



CASCADE STRATEGY

Crisis Communications

Jon Haber

Cascade Strategy

jhaber@cascastrategy.com

www.cascastrategy.com

Crisis: A Definition

- A situation that can:
 - Harm people or property
 - Seriously interrupt school operations
 - Cause parent/stakeholder worry or concern
 - Significantly damage school's reputation
 - Negatively impact bottom line
- Good management of a crisis can reduce the negative impact

Three Phases

1. Pre-crisis
 - Prevention and preparation
2. Crisis response
 - Implement the plan
3. Post-crisis
 - Evaluation; prepare for next time
 - Follow up on promised action



CASCADE STRATEGY

10 Steps of Crisis Communications/ Management



CASCADE STRATEGY

Pre-Crisis

1. Identify Your Crisis Team

- ID small team (3-4 max):
 - Head of school
 - Head of PR
 - Legal counsel
 - Maybe someone with special skills/special knowledge (school counselor)
- Agree beforehand: What you'll do when one critical person is unreachable

2. Anticipate Crises

- Brainstorm potential crises
 - Plan for best-case/worst-case scenarios
 - Better when not under pressure of actual crisis
- Benefit: Can prevent some crises by modifying existing operations

2. Some Examples of Possible Crises

- Student brings mace or knife to school
- Gunman invades school
- Employee has highly contagious disease
- Teacher arrested
- Heating system fails
- Arson at school
- Teacher dies suddenly
- You get the picture

2. Write It Down



**Crisis
Communications
Plan**

3. ID and Train Spokespeople

- The right skills
- The right position
- The right training

3. Train Spokespeople

- Avoid “no comment”
 - “No comment” suggests organization is guilty and trying to hide something
- Present information clearly; no jargon or technical terms
- Appear pleasant on camera
 - Avoid nervous habits or gestures (no fidgeting, “ums” or “ahs”)

4. Pre-draft Messages

- Templates for crisis messages
 - Blank spots where key information is inserted once known
 - PR team drafts; legal team clears

4. Pre-draft Messages

- “A student brought _____ to _____ Public Charter School today (insert date) was apprehended by school personnel before he (or she) could harm anyone. Teachers and school personnel were alerted and implemented emergency measures. The police were called within _____ minutes and the student was taken into custody. Parents were notified through _____.”

4. Holding Statements

- "We have implemented our crisis response plan, which places the highest priority on the health and safety of our students and staff."
- "We will be supplying additional information when it is available and posting it on our website."

5. Pre-ID Your Stakeholders

- Students
- Parents
- School employees
- Community
- City officials (PCSB, Mayor, OSSE)
- Others (ANC, other elected officials)
- Police, fire, emergency personnel
- Others

6. ID Methods of Communications

- Email
- Telephone
 - Phone tree
- Regular channels used by parents
- Website
 - Blog
- Social media
 - To disseminate information
 - But can spin out of control



CASCADE STRATEGY

Crisis

7. Assess the Situation

- Get the facts
- Ask precise questions
 - Seek facts, not conclusions
 - Where possible, verify from more than one source
- Avoid knee jerk responses
 - Investigate what happened.

8. Finalize key messages

- Short and precise are fine
- Understand concerns of your stakeholders
- Focus on the facts

9. Best practices

- Be quick and try to have initial response within first hour
- Be accurate and carefully check all facts
- Be consistent by keeping spokespeople informed of events, key message points
- Make public safety the number one priority

9. Best practices (contd.)

- Use all appropriate/available communication channels
- Provide expression of concern/sympathy for victims, if appropriate
- Include employees in the initial response.
- Be ready to provide stress and trauma counseling to victims of the crisis



Post-Crisis

10. Assess Organization's Response

- How did we do?
- What went right? What went wrong?
- What should we do differently next time?
- Is there something we promised the stakeholders?



CASCADE STRATEGY

Crisis Communications

Jon Haber

Cascade Strategy

jhaber@cascastrategy.com

www.cascastrategy.com