

### Five Tips for Selecting a Crisis Spokesperson:

So, who's going to tell your story?

Below are five key criteria to consider when selecting your media spokesperson in bad news situations. Remember, each situation is unique and, therefore, should *always* dictate who is best to speak on behalf of the company.

1. **Organization Executive** – while outside communications professionals may know how best to work with the media, for the credibility of your message and organization, the crisis spokesperson *must* be from the organization.

2. **Department Expertise** – choose an executive that not only knows that details of the situation, but is also a department expert. For example: in an IT crisis, look to the Chief Technology Officer as a potential spokesperson. Not only can he/she speak to the situation, but to how the department typically runs.

3. **Organizational Knowledge** – in addition to a solid knowledge of the department, the spokesperson should be well-versed on the organization's mission, vision and values so he/she can address the specific situation with statements that emphasize the established key messages of the organization.

4. **Communication Skills** – one of the most important criteria for selecting a spokesperson is their level of expertise and familiarity in dealing with the media. Ideally, this person would be media trained and prepared to deal with potentially emotional and hostile situations.

5. **Personality** – while it seems trivial, this person is going to be the face of your organization. This means they *must* have the personality and demeanor that your organization has decided to portray, while remaining calm under pressure and keeping their ego in check.

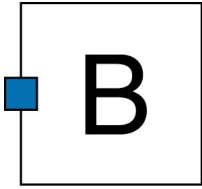
## Crisis Communication - [Preparing](#) for Bad News

People tend not to think about the "worst case scenario," often leaving the details of these matters to just work themselves out. While you can't plan for every potential situation, with a bit of preparation, you will be better able to act promptly and strategically, should a difficult situation occur.

When bad news happens - and it will eventually - you must act quickly to get your message out before the public creates the message for you. And believe us, the public's message will not be favorable to your organization! Below are some of the steps organizations (whether B2B, B2C, non-profit, etc.) can take to help them prepare for "bad news" situations.

- **Create "worst case scenarios"** - craft a list of three to five organization-specific worst case situations. Ask multiple departments (legal, HR, IT) this key question: "Tell me what bad news would keep you up at night?"
- **Identify a communications team** - define the individuals who need to be alerted when the bad news hits and have quick access to multiple methods of communication, such as cell, home and vacation home phone numbers. Prioritize and remember to alert the organization's switchboard operators, as they are the gatekeepers and will receive the majority of initial inquiries and will need to route them correctly. Update this information regularly and have it available via multiple formats.
- **Know your target audiences** - understand who your stakeholders are (media, employees, investors, suppliers, etc.) and how to reach them. Include key contact information and notes regarding their preferred mode of communication.
- **Outline key messages** - these will mimic your organization's mission statement and have blanks to fill in situation-specific information to match the various bad news scenarios you anticipate.
- **Establish company resources / document templates** - draft skeleton templates of news releases, fact sheets, Q&As, etc. Set up a crisis "dark page" on your Web site, a toll-free hotline and / or company e-mail address available for rapid response. Engage in social media tools, such as Twitter, that can help disseminate your message rapidly. (*Note: social media will only serve you in a critical situation if you have an established relationship with that mode of communication prior to the situation - so start now!*)
- **Make the tough decisions now** - have your legal department review and approve as much of your plan as possible. Identify a group of potential company spokespeople and media train them for tough situations. Most importantly, create a flow chart to expedite the approval process once the situation occurs.

Remember, while you can't plan for every situation, you can prepare for most. Each situation will have its own unique challenges, but the above tips can help you meet these challenges with a bit more confidence.



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### Five Interview Tips for Crisis Spokespeople

1. Never (ever) say “no comment,” and never lie. If you can’t address something or you simply don’t know – say so.
2. Remember that absolutely nothing is “off the record.”
3. Know your key message/s and stick to short, articulate statements (think sound bites) that are jargon-free.
4. Specify a location and, more importantly, a time limit for media interview briefings.
5. Stay calm and don’t become defensive or emotional - or debate your issue in the media.

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## Crisis Communications - Dealing with Bad News

So it’s happened. And although you may want to head home and turn off your phone, you need to deal with it right now. Below are a few key points to remember when the bad news hits.

**Be honest** – this is the most important part of the process, as your credibility is at stake! If you don’t know the answer – say so, and assure the audience you’re working to address the issue and will keep them informed.

**Get the information** – know the details (who, what, where, when, why, how) and identify: those affected; key publics; and current media coverage. If needed, go directly to where the situation occurred.

**Start communicating** – make a statement (via traditional and social media) within the first two hours without saying “no comment.” Provide an overview of the situation and assure you’re working to alleviate it and will provide updates. Notify employees of the protocol regarding how to handle the situation. Tell what you know, and only what you know – don’t speculate.

**Continue communicating** – if you aren’t getting your message out, the media / public will create the message for you ... and it won’t be good! Stakeholders must have an outlet to send questions / concerns. Activate the pre-established toll-free number, Web site, etc. and monitor blogs, Twitter and other social networking sites, so that all questions / concerns can be addressed immediately.

**Follow-up** – provide follow-up information and secure media interviews to demonstrate how the company worked through the situation and, if necessary, made changes to ensure it won’t happen again. Discuss with the communication team what worked / didn’t work and adjust your crisis plan accordingly.

Not thinking about potentially negative situations will not prevent them. While you can’t plan for everything, having a general strategy and documents in place will help ensure that bad news doesn’t evolve into a communication crisis. Above all, remember that open and honest communication will best serve the needs of your multiple publics and, most importantly, your company’s reputation.