

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM: MASTER MEDIA TRAINING BEFORE THE CRISIS

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ABOUT THE PRESENTER

- Nearly 10 years as a university public relations and media writing instructor and department outreach director/practitioner
- Immediate Past President, Public Relations Society of America Kansas Chapter; Chair-Elect, PRSA Southwest District
- 2 national business journalism fellowships @ Donald W. Reynolds Center, Arizona State University
- Media training for hundreds of students, student-athletes, financial and insurance industry communicators, small business owners, nonprofit leaders and aviation professionals
- PR internships at Southwest Airlines and Koch Industries
- 2.5 years in account management and PR for mid-sized advertising agency with B2B focus
- 4 years as a print and radio journalist
- Bachelor's and Master's in Communication from Wichita State (Go Shockers!)
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FLIGHT PLAN ...

- 1. The need for media training in an age of almost daily crises and Tweet-driven frenzies**
- 2. The evolving role of the traditional spokesperson**
- 3. Gaining executive and leadership buy-in**
- 4. A basic media training toolkit for executives**
- 5. Strategies for stronger interviews**
- 6. Context is key**
- 7. Questions and discussion**



IT'S BOUND TO HAPPEN ...

- We live in an age of seemingly constant crises -- some caused by our organization, others beyond our control
- How many can you name in the past year?
- Tweets and social media posts from influencers, customers, victims and special interest groups are often the drivers from a reputational standpoint



NEW WORLD ORDER: CRISES ARE DIGITAL AND VIRAL

Executives need to understand the complexity and speed brought upon by the digital age

“Social media had upended traditional media, public relations and advertising.”

-- Carol Fowler, Digital Media Head, *Chicago Sun Times*

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

- **Time is of the essence**
- **Responsiveness matters**
- **Proactivity yields better outcomes**
- **Public relations professionals still play important roles as counselors, ambassadors and experts**
- **Our role is often behind the scenes, helping our leaders and brand be prepared and look good when the cameras are rolling**

HOW TO HELP LEADERS PREPARE FOR A CRISIS ...

- **Review, update and practice crisis plans 2-3 times per year**
- **Understand the chain of command and approval processes (and that time is of the essence)**
- **Build positive relationships with key journalists and social media influencers in regular interactions (*before* you need them)**
- **Identify and train key spokespeople**
- **Develop positive, “evergreen” messages that can be used as proactive talking points in the critical first moments after a crisis**

THE 3 FS OF RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

Developed by Washington, D.C.-based media training firm
CommCore Consulting Group

Be Fast.

Be Factual.

Be Flexible.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE SPOKESPERSON OR PIO

- **Traditional communications spokespeople/PIOs have less trust from the media and the public in a world in seemingly constant crisis mode**
- **Audiences want to hear the message from the top**
- **The PR person or PIO is still the go-to for first line of communication and quick responses; they own the media relationships**



THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE SPOKESPERSON OR PIO

- **Media training for C-level executives is a matter of organizational culture -- PR is often the advocate, conduit and salesperson up the line**
- **Executive buy-in is essential to successfully weathering a crisis**

TOUGH SELL OR CAMERA-SHY LEADERSHIP?

- **Don't call it "media training." Instead try "message development or brainstorming session" or "crisis preparedness workshop"**
- **Strategic planning**
- **Seek input and empathize**

- **Worst case: Write the (bad) story how it might turn out if leadership did it only how they wanted.**

EFFECTIVE MEDIA TRAINING CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

- Don't get blindsided or thrown to the wolves
- Proactivity and preparation pay dividends, even for a very young source



A QUICK MEDIA TRAINING TOOLKIT FOR EXECUTIVES

- **Strategies and examples to help them understand and prepare**
- **Why it's important to be trained and prepared**
- **What they may want to say ... but probably shouldn't**
- **Where an experienced counselor can bring value**



CRAFTING A STATEMENT

- **Brief; 2-3 sentences that can be shared via social channels and website**
- **Say what you are doing to respond and express concern for those involved (empathy is different than admitting fault or guilt, or assigning blame)**
- **Attribute to a high-ranking official**
- **Transition to a positive or proactive message**
- **Say when you expect to be able to release more information or provide the next update**

SAMPLE STATEMENTS



WE ARE OPEN

With much consideration for everyone's safety, the Oklahoma Aquarium reopened on May 26. The river levels have not reached the building or main parking lot. Several of the access roads around the aquarium are closed, but visitors can safely access the facility via Seventh Street in Jenks.



SAMPLE STATEMENTS

“We are deeply saddened by the tragic accident that occurred at Ride the Ducks Branson ... Words cannot express how profoundly our hearts are breaking. We will continue to do all we can to assist the families who are involved and the authorities as they continue with the search and rescue. The safety of our guests is our number one priority.”

– Ripley Entertainment, issued the morning after the July 2018 Duck boat tragedy on Table Rock Lake

EXAMPLES OF “SAFE,” EVERGREEN TALKING POINTS

- **Safety**
- **Positive news (where appropriate)**
- **Community involvement**
- **Security (maintaining confidentiality, privacy)**
- **Explain policies and procedures (why you have to do things certain ways)**
- **Others?**

5 TIPS FOR ANSWERING A REPORTER'S QUESTIONS

- **Give your best information first. Don't build up to it.**
- **Repeat and reinforce key messages/talking points**
- **Keep answers short, simple and jargon-free -- think soundbites**
- **Bridge when necessary**
- **Maintain professional distance and courtesy**

SAVVY REPORTERS ARE LOOKING FOR SOUNDBITES, NOT FLUFF

“I don’t stand for coach-speak or vanilla, and I have the relationships to call bullshit in a way others can’t.”

-- Jay Glazer, *The Athletic*, Fox NFL Sunday and HBO’s “Ballers”



27-9-3 CONCEPT FOR SOUNDBITES

- **27 words**
- **9 seconds**
- **3 main points**

- **Requires practice**
- **Effective soundbites have the power to break through the digital clutter and steer the conversation**

MANAGING THE INTERVIEW

- **Be prepared**
- **Professional and official attire lends credibility**
- **Spell your name, tell how to pronounce difficult names and state your title**
- **10-second, concrete answers**
- **Be honest; do not lie (“Here’s why I cannot discuss that”)**
- **It’s OK to use notes**

HOW TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE

- **The interview begins when you start talking and ends at your discretion (say you have time for one more question, answer it, then say thank you and walk away)**
- **Don't let inaccuracies go uncorrected or allow yourself to be pushed into agreement**
- **Only answer a question when one is asked**
- **OK to pause or ask for clarification or to have a question rephrased**
- **Assume that everything is on the record and being recorded**

ALTERNATIVES TO SAYING “NO COMMENT”

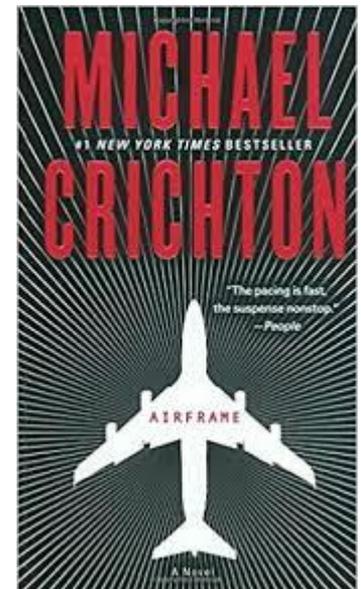
- **Saying “no comment” implies guilt or a cover-up**
- **“I don’t have that information right now”**
- **“The investigation is ongoing and we are in full cooperation with officials”**
- **“It is our policy to not comment on personnel matters to respect people’s privacy”**
- **“That’s not my area of expertise”**
- **Keep your promises to follow up or provide additional information**

CONTEXT IS KEY (AND WHERE A PIO'S COUNSEL CAN ADD VALUE)

A lesson on media relations from the novel, *Airframe*, by Michael Crichton (2011 edition, p. 345):

“The reporter is bright, facile and a quick study, but he does not have your depth of knowledge ... You work in a complex business ... If you try to explain that complexity, you’ll be frustrated.”

You’re the expert. Educate the reporter about your organization’s operations and policies and give background as needed; train executives to follow suit



“SNACKABLE” CHUNKS OF TECHNICAL OR COMPLEX INFO



WATER LEVELS

We continue to closely monitor the water level as it relates to the flow rate from Keystone Dam. Although the Arkansas River level increases about 5” for every 10,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) that is discharged from the dam, the Oklahoma Aquarium remains four feet above the river. Fortunately, the flow rate is expected to decrease in the coming days, and we don’t expect any water to enter the facility.

MORE ON CONTEXT

“First of all that transportation as an industry — including the airlines — has been significantly disadvantaged with the tax schemes over the decades, and that makes us less competitive with other industries in terms of attracting capital, because their cost of capital is simply higher. So this levels the playing field”

“We have the opportunity to consider renewing our fleet faster, and retiring some of the older aircraft. So this would be a trade for quieter airplanes, more fuel-efficient airplanes, and I think that would be a significant benefit. That may not drive jobs at Southwest, but it would drive more jobs at Boeing, as an example, so that would certainly be an economic stimulus. But in addition to those investments, it's an opportunity for us to share those gains with our employees.”

-- Gary Kelly, Southwest Airlines CEO,
Interview with NPR/WBUR's Here & Now
Dec. 12, 2017



RESOURCES

- <https://mediaworksgroup.com/media-interview-tips/>
- <https://michaelsmartpr.com/articles/>
- <http://www.commcoreconsulting.com>
- <http://www.mrmediatraining.com>
- **PRSA webinars, conferences/events and publications,**
<http://www.prsakansas.org>
- **A classic and fun example of the need for media training (Newhart)** <https://vimeo.com/32207413>

QUESTIONS?

Thank you!

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