

Applying Lessons Learned: Strategic Risk Communications

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Strategic Communications

Preparing for Successful Dialogue

Improve ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders about risks and risk management decisions

- Build confidence for communicating with stakeholders.
- Understand how to deliver messages to the news media and other stakeholders.
- Review basics of media/crisis communications.
- Identify opportunities for improved results with strategic communications planning.

PERCEPTIONS RULE

- Perception is reality.
- Corporate reputation depends not just on introducing policies and procedures that rate well with key stakeholders, but on consistent communications with stakeholders and a consistent level of visibility through the media.

Risk Communication CHALLENGE:

To help key stakeholders arrive at well-informed judgments of risks associated with risk management decisions and the acceptability of those risks.

Why Do It?

- Get ahead of issues
- Better relationships with stakeholders
- Better risk management decisions
- Improved court of public opinion judgments
- Improve ability of the organization focus on its mission
- Favorable outcomes from litigation

Why Is It Difficult?

External (and Internal!) Stakeholders

- The issues are complex
- Mistrust of information source
- Lack of scientific training
- Perceptions and misperceptions
- Organizational track records
- Increasing concern and fear
- Increasing media influence
- Fear of unwanted exposure

10 “Easy” Steps

Understand/Prepare/Train

- Have a plan.
- Define goals and objectives.
- Identify and prioritize audiences.
- Gather information about audience.
- Develop key messages and stick to them.
- Anticipate disruptions.
- Be honest about vulnerabilities.
- Practice, review, adjust.

Understanding Risk: People will want to know...

- So what? How could that affect us?
- Now what? What are you doing to [fill in the blank]?
- What are you doing about [fill in the blank]?

COMMUNICATE – INSIDE & OUT

- Management
- Public Affairs
- Legal
- Business Partners
- Investors
- Financial Institutions
- Customers
- Media
- Regulators
- Community Members

Why develop a message?

- Raise awareness
- Educate/inform
- Get consensus
- Change behavior

What's in a Message?

- What your audiences want to know.
- What you think is critical.
- What audiences are likely to misunderstand, if you don't address.
- Sensitivity to emotions, concerns, values, etc.
- Balancing conflicting information or different views.

Pretest Messages – Why?

- Increase chance of success
- Assess comprehension
- Assess recall
- Identify strong points
- Identify weak points
- Test sensitive/controversial points
- Identify cultural impact
- Assess personal relevance

Tools for Communicating

- News releases/Statements
- Fact sheets/newsletters
- Q&A
- Media briefings
- Community meetings
- Website/internet
- Print/electronic materials
- Hotlines/ Information lines

Communicating with the Media

- The media is a tool for carrying your messages.
- Reporters work under journalistic constraints.
- Risk claims are more sensational than substantive safety information.
- Conflict and sensationalism sell.

What the Media Wants

- Access.
- Straightforward responses.
- Concise facts in plain English.
- Comprehensible explanation.
- Commitment to follow-up.

Media Quick Tips

- Stick to your script.
- Never let your guard down.
- Do not speculate. Avoid hypotheticals.
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication.
- Take control.
- Monitor media coverage – Learn how perceptions are being shaped.

Phrases to Use

- “What I can tell you is...”
- “So far, what we know is...”
- “So far, what we have done is...”
- “What we are planning to do next is...”
- “We will be able to tell you more when...”
- “I’ll be glad to talk with you again at ...”

Responding to Challenging Questions/Statements

1. Allow ventilation/anger – up to a point
2. Determine their underlying concern
 - Paraphrase off of previous questions
 - A “How can we...?” response
3. Indicate that you care where they are coming from Be empathetic
4. Make your point/conclusion/sound bite
5. Provide facts that support your conclusion
6. Discuss next steps – include “when”

What crisis?

- Objective (damage to people, place)
- Subjective (damage to reputation)
- “Normal Accidents”
- Invites scrutiny
- Jeopardizes image
- Interferes with operations
- Costs money

Subjective is based largely on perceptions of responsiveness.

Media Communications in a Crisis

- Long before a crisis occurs, an effective risk communication effort will build the foundation for managing information flow during a crisis.
- Without an effective risk communication process in place, it is impossible to build trust, credibility and relationships during a crisis.

“Unrealistic Optimism”

- Over-reassurance
- Over-confidence
- Avoidance of emotion

Lessons to Learn: Homeland Security

- New era of terrorism alert, planning, response and risk communication.
- Communication, dialogue and information exchange on appropriate security issues with stakeholders – balanced with safeguards for sensitive information.
- Risk communication can enhance security, minimize fear and opposition.

CONCLUSION

