Incident Command Strategies for Crisis Communication

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3 Main Topics of Discussion

• What is incident command
• Crisis leadership
• Crisis Communication Plan

Proactive Crisis Communication
Incident Command System (ICS)

- Incident Command System—standardized hierarchical structure that allows for a cooperative response by multiple agencies, both within and outside of government, to organize and coordinate response activities without compromising the decision-making authority of local command.
Unified Command (within ICS)

• **Unified Command** is a team effort process, allowing all agencies with geographical or functional responsibility for an incident, to assign an Incident Commander to a Unified Command organization. The Unified Command then establishes a common set of incident objectives and strategies that all can subscribe to.
Press Information Officer (PIO)

- Member of your command staff—as important as your deputy
- Choose wisely
- Need to be right beside you
- Only releases what you authorize
- Presence is everything
Command Responsibly During Crisis

• Organize and control what is happening now
  • Simultaneous operations
  • Build your team and pull it together

• Beginning planning for the next operations phase
  • Relatively short term look (What does this look like 12 hours from now?)
  • Establish objectives, strategies, and tactics

• What’s on the horizon?
  • Always look two of three steps ahead
  • Demobilization planning starts at activation
Crisis Leadership

- Do your job not everyone else's
- Define the destination
  - Define what a successful resolution looks like
- Chess v. checkers
- Slow it down!
- Leaders are born and die in crisis
- There may not be a win, but you can always lose
- Amateurs discuss tactics, professionals discuss logistics
- What is the next, next?
- Recovery begins when the crisis begins!
Communication During a Crisis: Basics

• Starts well before the event. Relationship, practice, exercise, training.

• How long is this event going to be newsworthy?

• “No comment” is a comment.

• Can always be faster, never fast enough.

• This is your Super Bowl! Are you ready today?
Best Practices

• Be first. The first source of communication often becomes the source against which all others are measured.

• Be right. Accuracy is critical to credibility.

• Be credible. Honesty is fundamental to maintaining trust.

• Express empathy. Emotion cannot be countered with facts. People must first know that their leaders care.

• Promote action. Giving people something specific to do restores a sense of control over out-of-control circumstances.

• Show respect. Lack of respect for a public in crisis undermines trust.

• Own it. Earn and wear your brand.

• Can you over communicate?

• Be available.

• Be proactive.

• Frame it.

• Know your platforms.

• One voice. From PIO to call takers in unaffected buildings.

• Empathy, empathy, empathy.

• Celebrate your successes, acknowledge your failures.
Reminders and Questions

PIO Briefings

**Situation:** Here’s what I think we face.

**Task:** Here’s what I think we should do.

**Intent:** Here’s why I think we should do it.

**Concern:** Here’s what we should keep our eye on because if that changes, we’re in a whole new situation.

**Calibrate:** Now talk to me. Tell me if you don’t understand, cannot do it, or see something I do not.

PIO Pulse Check

- What have I missed?
- What is unclear?
- What has to change?
- Did I learn something others should know about?
- Who’s acting if lead is unavailable?
- Do PIOs have regular communication with command?
- Are PIOs are aware of incident-within-incident procedures?
- Regular communication with host unit / key contacts?
- Are we learning from our mistakes?
Platforms and Methods

- Press conferences
- Social media
- Your website
- Email
- FAQ
- Town Halls
- Podcasts
- Messaging Video
- Phone calls
Questions?

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