When It Rains, It Pours: Communicating in a Crisis

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The Struggle

PR pros

Lawyers

When LAWYERS Decide Our Press Strategy.

When PR PROS Decide Our Press Strategy:

DEFEANDANT IS LIABLE
Defining “objective”

What does “objective” mean to you?

What does “objective” mean to a reporter?
The Effect of “No Comment”

What does that mean to him?
SIDE A vs. SIDE B

Strength of Side A

PRIMACY

The FIRST thing an unbiased observer learns is the most CREDIBLE.
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Contrary information is REJECTED.

Information in line with an observer’s outlook is ACCEPTED.
RIP CURRENTS
Break the Grip of the Rip!

Controlling the NARRATIVE

Tell the FACTS as soon you know they are FACTS
TELL IT:
Fast
Truthfully
All at once

NARRATIVE

victim
villain
indicator
Victim  Villain  Vindicator

Who picks first? would

MONOPOLY

Lessons

Giving opponent free reign of media is never the correct response
Lessons

When you do get your message out, you're fighting against made up minds

PUBLIC OPINION

What about when we can't say something?
General (noncommittal) Responses
aka "holding statements"

Categories:
Aspirational
Procedural
More to Come
Gag Order

Ask Yourself:
What can you say that WON’T change?
Case Study: Tainted Water Supply

“Our goal is to provide clean and safe water to everyone in our community. We have dozens of safeguards to protect our water. When there’s a threat to our water supply, we want to act quickly to keep people safe.”

Aspirational

“When there’s a problem with our water supply, our safety professionals work closely with health department officials to test, treat, and monitor the water.”

Procedural
“We take water safety seriously. We know it’s important. That’s why we’re taking the time to carefully review the facts before we brief the public. As soon as we know more, we’ll respond with greater detail.”

More to Come

“The Health Department and MD EPA have asked us to not discuss the details of the water testing until all lab analysis is complete. Until that happens, we can’t speculate or talk about it further.”

Gag Order

KEY POINT:

Get Crisis Communications Help
Get my emergency tips card

tinyurl.com/MediaEmergencyCard

In a crisis, who will talk to the press?
-Competent
- Credible
- Caring

ARISTOTLE

GOAL: "They GET it."
In a crisis situation – create your own hashtag early on to help control the Twitter stream. If you don’t, someone else will.

Toledo 2014
#EmptyGlassCity

Show and Tell

KEY POINT:
KEY POINT:

VIDEO makes things more URGENT
While we’re waiting for approval of our message...

KEY POINT:

Give our side first or fast

Lessons

Reporters will go to air/print even when they don’t know the facts
Why We Speak In Sound Bites

The Incredible Shrinking Sound Bite

According to the Washington, D.C. based Center for Media and Public Affairs, the average network sound bite has shrunk to just 8 seconds from 42 seconds in the 1968 Presidential election.

Thinking Like a Video Editor

8th Grade English
Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counts: 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words: 277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences: 46</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Averages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per Paragraph: 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per Sentence: 16.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characters per Word: 4.9</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease: 50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result

The Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score is 10.3, indicating that the text is suitable for a grade 10 reader. The score is calculated based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence. A score of 6 or below is considered easy to read, while a score of 12 or above is considered difficult. This text is likely to be accessible to a general audience, making it suitable for a wide range of readers.
Oldest Person at the Thanksgiving Table

Use POWER Words

Lifeline of Ohio

23
LIFELINE OF OHIO POWER WORDS:

“RECOVER organs” ... not “HARVEST organs”

“A person’s DECISION” ... not “A person’s WISHES”

BAD Power Word Choice:

United Airlines

BAD Power Word Choice:
BAD Power Word Choice:

Power Word Choice: LEAK or SPILL

The Washington Post

Re-allocate? United ridiculed for corporate-speak response to passenger drought.
Power Word Choice:

INVESTIGATION
or
REVIEW

Power Word Choice:
ACCIDENT or INCIDENT

Getting the Human Element Into A Crisis
Message Discipline

Traffic Light

Red Light
Information you MUST NOT talk about – illegal, unethical, unprofessional

Yellow Light
Information you’d RATHER NOT talk about – not important or distracting from message

Green Light
Information you WANT to talk about – your message

MESSAGE DISCIPLINE =

STICK TO THE GREEN LIGHT
Don’t use the words of the opposition or reporters

Reverse the viewpoint of the issue

They say / DON’T Say

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will you resign?</th>
<th>I will not resign.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was this incompetence?</td>
<td>This wasn’t incompetence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is our water poisoned?</td>
<td>Our water isn’t poisoned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They say / **DO Say**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They say</th>
<th><strong>DO Say</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will you resign?</td>
<td>I will continue to lead this effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was this incompetence?</td>
<td>We are doing the best we can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is our water poisoned?</td>
<td>This water is unsafe to drink.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Underdog Swap**

**Widow Brown**
Traffic Light

Red Light
Information you MUST NOT talk about – illegal, unethical, unprofessional

Yellow Light
Information you’d RATHER NOT talk about – not important or distracting from message

Green Light
Information you WANT to talk about – your message

Green Light

Your three most important messages, such as:
Examples of hard work or good effort
Your mission
Why this matter is important
Yellow Light
Answers to hypothetical questions
Facts that place you in bad light (unless inoculating)
Your personal opinion
Rumors
Information about process and procedure

Red Light
Comments critical of sympathetic victims
Privileged or confidential information
Investigative materials
Defamatory comments
Lies

Beware of the danger of over-reassurance
When things are bad, don’t say things are fine

GOAL:

Your actions/gestures matter
Begin Communicating

Write a short statement (100 words or less)
Have your team review the statement

Release it Internally

Post it on social media
Use Dropbox and Twitter to Push Out Press Materials

Tinyurl.com/TryDropbox2018

Send it to local news media, noting who the statement is from.
Record audio sound bites on your smartphone

E-mail directly to radio and TV (include a headshot of the speaker for TV)

Have reporters follow your social media feed for updated information
Update it accordingly

If TV/radio reporters are gathering, prepare a crowd-controlled area for briefing
Set up room with media needs and message in mind

Don’t let your news conference look like this:
Use a “mult box”

Check the white balance for cameras

Mic check before starting
Assign roles and standing positions

Everyone must speak in front of the microphones

Always have an introduction with “green light” information and your primary sound bite
Restate the statement released on social media

The main speaker begins by introducing himself and other participants or refer to handouts

If questions go on too long signal the end of the conference by saying “one last question”
Consistency of contact
- regular briefings
- new content for newly arrived media outlets

After the Briefing...

Correct Misstatements and False Rumors
Check in with key stakeholders

CHECKLIST:

- Who are your top stakeholders?
- What are the most likely questions they will ask?
- Which can you answer now?
- When can you answer the other questions?

Monitor social media
QUESTIONS?

One last point...

Bring this Training to YOUR organization
Half day or full day

CHAPTERS ON:

1. How to write op-eds
2. How to write speeches
3. Sharpen writing skills
4. Crisis Communications