

# PR NEWS

## Three Tips to Bolster Your Crisis Communications Effort



03/28/2019

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Companies experience [four disruptive events every two years](#). When a crisis occurs, business leaders and communications teams are the difference between failure and success. Yet some firms restrict leaders from practicing their assigned crisis roles. Company culture fails to challenge communicators to practice responsibilities for activities that protect brand, license to operate, and standing with stakeholders during crises.

### **The Lion, the Fox, and the Donkey**

This [infamous fable](#) comes to mind when exploring the importance of investing in practice and preparation.

A lion, fox and donkey are collaborating to gather food. Quickly they amass a huge pile. The lion asks the donkey to divide the food. The donkey steadfastly divides it into equal portions. Angry, the lion kills the donkey. The lion then asks the fox to divide the food. Immediately the fox pushes a heaping portion in front of the lion. Pleased, the lion asks the fox who taught him to divide so fairly? The fox says he learned from the donkey.

This lesson rings true for brands: executives will make more mature decisions during crises if they and communicators learn from their or other's mistakes. Below are a few crisis management and communications lessons.

## **Sharpen Your External Lens**

If a brand wants to dispel myth, provide sound guidance, and become a better member of a community in which it works, operates and lives, it should view events through an external lens.

Unfortunately, large organizations begin their crisis response from the company's perspective. To establish what success looks like at the end of a crisis, the strongest teams always challenge themselves to view the situation from the stakeholders' perspective.

So, instead of communicating solely about issues of importance to the company, a proper response includes messaging that talks to stakeholders. It discusses the situation's implications for stakeholders. In addition, it provides guidance to help communities adapt to the crisis.

In many cases, communicators function as the external eyes and ears of the company or organization. It is up to us to represent the external stakeholders' view and communicate it to the board during a crisis.

## **Get in Touch with the Softer Side of Crisis**

The skills that senior leaders need to run a company will be useful during a crisis, but additional tools are needed. Soft skills like transparent communication, adaptability, empathy, and creativity, to name a few, are in demand. Leaders must be introspective and self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They must have the same level of awareness across the team in charge of managing a crisis.

Some crisis-management teams can build this awareness through simple, workshop-like activities. "[Lost at Sea](#)" is one example. In *Lost at Sea*, participants prioritize 15 items in their life-rafts. First individually, then as a team.

Finalized team lists are compared with U.S. Coast Guard-ranked and -scored items. Leadership characteristics and personality traits are observed throughout the exercise.

## **Recommended Frequency**

Some companies leverage immersive exercises that create useful stress, encourage exploration and failing-fast and allow leaders to play their real-time crisis roles. Strong teams follow a learning journey that matches their company's culture and maturity in crisis management. Some conduct exercises semi-annually, with additional training between that addresses identified gaps in capability.

The biggest advantage gained from practice is a reduction in the time it takes to move your team through the analysis and decision-making process. Leaders must set the tone. They need to develop a culture that invests in crisis management and communications training. After all, nobody wants their company to experience the same fate as the donkey.

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