Crisis Communications Strategies: Effective methods for communicating during a crisis

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What is “Crisis Communications”? 

• Managing the internal and external communication of a crisis situation 
• Examples of a crisis requiring communication:  
  ✪ Employee actions leading to negative results  
  ✪ Responding to publically known high profile and confidential cases  
• Everyone in the CAC industry is susceptible to a crisis communications situation  
• Preparation and anticipation are key to effective crisis communications
What is “Issues Management”?

- The ongoing management of potential issues to avoid crises from developing
- Anticipating potential problems before they erupt
- Being prepared with a Crisis Communications Plan:
  - A step-by-step plan for communicating a crisis upon “eruption”
  - Template messaging that can be applied to anticipated situations
  - A prepared, knowledgeable, and available spokesperson
The Value of Proactive Public Relations

- The establishment of “reputational capital”
- Developing positive and mutually beneficial relationships with the media
- Establishing credibility as subject matter experts in the field of child abuse intervention and prevention
- Supporting NCA’s ongoing media outreach and national initiatives
Strategic Principles of Crisis Communications

1. The Principle of Existing Relationships
   - During a “crisis situation,” communicate with all affected stakeholders and constituent groups
   - Leverage positive relationships and rely on reputational capital

2. The Principle of Media as an Ally
   - Utilize the media through open communication to serve as an outlet for reaching target audiences
   - Ongoing, proactive, positive media relations can help set the stage for a positive working relationship in times of crises

3. The Principle of Quick Response
   - Have your messaging ready quickly by observing the “One Hour Rule”

Ronald D. Smith (2005)
4. **The Principle of Full Disclosure**
   - Be as transparent as possible, while always respecting confidentiality restraints
   - Have messaging ready in regards to confidentiality, available information, and next steps

5. **The Principle of “One Voice”**
   - Contain and train your spokesperson
   - If multiple spokespersons are required, be sure to establish an open line of communication between the spokespersons and the internal trainer
   - Coordinate the message

Ronald D. Smith (2005)
Suggested Elements of the NCA Member Crisis Communications Plan

1. File a Critical Incident Report with NCA
2. Evaluate the situation by answering key questions
3. Alert Barefoot PR if media attention is anticipated
4. Develop targeted messaging for each affected/potentially interested audience
5. Train your spokesperson(s) with key talking points
The Response Process

Step 1: File a Critical Incident Report with NCA

What is a critical incident?

- Serious violations of law or regulations
- Significant changes in operation resulting in non-compliance with NCA standards for accredited members
- External impact that may result in negative media attention, negative legislative or regulatory attention, or other attention that may negatively impact the CAC/NCA brand
The Response Process

Step 1: File a Critical Incident Report with NCA

The filing process:

- CAC Director/Board Chair/or other senior personnel must file the report within 24 hours of learning of the incident
  - First – notify NCA’s Director of Member Relations and Grants (primary point of contact between reporting CAC and NCA)
  - Second – Submit the Critical Incident Report form to Irina Hein (ihein@nca-online.org)
- CAC must make follow-up reports at a minimum of every 3 months (or more frequently if requested by NCA) until the matter has been resolved
- Upon resolution, a final report must be filed
The Response Process

Step 2: Evaluate the situation by answering key questions

- Who are the key players involved?
- Of your various audiences, who will be affected and who will require communication?
- Is there a chance for media interest?
The Response Process

Step 3:
Alert Barefoot PR if media attention is anticipated

- We are here to support your communication with the media
- Utilize our experience with these types of situations and ask for advice on how to respond to media requests
- The earlier we know what’s going on, the better we can help
The Response Process

Step 4: Develop targeted messaging for each affected/potentially interested audience

- All messaging during times of a crisis should be:
  - Clear
  - Consistent
  - Concise
- Be as transparent as possible while communicating confidentiality restrictions
- Remain positive and open – and NEVER just say “no comment”
- Always share next steps
The Response Process

Step 5:
Train your spokesperson(s) with key talking points

• Know who your spokesperson(s) is and ensure he/she/they are always available until the crisis has reached a resolution

• Prepare clear, consistent, and concise talking points for your spokesperson(s)

• Establish open lines of communication between your spokesperson(s), your internal “trainer,” and all affected parties

• Ensure your spokesperson is comfortable and prepared to speak with the media
NCA’s Crisis Communications Resources Page for Members

http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/CrisisCommunicationsMemberResources

• Located in the Members Only Section of NCA’s website
• Includes:
  ✦ NCA’s Policy on Critical Incident Reporting
  ✦ NCA’s Critical Incident Report (downloadable Word Doc)
  ✦ Slides and recording of the Crisis Communications Webinar
  ✦ NCA’s Media Training Guide
  ✦ Sample of a “Critical Incident Preparation and Response Plan” (*produced by the Southern Regional Children’s Advocacy Center*)
Media Training Tips

Cardinal Rules for Media Interviews:

1. Know what you want to communicate – no more than 3 main points
2. Know how to phrase these points in a clear, consistent, and concise manner
3. Try to express these points in the first 3 minutes of the interview
Any Questions?

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