



CRISIS MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR CLUBS

Introduction

As part of its commitment to Clubs, the District Public Relations Committee has prepared guidelines to assist Clubs to prepare for and manage crises or unexpected events. These guidelines are not intended to replace those provided by Rotary International, but rather as a supplement to assist in developing a few steps, which will help you think through what to do.

The District PR Committee recommends the RI guidelines to you and a pdf of that booklet forms part of this document.

There are three parts of crisis management - preparedness, response and reaction.

Following is a simple five step process to use as the basis for developing a plan within your Club.

Crisis management part 1 -Preparedness

STEP 1

Pre-empt/mitigate the crisis by having a crisis management plan.

This involves developing your written plan, including identifying your crisis team. This will usually be your President, who will have overall responsibility and will co-ordinate activities, your designated spokesman, who will deal with ALL media inquiries and keep other stakeholders informed, such as the DG and your members. Also on the team is someone who gathers and maintains information and keeps a record of everything that happens during the crisis so that a fully informed review can be carried out afterwards. You should also have on the team someone with a special knowledge related to the current crisis. You may also wish to have other members in the team. Training of your spokesman should also be a priority.

Your plan should include a full list of stakeholders and their contact details as well as a comprehensive list of local media. If this is a matter affecting only your Club, you must take responsibility for managing it.

A catalogue of basic information about your club should be available and you should also be in a position to release to the media a basic holding statement until a full assessment of the crisis can be made and more comprehensive documents developed. That statement could include:

- The Club is aware of an incident and is gathering information;
- A paragraph about your Club;
- Your Club will be available to make a further statement when the facts are established;
- Contact details of your spokesman.

Crisis management part 2 - Response and Reaction

STEP 2

Identify the crisis – how do you know you're having one?

Sometimes in organisations it is difficult to know when you are having a crisis. Crises creep up, they are rarely obvious at first. A crisis can be defined as an event that is, or is expected to lead to, an unstable and dangerous situation affecting your Club and/or its members. For Rotary Clubs the crisis is more likely to be a threat to reputation or an accident during a community project. Crises are deemed to be negative changes and are often an emergency event.

So when you think you have a crisis, keep the following in mind:

- Don't bury your head in the sand – this may be your instinct when something goes wrong in your Club but it is the worst thing you can do. Pretending the problem doesn't exist will not make it go away. If anything, it will make things worse. One of the key aspects of crisis management is being able to react quickly.
- Clearly define what has gone wrong – don't get caught up in blame games or debates about who or what caused the crisis. Spend your time establishing exactly what the crisis is, who it will affect and what you need to do to manage the situation.
- Get your facts straight – it is important for the reputation and survival of your Club that you can demonstrate you are in control of the situation when things go wrong. If you are confused or unclear about the facts, it will be hard for people to have faith in your ability to get the crisis under control.

STEP 3

Manage the crisis

When the crisis occurs, reach for the plan. Know who to assemble and how you will commence handling it. It is difficult to proscribe a course of action as every crisis is different. However, keep in mind the following:

- Address the crisis; (see above)
- Define the problem; (see above)
- Gather the facts. (see above)
- Be honest in everything you do and say - honesty is your friend so don't be tempted to lie, cover up or underplay the situation. If you do, you will almost certainly be found out. You also run the risk of generating more negative interest and publicity about the situation and your Club.
- Establish your position – it is very important that you are clear about what has gone wrong and what you are doing/will do to put things right. Write this down as a clear, concise statement and make sure you stick to it!
- One spokesman only – messages must be consistent and clear
- Communicate (not just to the media) to all stakeholders

STEP 4

Manage the communication

Communicate, communicate, communicate - the minute people (including the media) get wind of what's happened, you're likely to get a lot of interest with questions coming at you from every angle. Communicate clearly, communicate honestly and above all, communicate often. Don't leave a vacuum for people to fill with speculation and rumour.

Take five – don't rush into answering media enquiries if you don't have all the facts to hand. You could do more damage than good by making comments on the fly. It is perfectly acceptable to ask journalists for their contact details and tell them you will get back to them as soon as possible (but you do need to act quickly!). You can also issue a holding statement while you gather together all the information you need. If you do this, make sure you issue it to everyone and stick to it! Don't be bullied into releasing information before you have had a chance to establish the facts.

Remember all your stakeholders – when you're being hounded by the press for statements, interviews and information updates, it's easy to forget some of your other very important stakeholders. Don't fall into this trap! Make sure you keep anyone with an interest in your Club informed of what has happened and how you are managing the situation. This includes your members, the District, local government and local elected representatives.

When dealing with the media, remember:

- Do not stonewall or deny that there is a crisis;
- Treat all media equally; no exclusives;
- Stick to the facts;
- Limit statements to the immediate problem;
- Keep records of all replies (media, reporter name, date, time, respondent, summary of response, follow up requests);
- Have media monitoring plan.

When acting as spokesman, make sure you:

- Get to your most important points first;
- Avoid getting trapped into stating a critics position;
- Support statements and assertions with FACTS or third-party evidence wherever possible;
- Comment from the widest viewpoint possible;
- Make it personal;
- Try to mention Rotary at least once;
- Try to use the PREP method to arrange your thoughts and argument -
 - Point
 - Rationale
 - Evidence
 - Point

Make sure you don't:

- Say anything OFF THE RECORD;
- Let words be put in your mouth;
- Guess or speculate.
- Argue or attack the media;
- Use jargon;
- Feel you must limit yourself to answering only the questions asked;
- Get lulled into a false sense of security.

Crisis management part 3 - Reaction

STEP 5

Review the plan

Appoint a crisis evaluation team to assess handling of the crisis and recommend changes in crisis procedures. Evaluation team members should be different from crisis management team members.

Questions to ask include:

- Did the crisis plan work?
- Where did it break down?
- What should be added?
- What was unnecessary and obsolete?
- Who should be on the next crisis management team?

Conclusion

This information is offered as guidance only. It is not intended to be proscriptive. Clubs will have members with wide and varying skills which they can bring to the development of plans. What is essential is that Clubs develop a plan, regardless of what it looks like. The process above is a good starting point.

If Clubs have developed effective crisis management plans the District PR Committee would welcome receiving copies so that they might be shared with others.

Suggestions on improvements to the guidelines are always welcome.

District 9685 PR Committee
26 August 2013