

FIVE “MUST INCLUDE” ITEMS FOR YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

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I often get asked the following question:

WHAT SHOULD WE INCLUDE IN OUR ORGANIZATION’S CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN?

While a crisis preparedness program is far more extensive than simply the plan (the plan being but one component – albeit a very important component – of the program), following are 5 sections I highly recommend should be included within any organization’s crisis management plan or playbook.

FIVE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR CRISIS PLAN

1. ACTIVATION GUIDELINES

Not all incidents and issues escalate to crisis level. And while your crisis preparedness program should scale across all types of issues and crises, your crisis plan or playbook is meant to only be activated when an issue escalates – or has the potential to escalate – to crisis level. So the first section within your playbook should define this criteria and provide your team with the tools and information they need to make this determination in the heat of the moment. Some elements you may want to incorporate into this section include:

- Definition of a crisis – whether in the broader sense of the term or by narrowing in and defining certain specific crisis scenarios
- The crisis management levels that all incidents should be categorized into
- Internal escalation protocol(s)
- Specific impacts that you want your team to consider when determining the level of an incident

2. DETAILED ACTION PLANS

Your action plans are basically a crisis management check list for your crisis team. They ensure that no important task gets forgotten or overlooked when things get hectic. When creating your action plans, you’ll want to identify the tasks and action items that each department would need to undertake and accomplish within the first 24-48 hours of a crisis occurring. Your action plans can be departmental (this is always my recommendation) and should:

- Be prioritized – list them out in the order you want them to be checked off
- Designate an allotted timeframe for completion – try to be as realistic and yet as timely as possible
- Designate a clear “owner” for each task – someone needs to own each action plan (for example your department heads may own their respective departmental action plans), as well as each task. These are the people (within your governance) who are responsible for ensuring the item’s completion
- Include a place for team members to keep notes and document progress for each action item, within each action plan.

Tip: If you list out your top 5-10 most likely crisis scenarios, this will go a long way in helping you identify the most important action items for each department or team member.

3. PRE-APPROVED CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND MESSAGING

One of the secrets to successful crisis management is timely, consistent and effective communications with your key stakeholders. Yet timely approvals of communications can be a challenging and daunting task. So one of your goals should be to pre-define your crisis communications strategy, and to draft your communications and have them pre-approved by all the right members of your team – to the most extent possible at this point in time. The list of pre-approved communications should include:

- Crisis communication strategy (i.e.: proactive vs. reactive, means of communication, hashtag strategy, etc.)
- Talking points / message points
- Holding statements / First response statements
- Official (written) communications to each stakeholder group
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

4. Thorough contact lists

You don't want to be searching for important contact information when time is of the essence in a crisis. So be sure to include the following contact information within your playbook:

- All contact information for each member of your crisis management team
- All contact information for each crisis team member's designated alternate
- All contact information for each key stakeholder that you could potentially need to reach directly in the midst of a crisis
- All contact information for any key vendors and third party consultants/experts that may be required in the midst of a crisis

Contrarily, if you already have a CRM or other systems that contain all of this contact information for one or more stakeholder groups, be sure to:

- Tag the appropriate data for easy reference, access and filtering in the heat of the moment
- Reference the systems in the appropriate places within your crisis plan (i.e.: your action plans)
- Have a hardcopy back-up somewhere (e.g.: the lists I detailed just above) in case your systems go down in a crisis

However, no matter what type of system you choose to use for your contact lists, don't forget to keep them updated and kept current!

5. A DETAILED RESOURCE REPOSITORY

In this section of your crisis management plan, you want to include all additional resources and material that may be needed by any member of your crisis team in the heat of the moment. This can include anything from:

- Timelines
- Flowcharts

- Specific stakeholder agreements or side letter details
- Network access credentials
- Anything else that may be useful for your team members and crisis management

THE POINT OF YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAYBOOK

The point of developing a crisis management plan is to think through any difficult decisions and map out, to the best of your ability, the necessary tasks, communications and information that will help make managing a crisis easier and more efficient.

As a high-level overview, the above are five sections I always include in my client's crisis plans. This certainly doesn't cover everything, but it should give you something to reflect on, whether you have a crisis preparedness program already developed, or are in the process of internally discussing this particular need.