

# Crisis Communication Planning

## Before the Crisis

Recognize that when a reporter calls it is an opportunity for *relationship* with a new person. Honor the opportunity God has place in front of you. Information flows quickly. Reporters sometimes have to file a story within 15 minutes of arriving at a situation. Be sure they have your information!

**Create and empower a Crisis Communications Team.** They must have authority to react *right away*. The reporter will not wait for your committee to meet. She has her own deadline and job to think about.

**Appoint and authorize Contacts/Speakers in priority order.** If the first person is not available move quickly to the next person on the list.

**Appoint an Extra Help Team** for handling phone calls, escorting media or paperwork. This is primarily administrative stuff. These should be people at the office or who can quickly get to the office, if need arises.

**Put together ALL emergency contact information for those listed above.** Be sure EVERYONE has a copy. The office's administrative support is especially important since they will likely get the first phone call. Also, train the support staff to respond *immediately* to press inquiries. Your organization should respond within 15 minutes of a reporter's phone call or email.

## Calming the Media Storm

**Create Your Message** — put together main themes and talking points before speaking to press. Practice a press conference with internal help, if possible.

**Talk Early** — Talk to the press first, if possible, and be helpful. Also, make every effort to contact people within your organization before the story hits the media. This prevents them from hearing about it on the evening news or reading it in the paper—NOT GOOD for morale. Talking first insures your side will be heard early on in the news cycle. People remember what they see and hear FIRST and LAST.

**Ask the reporter the Most Important Question — How can I help you?** Be sure to ask about the reporter's deadline and meet it! If a reporter catches you by surprise, assure him or her you will talk, ask for a short time to gather facts and call back allowing plenty of time for him/her to write the story. Meet the deadline at all costs!

**Talk Often** — the story will run with or without your input. Even if you have a prepared statement, be sure to answer questions and talk with the reporter whenever possible.

**Talk Honestly** — DO NOT try to withhold or be cagey with information or deny access. This will annoy and antagonize reporters and the story will not spin your way! Tell the facts as you know them. NEVER say that it's "proprietary" or "inappropriate" for you to give out information that's asked for. If you can't give out the entire answer, give what you can. If you don't know an answer, admit it and invite the reporter to call back after you get the information (and before the deadline, of course).

**Express Concern and Goodwill Toward Those Involved** — even if the situation is hostile, goodwill goes a long way with the public. Remember, audiences are more likely to remember *impressions* than *facts*.

**Provide Background** — Give the reporter any pamphlets or printed information about your organization, its purpose or mission. Tell them the history and talk about the positive things your group does beyond the scope of the crisis. You may get a positive story in the future.