

# 5 Steps to Communicating in a Crisis



# 5 Steps to Communicating in a Crisis



## 1. Stop shouting



## 2. Be empathetic



## 3. Don't be tone deaf



## 4. Let go of perfection



## 5. Be present

The ground underneath many businesses and organizations has shifted thanks to the COVID pandemic. It brought with it a number of challenges (and opportunities) for communicating with staff, customers, stakeholders and the public.

Many organizations that had little experience with crisis communications before the pandemic had to learn quickly and pivot as COVID threw curveballs. Now that you've had some on the job training, it's time to take a breath and learn how to effectively communicate in a crisis.

It's about knowing how to be heard above the noise versus being lost in the noise.



# Stop shouting

**Be clear on what information you need to share**, who needs to receive it, and what is the best way to reach that audience. There's a good chance not everybody needs to hear what you're saying. Now, more than ever, you need to drill down on who you are talking to and determine the best way they receive information.



*This means focusing on your audience's needs, not yours.*

Instead of just posting something on your website or social media channels, and walking away, you need to look at using targeted communications tools.

**If you're sharing information with your employees**, send emails with strong subject lines, concise text and a clear call to action (even if it's watch for more information to come). You may also want to follow up with phone calls (remember the phone?) to your managers to ensure they share the information with their teams (don't assume this happening).



# Be empathic

**In all your communications**, in person and online, make sure you lead with empathy. Acknowledge the struggles people are facing – emotionally, financially, mentally and with their physical health.

**By being empathic** in your crisis communications, people will appreciate that you care about them, or at least understand the challenges they are facing.

Never start any communications with – here is today's update or launch into information.



**Want to learn more?** Download my crisis communications training video and step-by-step guide at [www.howtocommunications.com](http://www.howtocommunications.com)





# Don't be tone deaf

**This is my biggest pet peeve** – companies who send me emails or have social media posts that are out of sync with our current reality.

Where it once (might have) been okay to send weekly emails about the latest sale, in a crisis, this can seem callous. Yes, I understand businesses still need to sell goods. But it's important that while selling you recognize the financial or emotional limitations of your customers. If you have prescheduled emails, make sure you pause them so you have time to ensure the messaging is relevant to the current reality.

**In a crisis**, make sure a team member is assigned to reviewing all scheduled communications. This is an area that's often overlooked and can come back to haunt you.



# Let go of perfection

**Communicating in a crisis is not the time for perfection.** Don't wait until you've created the perfect message to share some tough news or wait until you have all the facts to provide an update. People would rather hear what you have to say and receive regular updates than read a perfectly written piece of prose.

**I'm a big fan of bullet points during a crisis.** Why? Because our ability to process information is impacted when we're under stress.

Bullets help people see the key information, giving them permission to glaze over the materials (which I promise they will be doing).



# Be present

**Once you've determined your key stakeholders** (ex. staff, customers, clients, partnering organizations), you need to keep the communications channels open. These should be the regular ways you normally interact with them. Now is not the time to introduce new channels.

**If you have a strong public presence**, you need to be communicating regularly. How often depends on the crisis. In an immediate crisis (evacuation due to fire), it could be hourly or 2-3 times a day. While this may seem like a lot, your audience has a key interest in what you have to say and the information you're providing.



*If you aren't giving regular updates, they will seek information from another source – one that is likely less reliable. By letting others provide updates, you will quickly lose control of messaging, which will impact your organization's reputation.*

# Cynthia Lockrey

**Cynthia is a changemaker + communications expert.**



**She shifts people, teams, organizations and cultures to go from overwhelmed to clear and activated.**

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Over the years Cynthia has worked as a

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