**Crisis Mode -**

*Get out front and keep moving forward*

In more than 20 years of career experience from the Department of Defense to the private sector in the realm of public relations and communications I’m reminded of one consistent rule of thumb within the practice. A crisis can bring down the greatest of entities, the only way to confront it is by planning for it.

As a latch-key kid from the age of six, my parents prepared me for an environment of comfortable isolation over the course of roughly two hours in the afternoon. Part and parcel of this isolation was my recognition of a “height-appropriate” detailed list of Emergency numbers to use ‘just in case’ something were to happen. They wanted me to have access to all available means of outreach considering the matter I was facing -- Police, Fire, Neighbor, etc…

This was my first foray into the foundation of Crisis Communications.

An organizational approach to dealing with crises is not an overly complicated process. Assign the individual tasked with your communication strategy to conceptualize the manner in which your leadership and staff will address a negative situation or series of events, which potentially threaten the welfare or credibility of your organization. This stems from scandal and loss of reputation to the health and safety of personnel due to criminal behavior or poor decision-making.

At the outset, as communication professionals, we need to address succinctly what our leaders need from us in order to develop and execute a plan which is going to instill trust, allow for plausible actions, and create calm amidst an ongoing storm. As communicators, our bread and butter is thinking strategically, preparing for contingencies, and detailing a pathway to success for an entire organization. Let this be your guide.

When scripting your crisis comms plan, be sure to focus on the core elements of what is needed, both internally within the organization and what is expected from your external stakeholders.

Understand that when facing a crisis your audience is likely going to grow exponentially in a short period of time. Accurate and timely information is at a premium. Consider that in 2020, we find ourselves steeped in a digital battlefield where misinformation can be as great an enemy as the crisis you are initially facing. There is due diligence to crafting messages BEFORE you’re backed into a corner.

There should also be an understanding within your comms strategy as to the proper identification of what you are dealing with -- how are we defining the circumstances under which we are operating. If your organization's modus operandi is to label ALL THINGS a crisis, you will find yourself continually at a disadvantage over strained personnel hours and valuable resources. Keep in mind that a well-managed crisis not only preserves assets, but further permeates trust from leadership and your publics.

Once you’ve entered into the phase of putting your plan into action, there will be key tenets or principles with which you’ll need to consider in order to keep things running smoothly. Not only are you as the communications facilitator keeping your head on a swivel, but create and put into play a crisis management team arranged to deal with second and third order effects of actions completed or underway. Examples would be - responding to media queries in a timely manner, keeping your internal audience informed, and monitoring ongoing media reports for accurate information. Again, this is an operation of preserving trust and credibility within your organization. Take the time to craft your key messages and then position your interactions with the media and your audience to keep this a priority.

While there is no time limit associated with a crisis management operation, prepare yourselves and your leadership for the long haul. Let your plan reflect a concise and efficient order of executable actions. And once you have found your way along your pre-determined road map (or as I refer - “***CRISIS WAZE”***), be sure to take the time to go back and evaluate what you’ve been through. What did you learn along the way about your organizational effectiveness, leadership style and reaction to individual circumstances? Your lessons learned become a valuable resource toward rebuilding your crisis comm plan and strengthening the inner workings of your Communications Strategy.

The bottom line is the same as the first. Crisis is coming. And it may knock on your door. Keep your list of who to call right where you can see it and then do exactly what your parents told you to do. Follow the plan.