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School Safety & Prevention Series with Rick J. Kaufman, APR

Crisis Communication Goal:
Prevent Harm to Stakeholders

What we'll cover...

- Stakeholders as Assets, Not Liabilities

- Prioritizing Stakeholders

- Key Stakeholders and Why That's Important

- Best Engagement Practices

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If the top priority in a crisis is public safety, then the primary objective for crisis communication should be to prevent harm to stakeholders.

"The midst of a crisis is not the time to let students, staff and families know what to do in an emergency. That needs to occur before it happens."

Margaret Spellings

Former U.S. Secretary of Education

Crisis Communications Plan

- Communicate with honesty, candor & openness while acknowledging the risks

- Communicate with compassion, concern & empathy

- Collaborate & coordinate with credible stakeholders, sources

- Meet the needs of key stakeholder groups, including media; remain accessible & provide frequent updates
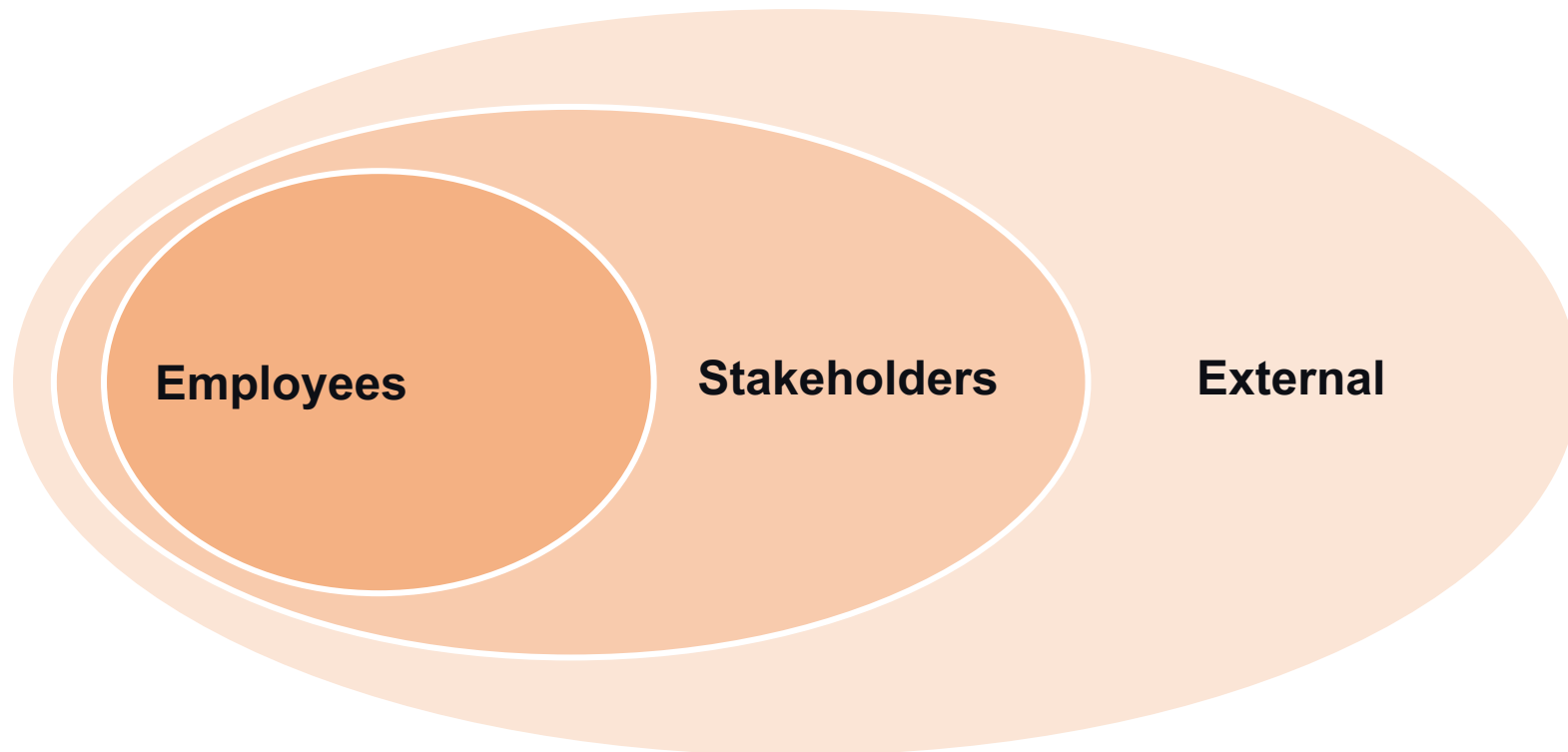
Effective Stakeholder Communication

Stakeholder Emotions

- Sympathy

  o Elicits a range of supportive behaviors

- Anger

  o Direct ire at organization, leaders; may elicit a negative bandwagon effect on other stakeholder groups

- Anxiety

Not all stakeholders are created equal

Employees **Stakeholders** External

An essential element of crisis communication:

Perspective Taking

The ability to view the crisis from your stakeholders' point of view, especially those who are victims

Prioritizing Stakeholders

Stakeholders will vary depending on the crisis.

Identifying stakeholders and how as groups they may be impacted is sound strategic planning

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Key Stakeholders: Employees

- PR ambassadors

- If not first to know, will share what they learn from sources

- Perspective may be contrary to district's key messages

- Friends, neighbors & media will target for info; and share what is learned

- Keep staff in the loop; helps shape perceptions, reinforce district's key messages

Key Stakeholders: Parents

- Must know if children are safe, unharmed

- Failure to allay fears, anxiety undermines organization's credibility & reputation

- Often view themselves as "victims" if child's school is impacted

Key Stakeholders: Community Leaders

- Assured sufficient resources are devoted to the crisis response, victims

- Organization is showing leadership, incident is under control

- Need information to share with their networks

- Need a venue to express their concern, preferably publicly

Key Stakeholders: Media

- Become very aggressive, especially in high-profile incidents; perceive higher importance given their audience reach

- Watch for all forms of gamesmanship, flattery, back-door approaches & end-runs

- May be community residents, with children in your schools

- Consider attempts by media to "localize" a school tragedy from another part of state, region or nation

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Key Stakeholders: FIRs *(First Information Responders)*

- Play a key role in disseminating news to inner-circle of friends, neighbors & family

- Tend to believe organization's info is credible

- Viewed as knowledgeable, credible by interpersonal networks

- In times of crisis, can transform into ambassadors

- Interpersonal networks are sources most sought after for info in an emergency

Key Stakeholders: Others

- School Board or Directors

- Politicians and other elected officials (i.e. city, county, etc.)

- Vendors & suppliers

- Community agencies

- Business partners

Influencing Key Stakeholders

- Focus communication plans on stakeholders with the greatest influence on your success

- Frequent updates in a crises builds long-term relationships.

- Relationships lead to a range of benefits in chaos & calm

- Key stakeholders become influencers with other stakeholders; reflects your point of view

Stakeholders
Communication Strategies

1. Communicate & engage

2. Target influential online stakeholders

3. Establish situational awareness

4. Quickly respond to fill info void

5. Source for factual info

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Stakeholders
Best Practices

1. Listen when they speak

2. Acknowledge

3. Set realistic expectations

4. Focus on people, not structures

5. Engage stakeholders in same manner as pre-crisis

6. Nurture stakeholder relationships

7. Measure relationships

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Parting thought...

Managing multiple stakeholder groups – often with varying and conflicting interests – is not an easy task. It's best to focus on your goal to build and maintain lasting strategic relationships with stakeholders.

Resources

- *Lukaszewski on Crisis Communications,* Jim Lukaszewski (*jel@e911.com*)

- *Measuring the Value of Public Relationships,* KD Paine

- *Innovative Strategies for Crisis Communication,* Kim Harrison (cuttingedgepr.com)

- Ingenium Communication

- Melissa Agnes, Crisis Management Strategist

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We'd like to hear from you!

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