

# Crisis Communications

## A **Crash Course**

On What to Do In a Crisis



We are here for you!

### Here's What We Will Discuss...

- *Definition of a Crisis*
- *PR Nightmares*
- *Steps to Take Before The Chaos*
- *The Spokesperson*
- *The Aftermath*



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Crisis Communications  
= designed to mitigate damage  
to a individual or organization  
facing a public challenge to its  
reputation.



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A crisis is NOT a matter of "if."  
It is a matter of WHEN!



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## Real PR Nightmares



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### The Volkswagen Emissions Scandal

In September 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency accused Volkswagen of manipulating its engine controls to be able to pass laboratory emissions tests. Not only was the company violating the Clean Air Act by selling vehicles that didn't meet environmental requirements, but it was also violating its customers' trust by making its cars seem more environmentally friendly.



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Unfortunately, the way the company handled the scandal made things even worse. As the story continued to evolve, the company's response was seen as inconsistent and, at times, contradictory to previous statements. Executives claimed they didn't know about the cheating, only to reveal they did just a few days later.

Meanwhile, the company's PR and social media teams struggled to keep up. As the company set out to recall millions of vehicles, officials promised to reimburse some, but not all, customers for their troubles.



All the while, consumers reported that the company seemed to be handling the crisis in a dishonest way by not fully "owning" its role in the scandal. Sales dropped 25% from the previous year. – [The Guardian.com](http://TheGuardian.com)



## Nightmares are FIXABLE!

### Starbucks Gets It Right

In 2018, two African American men were waiting for a friend and didn't want to order anything until he showed up. Because they were just sitting in the store and hadn't bought anything (yet), the manager asked them to leave. When they didn't, the manager called the police. The men were arrested and held for hours before they were released without being charged.



## Nightmares are FIXABLE!

The incident went public, and as some would say, viral. Immediately, Starbucks leadership stepped up. Howard Schultz, Chairman of Starbucks, said, "I'm embarrassed, ashamed. I think what occurred was reprehensible at every single level. I take it very personally, as everyone in our company does, and we're committed to making it right."



## Nightmares are FIXABLE!

In addition to Schultz's apology, Starbucks announced that it would be closing more than 8,000 stores on May 29 to conduct racial bias training for 175,000 employees. Schultz said, "It will cost millions of dollars, but I've always viewed this and things like this as not an expense, but an investment in our people and our company. And we're better than this." – [Forbes.com](http://Forbes.com)



## Steps Before The Chaos

### *Crisis Preparedness Plan*



### A. Anticipate a Crisis

1. Brainstorm with your communications, security, leadership, and legal team on all potential crises that could arise in your district.
2. Modify existing operational methods for preventable situations.
3. Develop a clear and accurate response for the best and worst case scenarios.



### 4. Determine your HUB:

- A. Management HUB = A private internal meeting space within your organization where your team develops and issues statements while monitoring the situation.
- B. Media HUB = A designated place where outside media will gather away from the crisis scene and your spokesperson will issue updates and information.



### B. Train a Spokesperson

1. Identify and train one spokesperson for your organization. This should be outlined in your policy.
  - This helps to eliminate inaccurate information and allows your organization to speak in one clear voice. Ex: The superintendent of your district.



3. The Spokesperson should be TRAINED, have the right SKILLS, and be PRE-SCREENED to ensure the agreed upon message is conveyed properly.



### Crisis Scenario:

A man enters your school with a gun. Local law enforcement are dispatched and are in search of the gunman. No one was killed, but there have been five people injured - two students and three teachers. Local media has shown up at your school.

**HOW DO YOU RESPOND?**



### C. Establish a Notification and Monitoring System

1. SHARE INFORMATION **ACCURATELY & QUICKLY!!!!!!**
2. The fastest way to reach your audience is social media. The same message should live on EACH platform.
3. Your district can also send messages utilizing an app or mass phone messaging service.
4. Rule of thumb: If there are deaths or injuries, the next of kin should be the 1<sup>st</sup> to know!



#### D. Perfect Your Message

1. The message you share or not share can make or break your brand.
2. Messages to your mass audience (social) and media should go out simultaneously.
3. Avoid the "no comment" statements. It is better to be brief, accurate, and compassionate.



#### 4. Develop a holding statement for various situations:

- "We are aware of the situation and have notified all necessary parties affected and involved. The safety of our students, faculty, and staff are our highest priority."
- "Due to the nature of this unfortunate event, we will be sharing information with the impacted families first. We will be supplying additional information when it becomes available via our website and social media accounts."



- "There are no imminent threats or danger. We have implemented our crisis preparedness and response plan which works with local law enforcement and places the highest priority on the health and safety of our students."



#### The Aftermath

- Analyze what you learned from your crisis.
- Determine what went right and what went wrong.
- Update your crisis plan based on your analysis.
- Develop any good possible PR from the situation.
- Release a FINAL Statement.



## Choose To Be **PR**epared!

*Any Questions?*



#### Useful Policies to Have in a Crisis

Five categories of policies:

1. Safety Drills
2. Communication
3. Digital Safety
4. Emergency Closings
5. Other Useful Policies



Safety Drill Policies  
 JGF - Student Safety  
 EBBC - Emergency Drills

- New requirement to conduct an active shooter drill within the first 60 days of each new semester.
- Each school must have disaster plans to include areas such as bomb threat, earthquake, fire, and tornado.
- Duty of principals and teachers to instruct and practice the proper techniques of fire drills, emergency management, and methods of escape.
- State of emergency declaration and procedures when the school cannot operate for the entire school term.



Safety Drill Policies  
 EBBA - School Safety Plan

- Requirement of a district school safety plan to address safety issues of the district.
- New requirement for the district to conduct a training on mental health and suicide prevention for all staff every 2 years.
- Requirement to self-assess the current plan and how to improve the plan with current situations.
- Requirement to assess the effectiveness of the crisis management plan and safety drill procedures.



Communication Policies  
 KB - Public Information Program

- Announcement to Parents - Materials for distribution will be released through the central office and approved by the Superintendent or his/her representative.
- School Sponsored Media - Any outside media announced in the name of the school must maintain the overall goal.
- Commercial Mass Media - The principal must be aware of and supervise all presentations made at the school. No students or staff may represent the school to the media without prior approval.



Communication Policies  
 KBB - Media Access to School Campuses, Staff, & Students

- All access to school campuses by the media must be granted by the Superintendent or his/her designee.
- Policy allows for a designee (usually Superintendent) to be a spokesperson for the district when the media requests information on an issue.
- Only those employees who are labeled as designees may represent the school district to any form of media.



Communication Policies  
 KM - Visitors to the Schools

- All visitors must check in at the school office and be issued a visitor's badge unless an exception applies.
- Principal may deny anyone who may negatively affect classroom procedures.
- No solicitations may be present on campus.
- Only security personnel, school personnel, law enforcement, educational professionals, or enrolled students may visit classrooms during instructional times.



Communication Policies  
 BBABA - Duties of Board President

- This policy discusses the variety of roles that can be given to the Board President.
- One of these roles is to be the spokesperson for the board at all times unless this role is specifically designated to another person such as the Superintendent.



### Digital Safety Policies

#### EFA - Data Breach Prevention (Cyber Security)

- Designed to protect the personally identifiable information and the breach of that information.
- Requirement that all employees protect and secure all electronic resources and information.
- Requirement to report any theft, inadvertent disclosure, or any other breach immediately to the district office who must then report to local law enforcement and those impacted by the breach.
- New section regarding phishing emails and how to recognize and report them.



### Digital Safety Policies

#### GABBA - Social Media Websites

- Very important policy which addresses the ever growing area of social media.
- Regulates the use of social media by employees within the school.
- Employees shall not friend students or make posts which will disrupt classroom activity, are solely responsible for the security of their accounts, and shall never act as or speak for the district on social media without prior authorization.
- Any violation can result in disciplinary action.



### Digital Safety Policies

#### GABB - Staff/Student Non-fraternization

- Also addresses social media and the restrictions that employees must follow.
- Emphasizes the importance of not posting anything on social media which might negatively impact the classroom or any information that may violate state or federal law.
- Violations of the policy in which a data breach or improper disclosure of student information occurs can include termination.



### Emergency Closing Policies

#### EBBD - Emergency Closings

- Discusses delays and school closures due to extreme weather conditions, disaster emergencies, etc.
- Gives the Superintendent the authority to close schools or to dismiss early due to any emergency that threatens the health or safety of students and staff.
- Creates a plan for delayed starts, when people must report, and how it will be communicated.
- Discusses protocols for extreme weather such as student and staff safety, transportation, and communication.



### Emergency Closing Policies

#### AFC - Authority for Emergency Closings

- Restates the duty of the School Board to maintain and operate all schools for the required time period.
- Requires the Superintendent to take an emergency action in consultation with transportation, emergency management, weather authorities, and any other emergency personnel.
- The Superintendent must notify the Board when he/she decides to close the schools.
- Also gives the Board authority to provide additional administrative leave with pay for emergency closures.



### Other Useful Policies

#### EBBAD - School Occupational Safety and Crisis Response Plan

- Strives to create a safety and crisis response plan that will create a safe and orderly learning environment for students while at school or at any school sponsored event.
- Though safety is everyone's responsibility, this policy delegates primary responsibility to the Safety Manager.
- The policy also holds all administrators, principals, managers, etc. accountable for making sure that all safety policies and procedures are carried out and upheld.



Other Useful Policies  
EBBB - Homeland Security

- Discusses the steps that need to be taken in the event an alert is issued by the National Department of Homeland Security.
- Discusses the green, blue, yellow, orange, and red threat levels and what each level means and requires.
- Has additional information on threat level red and how the Superintendent and other school officials must act in order to keep the staff and students of the district safe.



## Questions?



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