Crisis communication

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Crisis communication means

- **Communicating!** Not communicating is never the right decision

- But what if you don’t know?
  - Keep communicating
  - Provide procedural information

- Remember the R rule: reality and content prevail
  - First answer in private and real
  - Then adapt for the public answer
Do’s and dont’s

- You do not have to agree with all interview requests
- “We’re not pals, we’re reporters!” Lesley Stahl, 60 Minutes.
- No comment is guilty. Off the record doesn’t exist.
- And what about the staff?
  - Is essential, both as a way to
    - Keep the troops together
    - Gather information
  - If you don’t talk to your employees, the media will.
The first message: shaping your crisis

- Your first statement sets the tone for all that follow

- **Environmental crisis:**
  - Describe what you know for certain
  - Address health & safety of the community & your employees
  - If community is at risk: explain what the risk is and what you do
  - If external help teams are involved explain how you help them
  - If human life is at risk, state that clearly and early
  - If human life is lost, express condolences
  - Promise to come back with results of the investigation
The right spokesperson(s)

- Knows instinctively what to say and not say
- Is credible, compassionate and likeable
- Is cogent and understandable
- Is knowledgeable but not easily rattled

Select one per broad category:
- Safety/Security
- Environment
- Public Health...
Dealing with the law

“The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers”
Shakespeare: King Henry VI, part II, Act IV, Scene 2

- The core issue is saving the organization and its relation with all its stakeholders, not winning the legal battle...

- So if, in winning a legal case, you alienate and lose your customers, what good is the victory?
Dealing with the truth

- Mark Twain: “Always tell the truth; that way you don’t have to remember anything.”

- Remember: the famous crises that lasted for years (Firestone, Tepco, Ford and Dow Corning) all happened before the internet age.
Dealing with death

- Because you will/might get sued, lawyers will advice you to remain silent. Don’t!

- Remember to say sorry… despite the lawyers!

- On the contrary the CEO or highest ranking civil servant needs to act as spokesperson. He needs to clarify:
  - What happened
  - How did it happen
  - What you are going to do about it
Hoe het niet moet...

- "It depends on your definition of asleep. They were not stretched out. They had their eyes closed. They were seated at their desks with their heads in a nodding position."

John Hogan, van de Edison kerncentrale, in antwoord op een beschuldiging van een inspecteur van de Nucleaire Inspectie dat twee operatoren van de Dresden Kerncentrale op het werk sliepen.
Hoe het ook niet moet...

- "I was a pilot flying an airplane and it just so happened that where I was flying made what I was doing spying."

Francis Gary Power, U-2 verkenningspiloot die door de Sovjetunie gevangen werd genomen, in een interview na zijn vrijlating.
Hoe het zeker niet moet...

- "I didn't accept it. I received it." –

Richard Allen, Veiligheidsadviseur van President Reagan overde 1.000 dollar en de twee uurwerken die hij kreeg van twee Japanse journalisten nadat hij hen hielp een privé interview te krijgen met First Lady Nancy Reagan.
Klassiekers

- Garanderen dat iets niet meer zal voorvallen
- Deadlines garanderen
- Schadevergoeding
- Een ingewikkelde situatie eenvoudig uitleggen
- De onderliggende vraag herkennen
- Een turboterme hanteren
- Spreken in quotes
- Waarom drastisch ingrijpen niet werkt
- Concreet advies geven
Klassiekers II

- Wie is verantwoordelijk?
- Wat is er gebeurd?
- De WTF vraag
Een belangrijk onderscheid

- Boodschap
- Formulering
- Intonatie