

# Ten Lessons for Communicating Through a Crisis

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on Education  
Lipman Hearne  
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## Prepare As If Your Future Depends On It – Because It Does

- You need a comprehensive crisis plan before the crisis happens
- Emergency numbers, identified spokespersons
- beepers/pagers/cell phones
- Media training for spokesperson and top officials

## Get It In Writing

- Fool-proof instructions
- Contact information in one place
- Selectively disseminated
- Presented to your Board

## Practice

- Full-scale dry run identifies emergencies, weaknesses in your plan
- Include faculty and parent representative, student representative, Board chair
- Create messages around a “real” event to hone responses

## Communicate with All of Your Constituencies

- Don't leave it to the media to communicate the nature of a crisis to your own community
- Segment and tailor communications to each constituency
- Be honest, thorough and human

## Don't Antagonize the Media

- Understand the job reporters are trying to do – and help them do it
- Stonewalling never works
- Reporters appreciate cooperation – and will write accordingly
- Don't overreact when you don't like what you read – “going to the publisher” is rarely the right response

## Lawyers

- Lawyers often counsel silence – heed them at your peril
- Involve both your lawyer and your communications chief in important deliberations
- Disciplined and accurate communications don't encourage lawsuits – they help prevent them

## Research- Before, During, and After

- Understand impact without resorting to guesswork or anecdotes
- Survey important audiences – donors, volunteers and friends, and general public within a geographic area to gauge impact

## Prepare for the Long Haul

- A crisis rarely comes and goes in a day, week, or month – remain vigilant, prepared and responsive
- Stick to the rules throughout – you can't unilaterally declare that a crisis is over
- Look for ways to turn negatives into positives

## Stick to the Facts- And Tell the Truth

- Remember the Watergate rule – the cover-up is always worse than the crime
- Never speculate about the past or the future
- When non-disclosure is required, be honest about that – including the reasons why you can't respond
- Explain why some things (personnel matters, for example) must remain confidential

## First Things First

- Message to key constituencies – remember what's important – the welfare of your clients and the integrity of your institution
- Always lead with concern and compassion rather than facts and figures
- Always be available

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# Discussion