Crisis Communication Playbook

Practical Tools for Crisis Preparedness, Response & Trust-Building

Contents

- 5 Crisis-Readiness Essentials
- Risk Assessment Matrix Template
- Effective Crisis Message Development
- Message Statement Framework
- Crisis Preparedness Checklist

LOOK EAST℠

READY: 5 Essentials for Crisis-Readiness

In food and agriculture, how we respond in moments of crisis shapes long-term trust. The READY framework blends guiding principles with practical steps to deliver communication that is consistent, empathetic and effective.

R Root your plan in guiding principles

Start with a blueprint, not a bandage. Every effective crisis response begins with clear goals and guiding principles - without them, you're only reacting, not leading.

E Establish a written, comprehensive strategy

Write it down or risk writing it off. A crisis plan isn't a plan until it's written down. Create a comprehensive, practice and ready-to-use guide that the entire organization can access.

A Assess risks with a matrix and action steps

Don't just guess at risks, map them. Use a risk assessment matrix to pinpoint the crises that matter most, then build smart, proactive action steps for each scenario.

D Drill the plan: Review and revise as needed

Treat your plan like a living document not a dusty binder. Review it, refine it, and pressure-test it with company drills until it becomes second nature for your team.

Y Yield confident spokespeople through training

Train your spokespeople before the spotlight finds them. Your leaders and experts are only as effective as their preparation. Media train them now so they shine when the stakes are highest.

Risk Assessment Matrix Template

Engage staff and company leaders to help identify threats that could impact the business. Using the matrix, assess the likelihood of the risk and then assess the potential severity of the impact. This process will help prioritize the risks for which a detailed crisis response plan, along with action steps and messages, should be developed.

Severity of Impact

Likelihood	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Catastrophic
Probable Risk will occur				
Possible Risk is likely to occur				
Unlikely Risk is unlikely to occur				

The 5 Components of an Effective Crisis Message

In a crisis, words matter as much as actions. Effective communication reassures stakeholders, protects trust and demonstrates leadership in uncertain times. This framework provides a structured way to respond that is adaptable across channels - whether a press release, social media post, internal memo or video statement. By following these five components, communicators can deliver messages that are timely, credible and aligned with the values of your organization.

1. Acknowledgment

As soon as definitive information is understood about the situation, prepare a thoughtful statement to acknowledge awareness and prevent speculation.

- “We are aware of the situation.”
- “Here’s what we know at this time.”
- “We understand there are questions and want to share what we know.”

2. Concern & Empathy

Express authentic concern for those impacted, threatened, or worried. Lead with people not processes.

- “This is concerning.”
- “We were troubled to learn…”
- “Our first concern is for…”
- “We are thinking of everyone impacted.”

3. Action

Share specific steps being taken to address the issue and provide constructive direction.

- “We are actively working to address it.”
- “Here’s what we have done so far.”
- “Here’s what others can do.”
- “We will keep our website updated with the latest information.”

4. Context

Provide clear, accurate facts and dispel misinformation without appearing defensive.

- “We can confirm…”
- “We want to clarify…”
- “It’s important to note…”
- “Independent experts have confirmed…”

5. Commitment & Follow-up

Reinforce dedication to resolving the issue and outline next steps.

- “Our commitment is to keep people safe and informed.”
- “We will provide another update this afternoon.”
- “You can expect additional information tomorrow at [time].”
- “Please visit [website] for ongoing updates.”

Effective Crisis Message Worksheet

1 Acknowledgment

As soon as definitive information is understood about the situation, prepare a thoughtful statement to acknowledge awareness and prevent speculation.

2 Concern & Empathy

Express authentic concern for those impacted, threatened, or worried. Lead with people not processes.

3 Action

Reinforce dedication to resolving the issue and outline next steps.

4 Context

Share specific steps being taken to address the issue and provide constructive direction.

5 Commitment & Follow up

Provide clear, accurate facts and dispel misinformation without appearing defensive.

Stages of Crisis Management

Crisis management has three critical stages: preparation, response and recovery. Each stage plays a vital role in minimizing the impact of a crisis and accelerating stability for your business. Effective preparation lays the foundation for a swift and strategic response, while thoughtful recovery ensures your organization emerges stronger and more resilient. The checklist on the following pages outlines the must-dos to help you navigate a crisis with clarity and confidence.

Prepare

- Identify & Assess
- Plan & Train
- Reinforce
- Prevent

Respond

- Activate Team
- Assess & Monitor
- Respond
- Act

Recover

- Review
- Evaluate
- Improve
- Restore

> A crisis plan shouldn't be stored in one person's head or desktop. It must be in writing and accessible to the team. Create a comprehensive, relevant, and ready-to-use plan to guide the organization in crisis.

Donna Moenning, Look East

Crisis Preparedness Checklist

Taking time to plan for crisis now ensures your organization can respond quickly, empathetically and effectively when the unexpected happens. A comprehensive plan and well-defined team ensures swift, timely and effective responses during critical situations. This checklist provides 19 practical steps every company should complete before a crisis strikes.

- **Develop a Written Crisis Playbook:** Document procedures, resources, messages and team roles so the plan is accessible and actionable.
- **Root the Plan in Guiding Principles and Goals:** Align leadership around core goals such as ensuring safety, safeguarding reputation, business continuity, and principles such as empathy, transparency and communication.
- **Form a Cross-Functional Crisis Team:** Include communications, executives, legal, HR, operations, technical advisors and backups for each role.
- **Define Roles & Timeframes:** Map responsibilities for the first hour, three hours and 24 hours to ensure clear accountability.
- **Identify & Train Spokespeople:** Media train a primary spokesperson and at least one backup for consistent, credible communication.
- **Prepare Holding Statements & Templates:** Draft key messages, press releases, social media posts and Q&A responses that can be quickly adapted.
- **Create Scenario Playbooks:** Develop step-by-step guides for likely crises such as food recalls, cyberattacks, activist campaigns or employee misconduct.
- **Establish Key Message Frameworks:** Craft values-based messages that emphasize empathy, transparency and responsibility, not just facts.

Crisis Preparedness Checklist

- **Maintain Stakeholder Contact Lists:** Keep updated information for regulators, media, customers, partners, board members and employees.
- **Set Notification Protocols:** Predefine who gets informed first, by what method and in what order during a crisis.
- **Strengthen Internal Communication Channels:** Ensure systems like email blasts, intranet, text alerts or town halls are ready for rapid employee alignment.
- **Include a Social Media Decision Tree:** Establish guidelines for when to respond, clarify, delete, block or ignore online comments.
- **Increase Monitoring & Listening Tools:** Track traditional and social media for misinformation, sentiment shifts and stakeholder concerns.
- **Anticipate Questions with FAQs:** Draft responses to difficult or likely questions to keep messaging consistent under pressure.
- **Integrate Legal & Compliance Guidance:** Engage legal counsel in message drafting to balance transparency, empathy and protection.
- **Identify External Advisors On Call:** Build relationships with outside PR, legal, and subject matter experts who can be engaged immediately.
- **Conduct Regular Drills & Training**: Run annual company-wide crisis simulations and quarterly tabletop exercises.
- **Maintain a Crisis Documentation Journal:** Log decisions, actions, and statements during the crisis for accountability and post-event review.
- **Commit to After-Action Review & Recovery:** Debrief after every crisis, identify lessons learned and update the crisis plan accordingly.

Road to Rebuilding Trust

Recovery: Steps to assess, restore and improve confidence internally and externally.

1. Review & Improve

- Don't return to "business as usual" immediately
- Take time to evaluate the crisis response
- Review what went well and what needs improvement
- Assess lost trust, sales or reputation

2. Transparency Principles

- Demonstrate genuine listening
- Show you're learning from the experience
- Continuously improve based on stakeholder feedback
- Be open about changes and improvements made

3. Communication Strategies

- Provide consistent, honest updates
- Maintain empathy in ongoing communications
- Prioritize people over profits
- Show commitment to preventing similar issues in the future

4. Ongoing Trust-Building

- Keep the crisis communication plan a "living document"
- Regularly update and discuss potential scenarios
- Conduct periodic crisis preparedness reviews
- Maintain open communication channels with stakeholders

5. Commitment to Improvement

- Use the crisis as an opportunity to strengthen organizational processes
- Implement lessons learned
- Demonstrate proactive risk mitigation efforts

Are you crisis-ready?

We're here to help.

LOOK EAST℠

For questions or to learn more about our tailored crisis communication training, reach out. We're ready.

Michael Whitmer
MichaelW@LookEast.com

Donna Moenning
DonnaM@LookEast.com

Website
LookEast.com

2900 NE 60TH STREET, SUITE 200
GLADSTONE, MO 64119