

Guiding Principles for Responding to a Crisis



While your company can't predict a crisis, you can prepare for one. By adhering to these core guiding principles, you can prepare your company to respond in an appropriate, measured way — which will position your company to successfully navigate the crisis and come out stronger on the other side.

1. Organizational Principles

- Organize:** Establish a core team of individuals that represent all operational aspects of the business.
- Plan:** Develop a written plan that codifies the crisis team's operating procedures.
- Anticipate:** Define the key risks and vulnerabilities of the organization, and develop response scenarios for each one.
- Practice:** Test your plan regularly to gauge its effectiveness. Consider quarterly or annual tabletop crisis simulations to sharpen your response skills.
- Monitor:** Pay attention to what is going on inside and outside your organization, including what others are saying. Identify potential issues and address them proactively.

2. Operational Principles

- Don't Hesitate:** Move quickly. At the outset, a good response delivered promptly trumps the perfect solution delivered later.
- Take Control:** Take the initiative, lead the story, and be the source of all new and substantive developments.
- Aggressively Seek Information:** Work as quickly as possible to find out essential information.
- Demand Accuracy:** Deal in facts; never speculate. Communicate what you know and what you don't know. Never let inaccurate information go unchallenged, or it will take root as fact.
- Be Ready to Adapt:** Circumstances will change quickly. Anticipate changes and be prepared to pivot and respond accordingly.
- Be Thorough:** Half-measures and partial truths will not end the crisis. Get it all out at once; otherwise, the problem will persist and the organization cannot move into recovery mode.

3. Communication Principles

As you deliver your response, make sure to communicate:

- Facts:** Communicate what you do and don't know, correct inaccuracies, and never speculate. In the absence of hard facts, communicate process (what you are doing to get the facts).
- Empathy:** Always express concern for affected parties. Where appropriate, apologize.
- Accountability:** Demonstrate you will do everything possible to assist (even if it's not your fault).
- Action:** Be explicit about the steps you are taking to respond and address the problem. Update regularly.
- Remediation:** Fix what is broken and communicate what you are doing to ensure it won't happen again.

Experienced crisis communications consultants can help lead your firm's planning and response process. If you'd like guidance on forming or executing your crisis communications plan, please [get in touch](#).