



Kent Jarrell's 13 Tips for Dealing with a Crisis

Kent Jarrell, APCO Worldwide's senior vice president and director of litigation communications, offers 13 lucky – not unlucky -- tips on dealing with a crisis situation.

1. Teams create options and choices but a leader must decide on what to pursue.
2. Make no decision before it's time. Instead, concentrate on putting the fire out and then you may have more information in the next 12 hours or so to make more informed decisions.
3. Paralyzed management invites outsider intervention. If you don't act, someone else will. Monitor the media to give you an idea of what people are saying about how you're responding to the crisis.
4. Crises have personal effects, both physical and emotional, and remember that you're dealing with them when responding to any aspect of a crisis.
5. Crises create institutional memories and change corporate and career trajectories. How are you going to come out of this? People will always remember what you did or failed to do. This is useful for senior staff members to know to project to the top decision maker.
6. Reputation is your currency in a crisis; count on spending it. You will have to spend your asset base because you're trying to get people to give you the benefit of the doubt.
7. The public will accept mistakes if quickly acknowledged, but it will reject perceived arrogance, insensitivity, incompetence or lying.
8. The public demands more than scientific fact, the letter of the law, or minimum adherence to regulations. If you hide behind technical jargon, the public will think you won't address their concerns. Listen very carefully to the fears of your audience. If not, you will be speaking a language that will go right by your audience.
9. The reaction, especially if it is a cover up, can make an incident a crisis. The best example: Martha Stewart. She tried to cover up what she thought was an insider trade. Imagine her credibility if she had admitted early on she had made a mistake. She could have taught a lot of people a lesson
10. Allies are hard to find in a crisis. Adversaries are quick to gather.
11. The magnitude of the crisis determines the level of the spokesperson. You only want to bring in the CEO at a certain time. Be very certain when you insert the CEO and the board in a crisis situation.
12. Crisis equals an unstable condition.
13. Crises create opportunities.

