

Are You Ready for a Crises? REALLY?



By Todd Von Deak, Owner, TVD Associates & Brendon Shank, Associate Vice President of Communications, Society of Hospital Medicine

TODD VON DEAK OF TVD ASSOCIATES AND BRENDON SHANK OF THE SOCIETY OF HOSPITAL MEDICINE OUTLINE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TOMORROW TO BE BETTER PREPARED FOR A CRISIS AND THE MEDIA STORM THAT FOLLOWS.

As association and non-profit leaders, we are under near-constant pressure to improve the metrics that end up in board reports and performance dashboards. So it's understandable that we focus on revenue drivers rather than a crisis our leadership doesn't believe will ever happen.

The truth is, most organizations do experience a crisis at some point, and those that are prepared can not only survive, but will thrive.

Richard Levick, president and CEO of Levick Strategic Communications, said it best. "Every second counts. Stakeholders are demanding new levels of transparency and accountability. Every company is or will be in crisis. Those that answer the call

transform crisis into opportunity. Those that don't risk everything."

DEFINE CRISIS

In the heat of the moment, it's easy to rationalize away a crisis. If you do, odds are the crisis will escalate before you look up. That's why the best professionals get their leadership to agree on the general definition of a crisis well before one happens.

For example, a medical society found itself in the midst of a crisis when it received a phone call from a national media outlet about the organization being named in a governmental investigative report. Fortunately, they understood that that crisis wasn't the article itself—the article was an indicator that the

organization was in danger on numerous fronts.

Tomorrow: Initiate a dialog with colleagues and executive staff to define what a crisis would look like in your organization. Look past the "bad article" to consider things like brand reputation, revenue, and membership satisfaction as possible indicators of a crisis.

DON'T NEGLECT THE SIGNS

Once you have established or validated your definition of a crisis, make sure you are set up to monitor potential problem areas on a regular basis.

Tomorrow: Take a look at your "listening posts" to make sure you are getting the information you need to spot a crisis before it blows up. Spend time talking

with colleagues in other departments to better understand the data they regularly gather. Could existing reports be repurposed as monitoring tools for the communications group? You'll get new intelligence, and your colleagues will be excited to see their hard work used in a new way.

Be prepared

The actions you take long before a crisis will significantly impact how you come out of the crisis and whether you thrive or simply survive. Build a bank account of trust when times are good, and you'll have good options come crunch time.

Tomorrow: Think about where your organization may be vulnerable. For medical societies, the vulnerability may center on how the public perceives your relationship with industry partners. Once you've identified the vulnerabilities, ask yourself whether or not your organization is a positive example of how to conduct

business and what else you might do to be seen as a leader on the subject.

Whether you're a medical society or a manufacturing organization, it's not enough to join a third-party organization with a strong code of conduct. Make sure to audit yourself against that code to make sure that you are "walking the walk" of a strong corporate citizen. Do that, and you will have a compelling story to tell when the media calls.

After you've identified your vulnerabilities and taken steps to strengthen your story, make sure you have the basics covered. They include:

- Identifying your crisis management team and making sure the members know they are on it
- Mapping out how you will handle the first 24 hours of a crisis with members of your team
- Having "bridging" messages ready to go (e.g., "We are aware of the concern

raised by X and are actively looking into it. We will have additional comments as soon as we have the facts in hand.")

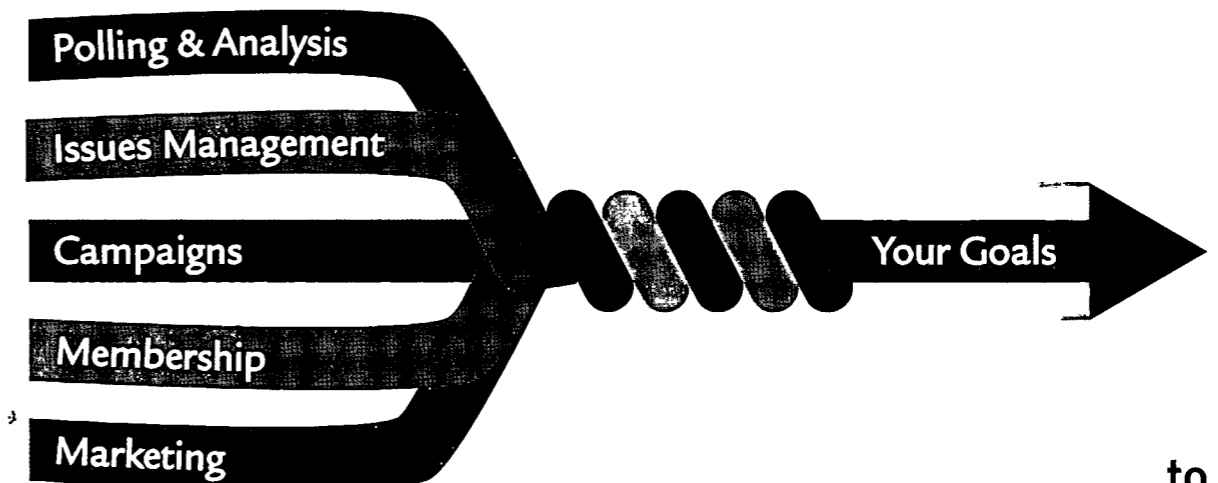
Obviously, these three things are not a roadmap to help you navigate the tactical decisions inherent in a crisis. But they will put you in a much better position to handle the peaks and valleys that come from being in the media spotlight.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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