritus* is President of The Lukaszewski Group Division of Risdall Marketing Group, based in St. Paul, MN. He is widely considered to be America's Crisis Guru®. A consultant to many large companies worldwide and bestselling author on crisis management, leadership and organizational recovery, you can find his books, "*Lukaszewski on Crisis Communication, What Your CEO Needs to Know About Reputation Risk and Crisis Management*" and "*Why Should the Boss Listen to You? The Seven Disciplines of the Trusted Strategic Advisor*" at Amazon.com. Visit his website at [www.e911.com](http://www.e911.com).