



Crisis and Issues Management

So, everybody hopes that they will never see or hear that terrible media article or broadcast about their business, or a critical social media post that goes viral, but it happens more often than many people think. Even though the majority of businesses are ethical and focus on customer satisfaction, it only takes one unlucky event, bad decision, duplicitous employee, or even an unhappy customer to push you into crisis mode.

If you think about it, however conscientious you might be, it is impossible for business owners and leaders to be all-seeing and all-knowing, especially when it comes to employees. Honestly, if you have never been "burned" by or disappointed in an employee, and if personnel have never lied to you or withheld information, you are fortunate. Those type of employees typically don't last long, which is one of the reasons all new LFPR team members are subject to a three-month trial period, both ways, in case it is not a "good fit." We have been very fortunate with our team at LFPR, but it happens.

Crisis management is defined as "the process by which a business or other organization deals with a sudden emergency situation." At LFPR we offer issues and crisis management services and there have been frequent times over the years when we have received an emergency call from organizations, businesses and individuals who are not clients but who have a crisis and need help immediately. This often involves evening and weekend work as time is of the essence. Strict confidentiality prevents me from saying any more but use your imagination and think about being in that situation. Nightmare, right? By definition a crisis is unpredictable and low-probability but when it happens it can cause significant negative effects to a business or professional which can take years to overcome or cause a business to fail. This is much more likely when crisis management is reactive, or in other words the reaction is knee-jerk or panic driven and appears defensive.

However, speedy responses are vital and "no comment" is not much better than a defensive and emotional reaction, as it is often interpreted as implying guilt. The best outcomes are when companies have already invested in issues management and have a plan in place – which is what LFPR does for our clients. This plan includes an agreed course of action including who should be the company spokesperson, with one backup in case that person is unavailable due to travel or sickness. These individuals should have had media training and either an agency or in-house expert to handle drafting the media statements, questions and answers, and field interview requests from the media. It is vital that everybody else in your business knows to be polite and courteous to inquiries about the issue but not get drawn into discussion. Even the best-intended statements by the person who answers the phone at your office can be used in a negative way. Taking a detailed message, contact information, and making sure that the spokesperson or PR agency does get in touch quickly is vital.



Also, remember that the media are just doing their job to the best of their ability. Journalists have a commitment to comprehensive reporting and serving the public as a watchdog so don't take their interest in your misfortune personally. They are trying to give you a chance to explain your side of the story.

What if you don't have an issues management plan in place? All is not lost. Do not stick your head in the sand and hope it will go away and above all do not throw fuel on the fire. There are times when it is better to let critical social

media pass or just politely answer once. ALWAYS take a breath and if possible, get professional advice. Tackling a crisis early on is best and is known as pre-emptive crisis management, which seeks to prevent or resolve a crisis as it emerges. Proactive crisis management is when organizations take the initiative early in the crisis and work to shape how events unfold. Don't despair if there is little warning of a crisis; responsive crisis management can be thoughtful and quick and significantly improve the outcome for your reputation. ■

LFPR is a full-service marketing agency offering a full range of event management and promotion as well as graphic design, website development and digital promotion, social media services, advertising and public relations.

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Website: www.lesleyfrancispr.com
Email: info@lesleyfrancispr.com
Phone: 912-417-5377
Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @lesleyfrancispr

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