

Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Association

Managing a media crisis - 10 steps to regain control

Introduction

One thing is certain about media crisis no two are the same. They are fluid and there are no hard and fast rules for dealing with them.

They evolve depending on circumstances, often circumstances that you have no control over.

They also will spring up without warning and you will likely be on the back foot straight away. They are also dangerous to your organisation's standing.

As financier Warren Buffet said it takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it

To avoid this there are several steps you can take to regain control

Until you are in control of the situation you will be unable to influence what people think about you. Thus unable to protect your reputation.

Here are 10 steps to think about that pretty much apply to all media crisis.

1 TAKE ACTION

The first step seems obvious. But not always a lot of organisations face with a media crisis, simply choose to ignore it and hope it will go away. It won't, and the longer you let it go on the worse it will get and the harder it will be for you to get a handle on the situation and take control

What this action will be will depend on what the situation is.

2 GET THE FACTS

First you must decide what the action is, never get railroaded into commenting on something that you do not have the full facts around.

You do not have to answer a reporter's question until you are ready. Speak to the necessary people and establish what the facts are then you will be in a position to talk with confidence and authority.

3 APPOINT A SPOKESPERSON

The more senior the better it shows that you are taking the issue seriously.

The only time this might not apply is if there was a technical aspect to the issue, then it might be appropriate to have an expert as your main spokesperson for added credibility.

4 THE MESSAGE

The message will very much depend on the issue but if, after getting the facts straight, you have done something wrong apologise.

People are generally accepting that things do go wrong and often being up front and holding your hands will go a long way to defusing potential longer-term damage. The quicker you can put a cap on an issue the easier it will be to get back to normal. Delaying things like issuing an apology only gives your opponents more time to fuel the fire.

5 GET ON THE FRONT FOOT

If it is something you have done wrong once you have said sorry you must very quickly act to fix the issue.

You need to tell people quickly what action you will be taking. This is your chance to start reclaiming ground lost. You are actively taking charge and proactively beginning to tell your side of the story.

6 REGULAR UPDATES

It is important that you continue to be proactive. A void will soon be filled by people out to make mischief. Update people regularly, even if you do not feel you have anything new to say reinforce previous commitments.

Be open and honest. People value transparency. If you are open and honest then people will be far more likely to trust in what you say.

And believe you when you say you are going to do something.

7 ALWAYS CORRECT INACCURACIES

Challenge inaccuracies constantly never get them go. It does not take long for something that is inaccurate to become fact in people's eyes if they hear it often enough

8 USE ALL CHANNELS

There was a time when media management meant how you could use the newspapers and radio to reflect your opinions. This is no longer the case.

Social media is a great way of getting your message over directly. The beauty about it is there is no one to interpret what you're saying, you decide.

There is a downside you must be prepared to absorb negative comments it is a two way channel this means employ enough resource to manage it properly. Do not ignore traditional news letters and even writing to people to state your case. Newspapers have limited readership you have the ability to talk to all your tenants.

9 REMEMBER YOUR STAFF

Staff are your most important ambassadors. They can champion your organisation within their network of family and friends so it is essential they keep them on side.

They need to hear news about what going on in your organisation from their manager or directly from the chief executive.

The first they hear about it should not be when they open the Evening Times.

This simply will reinforce a view rightly or wrongly that they are not valued.

10 REVIEW

Mistakes will be made during any media crisis when the dust has settled always review what went well and what didn't it will make easier for the crisis

SUMMARY

To summarise it is really all about control

If you can regain control of the situation then you can manage the messages that you want people to hear.

The quicker you can do this, the quicker it will all blow over.

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