



Presents

RESCUE YOUR REPUTATION

Proven Strategies for Crisis
Communications &
Management

The Reassurance Principle of Crisis Management

If you are facing a crisis or controversy, ask yourself this question. “Will my actions and words reassure those who depend upon me?” If the answer is yes then you are likely on the right path toward solving your problem. Indeed you are following the Reassurance Principle of Crisis Management, which says:

“Act and communicate to restore or maintain the trust of others.”

This grows out of the answer to the following question....

Why do people watch, read, or listen to the news?

The news audience wants to know, “Am I safe?”

Therefore, during *crisis* interviews, your messages (and actions) should **reassure** your audience that they are safe.

Ground rules

1. This is a session in “message focus.” Therefore, it should assist you with all manner of communications.
2. This approach is grounded in reality and principles – it works *most of the time*.
3. Expose this program to as many people as you can in your organization. That will create a cadre of individuals with the same knowledge to help you brainstorm strategy and tactics.
4. Create a crisis communications plan and test it with a drill. (To provide lightning speed!)
 - A. Create a crisis team – typically consisting of COO, General Counsel, and PR/Corporate Communications assisted by support teams of experts.
 - B. Conduct a vulnerability audit.
 - C. Write a contact list to show how all crisis managers can be contacted 24/7.
5. This is art not science.
6. Perfect practice makes perfect.
7. This is NOT spin control. Your mission is to develop reassuring tactics and strategies that, in turn, help you draft reassuring messages.

Crisis Response Principles

*When a crisis strikes, follow these steps to develop strategy & tactics**

- I. Take care of the victims or perceived victims. (The victim is where the story is.)
- II. Fix the problem. (When did you learn about it, and what did you do about it?)
- III. Notify stakeholders of your actions. (Do it as fast as possible and do not use the media in most cases.)
- IV. Acknowledge the situation to the media quickly and provide information. (Strive to respond in the first story.)
- V. Rehearse critical press interviews.
- VI. Don't make it worse.
- VII. Get it over with.
- VIII. Tell the Truth. ("God give me strength to face a fact though it slay me"
– Huxley)
- IX. REASSURE.
- X. Follow your crisis communications plan.

*Not all of these will apply in every case. Use common sense to judge.

Persuade the Majority with Words & Deeds**People
For
You****People
Against
You****People
Suspending
Judgment**

Persuade
them with
a process
that they
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as fair

When controversy strikes, some people will tend to support or oppose you automatically. However, most will delay judging until they have more information. Give them a reason to take your side. Avoid a “battle of the sound bites” and seek a problem-solving process most would perceive as fair. Involvement and/or oversight of a 3rd party is often a powerful step.

Crisis Example Scenario

An intoxicated employee from your company driving a carload of equally woozy fellow employees home from a company-sponsored weekend ball game strikes and badly injures a 12-year old child. Witnesses tell police the driver was speeding recklessly through a neighborhood. A TV reporter has just learned details from an officer, will go on the air in minutes, and calls you for comment.

List actions you would take to address this:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Using the crisis resolution model above on page 5, describe what kind of a fair problem-solving process you would employ to convince the public that you are “the good guys.”

Media Truths

1. Don't talk to reporters until you are prepared
2. Your media failure = company's failure
3. You are the message (Especially on TV)

How to delay a reporter until you are ready

1. Unless you are prepared and waiting on a reporter's call or visit, *in all other cases I suggest that you briefly postpone your interview until you are ready and focused.* Tell (or have your assistant tell) the reporter in a positive and reassuring manner...

"I'M SORRY, I CAN'T TALK TO YOU AT THE MOMENT, BUT I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DO SO IN __ MINUTES. WHAT IS YOUR DEADLINE? WHAT ISSUE DO YOU WANT ME TO ADDRESS?" (See first page in Support Section for full list of pre-interview questions)

2. Immediately begin preparing your message following the three-step model
3. Return reporter's call when you know your message and are "on top of your game"

Press Interview Paradigm

“Don’t catch spears...
...throw a message.”

3-Step Media Interview Preparation Model

1. Prepare a set of messages (of value to both audience & company)

- A. Write approximately 3 key messages
- B. If possible and appropriate, make the most important message catchy and quotable. Write it as an ideal headline. (Remember “We Vow To Protect Our Students” case).
- C. In a crisis, consider expressing: 1) *concern/regret*, 2) *"it's under control (investigation)"*, 3) *"what we're doing about it (fix it)."* Also consider *empowering the audience to protect/involve itself.*

2. Prepare a set of Q&A's

- A. List the worst-case or most likely questions and answer them. In a non-crisis, list the most likely questions and answer them
- B. In a crisis, use your worst-case questions to help guide you to your best messages. (Evaluate whether your messages inherently answer or deal with the worst-case questions. If your messages do not, then they may not be helpful).
- C. Ask yourself if there is an off-topic issue that could blindside you. If there is, plan for it.

3. Prepare to satisfy questions and steer the interview back to your messages (see following page)

Satisfying and Steering

When you are asked questions not directly leading to your key messages, “satisfy” the question with the briefest possible constructive answer and “steer” the interview immediately to your messages.

To steer, use bridging phrases such as...

“First, let me say...”

“The important thing is...”

“The bottom line is...”

“The critical issue is...”

“We prefer to look at it a different way...”

“The real issue here is...”

“What many people don’t realize is....”

“What’s more important is...”

“This debate underscores the need for (resolution of the issues)...”

“To the contrary,....”

“Let me put this in perspective for you...”

“What’s really at stake here is...”

Important caveat to satisfying and steering...

“Your credibility rests on your ability to answer tough legitimate questions!”

Steps to enhance the power of your media interviews**I. Outline your messages to convey a concept**

Your goal is to deliver your information conversationally, not memorize it. Think of your messages as a “concept” to be conveyed rather than inflexible statements. Use words that naturally come to you.

II. Avoid appearing too on-message or scripted

Accomplish this by:

- A. Knowing how to deliver each of your key messages in about 5 ways using different words or phrasing.
- B. Answering all questions - however briefly. (This is why it is important to contemplate worst-case questions.)
- C. Follow the "spirit" if not the "letter" of your messages in long form interviews.

III. Consider front-loading your message (Also see page 17)

Convey your messages at the start of the interview so you are not forced to weave them into the conversation later. Begin by saying to the reporter, “IF YOU DON’T MIND, I HAVE A FEW COMMENTS I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ABOUT THIS, AND WHEN I AM FINISHED I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS. IS THAT ALRIGHT WITH YOU?”

Messages For Scenario

An intoxicated employee from your company driving a carload of equally woozy fellow employees home from a company-sponsored weekend ball game strikes and badly injures a 12-year old child. Witnesses tell police the driver was speeding recklessly through a neighborhood. A TV reporter has just learned details from an officer, will go on the air in minutes, and calls you for comment.

Draft 3 key messages to deliver

Key Message #1

Key Message #2

Key Message #3

(After you write your best messages, look at the next page for four messages that I recommend.)

List 3 worst possible questions and answer them

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Suggested Messages For Scenario***Key message #1***

We regret that a child has been seriously injured in an accident involving one of our vehicles. While we don't yet know where the fault lies, we are getting the best possible care for the boy.

Key message #2

We will monitor the child's care to make sure he gets the treatment he needs to recover from this tragic accident.

Key message #3

Our employees are wonderful, responsible people, but we have launched an investigation to learn what happened.

Key message #4

If our investigation discovers there is a problem, we will fix it, because we never want this kind of accident to happen.

(Please note - Every message in this example delivers or promises action! When you act in response to a crisis you avoid mere "spin control.")

Why companies and organizations are often in conflict with the press**1. Your role with the news media:**

Make the company look good

HOWEVER

2. News is...

The abnormal - Usually negative, it is information that departs from the norm (conflict, irregular, unusual, special, different). If the information were about normal events, who would care?

3. Reporters distinguish themselves by...

Being first

How To Ease Tension With the Media**Get to know news managers and reporters who cover the company.**

1. Learn their priorities, areas of interests, marketing goals, and hierarchies for how they decide which stories to cover.
2. Create rapport so that when there is trouble with the company, with a story, or when you simply need some advice, you can talk frankly with them.
3. If they know you, they will be more likely to listen to story ideas of yours, will be less likely to run a critical story without your comment, and will more likely give you the benefit of the doubt.
4. If you trust one another, you will more likely be able to stop an incorrect or misguided story before it is published.
5. Look for ways to help the media. One of the best is to provide well-spoken experts to comment on major news events. This gives you valuable exposure, and provides them a local angle for national or international news. Be as accessible as possible. News managers are grateful for such assistance.

“Here are further suggestions for crisis and media management beyond those mentioned on the compact disc ‘Rescue Your Reputation. They are best learned in the context of media training, but I hope they help you.”

Rick Amme

How to divert a reporter if you are not a spokesperson

Non-designated spokespeople can say the following in a reassuring manner when confronted by a reporter:

"I AM SORRY, BUT I AM NOT THE RIGHT PERSON TO TALK WITH YOU, LET ME HAVE SOMEONE FROM OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM CALL YOU.

MAY I TELL THEM WHAT THIS CONCERNS?

HOW SOON DO YOU NEED AN ANSWER?

Immediately notify spokesperson of inquiry as per crisis communications plan

Remind spokesperson to return call within the apparent deadline, remembering that you want to get your best comment into the first story

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Pre-interview Check List

For optimum interview preparation, try to determine the following information from the reporter before scheduling the interview. *Your goal is to be forewarned without unnecessarily rankling the reporter or communicating an unwillingness to help the public. **

Ask:

- What are the content and the thrust of the story?
- What has the reporter already learned and from whom?
- Who will conduct the interview and for what news organization?
- What is the makeup of the news audience?
- What will be the setting of the interview?
- What is the deadline?

Consider whether you limit the subject matter and length of the interview. (In particularly adversarial or delicate situations you may want to record your interview or have a third party witness, but remember that such steps convey lack of trust and may incite a reporter.)

*To minimize misunderstandings and to avoid hostilities, consider having a secretary or other go-between rather than the interviewee ascertain this information.

More Interview Execution Steps

I. Focus the final minutes

So that your concentration is only on what you are about to say, avoid last-minute distractions and conversations before the interview begins.

II. Use the reporter's first name

This humanizes you, personalizes the interview, and may lower tension in the give and take.

III. Repeat the primary message

After delivering your messages then restate your primary message for added emphasis.

IV. Watch your body language

(This applies to print interviews as well as television because body language can be just as reassuring as words.)

- When sitting, sit slightly forward
- When standing, be comfortably erect, but not rigid
- Gaze level-eyed at interviewer, avoid a shifting gaze, and ignore the camera. The viewer expects you to look at your interviewer the same as you would address anyone talking to you (In satellite or remote interviews with distant unseen anchorpersons, look directly into the camera but with the same body language and energy level)
- Speak in a normal tone of voice
- Feel free to gesture, but only if it is natural. If you do, consider gesturing close to the face within camera view
- Always assume you are on the air or on the record between a reporter's arrival and departure
- Always assume a microphone is open

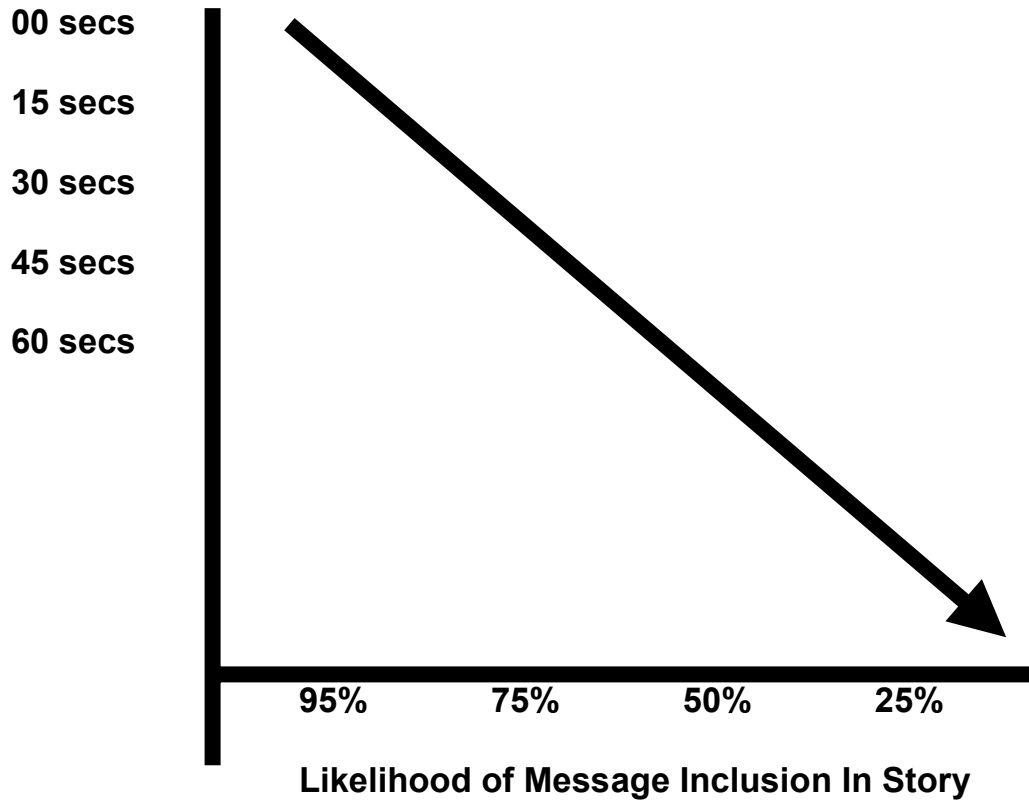
V. Always be "the quiet voice of reason"

Regardless of the behavior of the reporter(s), resolve that you will remain calm, cordial, and reassuring. Remember that the reporter is not your audience, but rather a conduit to thousands of people who want to know that you are operating in their best interests.

VI. Remember - When you are "liked" on television, you are usually believed.

Value of Front-loading Messages

Early mention of message



There is value to driving interviews toward your point of view as soon as possible. The earlier you go to your key messages in the interview the greater the likelihood the reporter will include them in the story. The benefit of the message to the public and repetition of the message improve the odds as well. As added insurance, repeat the key messages at the end of the interview. Repetition is good.

A Veteran's Tips For Surviving the Media

If you want the bottom line on how to protect or enhance your reputation with the press, listen to someone who logged two decades in the trenches with journalists. Richard "Rick" Barentine retired as CEO of the International Home Furnishing Marketing Association after jousting successfully with media for 22 years. This endlessly interviewed executive was exceptionally well qualified to advise how to make messages matter and avoid embarrassment. His departure left a model of media management as well as leadership.

In the winter of 1995, over lunch, Rick told what he had learned from countless press contacts. Here are Rick Barentine's recommendations for surviving the media - in quotes - with my elaboration. They reinforce or elaborate on much of what we cover in media training and add a few helpful wrinkles.

1. ***"Know what the questions will be about."*** This gives you time to consider what you will say and whether you should be saying anything at all. Never wing it when your reputation is on the line. Be prepared.
2. ***"Know the first question before the camera is turned on."*** You can make an immediately cogent comment. It also reduces the likelihood of being blindsided by a surprise question (although there is no complete defense against a reporter gunning for you).
3. ***"Assume everything you say is on the record from the minute the reporter walks in the door or calls on the telephone."*** Reporters consider you quotable at all times. You should too. Do not be fooled into thinking your comments don't count when a reporter is not taking notes or a camera is not taping.
4. ***"Never chit-chat casually about anything of substance. Never be casual about an interview. Always be 'on the job.'"*** Because offhand remarks are usually more lively, energetic, pointed, and colorful, they make wonderful grist for a reporter's mill. Talk extemporaneously at your peril.
5. ***"Only go off-the-record with reporters you know well and be very clear about when you are on and off."*** Executives occasionally - and recklessly - offer off-the-record information to reporters they barely know. Avoid it. If you feel you must provide facts on background, do it with someone you trust and be sure the journalist specifically acknowledges your terms. Your statements are not "off-the-record" until the reporter agrees that they are.
6. ***"Be conscious of your surroundings and background when giving a TV interview to make sure they are relevant to the story or frame you in a flattering way. Always wear a coat. Don't be interviewed about an employee death while standing at a tennis court."***
7. ***"Body language, eye level, eye movement, and posture are always important on camera."*** Furthermore, understanding - and believing - your message helps ensure persuasive body language.
8. ***"You should know technically what happens to your message whether at a TV or radio station or at a newspaper."*** If you are constantly in the public eye, then you should know how the media gather, edit/produce, and disseminate their stories.

9. ***“Say your message in a few seconds and then stop. The pause will be the edit point. Don’t ramble on. Silence is safety.”*** This is basic message focus. The more you talk, the more you obscure your message, and the more likely you are to say something you will regret.
10. ***“Be friendly with the photographers – they can make you look good.”*** This applies to both print and television.
11. ***“Know that after you give one interview to one reporter, a host of others may follow, so be prepared.”***
12. ***“Never call a news conference unless you’ve got real news.”*** If you cry wolf with reporters, they may not pay attention when you really need them.
13. ***“Never think that a reporter for a small news organization is too small. Their stories can get picked up and get wide distribution.”*** Even the most innocuous interview with a minor league newsperson can spread to major media and can get you in trouble.
14. ***“Always be helpful. Suggest questions, and help them find video.”*** While this is usually good advice, be wary of giving reporters a stick with which to beat you during controversial situations.
15. ***“Be aware of your audience. For example, don’t say [business] is great... this year when you know that layoffs are planned in a few weeks. Employees will hold you accountable for that deception.”***
16. ***“[Companies] don’t always make their executives available enough to reporters in good times to create good will in the community and build contacts that could help in bad times.”*** Positive stories are an investment in the bank of public good will.
17. ***“Know the news anchors and the station managers. They could help you with an unfair story. Reporters who know you are more likely to trust you and less likely to skewer you unfairly. It’s good to have constant contact with the press.”*** Rapport with the media is good – but not absolute – insurance against unfair news coverage.
18. ***“When the newspaper calls for an interview, ask them to bring their tape recorder so that your quotes will be more accurate.”*** This may be preferable to recording it yourself which communicates mistrust on your part. In critical cases, you may want to tape record your interview anyway.
19. ***“Know what the wire service is, and cultivate contact with its reporters.”*** Associated Press stories run statewide so communicate well with AP.
20. ***“Be aware that reporters will come around sometimes just to ‘pick the lint off you’ so be sure what you want to communicate. Help lead them to a story they can use.”***
21. ***“Don’t play favorites and be fair.”*** Reporters have long memories and have a remarkable capacity for rewarding favors or exacting revenge.
22. ***“Always be willing to answer the tough questions.”*** Your credibility rests on it.

Before calling a newsroom for coverage

- **Ask yourself, "Who cares?"** Does this issue or event interest anyone beyond your business and social circle? This appeal is essential for a worthwhile story.
- **"Make them care", if necessary.** Find a benefit to the audience and play to it. If you cannot, then consider your event may not be worthwhile for coverage.
- **Put people in it.** Find ways to incorporate real human beings, not officials. News consumers identify with others like themselves.
- **Make it visual.** Arrange video and photo opportunities to catch the eye and attention of the audience. Provide your own video if necessary.
- **Carefully schedule.** Set the event for the ideal timing of mid-morning, mid-week. Sometimes a good alternative can be to hold it at the same time as a newscast in order to solicit live television coverage.

Handling a reporter ambush*

Avoidance through accessibility. The best way to minimize the chance of an ambush is to avoid acting in a way that leads a reporter to believe that ambush is the only recourse.

Prepare. If a crisis or controversy looms, always have a reassuring message in mind. If you do not have one, and are ambushed, then try the following.

Strategies:

If you don't know anything about the topic or are not prepared to talk about it then try to buy time by saying....

"I'm sorry, I don't have any information on that (I am not prepared to talk with you about that), but I want to help you, let me meet you in ____ minutes. What is your deadline?"

If the reporter persists, then buy at least a few seconds to determine your most reassuring comment by saying...

"Do you mind repeating the question?"

"Do you mind if we do the interview over there?"

Avoid acting in a manner that conveys defensiveness, combativeness, or guilt. Always be the quiet voice of reason and find some way to be reassuring.

HOW TO LOOK YOUR BEST ON TV

"Generally, men judge by the eye rather than the hand, for all men can see a thing, but few come close enough to touch it. All men will see what you seem to be; only a few will know what you are..."

Niccolo Machiavelli

Why you should look your best

Visual impact - The eye delivers vastly more information to the brain than the other senses. Therefore, what the audience sees in your presentation tends to overwhelm what they hear, and especially when it is magnified through a TV camera.

8 seconds - A network research project found that people can make a snap judgment on how they feel about you in as little as eight seconds on television.

Be yourself - Because the eye does pick up so much information, it also is a good facade detector. If your actions are not genuine, they will register as false or disingenuous. So do not try to become something you are not, merely the best that you can be.

Brevity - The audience has only one chance to "get it" the first time you say it, and only retains about ten percent of what it is told. Be succinct.

In a studio

- Men should wear a basic foundation makeup to smooth the complexion and cover any five o'clock shadow
- Arrive early to get comfortable with surroundings (Host will often be busy and distracted)
- Maintain eye contact with host most of the time and look at any other guests occasionally.
- Avoid fiddling with microphones, pencils, or other objects.
- Bring your own make up or at least powder to reduce shine on face.
- Straighten coat shoulders.
- An unbuttoned coat may look sloppy.

- Tuck tie in belt if coat buttoned so it doesn't "peek" at the bottom.
- Groomed hair - watch for fly-away strands
- Crossed legs at ankles (or perhaps at the knees depending on your clothes – especially skirt length). Men should avoid cocking one leg over the other.
- Hands crossed in lap, but not clasped. They should be free for natural gesturing.
- Avoid swiveling in chair.

Remote Interview

- You will address your host via a microphone, earpiece, and camera using a satellite or microwave link. Therefore the camera becomes your interviewer and your focus.
- Your site may be a different studio or perhaps "on location" at an event, nevertheless the guidelines above still apply although wear clothing suitable for outdoor environments and circumstances. A casual shirt under a sports jacket may look better than the shirt alone.
- A producer will ask you to verify the earpiece volume and ask you to talk into your microphone to set the level, but you will probably not talk to the host/interviewer until the last minute.

Clothing

- Wear light-weight clothing to minimize getting hot in a studio and sweating
- Should enhance your appearance, not distract from your face
- No dark glasses
- Glasses jewelry can be distracting - wear them only if necessary, and use non-reflective lenses
- Remove bulky items from pockets

Women -

- Skirts that cover knee when seated
- Conservative patterns
- Avoid large areas of white or bright clothing, especially near the face and neck
- Blouses and scarves that do not detract from the face
- Traditional hosiery
- Sensible jewelry that does not distract
- Jewelry that will not rattle on a desk
- "Power Image"- Subdued, solid colors; Higher neckline; Tailored clothing; Hair away from face; High heels

Men -

- Dark solid suit
- Long-sleeve white or pale blue shirt with traditional collar

- Conservative tie
- Knee length socks

The Psychology of it all

You may find the TV environment artificial, impersonal, cold, confusing, distracting, threatening, and perhaps hostile. The setting may seem to conspire to make it impossible for you to act and talk normally. This disorientation and accompanying nervousness are routine. As difficult as it may seem, expect and accept these emotions. Countless others have felt precisely the same. Even professionals struggle with it.

In the last few minutes before your interview, avoid distracting thoughts and behaviors. Keep your mind on what you want to accomplish. Your mission is to focus on your messages, not verbatim, but as a concept. Feel free to convey your messages with the words that naturally come to you. Do not try to memorize. Be yourself. Be as comfortable as possible. Be real, be honest, and remember that the truth will set you free.