

CRISIS INSIDER

Insights, Strategies and Analyses for Brand Reputation Management

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HOT ZONE

Balancing Act: Taking a Stand on Political Issues Without Creating a Corporate Crisis

Gone are the days when companies could comfortably stay out of the U.S. socio-political morass.

The old strategy of remaining silent or neutral quickly riles customers and other stakeholders in today's charged, social media-savvy culture.

The voting rights controversy in Georgia provides lessons on how *not* to re-

spond to an important issue.

For most brands, it is hard to imagine how taking a stand on a political hot potato won't alienate customers. Yet, when done correctly, taking a political stand can build brand and employee loyalty.

Delta Airlines faced criticism for its about-face on Georgia's voter law. It sup-
(Continued on page 2)

BUZZ BOX

Terms You Need to Know

Empathetic Bankers: Bankers who [understand and respond](#) to customers' emotional state, according to **Accenture**. Maintaining a human touch is becoming difficult since 50 percent of customers [use digital banking](#). And it's more than a feel-good: Empathetic banks' earnings rose 1.3 percent in 2020, while laggards fell 0.6 percent. Similarly, mixing humanity and technology should be at the heart of crisis communication.

'Partisan Changes:' Some consumers, especially Millennials and Gen-Xers, want companies to take political stands. Voting rights legislation may test corporate stomachs for stand-taking. Traditionalists urge companies to [steer clear of politics](#) and "partisan changes." [Yet hundreds of business leaders](#) recently signed a letter defending voting rights. Savvy crisis pros are preparing for this battle's casualties.

CRISIS FORECAST

Defending Against Disinformation

Information warfare is no longer a problem just for governments. Increasingly, companies find themselves targeted. Few have adequate defenses. As the threat expands, developing the capability to counter disinformation needs to be at the top of your to-do list.

I remember watching, from the White House Situation Room, Russia launch a ferocious assault against Ukraine. The soldiers and arms actually were less concerning than the trolls, bots and an extraordinary effort at mass manipulation of reality.

Not only was Moscow focused on maligning those fighting for democracy in the country, but it also managed to convince many that patently false claims

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PR NEWS

HOT ZONE (Cont'd from p. 1)

ported the bill while in development; then, in the face of a boycott, changed sides and opposed it.

With voter rights, it is clearly not enough to disagree with legislation that many view as suppressive. A company must elucidate the action it will take to support its position.

Those actions might include providing paid time off for employees to vote, supporting efforts to get disenfranchised people to the polls or donating to a non-profit that fights for voter rights.

PREVIOUS STANDS

Taking a social or political position publicly can be messy and difficult, especially for brands that have not said previously that social, religious or political beliefs are integral to them.

Consumers have little patience for organizations that take positions incongruent with previously stated values.

Further, employees look for companies whose values mirror their own. They want an employer to take a stand on issues important to them. A recent [Workforce Mindset Study](#) from **Alight Solutions** found employees were deep-

ly disappointed with companies that communicated about inclusion and diversity, but took little action to support their words.


WORDS AND ACTION

As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. If a company decides to speak to an issue, it must act too.

The most important consideration in determining to get involved in a controversial issue is whether or not it aligns with company values.

As with most endeavors, preparation is key. If the issue and your stance align with your values, it is best to speak up.

Even better, anticipate the issue and discuss the company's position, preparing to voice an opinion publicly if deemed appropriate.

Seek broad input. Understand where your stakeholders stand on the issue. Don't wait to speak until it is too late to influence the conversation. And make sure that you identify next steps to align actions with words. 

—Deb Hileman

Deb Hileman, SCMP, is president and CEO, Institute for Crisis Management.

CRISIS FORECAST (Cont'd from p. 1)

were true or vice-versa. We did three things in response that are useful anywhere.

First, regularly and rigorously track popular disinformation narratives. This will help you understand lifecycle, common tactics and tradecraft. It can also provide early warning when the focus starts to shift toward topics that may be related to your industry.


Second, start building tools to protect yourself from an information attack. These include basics like fact sheets, external validating voices and a playbook for your team on how to respond.

Most lines of attack can be identified ahead of time. Make resources available on your website and social media channels that address areas of concern that can help defuse disinformation. Often those assets are far too complex or hard to find. Making them compelling and creative can ensure their effectiveness when issues arise.

Last, go on offense. Developing a clear counter narrative to the false accusations can move you off a defensive posture. Use this seemingly challenging moment as an opportunity to educate

a broader portion of the public about your work, vision and values.

Ensure that your response embeds emotion, as this is what too frequently enables fake facts to spread easily. One of the biggest mistakes clients make when faced with these situations is to fall into the same false frame.

For brands, disinformation can be extremely dangerous and it is growing more common and sophisticated daily. But, by closely tracking trends, developing strong defenses and preparing a proactive platform, you can significantly mitigate, and even maneuver around, the threat. The key is not to ignore or discount the problem's potency. Instead, engage early and come equipped with countermeasures to deny disinformation the ability to define the discussion around your company. 

—Brett Bruen

Brett Bruen teaches crisis at Georgetown University and served as President Obama's director of global engagement. He is president of the Global Situation Room.

Survey Notes Diversity Issues, Importance of Leaders in ‘Sticky’ Crises

While PR pros advise treating each crisis as unique, eschewing one-size-fits-all solutions, the pandemic presented something altogether different.

How do you characterize ‘the crisis of all crises and crises it spawns?’ What to call it? The imagination runs wild.

Dr. Bryan Reber and colleagues at University of Georgia (UGA) suggest the pandemic is a “sticky” crisis.

Sticky crises are severe, recurring and complex; they simultaneously result in a ripple effect of ancillary crises that influence individual organizations and entire industries.

They require near-immediate response and might compel crisis managers to explore and understand emerging crises’ breadth and scope. These additional complexities and communication demands influence the way crisis managers prepare for crises.

Leadership requirements during sticky crises and diversity were some of the areas examined in a survey from Crisis Insider parent PRNEWS and UGA’s Crisis Communication Coalition. More than 400 PR pros were surveyed in early spring 2021.

Below are several highlights.

DIVERSITY AND CRISIS

The novel coronavirus pandemic exposed race and social justice issues. #BLM marches spurred organizations to focus on DEI. Much effort centered on diverse workforces and leadership, ensuring equitable access to, and allocation of, resources, eliminating oppressive systems and processes and providing DEI education and training.

The link between DEI and crisis is an important consideration. So, the survey asked PR pros about their level of agreement with this statement: “My organization has DEI experts to rely on during crises.” Just 15.4 percent strongly agreed [see chart 1].

Key Takeaway: Diversity’s tie-in with crisis is a large blind spot for companies and organizations.

Crisis communicators should relay the importance of DEI-related crisis concerns to the C-Suite. They should emphasize that DEI issues are integral to ensuring ethical, sound and inclusive crisis management.

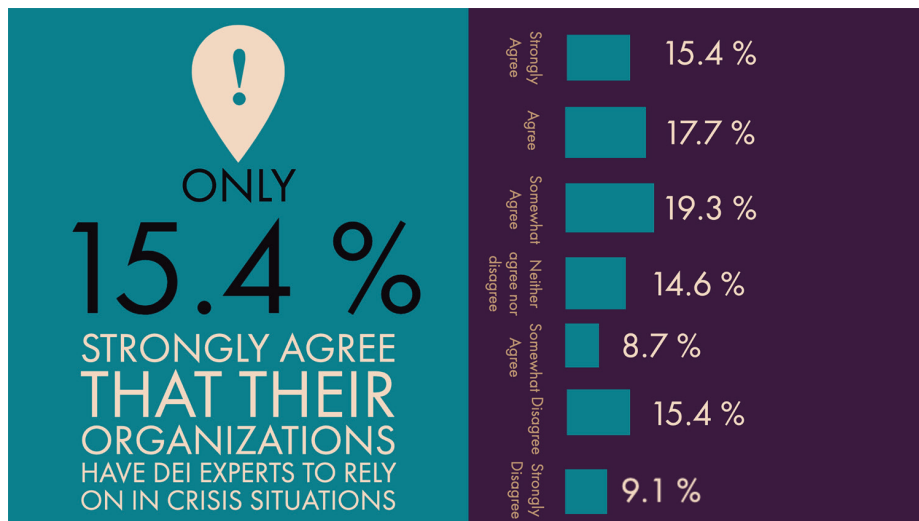


Chart 1: The survey shows plenty of work is needed on ensuring DEI input during crisis. Source: PRNEWS/UGA Study, April 2021 (450 people)

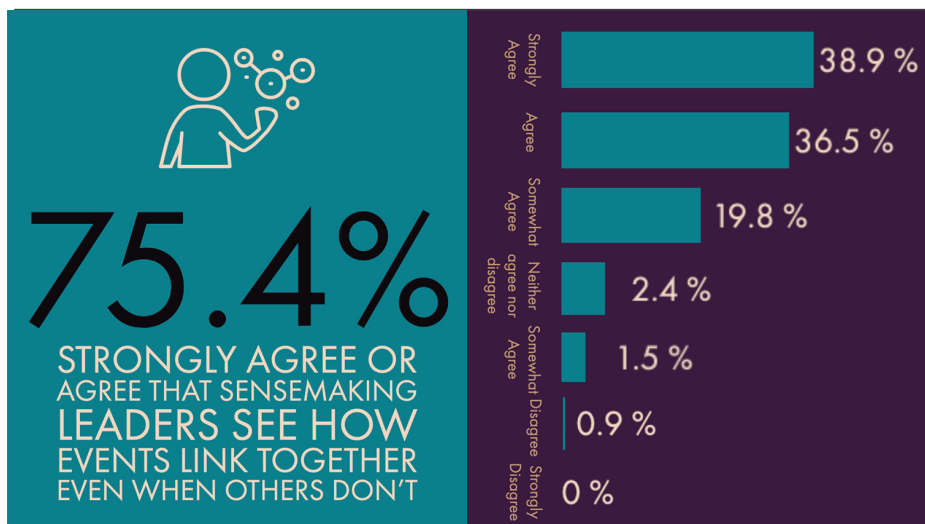


Chart 2: A significant number of PR pros agreed that adept leaders can analyze links between events and other factors that may lead to crisis and alert fellow executives promptly.

LEADERSHIP DURING STICKY CRISES

The survey questioned PR pros about leadership during sticky crises. Specifically, it asked about leadership qualities such as *sensemaking* and *resourcefulness*.

Sensemaking is a leader’s ability to examine and evaluate circumstances so their organization can spring into action if necessary.

Resourcefulness refers to leaders’ ability to make quick decisions, adapt to changing circumstances and use resources effectively.

For Reber and colleagues (2021): “Sticky crises demand not only a near-instant response, but they may require crisis communicators to see possibilities, understand the potential breadth

and scope of an emerging crisis, each which can bring...additional complexities and communication demands.”

Three-quarters (75.4 percent) of respondents agreed that a sensemaking leader sees how events are linked, can identify factors outside the routine and tells someone when this occurs (see chart 2).

Almost 86 percent agreed that resourceful leaders adapt quickly to pending crisis developments and deploy resources easily to respond to opportunities and threats (chart 3).

These questions gauge how important and necessary those qualities are to successful leadership. Knowing that qualities like sensemaking and resour-

(Continued on page 4

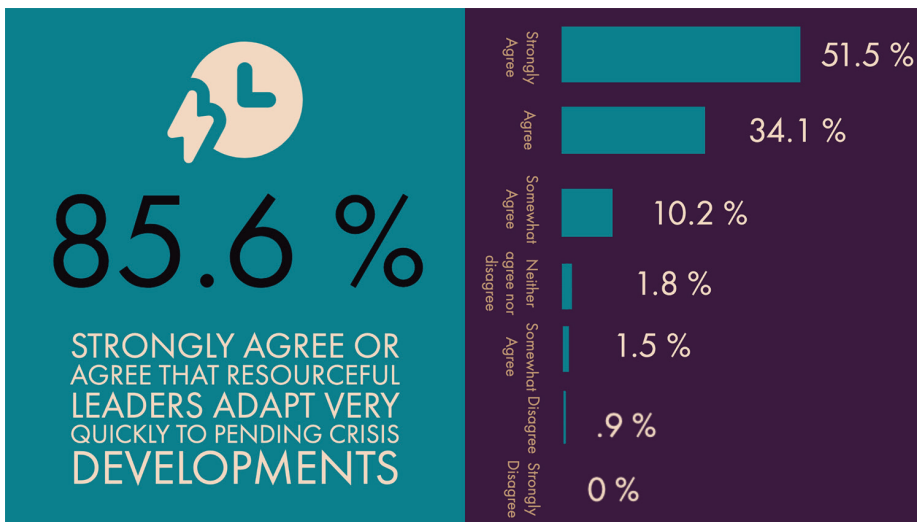


Chart 3: Rather than waver, resourceful leaders act quickly, which is crucial to crafting a timely, successful crisis response.

fulness are significant can inform leadership training to ensure preparedness for situations that could evolve into a sticky crisis.

Key Takeaway: Although sensemaking and resourcefulness are associated traditionally with good leaders, sticky crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, put a premium on leaders. In a sticky crisis, leaders need more foresight than normal to identify the scope of potential threats, ancillary crisis developments and seemingly-unrelated crisis impacts.

HEALTH THREATS & RESOURCES

Threat appraisal is key to proactively planning for crises. The same holds for sticky crises. Going forward, health seems a high priority for crisis preparation. In light of this, we asked PR pros to rate how threatening health issues—infectious diseases, mental health, affordable healthcare, working conditions etc.—were to their organizations.

In short, PR pros at larger organi-

zations (50,000+ employees) viewed health-related issues as very or moderately threatening (see chart 4). Meanwhile, employees at smaller organizations were less concerned.

The pandemic seemed to put a premium on having access to reliable health-related resources, such as infectious disease literature from medical professionals, support from local, state

and federal health officials and company health efforts.

Overwhelmingly, respondents said these resources (with the exception of company efforts) were not needed or barely needed. This response was regardless of organization size.

This suggests health information is more persuasive when it is customized as internal communication, even when outside experts provide the content.

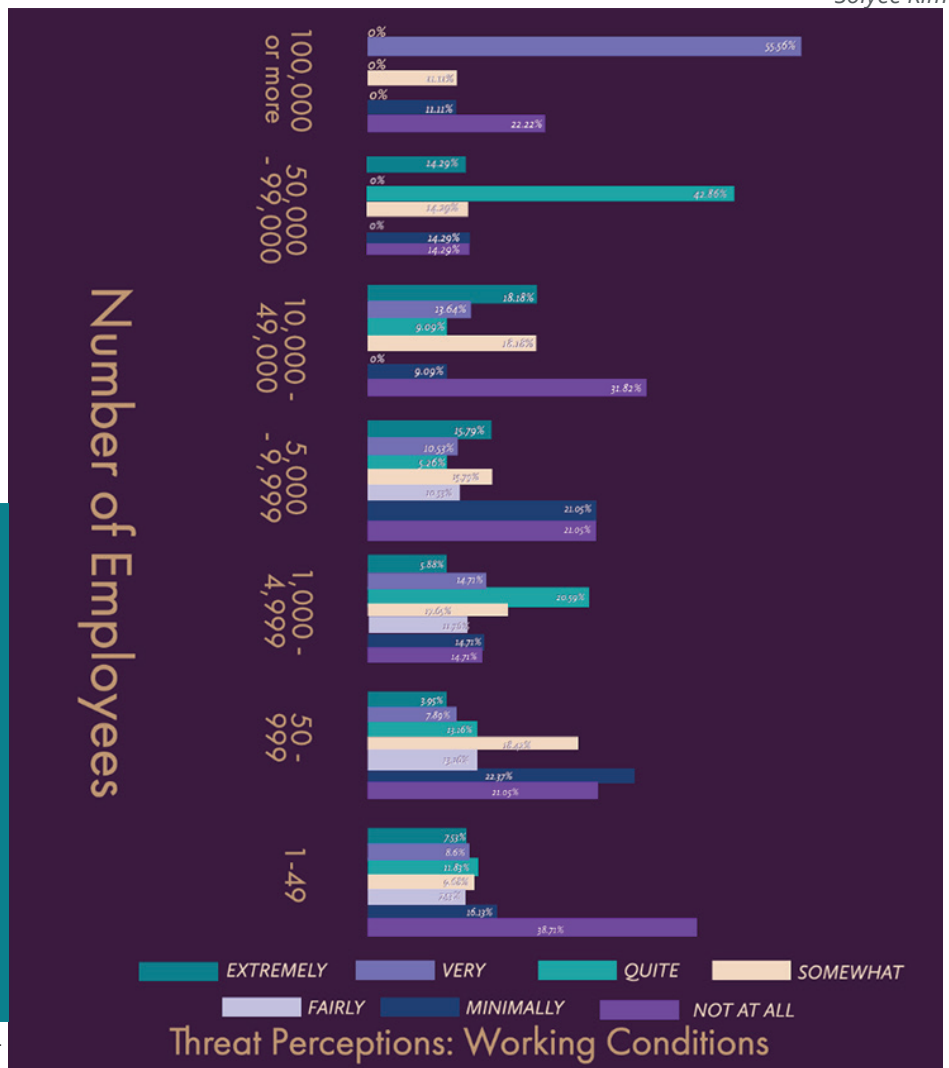
Key Takeaways: Health-related issues appear more salient in larger organizations. This likely is due to organizations with large employee bases increasing the potential for significant health issues. In addition, large organizations are more heavily scrutinized than smaller outfits, raising concern about a range of issues, including health.

Note: These results are a snapshot of the survey results. Crisis Insider subscribers will receive a white paper detailing the full results and implications for crisis communicators.

— LaShonda Eaddy, Ph.D. and Ph.D. students Sara Ervin, Janice Lee and Solyee Kim



Chart 4: Staff at large firms were more concerned with health issues.



Don't Bombard the C-Suite: Shoulder the Worry and Keep Volatile Leaders Calm

Editor's Note: The idea for this month's Crisis Dialogue springs from something we hear often from crisis pros: 'That person/company is difficult.' So, we talked with Chanel Cathey, founder/CEO, **CJC Insights, LLC**, and Daniel Roberts, a corporate crisis specialist, about handling uncooperative executives during a crisis. The conversation was edited for space and clarity.

Crisis Insider: Please give us examples of common traits of difficult executives during a crisis.

Daniel Roberts: [A difficult executive in a PR crisis will] sets unrealistic expectations, is not fully honest and speaks down to [crisis] advisors like us. There are so many things that cascade from there.



Daniel Roberts
Global Crisis
Strategist

Chanel Cathey: I agree. There could be a personality clash or they struggle taking guidance, directions and cues from us.

But Daniel's point about unrealistic expectations is huge. It's similar to media relations, where everyone comes to you and says, 'I want to be in the **New York Times** or on "Good Morning America."

You can't just let that go. You have to convey that it takes time and then you outline a strategy and level the expectations.

CI: So, in an ideal situation what happens?

Cathey: You set expectations honestly and early.

It's important to have a rapport [with top executives], even if one of them is the point of challenge and conflict. Relationships are key.

Crisis Insider: How do you build a relationship with a difficult executive?

Cathey: Be direct. For example, don't always send information [to that person] through someone else. Do it directly. But don't always do it in an email.

A paper trail is great; with difficult clients, however, if you say something

to them in person and it's not written down, that can be a problem. Cover your bases. If they come back later, after a conversation with you, and they're combative, you have a paper record.

CI: What else is important?

Cathey: Provide direct and honest feedback in real time. This can be challenging, especially if you're friends.

Often, difficult people are not receptive to feedback. Part of your job is to figure out the best way to offer feedback.

But, [crisis pros] sometimes are reluctant to give feedback in real time, so they wait and let things fester. Three weeks later, they [raise the issue and the executive] looks at them and says, 'Why are we talking about this now?' They've moved on.

[In addition] you, as the advisor, also must be receptive to feedback.

CI: When the CEO is difficult, what sorts of issues occur?

Cathey: [Problem] CEOs, at times, have difficulty making decisions quickly. And they're risk-averse.

STREAMLINE INFO, TIME CRUNCH

CI: So, what do you do?

Cathey: Don't bombard them. Streamline the information process. Give them updates consistently and be transparent, but don't overwhelm them with details.

[Bombarding them] can add to their stress. And if they're difficult, adding stress will make them worse.

Also, when a CEO is difficult, get a small group of advisors [from the company] to help make the call. That will relieve stress [on the CEO] and us.

In a crisis, you have to move fast. People often take too long getting to a point where they can respond.

So, as an external hire, when people are in panic mode, the first thing I do is

go to the CEO and find out who the most immediate parties involved are and get information to make decisions quickly.

Time is the biggest thing. People spend so much time trying to figure out who's answering to what that you're already behind the 8-ball in your [crisis] response.

It depends on the crisis, of course, but one thing I like to do is keep my circle of contacts [within a company] small.

Everyone's spinning their wheels during a crisis. So, go to the source, to leadership, and keep it contained.

WORK BEHIND THE SCENES

It's our responsibility to gather information, do scenario planning and then give them your best options for responses.

But don't [gather information and plot strategy] in front of the C-Suite...if you involve too many people you'll never get anything done.

It sounds very basic, but it's the breakdown in that key area—who is taking charge and who's managing the decision-makers—that can escalate a situation.

Roberts: I like Chanel's point of going to the CEO and convening a small group. But sometimes that's not possible.

So, say you're working with the head of communication. You realize [he/she] is getting a lot of pressure from [the C-Suite]. They pass that tension on to you. My advice is to stay calm and demonstrate you're actively listening and be as communicative as possible.

STAY CALM, DISARM THE EXECUTIVE

Also, don't get offended. Emotions are high. The executive sometimes is going to be choppy, short and crass. As a crisis professional, you can't get offended.

Next, disarm the executive. As Chanel said, communicate that you are working quickly toward a solution.

Emotions overtake people when they realize there's a lot at risk. It could be thousands of employees being laid off, millions of dollars lost. They are not in
(Continued on page 6)

their typical headspace, so processes could be skipped. That is not a good thing in corporate America. Processes are there for a reason.

AND A CHECKLIST

So, have a personal checklist. That might include having a copy editor look over everything that goes out the door. Even if you have a deadline with a reporter that you can't miss, get eyes on whatever you send.

And make sure Legal approves it and leadership signs off on it. I think it's fine to miss a deadline, on something that comes up unexpectedly, by a few minutes [as opposed to] sending out something that's inaccurate or makes the situation worse.

TAKE THE HEAT

Chanel: I agree. The ultimate win is keeping the client calm. Our job as communication professionals is to shoulder the worry.

CI: The difficult executive says, 'There's no crisis. We don't need counseling or to apologize. This will blow over.' What do you say?

Cathy: I've had that said to me so many times. Being young and a black woman, I've been undercounted and underestimated at every turn. I've also had amazing executives who've trusted me after I've shown what I could do. But, in our roles, we're constantly challenged.

CI: What do you do when the client is not responding to your advice?

Cathy: You use examples of other companies that went through something similar to what they're going through.

Use the worst example. 'They did this and look what happened.' Show them this can get big. And then you say, 'Here's my plan to make sure that doesn't happen.'

I like being on record saying that. If they don't take my advice, I'm already working on how to get them out of the mess they'll get into.

And, I agree with Daniel; stay calm. That's the hardest thing for me, not taking things personally.

Roberts: Let me flip Chanel's advice. I've advised executives who say, 'X did this, which is much worse than what we did, and they escaped unscathed. So, we'll be all right.'

You have to point out that X's reputation is damaged, whether they realize it or not. It might not be obvious from media coverage, for example, but chances are there's some damage.

So, don't just give worst-case examples, but counter their arguments in real-time. The way you do this is to include data, analytics and metrics, especially with C-Suite people, who are data- and numbers-driven.

CI: Daniel, do you have more take-aways?

Roberts: Don't take anything personally, particular if an executive doesn't take your advice.

Trust your gut, especially when you're dealing with a quickly evolving crisis.

And, it's OK to step back and stop before deciding on something. 'Stop for 30 seconds or 20 minutes and let's get this right.' It's...appreciated and often gives some really great results.

Cathy: Look at the personal side of crisis. Clients often become your friends. When you have to give feedback it becomes very difficult. The most prevalent thing is when people are not self-aware. It can be damaging to themselves and their brands.

I like to find fun ways for executives to 'look under the hood,' whether it's for themselves or their businesses...If you can find opportunities to do pressure-checks and give them advice, you won't have to course-correct so many things during a crisis.

CI: What about speed? Crisis, speed and calm don't often end up in the same sentence.

Roberts: Speed is two-sided. Reporters can throw up a story [online] in 20 minutes. But in the digital age, they can also update a story if you miss the deadline.

Chanel: Getting ahead of things is great. Some things you can call ahead of time.

You're in Minneapolis and the [Derek Chauvin] trial is going on, you know you need a game plan for if X verdict comes down and people are frustrated.

People are caught off guard because they don't scenario-plan. [In addition], they don't know ahead of time who is handling social [during a crisis], who is updating the CEO.

Also, decide what's the best platform for your message. You don't need to use 16 different assets at the same time... Trying to get your message out everywhere on every platform at the same time creates more opportunity for error. Picking a few [platforms] will help your speed.

Roberts: I totally agree. Your role as a [crisis advisor] is to be the voice of reason. And the best ones think 10 steps ahead. To Chanel's point, you're proactively providing materials to the executive so they are doing the least amount of work in the moment.

From the start, we are working on a holding statement or pulling the one we drafted a week ago; we're pulling strategy documents and a message to stakeholders. We're making our plan for today, tomorrow and 10 days from now.

CI: Other best practices?

Roberts: Rely on your past experiences. We know what worked and didn't. You have to trust your gut. Our expertise is why you hired us.

Cathy: In this moment, there's something else, too. We are seeing so many people messing up because they do not have a diverse set of folks...advisors, leadership, etc. in the room to make these fast decisions.

Maybe you have an older team and there's an ageism miss...you could have a statement that has nothing to do with race but the way that it comes out seems privileged and you end up in a whole different conversation.

So, there needs to be a diversity component in the room. And there needs to be respect for who's at the table and then a respect and admiration for their experiences and what they're recommending. 🗣️



Streamline the information process. Don't bombard the C-Suite. You're proactively providing materials to executives so they're doing the least amount of work during the crisis moment.

A Pre-Pandemic Crisis-Simulation Solution That Works Wherever You Are

One of the perennial rubs of crisis readiness is that companies [fail to exercise crisis scenarios](#).

Just about everyone has a crisis playbook, but few companies look at them regularly, much less conduct meaningful crisis exercises often enough to build and maintain staff muscle memory.

While we lack data on it, we'll guess that with so many employees working from home since the start of the pandemic, the already-sparse scheduling of desktop crisis drills has contracted even more.

One of the characteristics of crisis is an uncanny ability to arrive according to its schedule, not yours. As a result, a PR crisis strikes when the CEO is in a remote part of China negotiating a deal or the COO is on a ski vacation in Aspen and has gone off the grid.

As such, the most realistic crisis-readiness exercises, pre-pandemic and now, were and are conducted with staff situated in various locations.

As Eliot Hoff, **APCO Worldwide's** executive director and global crisis lead, says, "It was rare for a team to be in the same room" for a crisis drill even pre-pandemic. "With travel and disparate offices, decisionmakers were usually spread across the globe."

Obviously, the pandemic has made gathering the crisis team in a conference room for a table-top drill a bit of nostalgia from pre-pandemic times.

PRE-PANDEMIC CRISIS TOOL

Fortunately, a tool APCO developed before the pandemic works during this unusual moment as well. It's an interactive crisis-simulation software solution called emPOWER.

APCO offers it as a standalone crisis pressure-test tool as well as deploying it with the firm's clients as part of wider crisis-preparation efforts.

One set-up that worked before the pandemic, Hoff says, was having a selection of crisis team members participate in an emPOWER simulation together, in a conference room, with staff from other company offices or home offices joining remotely.

The jump to have everyone joining remotely during the pandemic was short.

Developed with simulation software company **Be Strategic Solutions** (BeST), emPOWER typically runs three-four-hour simulations, though APCO has built some that stretch over an entire week, Hoff tells us.

And the type of crisis simulation emPOWER can create is wide-ranging.

Examples include:

- ▶ data breaches or other cyber events,
- ▶ workplace violence,
- ▶ whistleblower journalist inquiries (often tied to litigation)
- ▶ natural disasters,
- ▶ protests and
- ▶ product recalls

NAME YOUR CRISIS

"We also work closely with clients to prepare scenarios unique to their company or industry," he adds.

A quick-service restaurant brand, for example, may ask APCO to build a simulation that focuses on food safety and employment issues.

In addition, if a company wants outside people, such as journalists and government officials, included in an emPOWER crisis scenario, APCO employees can assume the roles. Hoff even mentions APCO employees assuming the role of a company CEO who is away from the office, unable to participate in crisis discussions.

INSURANCE FIRM'S SIMULATION

Hoff explains how a recent simulation worked for a company in the insurance industry. The simulation included issues stemming from the pandemic and client-service disruptions to leadership transitions and tough media inquiries related to significant parts of the business.

"We based the simulation on concerns their executives articulated in pre-interviews with" us, "as well as our knowledge of crises similar clients have faced," he says. A cross-functional team of eight leaders participated.

APCO had three main objectives:

- ▶ Test coordination around multi-department issues and assess how

the team came together and responded

- ▶ Identify any gaps in coordination and highlight areas of strength; and
- ▶ Leverage the scenario and the company members' performance to refine the draft crisis playbook

Afterward, APCO analyzed data from the simulation. This helped it identify which parts of the client company's crisis playbook worked well and which needed adjustment.

SILOED DURING A CRISIS

For example, during the simulation APCO noticed participants tended to share information and make preliminary decisions within their own departments only, rather than reaching out broadly to colleagues elsewhere in the company.


[This type of silo behavior is far from unique](#). It has afflicted companies and organization for many years. Destroying silos, especially during a crisis, is critical.

In the case of the company in the emPOWER simulation, the lack of sharing with other departments meant key decisionmakers lacked information they needed "to be full crisis-management team participants," Hoff says.

With this insight, APCO adjusted the company's crisis protocol playbook to account for more inter-department knowledge-sharing when a crisis or issue begins to emerge.

APCO followed up this and every emPOWER crisis simulation it stages with a debrief and later a report. Many teams choose to share select insights and learnings with a broader group of staff, Hoff says.

When a company wishes, APCO also can record participant communication during the simulation via a conference line, **Zoom** or other platform, Hoff says. In addition, APCO can transcribe the communication and include it as part of its analysis.

Nobody knows when the pandemic will end. It seems certain, though, emPOWER's flexibility to stage crisis simulations in a variety of work environments positions it well for the future. 

Burger King UK's Whopper of a Tweet Provides Lessons in Diversity and Humor

Pardon the metaphor, but **Burger King UK's** March 8 tweet, "Women belong in the kitchen," requires a lot of peeling back of the onion.

You read that correctly; the tweet came from Burger King UK. It was meant to highlight a **Burger King Foundation Initiative** timed for March 8, [International Women's Day](#).

In the U.S., the initiative sets aside \$50,000 for at least two culinary arts scholarships for female employees of Burger King. The program is called H.E.R. (Helping Equalize Restaurants).

A H.E.R. print ad, run in the US, also begins with the offending five words: 'Women belong in the kitchen.' Fortunately, the ad also offers several paragraphs explaining the scholarships.

TO RESPOND OR NOT?

One of the most difficult moments for crisis communicators is knowing when, or even if, to react. Once you decide to act, finding a proper response is critical.

The backlash against Burger King UK's tweet was immediate. The company, though, seemed to forget a motto it used for 40 years: '[Have It Your Way](#).'

Instead, after choosing to respond, it doubled down with explanations.

One explanatory tweet noted women should be in the kitchen "[O]nly if they want to...yet only 20 percent of [U.K.] chefs are women. We're on a mission to change the gender ratio in the restaurant industry by empowering female employees with the opportunity to pursue a culinary career."

In the U.S., 24 percent of chefs and 7 percent of head chefs are women.

Later in the day, Burger King UK apologized (*see below*) and later removed its offending tweet. The brand said it didn't want to keep the space open for "abusive comments in the thread."

CRISIS AVERTED?

So, after roughly one month has passed, we ask the question from which this column derives its name: Did Burger King *avoid a crisis*?

"The fact that we're still talking about it now probably answers that! No, they didn't avert a crisis by taking the post down and apologizing," says Hannah Patel, director, at UK-based **Red Lorry Yellow Lorry**.

On the other hand, Patel adds quickly, "I'm sure [the incident] hasn't stopped anyone buying cheeseburgers and fries. I doubt [Burger King] is feeling the business impact too much."

Rohini Mukherji, VP, **Apex PR**, agrees with Patel about the lack of financial hurt. Fast food, which had a carry-over option before the pandemic, is doing relatively well compared to the rest of the sector, she notes. **Burger King** venues in North America have [bounced back](#) since early in the pandemic.

Unlike Patel, she thinks the crisis was averted, though admits the tweet "was definitely a misfire."

On the other hand, Mukherji believes the message, as intended, was not off brand for Burger King UK. "Burger King UK has a reputation for being bold" in its ads and social media "and for taking a stance on important topics within the industry and outside it."

The brand, she says, is known for joining conversations.

In fact, she believes this incident will serve Burger King UK well, eventually. "Look, anytime you are bold, you will put a foot in your mouth at some point."

ALL BURGERS ARE LOCAL

The two crisis pros agree few people know that Burger King UK was responsible for the offending tweet. Moreover, it doesn't matter, they say.

"[At first] I didn't even realize it was Burger King UK...and I'm based in the UK," Patel says. "The brand is synonymous with the U.S., so I would consider [the tweets'] impact across the brand globally, not just in the market that posted the content."

CRISIS CONTROL

Patel blasts Burger King UK for failing to take down the post immediately. In addition, she whacks Burger King for trying to "mansplain" the tweet's context.

"If more people than not find something you've posted offensive, then it probably is," she says. "Arguing that it's been taken out of context isn't an excuse."

Essentially, Burger King UK told people "not to have a sense-of-humor failure. They waited until it blew up before they did anything about it, probably because someone, who likely knows nothing about PR, once told them, 'Any PR is good PR.'"

THE APOLOGY AND DIVERSITY

Mukherji agrees with Patel on some basic points. Yes, she says, the apology could have come quicker. In addition, Burger King UK could have taken down the offending post faster.

Yet, she emphasizes the goal in reacting was "sincerity, not speed." It was a "good" apology, Mukherji says. There was no 'If we offended anyone...' It was 'We're sorry.' She adds, "The direct apology seems simple, but so many companies and people do it badly."

Like Patel, Mukherji, a Diversity Equity and Inclusion specialist, wonders about the issue-testing in this case.

"Did a woman post that thread? I doubt it." The incident, she says, is a lesson in the importance of diverse input. When you want to post something about a group—women in this case—run it by members of that group, she says.

In many cases, social posts need executive approval. Yet, if there's a lack of diversity at the top, an offensive post can get through.

Another issue, is more nuanced. A communication team may be diverse, but its diverse members must have authority to veto a social post or a campaign approach. "You can do that anonymously," Mukherji says.

The two also agree about the importance of being careful when using humor. Humor can help a brand stand out, but it may offend. Since humor is not a one-size-fits-all tactic, Patel says, make sure to test it. 

