



WHEN THE WORST HAPPENS:

EMPLOYEE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS FOR HR



Nothing tests your employee communications like a crisis.

Are you prepared?

Every human resources professional knows that not all crises can be prevented. Bad weather, accidents, and other calamities can strike any business.

The businesses that survive upheaval best are those that keep their lines of communication running – before, during, and after the event. This eBook shows you how to do just that.



STAY AHEAD OF THE CRISIS:

STAY AHEAD OF THE GAME

Most companies, when asked, say they understand the need for plans to deal with a crisis *after* it happens. One ERC/Smart Business Workplace Practice Survey found that 69.7 percent of employers said their business had a disaster recovery plan. Many of these same businesses would call "being proactive" one of their top traits – yet **only 39 percent** of businesses have a policy for dealing with weather-related crises as they happen!

Businesses that stay on top of a disaster as it unfolds:

- prevent a breakdown of communication
- preserve stakeholder trust and support
- ensure that employees can get back to ordinary work as quickly as possible
- keep from appearing inept – or worse – to customers and stakeholders

Want to manage crisis better? Use the practical communication strategies on the following pages.



START BEFORE THE STORM:

MAKE PLANS FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Every business can better address a crisis situation if it creates plans *before* one hits. Human resources personnel can kick off the planning process by asking the following questions:

- What are the most likely crises our organization will face?
- What's the best-case (and worst-case) scenario for each potential crisis?
- What resources do we have to address each crisis? What will our needs be if it happens?
- Can we "head off" this crisis by changing our normal daily business operations? If so, how?

Plans to address these crises should keep the lines of communication open and allow the business to maintain "essential" functions whenever possible.

Action Steps:

1. Gather accurate, up-to-date contact information for each employee.
2. Include contact information for at least one emergency contact per employee.
3. Update this information at least once per year, and keep copies in a place that is secure, but also accessible in case of crisis.
4. Designate a "crisis communicator" to share internal information with employees, keeping them up-to-date throughout a crisis.
5. Designate a "crisis spokesperson" to serve as the point of contact between the company and the media.



“TALKING IN”:

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR STAFF DURING AND AFTER A DISASTER

Whenever possible, put "internal" communication before "external" communication.

Why should you contact employees first? As a company, you may need to:

- **Deliver important information.** In some crises, employees should not try to come to work; or if they do, they may have to take a detour. Let employees know what your company's status is and what to expect next.
- **Gather important information.** Contacting employees lets you know where they are and whether they are safe. Employees may also have important information that your organization needs during the crisis.

- **Connect employees to one another.** Use your crisis communicator and spokesperson to simplify internal communication and coordinate employees' crisis management efforts.

- **Connect employees to leaders.** Create a transparent system employees can use to get their questions answered quickly during a crisis – even if the answer is "we'll find out and get back to you."

Internal communication during the first few hours of a crisis keeps everyone "on the same page." It ensures that external communications are controlled and that your business returns to normal operations as quickly as possible.



“TALKING OUT”:

COMMUNICATE WITH MEDIA AND OTHER EXTERNAL CHANNELS DURING AND AFTER A DISASTER

Once all the business's employees are within the communication loop, it's time for the organization to reach out to external parties.

Your company's crisis communication plan should identify one or two "crisis spokespeople" to handle all external communications after a disaster. Make sure the "crisis spokesperson" and "crisis communicator" work together to release coordinated, consistent information.

Some tips for "talking out" effectively:

- **Move quickly.** Get the first message out within the first 24 hours.
- **Be proactive.** If a crisis centers on your company or may put your organization in a bad light, move to discuss it publicly *before* media coverage takes hold. Maintain a calm and confident persona in all communications.
- **Assign someone to handle online comments and criticism.** This may be the designated "crisis spokesperson" or another individual.
- **Use external communication as part of a crisis preparedness plan** – never *instead* of a crisis preparedness plan.



USING TOUGH FACTS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE:

HOW TO "TALK OUT" BY BUILDING AN "INFORMATION CENTER"

If your organization finds itself at the center of a prolonged disaster, consider using your company's blog or website to create an "information center," including:

- Links to news stories and information pieces
- Links to social media conversations, such as Twitter hashtags
- Links to organizations and programs that help those affected
- Reports or evaluations from third-party experts

Aim to provide a "one-stop source" for all information and coverage related to the crisis, both good and

bad. An information center addresses the problem in an open, candid manner. It also positions your organization as the "resident expert" on the problem.

A Comment on Comments

An information center built on a company blog provides a natural place for members of the public to leave comments, make criticisms, and drop off links to information your company may have missed.

These comments should be encouraged, but moderated. Answer questions promptly. Ensure the moderator works with the "crisis communicator" and "crisis spokesperson" to maintain a consistent message.



“TALKING TEMP”:

DON'T FORGET TEMPORARY AND CONTRACT EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS!

As a "host employer," you have the responsibility to communicate with your temporary and contract workers during a crisis. Incorporate the following tips into your crisis communication plans:

- **Work with your staffing partner to create a joint safety program.** Talk about who will provide the training contingent workers need.
- **Include a "what to do" section in your crisis management plan for contingent workers.**
- **Create a communication plan for contingent workers.** Talk to your staffing partner about how to communicate with temp and contract workers during a crisis.

- **Gather contingent workers' contact information,** including updated contact information for an emergency contact for each person.
- **Ensure all temporary and contract workers have detailed safety information,** including training and documentation related to specific hazards and disaster scenarios they may face while at work.

Contact your staffing partner promptly after a crisis occurs. A brief telephone call or email helps your staffing organization help you during a disaster.



HOW (ELSE) TO GET THE WORD OUT:

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has extraordinary abilities to connect individuals and companies during a disaster. However, its power should be carefully controlled.

Benefits for internal staff:

- Avoid tying up phone lines, freeing this resource for the use of emergency crisis response teams.
- Messages can be checked at employees' convenience, allowing them to prioritize immediate crisis needs.
- Most or all employees can be reached with one message.
- It facilitates two-way communication during a crisis.

Benefits for communicating with the public:

- Updating employees' family and friends in other areas about employees' status.
- Controlling the message and persona expressed during a developing crisis.
- Public comments provide insight into public opinion regarding the crisis.
- Reaching a larger audience more quickly than conventional news media channels.



HOW (ELSE) TO GET THE WORD OUT:

RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media's power means its use isn't risk-free.

Risks with internal employees:

- Employees may inadvertently make a "private" message public while posting or responding. No social media message can be considered truly confidential.
- Employees may be unable to check their social media streams, causing them to miss important messages.
- Employees who do not use social media cannot connect with the company on these channels.

Risks with public communications:

- Unmoderated comments may devolve into profanity and personal attacks.
- Company social media may not be updated in a timely manner.
- Non-participation allows the public to set the tone and content of the conversation surrounding a crisis.



GETTING THE WORD OUT:

MAXIMIZE SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECTIVENESS

To minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of using social media to communicate during a crisis, consider the following tips:

- Control social media messages carefully. Keep messages short and to the point.
- Communicate sensitive information with employees directly – never over social media.
- Allow comments, particularly if a disaster centers on your company, but moderate them. Create a commenting policy that allows criticism but that prevents profanity or personal attacks.
- Designate one or two public relations professionals

to moderate comments left on your company's social media sites, such as Facebook.

- Respond to all comments in a proactive, professional tone.
- Arrange for regular "check-ins" between social media moderators and crisis communicators and spokespeople.
- Use multiple social media channels.

A well-managed plan can ensure that communication continues smoothly after a disaster while also providing key insights into public reactions to a crisis and a company's response to it.



AFTER THE STORM:

EVALUATING AND ADJUSTING YOUR CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

After a crisis has passed, take the following steps:

- Hold a meeting to evaluate the plan's effectiveness. Include input from the designated "crisis communicator" and "crisis spokesperson."
- Continue to follow up on social media messages. In a long-term crisis, plan with social media managers for long-term follow-up.
- Contact your staffing partner to touch base, arrange additional help, or adjust crisis plans to better accommodate contingent workers.

- Train employees on new crisis communication procedures. Provide both regular employees and contingent workers with updated crisis communication plans.
- Focus on employee well-being where needed.

Nothing tests your organization like a crisis. When one strikes, use these strategies before, during and after the event to keep the lines of communication running – and weather any storm successfully.

