

Crisis Communication: What the Media Want to Hear From You

[00:00:00.12] The National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College presents the Critical 3 Series, providing timely and crucial information from our most popular training offerings. Visit NCJTC.org to find more essential criminal justice training. Created for you by experts in the field, we are pleased to bring you Crisis Communication-- What the Media Want to Hear From You, with Anne Schwartz.

[00:00:26.08] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:30.34] One of my favorite sayings to keep in mind during a crisis is, it doesn't matter what it is. It matters what it looks like. And that is the battle that all of us, in every sector, fight each day. We know what something is. We also know what it can look like.

[00:00:49.06] Crisis can come in many forms. Today, we're going to talk about what the media want to hear from you, whether it's local media, or how you're going to interact on social media with your community. When you're dealing with a crisis, whether you are a fire department, EMS, police department, social services agency, or anyone who has charge of a public building or people in the public sector, we have to talk about what your crisis could be, and what do you do when it happens?

[00:01:21.94] The question to ask yourself before a crisis is what constitutes a crisis for you? It could be injured personnel, an officer-involved shooting, maybe an officer-involved death, a death in custody. It could be some kind of a personnel issue that involves some kind of discipline. Equipment failures, like a radio malfunction, possibly a malfunction of the 911 system. There could be a failure of procedures, which means it's a crisis because we have to talk to the public about how we're going to remediate those.

[00:01:52.74] In a crisis, the first critical point to remember is telling the public, what do you know? And maybe we can emphasize those different words to remember. What-- what is the information? What information do you have?

[00:02:10.37] And then what do you, what do you know? I have this information. Here's what I have been told. Here's what I have for you. And then the last word, what do you know? What do you know for sure? Not guessing, not giving information that's not verified. What do you know?

[00:02:28.48] We don't want to share any kind of speculative information. We don't want to get out there and say, we think, or we have information from witnesses who say. Especially when we're starting with the premise of here's what we know.

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[00:02:44.66] The minute that a piece of information that we have given out that turns out not to be accurate later, then it throws our entire news information sharing into question.

[00:02:55.61] You lied to me there, or you didn't give me a full truth there. How can I believe the rest of what you're saying? It's very important to stay on the message, as we say, of what do you know?

[00:03:08.90] There is always an opportunity that someone is standing there with a camera, not necessarily a news camera, just someone with a phone taking citizen video. Those people may speak up to reporters at the scene and say they saw one thing. And the media may go and begin to share that. Or they may ask about that in an interview with you.

[00:03:29.57] It's very important then, when we're following the what do you know, if you have not interviewed that person yet, if you haven't heard that version of the incident yet, it's very important to say, I came out here to share with you the facts. Here are the things we absolutely know right now, but we want to make sure that if anyone has any information that they can give us on what they saw or what they heard or if they have any citizen video, we would like them to come to us and to share that with us so that we can continue to share with you things that we know, things that we can confirm.

[00:04:04.97] Critical point number two to remember when you're communicating in crisis is you must tell people what are you doing, and what do you want them to do? In a crisis, people want to know, what are you doing? What are you doing to make the situation better? What are you doing to make it safer? And you're doing something in order to mitigate the situation.

[00:04:25.08] The second part of that is, what do you want them to do? People are thinking, well, what can I do to make the situation better? Should they not drive in a certain area? Should they share cell phone video if they have that? They want to know what action they can take to help keep themselves and their neighborhoods safer.

[00:04:42.92] For example, you want to tell people, what are the signs they should watch out for? How can they monitor their environment to make sure that they are not affected negatively by, let's say, a HAZMAT situation? One thing we can always do is we can always ask them to share any information they have with us.

[00:05:02.81] Did you see something? Did your child come home and tell you something? Is there something that you've noticed in the past that maybe you didn't think was important enough to speak about then. Knowing the information you know now, is this some information that you think that we might be able to use and might be helpful? So in a crisis, tell people what you're doing. Tell them what to do.

[00:05:26.42] Critical point number three to remember when you're communicating with the media and the public during a crisis is to be aware of the blame game. The media and the public want to know who is to blame.

[00:05:39.97] Because even though we may not want to point a finger early on in any kind of an investigation or a critical incident, the media want someone to blame. That's why it's important for you to say right off, we understand that we don't want this to ever happen again, so we're doing a deep dive into all the facts here. We're going to find out if there was something that was missed somewhere along the line. We're going to find out if there was a policy or procedure that, perhaps, wasn't followed, or that, perhaps, needs to be edited in some way.

[00:06:17.59] It starts out with the media wanting information. But eventually, people need to blame someone. People need to be able to say, if you had done this, then this wouldn't have happened. If this, then that wouldn't have happened. The blame game is coming, got to be ready for it.

[00:06:33.85] You have a great story to tell. And even in crisis, we need to figure out the way that you can share that story. By saying nothing, we can almost make it worse. It doesn't matter what it is, it matters what it looks like. That's why telling our own story is so important.

[00:06:52.06] The critical things to remember when you're communicating with the media in crisis are first to tell them, what do you know? What do you know? Second thing to remember, communicating with media in a crisis, we want to tell people what are you doing, and what can they be doing to make themselves and the situation safer? Number three is beware of the blame game. It's coming, people want to know who to blame.

[00:07:24.26] Don't get caught unprepared when you have to communicate in a crisis. But you can be prepared even if you don't know what crisis is coming toward you. How you communicate with the world is watching will set the stage for the rest of your career. Look no further than the nightly news to see how it's done well and how it's not done well.

[00:07:46.61] [SWOOSH]