



A KCA Construction Industry Article of Interest:

Preparing for a Crisis Saves Money, Lives & Reputation

By Chris Martin, Atlas Marketing

Crisis. This six-letter word will send any company scrambling. In the construction world, the first crisis that probably comes to mind has to do with job site safety. Some of the worst crisis situations occur when an employee's safety is compromised, however, that is just the tip of the iceberg. Whether it's concrete not setting correctly, a blizzard hitting the same day a delivery of materials is expected, or a structural steel order is delayed, crises can hit at any time. It is not IF a crisis will happen, but when it will happen. They say the best defense is a good offense and extensive planning for any situation will minimize, if not, avoid that next crisis. Regardless of what happens, learning how to communicate during these intense situations with your employees, clients and possibly the media is crucial to finding the light at the end of the tunnel.

While there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, there are some basic guidelines you can employ in advance to improve your preparation.

Learn to recognize a crisis

While crises are defined differently for specific companies, some general topics may fit the bill, such as project related injuries, a loss of funding, a key handover mishap, or the untimely death of an executive. It is important to clearly define a crisis for your company and work to prepare within those parameters.

Develop messages

Once the definition of a crisis is established, begin to develop basic messaging for when it occurs, because it will. Depending on the nature of the issue, you may speak with the media so you will need concise messages. This means being fully briefed on the topic at hand and ready to communicate in a way that creates as little additional damage as possible.

Manage the message

Whether speaking to the media, staff, or stakeholders, always remember you own the information. To that point, ask some specific questions to determine any agendas before discussions. When communicating, state your point clearly and then stop talking. Keeping it short will help to limit the amount of collateral damage that may occur.

Keep your composure

The biggest error made during a time of crisis is to get too emotional or over-promise a fix for the problem. No matter how serious the situation, think of the ramifications of your response by:

1. Understanding the situation as best you can.
2. Focusing before speaking with the media, your staff, or stakeholders.
3. Knowing the mindset of those in your audience – they are affected by the situation as much as you.

Most important, know that making promises you cannot keep will only lead to another crisis.

Practice, practice, practice

I'm guessing the repetition above gets my point across, but if I could add a few more practices in there, I would. This is the number one mistake I run into— assuming 'I'll do fine when I have to speak.' Once you have your messages down, practicing them is crucial to success. It gives you a chance to refine your messages and anticipate any difficult questions that may come your way. Also, don't think you have to wait for that crisis to happen before you practice. I'm a big believer in testing the system and process. You never want your dry run to be the big performance.

Using these guidelines can help you manage a crisis, but working with a communications professional ensures the information is communicated to stakeholders smoothly and efficiently. A professional will know the proper steps to take so that the situation is managed and inaccurate information is not being released, which can create an even bigger crisis. With extensive planning, a crisis can be averted and if it does occur, easy to manage.

BIO



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