

The 9 Rules of Crisis Communications

Rule #1:

What you think happened, probably did.

- Don't defend the unknown
- Be clear in maintaining what you do know and don't know
- Be realistic
- If you find yourself wishing or self-convincing, stop
- Be proactive in your self-assessment of a personal or business issue

Rule #2:

Facts don't need spin.

- What you attempt to hide will come to light eventually, because there are thousands of savvy journalists working to find the truth at all times
- It is difficult to successfully put a good filter on a bad story
- Transparency and honesty are extremely valuable
- You will never make a journalist say, "I hadn't thought about it that way"
- Be straightforward and concise in communications

Rule #3:

Bad things happen on weekends, holidays and when the weather is nice.

- More people out, more alcohol, more cars on the road, late nights, big events with large crowds... all in a good weekend
- Social media is 24/7, meaning media cycles are now the same
- If something happens on a Saturday, it might come to light on a Monday. You're never out of the woods
- Assign an "owner" to cover weekends where you anticipate activity
- Never have your entire Communications team off the grid at once

Rule #4:

We do all windows, we do all floors.

- Many crises turn into an "all-hands" situation
- No one is above or below any given responsibility, which can appear at any given minute
- Step into the position that needs you most

Rule #5:

Don't answer questions based on speculation.

- Hypothetical questions, implied answers can be dangerous traps
- Guessing is never a good game to play when it comes to reputation and addressing the public

- A bold, incorrect prediction might not cost your reputation tomorrow, but it will eventually
- Only share what you know
- Don't be afraid to call out a speculative question
- "I'm hesitant to speculate, but what I do know is..."

Rule #6:

Saying "don't quote me on that" means you get quoted.

- Conversations with reporters should always be presumed "on the record" unless specifically agreed "off" by both parties
- Do not divulge any information you don't want shared, do not state anything you wouldn't be comfortable quoted on
- Trust is key
- The media is always looking for a headline – have your own back

Rule #7:

The media is a terrible lens through which to tell your story.

- The press is filtered
- A media engagement is a transaction. The press and your company each want something different
- They will rarely be the same thing
- Media reporting increases the chances that your message becomes distorted
- Focus should always be on your core audience; the group of people who will decide your future
- Controversy is headline material

Rule #8:

Don't repeat the negative.

- Denials are problematic
- Most people don't hear the actual denial
- What registers most is the accusation itself
- Repetition equates to reinforcement

Rule #9:

Never* use your principal to deliver bad news.

- **Unless they are excellent on camera + comprehensively media trained
- Be honest about your principal's assets and liabilities
- CEOs should – barring business critical circumstances – only deliver good news such as funding, expansion, new products, new hires and corporate milestones
- A CEO's name and reputation trade by itself. A company's name and reputation rarely divert from that of the CEO
- Her / his poor reputation can hurt a company's image more than a strong reputation can help it