



Don't Go it Alone in a Crisis

**Will you be prepared if the unthinkable happens?
An emergency-management expert shows you how to be sure.**

By Lucien Canton

You rarely know beforehand when a crisis is going to hit. That's why pre-planning is so important. You need to know the steps to take and the people you're going to rely on to help you if the worst should occur.

Make the Right Decisions

First, keep in mind the three phases of decision-making in a crisis:

1. Collect and analyze information. The early stage of a crisis is one of confusion and uncertainty. The cause of the crisis isn't always evident. The long-term impact is usually obscure. If you can quickly gather information to use in decision-making, you'll have a distinct advantage. It's critical, therefore, to have people who know what kinds of information to collect and where to find it.

2. Create an action plan. Once you have enough information, begin the process of considering options and deciding on a plan. Gain input from people who understand the nature of the crisis and are familiar with your organization.

3. Implement your plan. Having a sound plan is meaningless if it can't be implemented. You need support to obtain resources, direct the operations of employees, and communicate with customers and vendors. The job is just too big for one person.

Build the Right Team

Success in a crisis hinges on decision-making, and those decisions must be informed by trusted advisors and implemented by capable people. To be an effective leader, you need a good crisis management team.

Creating such a team isn't all that complicated if you build on day-to-day problem solving. A major mistake is to develop a team that only meets during a crisis. A much better approach is to use the people you rely on each day, who are used to working together and who trust each other.

Ask these four questions when developing your crisis management team.

1. Whom do you trust? These are the people you turn to for everyday problems, the people whose opinion you seek on new ideas. Most important, they're the people you'll listen to

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when they tell you you're wrong. These trusted advisors should form the core of your crisis management team.

2. Whom do your employees trust? In any organization there's a formal organizational structure and an informal one. The closer these two mirror each other, the more efficient the organization. The informal structure is represented by employees that other employees respect and trust. While you may or may not add these individuals to your crisis management team, you can use them to “take the pulse” of other employees, act as conduits for information, and help implement your action plan.

3. What skills will you need? Some people are obvious choices, such as your management team, your publicist, and your legal counsel. But consider others who may not be so obvious – administrators, human resource staff, and those who interface with customers and suppliers on a regular basis. Not all these people need to be decision-makers, but they can provide important advice and suggestions.

4. Who has the information you need? Information is the cornerstone of decision-making. Some of that vital information is internal. Do you know where to find it? For some problems, a maintenance person who knows your building's operating systems might be the most important member of your team. What about external sources? An employee who has built a relationship with public safety agencies or with your insurance company can get

information that's not available through the media. Speaking of which, who will monitor broadcast and social media?

A crisis management team shouldn't be just for crisis. It should be composed of the people you trust and rely on for normal operations and problem solving. Augment that core group with the additional staff and skills you need, and you'll boost your ability to manage in the face of a crisis. 

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Hone Your Crisis Communication Skills

To be sure you communicate smoothly and clearly when trouble strikes, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

When You're Forced to Say "No Comment" (Vol. 22, No. 4)

Will You Be Ready when Disaster Strikes? (Vol. 18, No. 3)

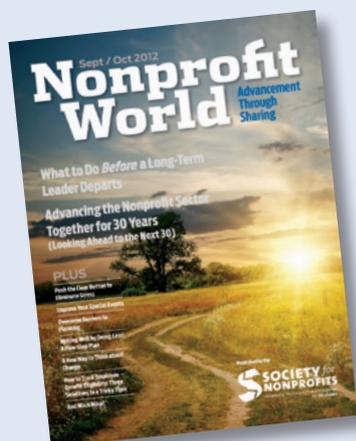
Stand Tall in the Storm: Three Strategies for Coping with Crisis (Vol. 27, No. 6)

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