Tanana Valley State Fair Crisis Public Relations Plan Project

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ABSTRACT

This project proposal outlines the necessity and importance of emergency public relations during a crisis situation for the Tanana Valley State Fair. It articulates what an organization can expect when it is not prepared to address communications during a crisis situation. This project proposal is a recommendation for management of the Tanana Valley State Fair for an effective Public Relations Crisis Communication Plan, as well as a personnel training program to address the current lack of a formal plan. The project also presents a literature review on the issue of crisis public relations and its application to the Tanana Valley State Fair. In addition, it describes the methodology employed in the development of the Public Relations Crisis Communication Plan. The training progam and its supporting materials for the training sessions, along with a media relations plan, have been developed based on the research discovered in public relations crisis communication. The construction of the training program is born by studies on prepatory data and its effects on human preformance during stressful situations. As a result of this research, the proposed project on a Public Relations Crisis Communication Plan and training program have been developed for the Tanana Valley State Fair.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Kathleen Fearn Banks (2010) states that a crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name, in which the crisis occurs. The United Way (2001) defines a crisis as a significant disturbance in an organization's activities that results in extensive news coverage and public scrutiny and which has the potential to cause long-term public relations damage. Often, management tends to minimize or deny the occurrence of a crisis. Currently, the Tanana Valley State Fair does not have an Emergency Public Relations Plan (EPRP) or an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for its personnel. A crisis communication plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of communication within the organization and externally between the Tanana Valley State Fair, its stakeholders, the media, and the public in the event of an emergency or controversial issue. In the absence of standardized guidelines, an organization's ability to respond to a crisis effectively is significantly inhibited. Without a specific protocol or standardized guide, the failure to anticipate questions and develop ready-made messages and materials for the public and media makes responding to the influx of inquiries a challenge (Prue, Lackey, Swenarski, & Grant, 2003). In addition, lack of planning would make it difficult for fair personnel to assist emergency responders, trained personnel, and other experts sent to handle the crisis.

Without either of these plans in place, the fair could have major problems in the event of an incident. A *Clinical Pediatrics* report dated May 2013 states that there was an average of 4,423 pediatric annual injuries of children aged 17 years and younger treated in US hospital emergency departments in the United States involving amusement rides between 1990-2010 (Thompson, Chounthirath, Xiang, & Smith, 2013). The mean patient age was 8.73 years. The

head and neck were the most commonly injured body regions (28.0%), and the most common type of injury was a soft tissue injury (29.4%). Falling in, on, off, or against the ride constituted the most frequent mechanism of injury in 31.7% of those children (Thompson et al., 2013). These statistics suggest that the Tanana Valley State Fair management should have some type of action plan in place to address any type of potential emergency, especially medical pediatric injuries.

In the event of any kind of emergency, the Tanana Valley State Fair and its employees are ill-equipped to handle the flow and content of communication to its employees, board of directors, local law enforcement, media, and the community due to the lack of formal Emergency Public Relations Plans and training. From a communication perspective, it is not the event itself that creates the crisis but the manner in which it is communicated to key public individuals (Seitel, 2004).

For example, an incident occurred during the Tanana Valley State Fair, summer of 2016. Fairbanks rappers Bishop Slice, also known as Julian Lille, and Starbuks, also known as Michael Cofey, were ordered to leave the fairgrounds on Thursday evening, August 10, 2016 by fair general manager Joyce Whitehorn. A fair attendee had complained about the lyrics of their songs, and as a result the two men were escorted off the grounds by fair security (Boyce, 2016). The incident prompted several other acts to cancel their performances and sparked an outpouring of support on social media. Cofey recorded the encounter live on Facebook; the recording had thousands of views. If an EPRP would have been in place during the 2016 Tanana Valley State Fair when Slice and Starbuks were asked to stop preforming and leave the fair, the EPRP would have stopped the media from receiving multiple mixed messages, allowing them to control the

story, rather than the Fair. Consequentially, because of the miscommunication and subsequent pressure from the public, the manager of the Tanana Valley Fair was forced to resign.

Another example to demonstrate the need for an EPRP took place during 2017, when the Tanana Valley State Fair experienced a children's roller coaster derailment, causing injury to multiple children. Subsequently, a lawsuit was then filed by a parent claiming that her children were injured and traumatized by this incident (Chomicz, 2017). Although this accident was minor compared to the accident that occurred at the 2017 Ohio State Fair in Columbus, Ohio, where a ride malfunctioned and killed one person and injured seven others, it demonstrates the need for the fair to establish a crisis communication plan (Madden, 2017). Another serious amusement park accident occurred during the summer of 2017 at Six Flags Great Escape in New York, where a teenage girl slipped from her restraints, was hanging from the gondola ride, and would have fallen to her death if not for a rescuer who caught her (Long, 2017). During any type of incident such as these, an EPRP would function to control the flow of correct information in a timely manner, but without an EPRP in place, the information could be disseminated incorrectly, as demonstrated at the Tanana Valley State Fair.

The foremost common communication mistakes an untrained organization makes are (Grant & Powell, 1999):

1. Inaccurate, contradictory, and incomplete information, especially in the initial stages of a crisis.
2. Constantly changing information.
3. Breakdown of normal communication channels
4. Confusion.

The proposed solutions to these four common mistakes are (Smart, 2005):

1. Development of a crisis communication team will eliminate the occurrence of conflicting, inaccurate and incomplete messages to key publics.

2. Training in development of a message, as well as designating a single-spokesperson, eliminates the possibility of this mistake. Without proper development of a message or a designated spokesperson, the media, as well as community members, may distrust Fair personnel; it is also confusing to the public when more than one person provides critical information.

3. A crisis communication team allows the Fair to have set channels of communication so as to remove the confusion resulting from a breakdown of communication. When managers and employees are unsure as to how to handle a certain event, they lose their ability to communicate with other key people during a crisis situation.

4. An organization well-trained in crisis communication is able to avoid confusing its key publics. Confusion occurs when one or more messages are sent by a single organization at a time when the public needs to be informed.

The primary reason for establishing an Emergency Public Relation Plan (EPRP) is to stop confusion by controlling the messages that are given to the media and public in the event of an emergency. First and foremost, without an EPRP first responders can be delayed in their response to the incident, losing valuable time when it comes to injured people. Once an emergency occurrs, the media will seek information and community members will call to find out about loved ones that were in attendance. Without the proper phone bank or training, the fair employee answering the phone could be ill-prepared and give incorrect information to the public, thus furthering confusion. An Emergency Public Relations Plan would also equip fair personnel

to have one spokesperson in charge of addressing the media. By not having this plan and training in place, multiple, confusing, and misinformed messages could be delivered to the media and public. Mixed messages will cause trouble for investigators trying to determine what caused the incident to initially occur. The facts of the emergency might be lost or miscommunicated, but an EPRP would prevent this by keeping records of what was said and released to the media during and immediately after an incident. There are many problems associated with a lack of an EPRP, some of which are the time wasted initally and miscommunication to the public and media.

Karen Lane, the fair's manager, stated, "The fair did not have an Emergency Action Plan or an Emergency Public Relation Plan and when [the fair does] need to have an ambulance come they must walk it to where it is needed" (Personal Communication, July 2017). This can cause a delay in care for the victims, but was done to help the ambulance crew drive through the crowds. If the fair had a EPRP, they could inform crowds that an emergency vehicle was coming through and reduce the time taken to get the victims help. Without an EPRP in place, multiple messages and inaccurate information can cause a delay in care for victims, as well as trouble for the fair patrons by not knowing where to move or if the fair needs to be evacuated because of the emergency. The Tanana Valley State Fair personnel are not currently trained in emergency management and this is why the fair should have an Emergency Public Relation Plan built for them. This project will discern the problems that can occur due to not having an EPRP and then develop a Crisis Communication Plan (CCP). It is the goal of this Crisis Communication Plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that management and staff are familiar with those procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted regarding the Fair's crisis communication needs, including an interview with the management of the Tanana Valley State Fair, reveal that although the fair has an array of tools in place that can assist in the event of an incident, several important elements are still lacking in order to be properly prepared to manage communication in a crisis. The Tanana Valley State Fair management and employees must be prepared to manage the flow and content of communication to key external and internal public officials during a crisis.

An interview with Karen Lane, the fair's manager, showed that there are numerous necessary tools the fair needs to be better prepared for a crisis. One such tool would be a Crisis Communication Management Team (Freeo; Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015). This team consists of top-level management, lower-level managers, and employees who would be able to offer insight into an emergency. The Crisis Communication Management Team would decide the appropriate actions to take during a crisis.

Based on the knowledge gleaned from the interview with Karen Lane, the fair has some hand-held radios, but has a limited number of channels to handle all communication in the event of an emergency. The Fair is also in need of a landline phone set aside for calls during emergency situations. In many crises, technology-based communication capabilities become useless due to the high number of calls, which overloads these technologies at the time of an emergency. To avoid this problem, the Tanana Valley State Fair must ensure communication capabilities other than landline and cell phones are available.

The Fair's webpage should also include a Community Crisis link that is available to the media and community during an emergency. This will reduce the need for personnel to answer

phone calls during the crisis, and instead critical personnel can be utilized in more constructive ways during an emergency. The fair management must also remember that "The 21st century poses new and ever evolving challenges for the practice of emergency risk communication, the real-time exchange of information, advice, and opinions between experts and/or officials and people who face the threat to their survival, health, economic, or social well-being" (Savoia, Lin, & Gamhewage, 2017). It is this exchange of information that must keep flowing during a crisis.

In order for this to function correctly, the website must be continuously updated during the situation. This task can be completed by one person, versus the large number of people needed to answer the phone bank, which could, as mentioned, be overloaded by the high influx of calls. To avoid the same problem of overload, the Tanana Valley State Fair website should also have ample bandwidth to handle the volume of inquiries during an incident. The person designated to monitor and maintain the webpage must continually update the information available. They will also need to know what can and cannot be shared with the public, such as the names of minors or of victims of families that have not been notified. Both the media and the community demand to know what is happening at all times. The most advantageous way to do this is to provide as much information as possible with updates as the situation changes on an easily accessible resource.

Furthermore, the Tanana Valley Fair should train and communicate with local emergency services, in addition to the first responders that are stationed at the fair. Training is vital to preparedness and will help with both fair employees and first responders become more familiar with the necessary tasks during a crisis. Open communication with the authorities and medical facilities will enable fair personnel to be prepared in the event an incident occurs.

Additionally, there must be a designated landing area for medical helicopters on or near the fairgrounds in order to facilitate fast transportation of severely injured persons. The local air ambulance and military helicopters should be aware of this landing zone, and medical personnel on site should be trained in where and how to meet the helicopter at the designated area. Likewise, there should be primary and alternate routes designated for emergency vehicles trying to reach the emergency and injured personnel in case one of the routes becomes blocked. The blocking of routes can be caused by mass hysteria during a lock-down or evacuation of the area. This crucial situation can be life or death for seriously injured persons if the alternate routes are not designated.

To better facilitate emergency communication, there must be a designated person to act as a liaison between the fair and local emergency services. This will ensure communication is open and free flowing between all agencies during and after the event. Having free-flowing communication between all responders and the designated fair liaison will help in crowd control, vehicle movement, and care for injured persons.

Seeger (2006), in his paper *Best Practices in Crisis Communication*, points out that "A second best practice of crisis communication is pre-event planning." This proposed project will have a variety of benefits not just limited to how fair personnel preform during a crisis, but will also allow them to function at a higher level during every day tasks because of the knowledge they have gained during the training sessions.

The goal of a proposed training program is to provide all fair employees with easy to learn emergency public relations management tools. A crisis communication training program would ensure that fair employees at all levels are skilled in emergency public relations. Objectives are used not only to state the plan's goals, but are key in its evaluation, as meeting

each objective determines whether the plan has been executed successfully. Objectives also allow fair personnel to evaluate the training program after the crisis. Successful completion of each objective leads to the success of the training program, as well as the emergency public relations plan. The development of a comprehensive emergency public relations training program will serve the purpose of teaching fair personnel the fundamental principles of emergency public relations and will prepare them to properly respond to a crisis situation.

The development of a fully functional program is another objective of this project. Once employees are trained, they can participate in crisis simulation drills successfully; these drills reinforce information learned during the training. Combining both class room training and simulations, fair personnel will learn to implement the eleven management tools for effective crisis communication management and other crisis public relations methodologies (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000). This method of training will prepare them to properly respond to emergencies rather than react to events (Grant & Powell 1999).

Upon completion of training, the fair should have a Crisis Public Relations Plan booklet in each department, and each employee in a given department will know its location and understand his or her duties in the event of an emergency. A Crisis Public Relations Plan booklet is a resource in the event of an emergency. The booklet also facilitates defining issues accurately and understanding rapidly evolving events, which fair personnel will utilize by constantly changing and adapting tactics to aid in management of the emergency (Grant & Powell, 1999).

The fundamental objectives of the Emergency Public Relations Training Program are to establish a crisis communication management team, communicate through a single credible spokesperson, ensure the fair take necessary steps to contain an incident or event in order to prevent it from escalating to the level of crisis, to make sure the impact of the crisis on the fair is

kept to a minimum, and, lastly, to ensure the fair can control a situation and along with information given to the media (Grant & Powell, 1999). These combined objectives will allow the Tanana Valley State Fair to successfully manage a given crisis and emerge with minimal damage to its reputation. Grant and Powell (1999) state that when these objectives are met, crisis related messages are accurately and timely transmitted, received, clearly understood, and believed. Grant & Powell (1999) also ensure the company will be perceived positively as caring, concerned, and having taken appropriate action to correct the situation.

Training is important because studies have shown that people under stress during emergency situations are more than willing to defer decision-making and additional tasks to others (Driskell, James, & Salas, 1991). Driskell et al. (1991) offer an explanation, stating, "Organizations respond to stress by centralization of authority so that control and authority for decision making is concentrated at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy." While this may be true for an untrained organization, organizations that have been properly trained in crisis management will have the necessary skills to maintain their chain of command and execute decision-making authority at the proper levels. Training will empower an organization and its employees to identify, manage, and react to a crisis appropriately, rather than hesitate and lose valuable time. Other researchers believe stressful situations can result in many adverse consequences, which may include confuting, decrease in performance, and poor time management (Inzana, Driskell, Salas, & Johnston, 1996). However, Inzana et al. (1996) have found evidence that preparatory information can reduce these consequences of stress.

The majority of studies reviewed had consistent findings, as they concluded stress could lead to the deferring of both decision-making and power to other people. The question of how stress affects decision-making or task performance is the common factor of all reviewed studies.

These findings relate to the development of an Emergency Public Relations Plan, as crisis situations inevitably create stress for organizations – a crisis builds pressure to respond in an accurate and complete way in the shortest amount of time possible (Wilcox et al., 2000). Because of this stress and added pressure, it is necessary to determine the consequences of stress on decision making.

Callaway, Marriott, and Esser (1985) examined highly cohesive groups and their tendency to support their members (also called groupthink), which results in reducing conflict and disagreement, and thus the stress involved in decision-making. While it does reduce stress, the price that is paid for groupthink is lack of critical inquiry. Callaway et al. (1985) also looked at the role of individual members of the group and how their characteristics affected the stress of decisions making. Callaway et al. (1985) stated, "Lack of critical inquiry is the key factor in the occurrence of groupthink, then a predisposition on the part of the group member to argue for their own points of view to persuade and influence others would be expected to counter the group think tendencies." Three propositions were investigated:

> (a) that the concurrence seeking and lack of critical inquiry of group
> suffering from groupthink represent a stress-reduction process; (b) that the
> presence of decision-making procedures structures the decision-making
> process sufficiently to lower the state anxiety, increase critical inquiry, and
> improve decision making quality of highly cohesive groups; and (c) that
> some individuals – those high in dominance – are less likely than others to
> engage in concurrence-seeking behavior to reduce the stress of the decision-
> making, but rather continue to critically evaluate alternatives and produce
> high-quality decisions. (Callaway et al. 1985)

Callaway et al.'s (1985) finding supports their stress-reduction theory of groupthink in regard to groups containing either high or low dominance individuals. In terms of emergency public relations and people selected to be part of the crisis management team, these finding allow the Tanana Valley State Fair to train and select crisis management members appropriately. Discussing the importance and encouraging the practice of critical inquiry can prevent groupthink, thus allowing for the passing of information and ideas to be processed. The fair can evaluate members of the Emergency Management Team to determine the most dominant members – it is the dominant members who are less likely to engage in groupthink and are, in fact, more likely to critically evaluate options. By carefully choosing dominant members, the fair personnel will subsequently reduce groupthink, and therefore make more informed and accurate decisions.

Building on the importance of leadership and influence in group decision making, another team examined the amount of influence and power given in a crisis versus a non-crisis situation (Mulder, DeJong, Koppelaar, & Verhage, 1986). For their study, Mulder et al. (1986) developed the Influence Analysis questionnaire to "measure relevant aspects of influence and the power on which it is based in crisis and in non-crisis circumstances," as rated by the leader's subordinates and supervisors. The results concluded that in crisis situations, expert power, formal power, and upward influence were perceived by the leader subordinates, as well as engaging in reduced consultation with others (Mulder et al. 1986). In regard to high evaluation of the leader by his or her subordinates, the leader was "ascribed more forceful leadership qualities" (Mulder et al. 1986). These results show the importance of crisis management leaders having the

confidence of their subordinates, which will result in a Crisis Management Team that can function quickly and efficiently, as they will have unlimited resources available.

Driskell et al. (1991) examined the centralization-of-authority hypothesis, which suggests that:

> Stress should strengthen the hierarchical structure of authority relations in the group. This implies that (a) under stress, group members will defer more to the opinions, ideas, and actions of the group leader and (b) at the same time, the leader will be more likely to reject input from the group members.

In short, subordinates are willing to give up more power and leaders become more powerful in stressful situations. There has been empirical evidence to support his hypothesis. Driskell et al. (1991) developed a study requiring two people to work as a team; the variables were the status of the individual (subordinate to supervisor) and the level of stress (no stress, stress). Three major findings were drawn from their results. First, status in the group (subordinate to supervisor) was an important determinant of interaction, "Low status group members were much more likely to defer to the decision inputs of higher status group members, and high status group members were generally less likely to defer to subordinate group members" (Driskell et al., 1991). In a Crisis Management Team, it is important that members are equal, in order to ensure that all members will be confident and provide his or her ideas and analysis. Second, researchers found low status members "were even more willing to defer to others when under stress," which solidified earlier findings that demonstrate members become hesitant to take action during emergencies (Driskell et al., 1991). Therefore, Crisis Management

Team members must be equals and have confidence in their abilities when events become stressful, such as during an emergency. Third, contrary to the centralization-of-authority hypothesis, which predicts high status members would reject input from others and make decisions on their own, it was found that "high status group members under stress become more receptive to the task inputs of their partner" (Driskell et al., 1991). Such receptiveness would greatly benefit a Crisis Management Team, as the members would be diverse and experts in specialized field and tasks. By listening to others' input, the Crisis Management Team's decision is more likely to be more complete and accurate, ultimately aiding in the quick response and communication during an incident.

Preparatory information is the key to success in training an organization to be prepared for a crisis. Inzana et al. (1996) examined a reparatory information strategy to "address how the person is likely to feel in the stress setting, describe the events that are likely to be experienced in the transition from normal to stress conditions, and provide information on how the person may adapt to these changes." Inzana et al. (1996) wanted to investigate the effectiveness of preparatory information as a stress-training intervention and to measure the effects of preparatory information on enhancing performance under stress. The researchers hypothesized preparatory information would allow individuals to experience less stress, have more confidence, and perform more effectively than if they had not received preparatory information (Inzana et al., 1996). The results of the study provided strong support for the hypothesis, "Those who received preparatory information prior to performing under high-stress conditions reported less anxiety and greater confidence in their ability to perform the task and made fewer performance errors under stress" (Inzana et al., 1996). These results solidify training needs in organizations for emergency public relations management. Without proper training, employees will not function

effectively under the stress of an emergency. The purpose of training organizations in emergency public relations is to provide them with the tools necessary to properly respond to communicate during a crisis situation.

The findings of these various studies confirm the need for organizations to train employees in emergency public relations. Training will provide a knowledge base and a confidence to enable an organization to respond competently, effectively, and quickly. Training will also help employees communicate efficiently during an emergency. The vital part of any Emergency Public Relations Plan is the Crisis Management Team, which should consist of individuals who are confident and will engage in critical inquiry even in times of stress. The Crisis Management Team needs to contain leaders who possess formal and expert power and who have upward influence over their subordinates; they must have the confidence of their subordinates and their supervisors.

Within an Emergency Public Relations Training Program, simulating drills must be conducted to better prepare an organization for a crisis situation. This is a form of hands-on preparatory information. By involving the Crisis Management Team in simulation, trainees are able to better experience their emotions and thoughts in the stressful situation, describe their feeling as the situation quickly changes from normal to stressful, and, as result, understand how they need to adapt to the changing situation. An experience like this in a controlled environment can provide an organization with a knowledge base they could not otherwise gain.

Being fully prepared is important to managing a crisis: "How an organization responds in the first 24 hours, experts say, often determines whether the situation remains an 'incident' or becomes a full-blown crisis" (Wilcox et al., 2000). Proper crisis management and communication not only affects an organization at the current moment and in the near future, it

can also determine how the organization is perceived by many years to come (Seitel, 2004). In the past, The Tanana Valley State Fair has had no formal Crisis Communication Plan in place, causing the organization trouble due to lack of preparedness for handling crises.

CONCLUSION

The Tanana Valley State Fair has made mistakes in the past, like the 2016 musical artist incident mentioned, as well as during other crises. It was because of these misunderstandings this project was built. Without having any formal training, the Tanana Valley State Fair manager was unable to control the information communicated and consequentially was removed from her position. By using the materials and plan included, the Tanana Valley State Fair now has the tools needed to form a Crisis Communication Management Team and the ability to avoid making further mistakes. With the provided materials, employees can be trained in how to correctly and efficiently perform during a crisis. It is important for the fair to implement Wilcox et al.'s (2000) 11 Management Tools for Effective Crisis Communication. The Tanana Valley State Fair must also understand the importance of putting the public first; communicating with the public through a single spokesperson will help maintain control of the messages released, along with stopping the spread of misinformation that could potentially damage the fair's reputation. Utilizing the checklist and training sessions included in this proposal will help the fair accomplish this.

It is recommended that the Tanana Valley State Fair build an Emergency Action Plan, which is a vital component, along with the Crisis Communication Plan. By having these two documents, the fair will be better prepared for the unknown that happens during a crisis. Additionally, it is recommended that the fair hold an annual refresher training program for past employees, as well as training for first time fair employees before the fair opens its doors to the public. The fair should also include the venders in part of the training and decisions making groups during a crisis. They can use a notification phone apps like Nixle and Rave to inform the public and venders during all parts of the crisis. It is crucial that the Tanana Valley State Fair

continue to update and build new scenarios to keep the training relevant and all encompassing.

Once the fair has implemented not just a Crisis Public Relations Plan, but also has an Emergency

Action Plan, the Tanana Valley State Fair will be a safer place for the public.

Appendix A

The Emergency Public Relations Checklist[1]

I.   Public Relations Emergency Headquarters (PR HQ). The PR director remains at the

designated PR HQ and supervises:

A. Notification and liaison

1. Internal:

a. Notify the manager, other supervisors, and board members immediately,

including continual updates.

b. Gather information and feedback about the situation from internal and

external sources.

c. Monitor the internet for developing issues and proper coverage.

d. Include all media and internet monitoring in the Publicity Placement binder.

e. Assess personnel and equipment needs.

2. External: Notify the media, first responders, and family members. Before

releasing names of injured or deceased, notify next of kin (24 hour rule

suggested).

B. Preparation of materials for media

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[1] Adapted from United Way of Marion *County Crisis Communication Plan*, 2007; Colorado Non-Profit Association, N.D. *Crisis Communication Plan*; and Jessica Smart, *An Emergency Public Relations Plan for the Stanislaus County Fair in the Event of a Medical Crisis*, 2005.

1. Have company background, incident fact sheet, and biographies of manager, public relation director, and fair board members prepared and posted on fair website.

2. Prepare basic press release on crisis as soon as possible (1 hour rule suggested).

   a. Include all known facts – what happened, how, when, where, who, and how many involved – not why (admission of fault).

   b. Be certain all information is accurate. Never release information that has not been confirmed.

   c. Withhold names of victims until next of kin are notified (or 24 hours, whichever comes first).

   d. Clear release with senior management, legal department, and personnel department.

   e. Issue release immediately to local and national media specialized publications, employees by email and phone, community leaders, insurance company, and pertinent governmental agencies by fax and email. Be sure to post news release on the fair's website.

   f. Develop a list of "Frequently Asked Questions" – and answers – and make it available to all crisis communication team members. Post the list to the website for referral.

3. Continue issuing timely statements to media in an ongoing crisis.

4. Use one-voice principle: all information is delivered by the chosen spokesperson.

     5. Use full-disclosure principle (except admission of fault).

     6. Continue to update the key message statement.

     7. Update employee communications as needed.

II. Media Information Center (MIC).

   a. Designate place for the media to gather, if necessary.

   b. Locate MIC at site near crisis area, but away from PR HQ. (Media people admitted to site of emergency must be escorted by PR personnel).

   c. Have sole spokesperson on duty, day or night, at MIC.

     1. Use one-voice principle: all information is delivered by the fair spokesperson.

     2. Use full-disclosure principle (except admission of fault).

   d. Assign staff to support reporters with faxing and calls if necessary.

   e. Keep a record of all media inquiries.

Appendix B

Emergency Public Relation Management Training Program: 16-hour Outline[2]

Session 1: 4 hours

I. Overview of purpose and expectations

    A. Statement of purpose and expectations for the training

    B. Introductions

    C. Quiz: Dos and Don'ts of crisis communication

II. Principles of planning and training

    A. Why planning is important

    B. Present studies on preparatory information

III. The communication perspective of a crisis situation

    A. The event does not make the crisis

    B. The power of effective communication

IV. The importance of the Crisis Communication Management Team.

    A. Leadership, confidence, and rumor control

    B. Decision making

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[2] Adapted from United Way of Marion *County Crisis Communication Plan*, 2007; Colorado Non-Profit Association, N.D. *Crisis Communication Plan*; Jessica Smart, *An Emergency Public Relations Plan for the Stanislaus County Fair in the Event of a Medical Crisis*, 2005; Fran R. Matera & Ray J. Artigue, *Public Relations Campaigns and Techniques*, 2000.

Session 2: 4 hours

    I. Preparation

        A. Anticipating to prepare for a crisis

        B. Brainstorming potential situations

    II. The 11 Tools of Effective Crisis Communication Management

        A. Importance of the tools

        B. Case study – consequences of neglecting to employ the tools

            1. What happens when the tools are not used

            2. What can happen when tools are used properly

    III. Why having a single spokesperson is important

        A. Unified voice

        B. Anyone can be quoted as a "fair official"

        C. Spokesperson has the accurate information

        D. All media needs to be directed to the spokesperson (good media relations)

Session 3: 4 hours

    I.   Overview of emergency public relations in action

        A. Where to start

        B. Information gathering and dissemination

    II.   Following the checklist

        A. Importance and usefulness of checklist

        B. Brainstorming – does anything need to be added?

C. Developing general talking points

1. What occurred

2. What is being done about the situation

3. When the next press release or press conference will be held

II. When the crisis has been averted, managed, or has been taken over by another agency

A. Checklist – was everything accomplished?

B. Have all media inquires been addressed?

C. Debriefing and discussion

Session 4: 4 hours

I. Crisis simulation drill

II. Review and discussion of simulation drill

A. Did everyone know what to do?

B. How could the situation have been handled differently?

C. Was there any confusion of roles?

III. Recommendations

A. Role identity?

B. Were lines of communication open?

C. Any areas in need of improvement?

D. What aspects of the training were beneficial?

Appendix C

Equipment recommended

During a crisis, it is important to remember that the public must come first, as stated in the 11 Management Tools for Effective Crisis Communication Management (Wilcox et al., 2000). To accomplish this, the public must remain safe, always clear of the danger. At the same time, when the public is moved to safety, first responders can more easily reach individuals who need their help. The tools on Wilcox et al.'s (2000) list promote these actions. Other tools and equipment, listed below, will help with establishing the PR HQ, MIC, and workplace for the media to receive updates. Without these tools, the Crisis Communication Team could not operate effectively during the emergency.

Loudspeaker:

A loudspeaker system that can reach all areas of the fair during an emergency will aid with evacuating the public. Additionally, a loudspeaker can inform the fair's personnel with information about helping with crowd control and evacuation, as well as where personnel should be. It can also be use to advise the public to stand clear of pathways that first responders vehicles will need to get to the scene faster. The loudspeakers are crucial to getting the initial message out to the public during an emergency.

Bullhorns:

A bullhorn is a backup to loud speakers. They can be used in areas where loud speakers are damaged, or, conversely, in areas where the loudspeakers may not reach, such as the parking lot. The bullhorn can also address large numbers of people in localized areas when addressing the entire fairgrounds is not necessary. Additionally, if the MIC becomes overcrowded, with

more press than originally planned for, a bullhorn could be used to get information to the media in a timely manner.

Multi-Channeled Radios:

Multi-channeled radios must have enough channels for everyday operation, plus one empty channel for use during an emergency. Radios are useful for everyday operations, passing general information, and also updating the office with any situation that may need attention during a normal day at the fair. When a crisis occurs, radios become crucial. Radios can be used to let the office or manager know of the crisis within minutes, along with talking to first responders during the crisis. An extra channel is needed in case of emergency, as most of the channels are used for everyday needs. By having an extra channel, the information can be passed without delay because there is no other information being broadcast.

Cellphones:

Cellphones are a valid form of communication during both normal days and emergency situations, especially if sensitive information is being shared and, therefore, should not be broadcasted. If cellphones are issued to fair personnel, employees are able to make the initial call private in the event of an emergency. They can also be used to quickly contact the Crisis Management Team.

Computers:

One computer should be designated to update the fair's website in the event of an emergency, as timely information becomes very important during a crisis. This will be one of the most important pieces of equipment needed during a crisis to keep the public updated on what has occurred and information about victims. Other computers can be used to write and send press

releases, along with keeping a record of the incident in real time. In the event of a law suit, a record such as this can be used to demonstrate the fair did everything possible to help with all aspects of the crisis. As a good-will gesture, the fair may also want a computer in the MIC, available for the media to use.

Phone bank:

A room with a large number of phones is needed to receive calls from the public and media. A phone bank is one of the most important things the fair can set up. It allows the public to get updated information and also check on family members that were present during the crisis. The phone bank will need to be staffed at all times during the crisis, and for the immediate days following, to ensure that all inquiries are answered. The personnel that handle the phone bank will need to be trained in how to answer questions which they have the correct information for. If personnel cannot answer a question because they do not have the information, they should also be trained in how to handle that situation, or have a person they can refer the caller to.

Large Map of Fair grounds:

A larger map of the fairground is needed for crisis managers to plan evacuation routes. These maps should be present in all areas where the Crisis Management Team is working and include the planned evacuation routes. Although these routes should be planned ahead, it is crucial to remember that in times of crisis things do not go as planned. Having a detailed map of the fairground can aid in making new routes during an emergency. Additionally, the map can be used to brief the media on where the event occurred. Furthermore, the fair can provide maps with all key locations marked, ready to hand out in a press packet.

This is a list of recommended tools and is not all inclusive. The Tanana Valley State Fair

will need to evaluate this list after training and emergencies to add, delete, or modify the tools.

Adapted from American Red Cross disaster kit checklist 2017; FEMA preparedness checklists
and tool kit, 2017.

Appendix D

Training Program Materials

Training Session #1

A. Dos' and Don'ts of Crisis Communication – Quiz

Please circle the answer True or False for each question.

1. When speaking for the fair after a crisis has occurred, you should deliver all information and in a timely manner. True or False

2. Always double check information for accuracy. True or False

3. Be friendly, polite, and professional. True or False

4. Relay all known facts when speaking to the media, and tell them if you don't know something. True or False

5. Say "no comment" if you don't know an answer to a question. True or False

6. Allow the media to bully you in to making a statement. True or False

7. Make speculations when you have good points. True or False

8. Be helpful to the media. True or False

9. Be patient with the media as they do their job. True or False

B. The Most Common Mistakes Made During a Crisis

The four most common mistakes of an untrained organization are:

1. Inaccurate, contradictory, and incomplete information, especially in the initial stages of a crisis. Development of a Crisis Communication Team will eliminate the occurrence of conflicting inaccurate and incomplete messages to key publics.

2. Inconsistent information that is constantly changing. Training in the development of a message, as well as designating a single spokesperson, eliminates the possibility of this mistake. Without proper development of a message or a designated spokesperson, the media and community members may distrust fair personnel. Additionally, it is confusing to the public when more than one person provides critical information.

3. Breakdowns of normal communication channels. A Crisis Communication Team allows the fair to have set channels of communication. When the manager and employees are unsure how to handle a certain situation, their ability to communicate with other key individuals during a crisis situation is lost.

4. Confusion. An organization well trained in crisis communication management is able to avoid confusing its key publics. Confusion occurs when multiple messages are sent by a single organization at a time when public needs to be informed.

C. Lack of Effective Crisis Communication

Ineffective communication during a crisis situation can result in chaos and confusion, as well as increase the severity of the crisis. According to Grant and Powell (1999), without proper crisis communication management training, fair personal can expect any or all of the following to occur:

1. Raised levels of public anxiety, concern, and fear can fuel rumors, as result of an inability to communicate accurate information.

2. Inaccurate perception of risk due to an inability to communicate accurate and reassuring information, as well as diminished response time.

3. Allegations and claims due to lack of information, or rampant rumors spread because of heightened levels of public anxiety.

4. Injury or harm due to mass hysteria, chaos, rumors, and lack of information.

5. Negative images of the company due to rumors and lack of or constantly changing information.

6. Loss of shareholder and public confidence resulting from insufficient or constantly changing information, and slowness to respond.

D. Grant and Powell's (1999) Seven Deadly Sins of Crisis Communication

1. Unpreparedness: thinking "it will not happen to me"

2. Absence: not being on site

3. Ignorance: not understanding the audience's needs

4. Silence: saying nothing or "no comment"

5. Distance: having a boardroom bunker mentality

6. Fabrication: saying anything but the truth

7. Naiveté: not knowing the standards you will be held too

Committing any one of the preceding sins will, in the public's eye, negatively reflect on the fair's efforts to take responsibility, manage the situation, and tell the truth. When under extreme pressure, there is a tendency to become defensive and efforts are made to diffuse the situation in any way possible. Remember, however, in most cases, it is better for an organization to get the information out on their own terms, rather than waiting for media and community members to ask.

E. Why Training is Important and Studies on Preparatory Information

Studies have shown that untrained personnel under stress, for example, like during a crisis, will often willingly defer decision making to others. Driskell (1991) explained this by stating, "Organizations respond to stress by a centralization of authority so that control and authority for decision making is concentrated at the higher levels of the organization hierarchy." By properly training employees, this can be avoided during a crisis situation. Centralization of authority will be needed to maintain organizational structure, as it pertains to position of authority and decision making during emergency situations. Crisis management training can enable an organization and it employees to anticipate a crisis situation and respond accordingly, rather than react hastily. According to Inzana, Driskell, Salas, and Johnson (1996), stressful situations can result in many adverse consequences, which may include a decrease in performance; however, this team also found evidence that preparatory information can reduce these consequences of stress.

Preparatory information is key to success in training an organization to be prepared for a crisis situation. Inzana et al. (1996) examined a preparatory information strategy to "address how the person is likely to feel in the stress setting, described the events that are likely to be experienced in the transition from normal to stress condition and provide information on how the person may adapt to these changes." Inzana et al. (1996) wanted to determine the effectiveness of preparatory information as a stress training intervention and to measure the effects of preparatory information on enhancing performance under stress. The researchers hypothesized preparatory information would allow individuals to experience less stress by having more confidence, and perform more effectively than if they had not received preparatory information (Inzana et al., 1996). Results of the study provide strong support for the hypothesis that

individuals who receive preparatory information prior to performing under high stress conditions experience less anxiety, as well as higher confidence in their ability to perform the task with fewer errors (Inzana et al., 1996). These results solidify the need for organizations to be trained in crisis management. Without proper training, employees will not function effectively under the stress of a crisis situation. The purpose of training organizations in crisis management is to provide them with the tools necessary to properly respond to and communicate during an emergency.

The findings of various studies confirm the need for organizations to train employees in crisis management. Training will provide a knowledge base and a confidence that will enable an organization to respond competently, effectively, and quickly to an emergency situation. Training will also help employees effectively communicate during a crisis situation. The most vital part of any crisis management plan is the Crisis Management Team. Based on the results of several studies, the Crisis Management Team must consist of individuals who are confident and will engage in critical inquiry, even in times of stress. The Crisis Management Team needs to contain a leader who possesses formal and expert power, and who has an upward influence over their subordinates. The leader must have the confidence of their subordinates and supervisors.

Simulation drills need to be conducted to better prepare and organization for an emergency. For this reason, in particular, a crisis management training program is needed. The drills are a form of hands-on preparatory information. Involving the Crisis Management Team in a simulation allows the team to experience their emotions and thought processes in a stressful situation without the consequences of a real emergency. The team will begin to understand how they will learn how to adapt to the changes that happen in a crisis. Both the drill and simulation give the fair knowledge and experience they could not otherwise obtain.

Being fully prepared is important to managing a crisis situation. Wilcox et al. (2000) state, "How and organization responds in the first 24 hours, experts say often determines whether the situation remains an 'incident' or becomes a full-blown crisis." Proper crisis management and communication not only effects an organization at the current moment and the near future, but can also determine how the organization is perceived for many years to come (Seitel, 2004).

F. The Power of Effective Communication

According to Grant and Powel (1999), effective crisis communications help ensure:

- The incident or event does not rise to the level of a crisis

- The impact of the crisis on the company is kept to a minimum

- The company establishes control over the situation and media

- Crisis related messages are accurately and quickly transmitted, received, understood, and believed

- Crisis related messages result in meaningful and appropriate actions.

G. The Crisis Communication Team

The Crisis Communication Team should, at the minimum, include: all public relations staff, Tanana Valley Fair manager, the fair board president, and any top officials for other involved agencies. This team is the fundamental component of effective crisis public relations. The team should be comprised of "people who are perceptive, intuitive, knowledgeable in one of more functional areas, able to accept additional responsibility, clear thinkers, decisive, calm under stress and capable problem solvers" (Grant & Powell, 1999). The Fair's manager will select this team because these individuals will be responsible for executing the plan in an orderly and efficient manner in the event of a crisis.

Sandra K. Clawson Freeo (n.d.) describes the Crisis Communication Team as an essential art of identifying what actions should be taken. The team should include individuals who are key to the given situation; members of the team should vary as the crisis varies. One of the first orders of business for the crisis communication team is to determine the appropriate message to address the situation (Freeo).

Training Session #2

A. The 11 Tools of Effective Crisis Communication Management

The 11 management tools for effective crisis communication management are (Wilcox et al., 2000, p.181-182):

1. Put the public first.

2. Take responsibility. An organization should take responsibility for solving the problem.

3. Be honest.

4. Never say "No Comment."

5. Designate a single spokesperson.

6. Set up a central information center.

7. Provide a constant flow of information. When information is held, the cover-up becomes the story.

8. Be familiar with the media needs and deadlines.

9. Be accessible.

10. Monitor new coverage and telephone inquiries.

11. Communicate with key publics.

Wilcox et al. (2000) explain the various ways organizations improperly respond to crises. Organizations can attack the accuser who claims a crisis exists, confronting the accuser's logic and facts. Some organizations may respond by denying there is a crisis, or they make excuses, attempting to minimize their responsibility for the crisis. Or, the organization may emphasize there was no intention to do harm and that it had no control over the events leading to the crisis. Some organizations use justification, attempting to minimize the crisis, with a statement about how no serious injuries occurred.

If an organization makes attacks, excuses, or denials, ingratiation is sometimes necessary afterwards, when actions are taken to appease the community at large, such as coupons given to ease complainants, or the organization makes a substantial donation. In the event that an organization mishandles a crisis, they should also take corrective actions and fully apologize. By taking corrective actions, the organization is trying to repair the damages done from crisis mismanagement in order to prevent a worse situation. By giving a full apology, the organization is taking full responsibility and asking for forgiveness. These various responses have been spelled out, however, and Wilcox et al. (2000) have discovered not all organizations respond to crisis in the same way.

In crisis situations, organizations must be able to adapt to how the media and public are responding to the organization's efforts to rectify the situation. "Organizations do have to consider more accommodative strategies (ingratiation, corrective action, full apology) if defensive strategies (attack accuser, denial, excuse) are not effective in repairing the organization's reputation," (Wilcox et al., 2000). The differences between the two approaches are "accommodative strategies emphasize image repair which is what is needed as image damage

worsens. Defensive strategies such as denial or minimizing logically become less effective as organizations are viewed as more responsible for the crisis" (Wilcox et al., 2000).

Without proper emergency public relations training the following can occur:

1. Raised levels of public anxiety. Concern and fear can fuel rumors, as a result of an inability to communicate accurate information.

2. Inaccurate perceptions of risk due to an inability to communicate accurate and reassuring information, as well as diminished response time.

3. Because of heightened levels of public anxiety, exaggerated allegations and claims can occur due to the lack of information or spread of misinformation.

4. Injury or harm due to mass hysteria, chaos, rumors, and lack of information.

5. Negative images of the organization due to rumors and lack of or consistently changing information.

6. Loss of shareholder and public confidence resulting from insufficient or constantly changing information and a slowness to respond.

B. Having a Single Spokesperson

Seitel (2004) states, "The quickest way to end the agony [of a crisis] and begin to build back credibility is to communicate through the media." In order to effectively communicate through the media, an organization needs to designate a single spokesperson. It is imperative that the spokesperson be a credible, high ranking official in the organization, as he or she will be making official statements and answering media questions during the crisis. Freeo (n.d.) outlines the criteria for a spokesperson: her or she must be "comfortable in front of a TV camera and with

reporters, preferably skilled in handling media, directing responses to another topic identifying

key points, able to speak without using jargon, respectful to the role of the reporter,

knowledgeable about the organization and the crisis at hand." Furthermore, the ideal

spokesperson must be "able to establish credibility with the media, project confidence in the

audience. . .be sincere, straightforward, and believable, accessible to the media and to internal

communications personnel who will facilitate media interviews, and be able to remain calm in

stressful situations" (Freeo, n.d.). In addition to an appointed spokesperson for the organization

involved in the crisis, there should also be spokespersons from the various other agencies

involved, including police, fire department, emergency responders, etc.

It is important to note that all media inquiries must be sent to the PR HQ. The chosen

spokesperson is the only individual who should be in direct contact with the media at any time,

but especially during a crisis. The spokesperson should always have all information verified to

be accurate and approved by the appropriate channels of officials, thus it is important the

spokesperson be the only individual dealing with the media.

C. Media Relations

During a crisis, organization personnel tend to think of the media as an enemy. However,

the opposite can be true. The role of the media can be positive within a crisis situation, but

always remain cautious of what information is given. When instead thinking about the media

relationship as a win–win situation, the relationship can benefit both parties. An individual

helping a reporter with his or her story can make the reporter's job easier and, therefore, may see

a more positive story about the organization. By being a good resource for members of the

media, personnel gain credibility. In other words, the reporter will come to helpful individuals again and will not assume an organization is attempting to withhold information or spin a story. Public and media relations are not about spinning the stories or situations; instead, these relations are about being reliable and useful in order to positively publicize the organization represented. Seitel (2004) offers 12 principles to remember when addressing the media:

1. A reporter is a reporter: A member of the media is never "off duty." Anything said to a journalist is fair game to be reported.

2. You are the organization: Public relations professionals represent the organization and, as such, everything said must be carefully planned.

3. There is no standard issue reporter: Reporters are simply doing their jobs, and should be treated as such.

4. Treat journalists professionally: A journalist's job is to report the story, whether it be good or bad for the organization. A public relations person's job presents the organization in the best light.

5. Don't sweat the skepticism: Journalists aren't paid to ask nice questions. They are paid to be skeptical.

6. Don't "buy" a journalist: Never threaten or coerce a journalist with advertising. The line between advertising and news should be a clear one.

7. Become a trusted source: Journalists can't be "bought," but they can be persuaded by a source of accurate information. Become a source and a positive relationship will follow.

8. Talk when not "selling": Becoming a source means sharing information with journalists, even when it has nothing to do with your company. Reporters need

contact information and story ideas – supply both, even when they don't relate to your organization.

9. Don't expect a "news" agreement: A reporter's view of "news" and an organization's view of "news" differ. If there is a discrepancy in views, a journalist's will win.

10. Don't have an attitude with reporters. They need the information you posses.

11. Never lie: This is the cardinal rule. Never lie to a reporter, or that reporter will never trust you again.

12. Read the paper: Know what journalists write about because it will make them happy.

Training Session #3

A. Where to Start When an Incident Occurs

An alert goes out reporting there has been an incident – what should be done now? Immediately, the PR HQ, MIC, and PIC stations should be designated, running, and fully staffed. Next, all pertinent information must be gathered: who, what, when, why, and where. Once information has been gathered and verified, drafting the initial press release should begin. As this is the initial release it should include:

- Current situation

- Your agency's response

- Media contact person

- Media Center location

- Media only phone number

- Time of first briefing and next press release

Once the release has been approved and physically signed by all executive officials and agencies involved, the release should be disseminated. It is vital the release be out as soon as possible. Afterwards, continue information gathering and providing updates to the media.

NOTE: If the incident occurs late in the evening, it is wise to call the local paper editor, producers of television news shows, and producers of radio news shows to inform them an incident has occurred. Also notify these organizations of the press advisory they will be receiving with a specified time slot, as they will more than likely be working with a deadline. This is yet another good media relations practice.

B. The Emergency Public Relations Checklist

Checklists are important, as they help create focus in a time of chaos. It can be difficult to remember smaller details when in the midst of a crisis and the checklist helps minimize forgetfulness. It is important to note that all items on the Emergency Public Relations Checklist will apply to all crisis situations. Equally as important, there may be crucial items omitted from the checklist that perhaps the Crisis Communication Team has not yet pondered or encountered. For this reason, the Crisis Communication Team will more than likely need to revise the checklist after a crisis.

Training Session #4

A. The Simulation Drill

The following information are merely times and facts. Given this information, the Crisis Communications Team must decide what actions to take.

On a Wednesday, the following happens at the Tanana Valley Fair:

- 7:30 p.m. The manager has been informed of a earthquake of _____.
- 7:45 p.m. The fairgrounds are being evacuated (with State Troopers and Police aide) to prevent any further incidences on fairgrounds and for public, employee, and vendor safety.
- 7:50 p.m. Several local members of the media have arrived at the Media Center through the standard check in procedure. They are eager to know what is going on and want to see the scene.
- 8:00 p.m. Multiple fair patrons have been taken to Fairbanks Memorial Hospital with both life and non-life threatening injuries.
- 8:10 p.m. The fairgrounds and surrounding area have been successfully evacuated with no further incidents.
- 8:40 p.m. All minor injured patrons have been treated and released from Fairbanks Memorial. All majorly injured patrons are being evaluated at this time. Thus far, no injuries have been fatal. The hospital will update fair personnel when needed.
- 9:30 p.m. No further information has been given and updates are coming in from the hospital when patron conditions change. There will be a meeting with the board of

directors, law enforcement agencies, the involved fair personnel, and other first

responders in the near future.

Adapted from American Red Cross disaster training program 2017; FEMA disaster training program 2017;*Crisis Communication Plan*; Jessica Smart, *An Emergency Public Relations Plan for the Stanislaus County Fair in the Event of a Medical Crisis*, 2005; Fran R. Matera & Ray J. Artigue, *Public Relations Campaigns and Techniques*, 2000.

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