

DESIGNATING A CRISIS SPOKESPERSON

Situations that call for crisis communications can be stressful, complex and on-going. Those factors make this a vital time for an organization and its brand; and the right message can make the difference to the health of your image and reputation.

As organizations become more proactive in their continuity planning, many have embraced the role of communications in their preparation. These groups have also come to understand that fully managing a situation includes a solid crisis communications strategy as a vital part of the process. As professional communicators work on such events, one of the top decisions they'll help you make will be picking your spokesperson.

Selecting an appropriate spokesperson for a crisis situation is not always cut-and-dry. During a major event, you want to have the right spokesperson for the situation.

Here are a few things to consider when choosing a crisis spokesperson:

- **Organizational Structure:** Think about the way your organization is structured. Is it a smaller district with a small administration? Or is it a larger district with multiple layers? As a general rule of thumb, the larger the organization, the more options you'll have.
- **Proper Level:** Each issue that an organization faces has different levels of scrutiny. The specific situation will help you to determine the spokesperson based upon their perceived status. You can potentially diffuse or enflame a situation by selecting the correct or incorrect representative for the situation.
- **Credibility:** When selecting a spokesperson for a situation, your crisis communications team should consider an individual's subject matter expertise. Your first inclination may be an adept speaker however, if he or she knows very little about the topic, you may want to reconsider. An expert will not only be more credible with content, but will also be better able to handle follow-up or unplanned questions.
- **Escalation:** In a situation, you should be mindful of a worst-case scenario. Information or events can change, putting your organization's credibility at further risk. You should always consider giving your district the potential to change or elevate your spokesperson if necessary.

Selecting a spokesperson in a crisis communications situation is often multi-faceted decision. It is strongly encouraged that organizations build these considerations into their crisis communications plan to remove stress and demonstrate internal transparency as to why you've chosen a specific spokesperson instead of others.

Situations which require crisis communications can be stressful and demanding. That's why having a solid plan with defined roles in place prior to a situation can remove stress and be the difference between success and failure during a high-profile event.

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