

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

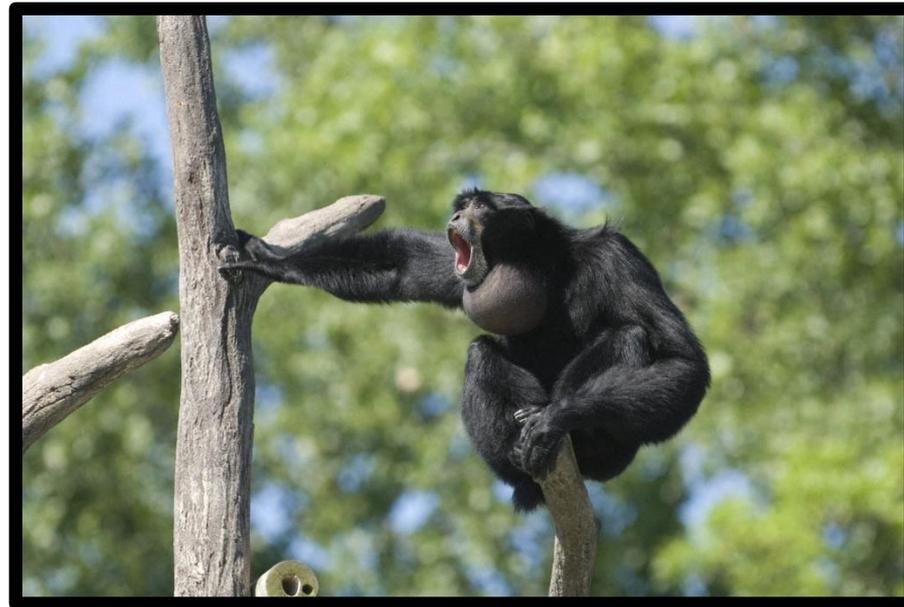
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Zoos and aquariums thrive on public visibility for their audience

- Poor communication, especially during a crisis, can destroy an institution's image.



Crisis Control is a Management Responsibility

- Many zoos and aquariums lack an effective crisis communication plan
- Crisis plans are effective when they can be implemented immediately

*“By the time you hear the thunder,
it’s too late to build the ark.”*

~Unknown

What is a crisis?

Any event or situation that can harm an institution's viability and reputation.

(wrong-doing is not necessarily involved)

“It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and only a few seconds to destroy one.”

~ Unknown

Examples:

- Animal escape or lost animal
- Animal death (natural or euthanasia)
- Keeper or visitor death or injury
- Natural disasters (floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc)
- Environmental emergency (fire, chemical leak, gas leak)
- Ride accident or structural incident
- Missing child
- Crimes (theft, assault or bomb/terrorist threat)
- Civil disobedience – (animal rights protest)

But Don't Forget...

- Animal mistreatment (or perceived mistreatment)
- Disgruntled employee
- Management issues (mismanagement, personnel issues)
- Water-related (drowning or waterborne illness)
- Human diseases (food-borne illness or communicable disease)
- Epidemic
- Too much of a good thing

Preparing Your Plan

- Anticipate potential problems and controversies
- Form a Crisis Team ahead of time
 - Management, legal, HR, operations, financial, curators, veterinarian, public relations (and alternates)
- Crisis management plan – how the group will operate and how decisions will be made

Preparing Your Plan

- Crisis team emergency contact list
 - PR must be high on this list
 - Consider a paging system
- Have a social media plan in place
- Periodic review of plan and team

Media Spokeperson(s)

- Designate a Media Spokesperson
 - Needs to be completely informed
 - Depending on crisis other spokespersons may need to be available

Media Spokeperson(s)

- Other roles
 - Clearinghouse for info
 - Information dissemination
 - Preparing statements and working with media
 - Follow-up publicity to emphasize crisis has passed

Crisis Communications Plan Includes:

- Contact information
 - Media
 - Staff, board, volunteers
 - Government officials
 - Local agencies – law enforcement, hospitals
 - AZA and AZA institutional PR contacts

Crisis Communications Plan

Includes:

- Protocol for staff and volunteers
- Media protocol and access policy
- Fact gathering questions
- Example messages/release templates
- Fact sheets regarding attractions, buildings, rides, animal population
- Emergency response plans
- Media log sheets

Crisis Communications Plan Includes:

- Identifies the location and staffing of:
 - Communications Center
 - Media Center
 - Employee Information Center
 - Family and Friends Center

Plan, prepare, rehearse and periodically review

- Cooperate as truthfully, courteously and efficiently as possible to those investigating
- Tell your side of the story
 - Avoid speculation and false assumptions
 - Maintain control of the situation so the media doesn't seek information from other sources

What To Do When A Crisis Occurs

- Assemble the appropriate crisis team
- Notify as designated in plan
- Gather all pertinent facts as quickly as possible
- Assess situation
 - Do your homework
- Make follow-up phone calls

What To Do When A Crisis Occurs

- Contact media when reliable information is available
- Ensure that employees know who the designated media representative is
- When possible, develop fact sheets for media distribution
- Make sure internal audiences hear it from you first

Working with the Media

- If facts are immediately available: tell reporters on the spot and update as often as possible
- If facts are not available: tell reporters you will get back with them
 - *Don't use this as a put-off*
- Know and respect reporters' deadlines

Working with the Media

- Treat each reporter fairly and equally
 - No exclusives to a specific reporter
- **Never** say “No Comment”
 - Explain the reason for information being withheld
- Stick to the facts and don’t speculate
 - If asked to speculate – tell them this is not useful

Working with the Media

- Be proactive on getting information out to the media
- Emphasize solutions
- Keep explanations simple and to the point

*“If it’s going to come out eventually,
better have it come out immediately.”*

~Henry Kissinger

Working with the Media

- No dollar damage estimates should be given
 - Until investigated, appraised and approved by zoo officials
- Avoid statements of liability – don't try to lay blame
- Be concise and choose words carefully
 - Most interviews or statements are seldom printed in their entirety

Working with the Media

- Show empathy
 - Express genuine concern for the victim
- Remain calm
 - Your manner and words show your control of the situation

*“Nobody cares how much you know,
until they know how much you care.”*

~Theodore Roosevelt

Working with the Media

- All arriving media handled according to protocol
- Handling media requests to cover emergency first-hand

Questions to Answer During a Crisis:

- Be prepared to answer the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - How did it happen?
 - Are there injuries or fatalities?
 - What are the damages?
 - What is being done
- Be **careful** with “Why did it happen?”

Monitor, Evaluate, Fine-tune

- Monitor media coverage and social media
 - Are your messages working?
 - Do they need to be fine-tuned or updated?
 - Is clarification needed?
 - Are you reaching all of the intended audiences?

After the Crisis Has Passed

- Evaluate
 - Assess potential for negative public reaction and development messages
 - Make changes to plan if necessary
- Document – keep files
- Assess advertising and social media plans
 - Should it be suspended for a period of time?
 - Is it detrimental to the messages being implemented?
- Assess and utilize PR opportunities

Crisis Plans Must Be Available

- Copies in multiple locations at work
- Copy at home
- Copy in your car
- Flash drive that can be carried with you at all times
- Upload to cloud-based service