CRISIS EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION

by Leaders for Leaders

BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE.

CDC

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On April 19, 1995, an explosion ripped through the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City killing 168. Former Oklahoma Govneror, Frank Keating (pictured above), helped the city overcome the tragedy through quick response and by emphazing open and honest dialect with the public. His ability to express emphathy following the horrific incident not only allowed the community to get back on its feet, but also allowed Keating to connet with the families whose lives had been shattered.

Keating, along with six other leaders detail key emergency risk communication principles during an event in the face of a major public safety emergency in this book: CERC: by Leaders for Leaders.

(photos courtesy of David J. Phillips - AP and Paul Whyte - USA Today)

Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication:
By Leaders For Leaders

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Project Development
William Hall, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA), HHS
Barbara Reynolds, OC, OC, CDC
Marsha Vanderford, Ph.D., OC, OD, CDC

Written by:
Barbara Reynolds, MA, OC, OD, CDC

Edited by:
William Hall, ASPA, HHS
Marsha Vanderford, Ph.D., OC, OD, CDC
Marc Wolfson, ASPA, HHS

Project Consultants
Matthew Seeger, Ph.D., Wayne State University
Tim Sellnow, Ph.D., North Dakota State University
Daniel Baden, M.D., OC, OD, CDC

Graphic Layout/Research:
Chad R. Wood, OC, CDC

Digital Graphic Design and Development
Pete Seidel, PHPPO, CDC
Alex Casanova, PHPPO, CDC

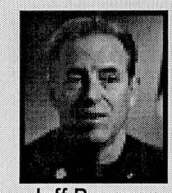
Audiovisual Production Specialists.
Morris Gaiter ..... Producer
Bryon Skinner ..... Videographer
Todd Jordan ..... Videographer
Susy Mercado ..... Production Assistant

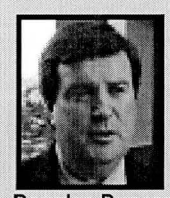
Video Clips Coordination
Chad R. Wood
Bindu Tharian

With special thanks to the following
State and Local Health Department Communication Consultants:
Bob Alvey, Arkansas
Mary Anderson, Montgomery County, MD
Ken August, California
Roxanne Burke, Shasta County, CA
Jamie Durham, Alabama
Kimberly Fetty, West Virginia
Don Pickard, Kansas City, MO
Richard Quartarone, Georgia
Terri Stratton, California
Mary Jo Takach, Rhode Island
Melissa Walker, Louisiana
National Public Health Information Coalition Members
William Reynolds, Atlanta American Red Cross
Susan Dimmick, Ph.D., University of Tennessee, Knoxville

"The Leaders"

John Agwunobi
Anthrax


Jeff Bowman
San Diego Fires


Douglas Duncan
D.C. Sniper

Julie Gerberding
SARS

Frank Keating
OK City Bombing

Patricia Owens
ND Floods

Ivan Walks
Anthrax

Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication:
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Introduction:

This book gives leaders the tools to navigate the harsh realities of speaking to the public, media, partners and stakeholders during an intense public-safety emergency, including terrorism. In a crisis, the right message at the right time is a "resource multiplier"—it helps response officials get their job done. Many of the predictable harmful individual and community behaviors can be mitigated with effective crisis and emergency risk communication. Each crisis will carry its own psychological baggage. A leader must anticipate what mental stresses the population will be experiencing and apply appropriate communication strategies to attempt to manage these stresses in the population.

Nowhere in this book is there an implied promise that a population or community faced with an emergency, crisis, or disaster will overcome its challenges solely through the application of the communication principles presented here. However, this book does offer the promise that an organization can compound its problems during an emergency if it has neglected sound crisis and emergency risk communication planning. Readers should expect to gain the following understanding:

The Psychology of Communicating in a Crisis

- 5 communication failures that kill operational success
- 5 communication steps that boost operational success
- How to reduce public fear and anxiety, and come to terms with "panic"
- Why people need things to do
- 5 key elements to build and maintain public trust in a crisis

Your Role as a Spokesperson

- New research on the public's perception of government
- Applying the STARCC principle in your communication
- Questions the public and media always ask first
- 5 mistakes that destroy stakeholder cooperation
- How to deal with angry people

Working with Media during a Crisis

- Your interview rights with the media
- Countering media interview techniques that can hurt you
- 2 things that guarantee your press conference will fail
- 3 things to say early in the crisis when the media are beating on your door

Public Health and Media Law

- The media's right of publication
- Employee access to media
- Legal definitions of detention, isolation and quarantine

Included in this book are excerpts from interviews so that you can hear directly from leaders—governors, mayors, health officials, and fire chiefs—who stepped up to the microphone during crises and faced their community and the world. Learn how they made tough decisions about how to inform, console and motivate their constituents during and after the crisis.

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The need to communicate clearly was never more compelling than during the recovery from the World Trade Center attacks. People were desperate for information. The information had to be correct, but there were delicate questions of taste and sensitivity as well.

-Rudolph Giuliani

We talked about the anthrax attack because two members of our community had died. That's not a scare when you actually kill someone. It's an attack, and that sort of language nuance builds a level of connection with the community so you're viewing the incident the same way they're viewing the incident.

-Ivan Walks, M.D., Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

Communicating in a Crisis is Different

Crises can assault your community in an instant or creep slowly into your midst randomly wreaking havoc until it has you firmly in its grip. Conventional explosions, category-5 hurricanes, chemical releases, shooting sprees, deadly disease outbreaks, 500-year floods, dirty bombs, nuclear bombs, fertilizer bombs, earthquakes, blazing brush fires, infrastructure collapses, and raging tornadoes are just some of the disasters we know threaten somewhere at sometime and are, ultimately, outside our control.

Leaders do control, however, how well their communities respond and recover from the disasters they suffer. As a leader in a crisis you can have a real, measurable affect on the wellbeing of your community through the words you say and the speed and sincerity with which you say them. Research indicates that, in natural disasters, the public perceives the success of the operational response by the amount and speed of relevant information they receive from the emergency response officials (Fisher, 1998).

Communicating in a crisis is different. **In a serious crisis, all affected people take in information differently, process information differently and act on information differently** (Reynolds, 2002). As a leader, you need to know that the way you normally communicate with your community may not be effective during and after it suffers a crisis.

In a catastrophic event, your every word, every eye twitch and every passing emotion resonates with heightened importance to a public desperate for information to help them be safe and recover from the crisis. In several surveys, **the public was asked who they would trust most as a spokesman or reliable source of information** if a bioterrorism event occurred in their community. Respondents trusted most the local health department or a local physician or hospital. However, respondents also trusted "quite a lot" or "a great deal" their own doctor, the fire chief, the director of the health department, the police chief, the governor and a local religious leader.

What the public seeks from its leaders in a crisis

The public wants to know what you know. The leader's challenge is to give the public what they are demanding within the fog of information overload. The public wants to accomplish the following 5 things with the information they get from their leaders:

- Gain the wanted facts needed to protect them, their families and their pets from the dangers they are facing
- Make well-informed decisions using all available information
- Have an active, participatory role in the response and recovery
- Act as a "watch-guard" over resources, both public and donated monies
- Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy, including economic security

That's a lot to expect from a leader "hell-bent" on making sure his community is going to get all it needs to make the crisis end and the community well again. Leaders who have faced a crisis in their community readily admit that in their planning for a crisis they may have invested only about one percent of the pre-crisis funding to public communication planning and then training about 10 percent of their time in drills or exercises on the public education component. They then found that when the crisis occurred they were spending about 90 percent of their time dealing with decisions about communicating to the public.

Leaders lead with goals in mind

A leader who wants to do the following will need to have a community on board to help them accomplish these goals:

- Decrease illness, injury and deaths
- Execute response and recovery plans with minimal resistance
- Avoid misallocation of limited resources
- Avoid wasting resources

The fact is, in a crisis, good communication to the public is a necessity, not a luxury. The public needs information from its leaders and leaders need support and cooperation from the public.

Leaders will make the following communication decisions

The following are the decisions a leader will be expected to make during a crisis about communicating to the public:

- What to release
- When to release it
- How to release it
- Where to release it
- Whom to release it to
- Why release it

A well-prepared leader will have communication plans and resources in place to help minimize the number of decisions about communication that must be made in the moment. We can predict both the types of disasters our communities face and we can predict the questions the public will have during a disaster. Plan now. Plan with your communication and public information professionals. Plan with your disaster-response partners.

Five communication failures that kill operational success

Communication experts and leaders who've faced disasters can tell others what is going to cripple or even destroy the success of their disaster response operation.

This [fireman] was on the verge of emotional exhaustion. I mean he had seen a horror, he didn't know what to do. There was no living person in that building that he was able to save. So I knew that my function had to be one of reassurance to those who were risking their lives to help us.

-**Frank Keating**, Governor, Oklahoma City, Bombing, 1995

- Mixed messages from multiple experts
- Information released late
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Not countering rumors and myths in real time
- Public power struggles and confusion

1. Mixed messages

The public doesn't want to have to "select" one of many messages to believe and act on. During the mid-90s the Midwestern United States suffered a spring of great floods. Response officials determined that the water treatment facilities in some communities were compromised and that a "boil water" directive should be issued. The problem developed when multiple response organizations, government and non-government, issued directions for boiling water and each of them was different. The fact is, in the United States, we turn on the faucet and clean water comes out. Few of us know the "recipe" to boil water because we've never had to.

> ☑ **Reality check:** Unofficial experts will undoubtedly pop up to offer unsolicited advice. First, be concerned about what the "official" officials are saying and whether these messages are consistent. Your cumulative, consistent voices may drown out conflicting messages. Also, consider identifying the unofficial experts in your community and ensure they have early access to the recommendations you will be giving.

So, what's the big deal? Just pick one and get to it. Not so fast! Consider this. I'm a young mother with an infant son and I need to mix his cereal with water. I'm a middle-aged son caring for his mother who is currently immune compromised because of cancer chemotherapy. I'm the sister living down the street from my HIV-positive brother whose T-cell count is back on the way down. Or, just maybe, I'm an average person who doesn't like the thought of gambling on a bad case of diarrhea if I don't pick the right boil-water instructions.

> *I think the most important thing to learn from this or any other tragedy that is handled well in the public domain is that unlike the frustration we feel sometimes on an airplane when something goes crack or the plane doesn't leave and there's total silence from the cockpit, that's the worst thing to do. The best thing is transparency and openness.*
>
> -**Frank Keating**, Governor, Oklahoma City, Bombing, 1995

In a crisis, people don't want to "just pick one" of many messages, they want the best one or the right one to follow. When faced with a new threat, people want a consistent and simple recommendation to follow. They want to hear absolute agreement about what they should do from multiple experts through multiple sources. Messages do not have to be wrong to be damaging. If they are inconsistent the public will lose trust in the response officials and begin to question every recommendation. Local, state, regional, and national response officials and their partners must work together to ensure messages are consistent, especially when the information is new to the public.

2. Information released late

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, many people wanted

advice on whether or not to buy a gas mask. These calls found their way to CDC. Three weeks after the attack, CDC had an answer on its website. During the 3 weeks CDC took to develop and vet its answer, a number of experts were willing to give an answer—unfortunately it wasn't the right one. When CDC issued advice to the public not to buy gas masks, the "gas-mask" aisles at the local Army-Navy Surplus stores were already empty. In all fairness, few of us could anticipate the consequences of a 9-11 type attack— but all of us can now create a process to quickly react to the information needs of the public. If we can not give people what they need when they need it, others will. And those "others" may not have the best interest of the public in mind when they're offering advice.

If the public expects an answer from your organization on something that is answerable and you won't provide it or direct them to someone who can, **they will be open to being taken advantage of by unscrupulous or fraudulent opportunists**.

I think that there is always a tendency for individuals to try to take out the bad parts and leave in only the good parts. I think it's absolutely critical as a leader to deliver an honest message, a message that contains all the parts, the good and the bad.

-John Agwunobi, M.D., State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

3. Paternalistic attitudes

Putting on a John Wayne swagger and ostensibly answering the public's concerns with a "don't worry little lady, we got ya covered" doesn't work in the information age. People want and expect information to allow them

☑ **Reality check**: Don't spread a rumor by holding press conferences every time you hear a rumor, unless it has been widely published already. If the rumor is circulating on the Internet, have a response on the internet and with your telephone information service ready to deal with the rumor. The media will report rumors or hoaxes unless you can answer quickly why it's false. Have an open, quick channel to communicate to the media if your monitoring system picks up a troublesome rumor. Don't think "this is preposterous, no one will believe it." In a crisis the improbable seems more possible. Squash rumors fast, with facts.

to come to their own conclusion. As a leader, it's not enough to satisfy your own worries with copious bits of information and then turn around and state a bottomline unsupported with the facts you know. As difficult as it may be, **help the public to reach the same conclusion you did** by sharing with them what you learned to reach that conclusion. What did you learn that made you believe the situation wasn't worrisome? Share that.

Treat the public like intelligent adults and they will act like intelligent adults. Treat them any other way and they will either turn on you or behave in ways that seem illogical to you. You are a leader for the public, you are not their parent. **Never tell people "don't worry."** Tell people what they need to know so they can reach the decision that they do not need to worry. Engage the public in the process and they will follow your lead.

It was everyday for three weeks. Everyday people got up and said this might be the day I get killed. When I walk out of my house, when I walk out to my car, when I pump gas, when I go into my store or office building, this is the day someone might shoot me.

-**Douglas Duncan**, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, D.C. Sniper Attacks, 2002

4. Not countering rumors in real-time

During a pneumonic plague outbreak, how successful will your drug distribution program be if a rumor starts that there isn't enough drugs for everyone? What is your system to monitor what is being said by the public and the media? What is your system to react to false information?

5. Public power struggles or confusion

Did you hear about the governor who held a press conference about a public safety crisis at the same time the mayor of the city was holding one on the other side of town? It really happened and it set the tone for a lot of speculation about who was in charge and what was or was not true.

In the information age, it's easy to see how this could happen. Sometimes there may be a power struggle over jurisdictions or other issues. The important thing is to make sure these are worked out quickly and confidentially. It's naturally disconcerting to the public to think that the people responsible for helping them are not getting along. All partners need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. When they overlap, and they do, make sure you can settle concerns without causing headlines about power struggles or, worse, confused response officials. When all else fails, stay in the scope of your responsibility and refrain from declaring "I'm in charge" without being certain that you are.

☑ **Reality check**: The best laid plans . . . No matter what's on paper and agreed upon, response officials should understand that plans need to be flexible. The trick is that the process of creating a plan means that the response officials will not be strangers to each other when the crisis occurs and may have built relationships that can withstand the strain the crisis will naturally cause.

Even if everyone shows up at the same press conference, the officials could send the wrong message to the public. If people are jockeying for the microphone or looking back and forth at each other hoping someone will answer a question posed by a reporter, the public will be left with the impression that there are power struggles or confusion going on.

Early in the sniper shooting incident in metro Washington D.C., Montgomery County Police Chief Charles Moose had to formally request involvement by the F.B.I. Although there were natural concerns about what that might mean to local law enforcement, the chief chose to involve the F.B.I. and did it quietly and what appeared seamlessly to the public. **At no time did the public perceive a power struggle** among the response agencies. This, however, was a community who had previously survived a terrorist attack at the Pentagon and an anthrax attack at the Capitol. They had learned the value of a united front with multiple jurisdictions working cooperatively for the good of their community. Turf wars need to end at the moment the crisis begins. A good plan can help avoid turf wars from the start.

Five communication steps for success

Could it be as simple as 5 steps to communication success in a disaster? Yes and no. These 5 steps are the keys to success, but each step is a challenge in itself. However, every bit of research in the area of successful communication, especially in a crisis, unanimously agrees you can't skip any one of these and expect to be successful. Remember, the reason you as a leader are focused on better communication is because most of this burden will fall to you, according to peers who've been there before you. The following are the 5 steps to communication success:

- Execute a solid communication plan
- Be the first source for information
- Express empathy early
- Show competence and expertise
- Remain honest and open

1. Execute a solid communication plan

Working from a communication plan is as important in a crisis as working from a logistics plan—stuff won't get where it needs to go when it needs to be there without a good plan. (A later segment will discuss the elements of a communication plan. Consult with your communication director or public information officer.) As a leader, you need to know that the public judges the success of your operation, in great part, by the success of your communication.

Any doubts? Consider what CDC experienced during the 2001 anthrax incident and then in the 2003 SARS outbreak. A full year after the 2001 anthrax incident, national media were still criticizing CDC's anthrax operation. However, the theme of the criticism was consistently about its inability to effectively communicate to its partners, important stakeholders and the media. In 2001, CDC did not have a crisis communication plan and adequate resources dedicated to the effort.

A lot changed at CDC following the anthrax incident, especially in the area of crisis communication. Then in late 2002, people started dying around the world from an emerging disease, SARS. While the SARS outbreak was still unfolding, and there was great uncertainty about the magnitude of the outbreak, national media were praising CDC for its effective operational response. The change the media perceived was not in the operational functions, because both in anthrax and in SARS CDC had smart, dedicated people responding. The difference perceived by media, stakeholders and partners was the speed and consistency of its communication. CDC had a plan and the plan was executed and the plan made a huge difference in the public's perception of its ability to do the job.

2. Be the first source of information

There are two important reasons to strive to be the first source of infor-

Leaders must find a balance between speed and deliberation. . . .The need for quick decisions . . . is strongest in times of crisis. People are afraid and uncertain, and need to feel that someone is in charge.

-**Rudolph Giuliani**, Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book Leadership

mation in a crisis. The public uses the speed of information flow in a crisis as a marker for your preparedness. No matter that the HAZMAT team showed up in 2 minutes, evacuated the scene and determined that the fire at the chemical plant should be allowed to burn out instead of putting water on it which could spread hazardous chemicals into the water table. The operational response was perfect. Yet, when this happened recently in Atlanta, the local news coverage was filled with angry families who saw the black smoke and wanted to know if they should evacuate but weren't able to find out as quickly as they wanted. Parents, gripping the hands of their small children, castigated the people who knew but didn't tell them that they were safe. Living in the information age, means being expected to not only save lives, but be able to tell people while it's happening that you are saving lives.

The second reason is a psychological reality. When a person is seeking information about something they do not know, **the first message they receive carries more weight**. The tendency is for people to typically accept the information and then if they hear a second message that conflicts with the first, they start to weigh them against each other. This is especially dangerous if the first message is incorrect but it sounds logical.

For example, the news media reports that health officials are swabbing the noses of congressional staffers for anthrax spores to see if they need to take antibiotics. So, Mr. Public is exposed to a white substance in the break room of his factory, and he thinks he should get a nose swab too. In fact, a positive or negative nose swab for anthrax spores is not a reliable way to determine if someone should be given antibiotics. That determination is made with other data such as proximity to the exposure site and ventilation systems. Even so, reasonable people who had heard about the nasal swabs and were incorrectly told they were to help in a medical diagnosis would be expected to clamor for the same kind of care.

So, by putting energy into getting the right message out first means that later incorrect messages will have to bounce up against the right message. That's better than having to not only get out the right message, but having to spend considerable effort discounting the incorrect first message.

Empathy is the door that opens your voice to the information that you want to communicate. So if people can perceive that you actually care about it in a genuine, human way, I think they're much more willing to listen to anything else that you have to say. If you don't do that, you have really lost your audience because people won't listen to you.

-Julie Gerberding, M.D., Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

3. Express empathy early

If a leader takes only one concept from this book, this may be the most important and, for some, the most challenging. Your peers who have experienced a leader's role in a public safety crisis and academic experts from around the country agree on this point: a sincere expression of empathy is as essential to your ability to lead the public in a crisis as the right key is to opening a lock. You can stick other keys or bent paper clips or tiny screw drivers into the lock, but it won't open until you insert the key with the right grooves and edges. So it is with your message: the public won't be open to you until you express empathy. So what's empathy? Empathy is the ability to understand what another human being is feeling.

Empathy does not require you to feel what that person is feeling. Empathy does not require you to agree that what the person is feeling is appropriate. Empathy is the ability to at the very least describe your understanding of what they are feeling. In its best form, empathy is talking from the heart and relating to fellow human beings as fellow human beings, not victims, not casualties, not evacuees or refugees or the public, but as people who, in a crisis, are hurting physically, perhaps, but especially emotionally.

Research shows that an expression of empathy should be given in the first 30 seconds of starting your message. To do otherwise is to waste your time, because, the public will be waiting to hear whether or not "you get it." Your audience is wondering whether you understand they are frightened, anxious, confused? If you don't articulate what they are feeling in the moment, your audience's minds will be consumed with the question of "do they get it" and not hear a thing you are saying. A sincere expression of empathy early in your communication will allow people to settle down the noise in their minds and actually hear what you have to say.

4. Show competence and expertise

If you have a title and are part of the official response to a crisis, the public will assume you are competent until you prove otherwise. It's not necessary to recite your entire resume or *Curriculum Vitae* at the start of a crisis response. According to the research, most people believe that a person holds a professional position because they are experienced and competent.

5. Remain honest and open

If you are a government official, there is a healthy belief in your community that the government withholds information, according to research done as recently as 2003 (CDC unpublished). So, before you even begin to communicate with the public they already assume you are holding back information. In criminal investigations that may be true. In all cases, treat people like you would like to be treated yourself. The danger comes from assuming you are protecting people or avoiding a bigger problem by keeping information away from the public. The motives may be noble, but the outcome could be the opposite. CDC and five universities did a series of 55 focus groups. Among the findings, three points were clear themes from the participants: *any* information is empowering, uncertainty is more difficult to deal with than knowing a bad thing; and participants are prepared to go to multiple sources for information.

Here's where the idea of holding back information as a way to "manage" the crisis breaks down. We live in the information age. It's going to get out either in an up front way or a back door way. Assume that if someone other than you knows the fact, everyone knows the fact. Do you want to present the facts in context or do you want to try to clean up a mess of someone else's making?

You know, I'm struck by the fact that as the towers fell on September 11th, Rudy Guilliani, covered in dust stood there in front of the cameras and said what he saw, said what everyone had seen. He looked up and looked around him and basically told the world, I saw what you saw, it's true, the buildings fell. But what he didn't do at that early stage in his message delivery was try to put answers on all the questions that all of us had. He left us, however, very sure, very certain that there was a machine that had been set in place that was gathering that information.

-**John Agwunobi, M.D.**, State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

There was tremendous pressure to place a figure on the casualties. The media demanded an official estimate. I decided right away not to play the guessing games with lost lives. I told the truth: 'When we get the final number, it will be more than we can bear.'

-Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book Leadership

Bad news does not get better over time. **There is absolute consensus among professionals that the faster you give up bad news the better,** because holding back implies guilt and arrogance.

Do we choose to withhold frightening information because we don't want people "to panic?" Do we withhold the information because we think it will cut down the number of phone calls from the public and media requests from reporters? Not knowing is worse than knowing. People can cope with bad news and the anticipation of bad things to come. During a summit at Johns Hopkins University in 2003, one participant made the following point: "Do you know what the definition of panic is from the perspective of public officials? It's when the public does anything they don't want them to do."

Without question, for very good reasons, some information must be withheld. When that is the case, respectfully tell the public you are withholding information and why. If the answer is "because we don't want you to panic," then there is no reason to withhold the information.

Sometimes the public will see on the TV what you can't officially confirm. To be honest, would be to say, "I know what is being reported, but this instant I'm going to let our official channels work. I want you to know the steps we take to make sure what is officially reported is as accurate as possible. Like you, I want information as fast as possible and like you, I'd prefer it also to be right. We will definitely tell you what we can confirm and will update you as we learn more. In the meantime, let me remind the community to (action step)."

Former mayor Rudolph Giuliani experienced pressure like that regarding the casualty numbers in the days following the terrorist attack in New York City. He said, "There was tremendous pressure to place a figure on the casualties. The media demanded an official estimate. I decided right away not to play the guessing games with lost lives. I told the truth: 'When we get the final number, it will be more than we can bear.'" (Giuliani, 2002, p. 25) The mayor was honest and open, and did not violate the city's operational plan for release of casualty numbers in a crisis.

☑ Reality Check: You may be an expert and not be feeling fear. That's OK. But the worst thing you can do is to tell a frightened person they have no reason to be frightened. Never utter the words, "There's no reason to be afraid." Instead, acknowledge the fear. Make no statement about wanting it to go away. Simply tell them what you know that makes you less afraid. "I understand that anything related to radiation can seem frightening. Let me tell you what I know. . . ." Give people one good fact to "chew" on and then tell them where to get more information.

During a disaster, what are people feeling inside?

People are feeling a lot of different emotions. Each person may or may not feel any or all of a range of emotions. However, patterns do emerge in a crisis and a leader needs to expect these and understand that is why communicating in a crisis is different.

There are a number of psychological barriers that could interfere with the cooperation and response from the public. Many of them can be mitigated through the work of a leader with an empathetic and honest communication style.

Fear, Anxiety, Confusion and Dread

In a crisis, you can expect people in your community are feeling fear, anxiety, confused and, possibly, dread. Your job as a leader is not to make these feelings go away. If that's the goal, failure is a certainty. Instead, these are the emotions that you should acknowledge in a statement of empathy. "We've never faced anything like this before in our community and it can be frightening."

Hopelessness and helplessness

Looking for a communication goal in a crisis? Here's the number one objective. If the community, its families, or individuals let their feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion and dread grow unchecked during a crisis, psychologists can predict they will begin to feel hopeless or helpless. What leader needs a community of hopeless and helpless victims?

So, a reasonable amount of fear is OK. Instead of striving to "stop the panic" and eliminate the fears, help the community manage their fears and set them on a course of action. Action helps overcome feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Give people things to do. People want things to do. As much as possible, give them relevant things to do: things that are constructive and relate to the crisis they're facing. Anxiety is reduced by action and a restored sense of control.

The actions may be symbolic (e.g., put up the flag), or preparatory (e.g., donate blood or create a family check-in plan). Some actions need to be put into context. Be careful about telling people things they should do without telling them when to do it. Phrase these preparatory actions in an "if—then" format. For example, "Go buy duct tape and plastic sheeting to have on hand, and if (fill in the blank) occurs, then seal up one interior space in your house and shelter in place."

The public must feel empowered and in control of at least some parts of their lives if you want to reduce fear and victimization. Plan ahead the things you can ask people to do, even if it's as simple as "checking on an

When we first started to figure out what we were dealing with, there were two things that entered my mind right away. One was to support the chief and our police department. And then the other part was to support the public, to reassure them, to try to calm them, to give messages to them to help them cope with what they were dealing with.

- **Douglas Duncan**, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, October 2002

elderly neighbor."

What about panic?

Contrary to what one may see in the movies, people seldom act completely irrationally or panic during a crisis. We do know that people have run into burning buildings, have refused to get out of a car stuck on the tracks with a train speeding close, and have gone into shock and become paralyzed to the point of helplessness. The overwhelming majority of people can and do act reasonably during an emergency. How people absorb or act on information they receive during an emergency may be different from non-emergency situations. Research provides some clues about the receiver of information during an emergency. Research has shown that in a dire emergency, people or groups may exaggerate their responses as they revert to more rudimentary or instinctual " flight or fight" reasoning, caused in part by the increase of adrenaline and cortisol in the blood system.

In other words, that primitive part of our brains that we can credit for the survival of the human species kicks in. One can not predict whether someone will choose fight or flight. However, everyone will fall at some point on the continuum. "Fighters" may resist taking actions to keep them safe. "Fleers" may overreact and take additional steps to make them extra safe. Those extremes are what most of us see reflected back in the media. However, **the overwhelming majority of people do not engage in extreme behavior.** It just feels like they do when you're the one responsible for getting a recommended response from the community.

During the 2001 anthrax incident, media reported local shortages of the antibiotic known as "cipro" because people began to seek out prescriptions anticipating the threat of anthrax. Question. If I want a prescription of cipro in my back pocket even though I live on the other side of the country, is that a panic behavior? No, it's my survival instinct kicking into overdrive. If I hear my community leader saying "don't panic," I think that doesn't apply to me. While I'm chasing down a cipro prescription I think I'm rationally taking steps to ensure my survival, and someone else must be panicking. If you describe individual survival behaviors as "panic," you've lost the very people you want to talk to. Acknowledge their desire to take steps and redirect them to an action they can take and explain why the unwanted behavior is not good for them or for the community. You can call on people's sense of community to help them resist individual grabs for protection.

I think when faced with a crisis, the world will watch.

-John Agwunobi, M.D., State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

When people are swamping your emergency hotline with calls, they are not panicking. They want the information they believe they need and you have. As long as people are seeking information, they may be fearful but they are not acting helpless, nor are they panicking.

Physical and mental preparation will relieve anxiety despite the expectation of potential injury or death. An "action message" can provide people with the feeling that they can take steps to improve a situation and not become

passive victims of the threat. Action messages should not be an afterthought. Reduce the level of extreme reactions by reaching out early with a message of empathy and action.

Uncertainty

Have you ever had to wait over the weekend for the results of a life or death medical test? The not knowing quickly seems worse than dealing with a bad result. People hate uncertainty. We all spend a great deal of our time in life working to reduce uncertainty. The uncertainty that is inherent in most crises, especially early in the event, will challenge even the greatest communicator. Early in a crisis, typically there are more questions than answers. The full magnitude of the problem is unknown. Perhaps the cause of the disaster is unknown. Even, what people can do to protect themselves may be unclear.

A danger, early in a crisis, especially if you're responsible for fixing the problem, is to promise an outcome outside your control. Never utter a promise, no matter how heartfelt, unless it's in your absolute power to deliver. We can hope for certain outcomes, but most we can't promise. Instead of offering a "knee jerk" promise, "we're going to catch the SOBs who did this," promise "we're going to throw everything we have at catching the bad guys, or stopping the spread of disease, or preventing further flood damage."

People can manage the anxiety of the uncertainty if you share with them the process you are using to get the answers. "I can't tell you today what's causing people in our town to die so suddenly, but I can tell you what we're doing to find out. Here's the first step . . ."

Remember, in a crisis, people believe any information is empowering. Tell them what you know and most important tell them what you don't know and the process you're using to try and get some answers. Mayor Giuliani cautioned, "Promise only when you're positive. This rule sounds so obvious that I wouldn't mention it unless I saw leaders break it on a regular basis." (Giuliani, 2002, p. 165)

Most of the response to a naturally occurring disaster or a planned attack is psychological. Well the worried well don't show up [at the ER] and say 'psychologically I'm not feeling as I usually do.' They show up and say 'I've got a headache, I've got a stomachache,' and so they come into our medical system in a way that doesn't readily identify them as a psychological victim.

-Ivan Walks, M.D., Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

Expected behaviors that must be confronted?

So if people are not panicking, why do things seem so confused and challenging in a crisis, especially in the early stages? Just because an action a person chooses to take may be driven by their survival instinct, it doesn't necessarily mean it's the best behavior for the community as a whole. There are a number of troublesome expected behaviors that can and do occur in major catastrophes. A leader should be aware of these behaviors and be prepared to confront them in his or her communication to the public.

Dependence on special relationships

Some people will attempt to bypass official channels to get special treat-

I think the most frustrating thing for me was clearly not having up to date and accurate information. My audience, when I started these press conferences, was the city of San Diego, yet I forgot, didn't comprehend or perceive that people all over the county were watching these press conferences.

-**Jeff Bowmen**, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

ment or access to what they want during a crisis. This behavior may result from a person's sense of privilege, or because of a growing mistrust that officials can't guarantee the person's wellbeing, or an inflated need to be in control, or because an information vacuum exists about what is available and why. Whatever the cause, the result can be damaging to the harmony and recovery of the community. If there is a perception that "special" people get special help, it invites chaos in the grab for supplies.

In Richard Preston's book *Demon in the Freezer*, neighbors and friends were approaching the wife of a prominent government smallpox researcher asking for help to obtain vaccine through unofficial channels for their children in case of a bioterrorist attack with smallpox. These people could not go to their local pharmacy and buy the vaccine, yet they wanted control over the safety of their families and they were taking "survival" steps to do that.

Good communication can reduce some of these reactions. The more honest and open government officials are about what is available when and for whom, the better odds officials have of reducing the urge among individuals in the community to seek out their own options. We owe people affected by the crisis and people who anticipate being affected by the crisis enough information to help them manage their anxiety and put off behaviors that divide the community into "them" and "us."

Vicarious rehearsal

In an emergency, some actions are directed at victims, and those exposed or have the potential to be exposed. However, those who do not need to take immediate action will be engaging in "vicarious rehearsal" regarding those recommendations and may need substitute actions to ensure that they do not prematurely act on recommendations not meant for them. Simple actions in an emergency will give people a sense of control and will help to motivate them to stay tuned to what you are recommending.

Interestingly, experience has shown that, often, people farther away (by distance or relationship) from the threat may actually exercise less reasonable reactions than those who are facing the real crisis. The communication age allows some people to vicariously participate in a crisis in which they are not in immediate danger of harm. These people will mentally rehearse the crisis as if they are experiencing it and "try on" the courses of action presented to them. Because these "arm chair" victims have the luxury of time to decide their chosen course of action, they may be much more critical about its value to them. In some cases, these people may reject the proposed course of action and choose another or insist that they too are at risk and need the recommended remedy themselves, such as a visit to an emergency room or a vaccination. In its most troublesome form, these "worried well" will heavily tax the recovery and response. It's a complicating factor for those who have to make recommendations about what people should do. Typically officials are clear and make the right recommendation for the people who are truly affected by the crisis. "You have to

take Cipro for 60 days because you've been exposed to spores of anthrax." This is the communication that goes on in emergency rooms, not doctors' offices. But what about all the people who are watching it and, even though they haven't been exposed, they think that message means something to them? Here is another wrinkle. What happens if people are watching officials respond to a crisis, and they are recommending something that has a downside to it, like maybe 60 days of diarrhea? They may decide they don't really like the idea of having 60 days of diarrhea and mentally reject the idea. According to research, if a person mentally rejects an action, it will be harder for that person to take that action in the future. Officials must consider creating alternate messages for those people vicariously experiencing the threat, but who should not take the action currently being recommended to victims. The challenge is to get them to delay taking the same action until it's warranted by circumstances.

MUPS: Multiple Unexplained Physical Symptoms

Most leaders are familiar with the concept of the worried well. Officials worry that during a crisis our health care systems may be overloaded because well people who think they are sick are going to come to the emergency room. Robert Ursano, M.D., from the Department of Defense, is a psychiatrist that has done a number of studies that have validated the concept of multiple unexplained physical symptoms (MUPS). It's the worried sick who will, in fact, challenge the capacity of our health delivery system in a crisis. The fact is that stress caused by a crisis situation will make some people actually physically ill. They have headaches and muscle aches, stomach upsets and, even something easily measured, a low-grade fever. That kind of stress in a community is harmful as overburdened medical providers will have to actually try to figure out who is really sick and who is sick from the stress of the situation. Communication can help in some measure by at least alerting the community that they need to consider whether there symptoms are from stress and, if so, provide them steps to help them reduce the stress such as deep-breathing exercises, physical exercise and talk therapy with friends and relatives. Uncertainty and the anxiety that develops from uncertainty can cause great emotional stress in a community.

Stigmatization

In some instances, victims may be stigmatized by their communities and refused services or public access. Fear and isolation of a group perceived to be contaminated or risky to associate with will hamper community recovery and affect evacuation and relocation efforts. In a disease outbreak, a community is more likely to separate from those perceived to be infected. During the SARS outbreak, which was believed to have originated in China, cities reported that the public avoided visiting their Chinatown sections of the cities. In fact, the governor of Hawaii publicly had dinner in the Chinatown section of Honolulu at the time to help counter the stigmatization that was occurring.

We had the complication of trying to take in the epidemiological information that was spotty at best and at the same time translate some very frightening information to people in the way that gave them the right balance between what we know or what we're learning without causing such alarm that people really wouldn't hear what we were saying. It was tough.

-**Julie Gerberding, M.D.**, Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

Leaders must be sensitive to the possibility that although unintentional and unwarranted segments of their community could be shunned because they become "identified" with the problem. This could have both economic and psychological impact on the well-being of members of the community and should be challenged immediately. This stigmatization can occur absent any scientific basis and could come not only from individuals but entire nations. During the first avian influenza outbreak in Hong Kong in 1997-98 and during the first West Nile virus outbreak in New York City in 1999, policies of other nations banned the movement of people or animals, absent clear science calling for those measures.

Perception of risks

The perception of risk is also vitally important in emergency communication. Not all risks are created equally. A wide body of research exists on issues surrounding risk communication, but the following emphasizes that some risks are more accepted than others.

- **Voluntary versus involuntary:** Voluntary risks are more readily accepted than imposed risks.
- **Personally controlled versus controlled by others:** Risks controlled by the individual or community are more readily accepted than risks outside the individual's or community's control.
- **Familiar versus exotic:** Familiar risks are more readily accepted than unfamiliar risks. Risks perceived as relatively unknown are perceived to be greater than risks that are well understood.
- **Natural origin versus manmade:** Risks generated by nature are better tolerated than risks generated by man or institution. Risks caused by human action are less well tolerated than risks generated by nature.
- **Reversible versus permanent:** Reversible risk is better tolerated than risk perceived to be irreversible.
- **Statistical versus anecdotal:** Statistical risks for populations are better tolerated than risks represented by individuals. An anecdote presented to a person or community, i.e., "one in a million," can be more damaging than a statistical risk of one in 10,000 presented as a number.
- **Endemic versus epidemic (catastrophic):** Illnesses, injuries, and deaths spread over time at a predictable rate are better tolerated than illnesses, injuries, and deaths grouped by time and location (e.g., U.S. car crash deaths versus airplane crashes).

☑ **Reality Check.** First impressions are lasting impressions. If you shoot out of the gate and fall flat, it won't matter much if you get back up and flawlessly jump all of the hurdles in record time. This doesn't necessarily mean having all the answers; it means having an early presence so the public knows that you are aware of the emergency and that there is a system in place to respond. A great message delivered after the audience has moved on to other issues is a message not delivered at all.

I believe they called it a 225 year flood. And we are at the fork of two rivers. It was coming so fast it was just taking the manhole covers out, and it was just unreal. It just hits you in the stomach and my first thought was save lives at all cost.

-Patricia Owens,
Mayor, Grand Forks, North Dakota,
Flood and Fire

- **Fairly distributed versus unfairly distributed:** Risks that do not single out a group, population, or individual are better tolerated than risks that are perceived to be targeted.
- **Generated by trusted institution versus mistrusted institution:** Risks generated by a trusted institution are better tolerated than risks that are generated by a mistrusted institution. Risks generated by a mistrusted institution will be perceived as greater than risks generated by a trusted institution.
- **Adults versus children:** Risks that affect adults are better tolerated than risks that affect children.
- **Understood benefit versus questionable benefit:** Risks with well-understood potential benefit and the reduction of well-understood harm are better tolerated than risks with little or no perceived benefit or reduction of harm.

The principles of risk communication are vital when developing messages during an emergency. If it's the first emergency of its type—manmade, imposed, or catastrophic—the communication challenges will increase.

Populations subjected to risks caused by human action and meant to destroy, hurt, and create terror will react with greater outrage. Unfairly distributed, unfamiliar, catastrophic, and immoral events create long-lasting mental health effects that lead to anger, frustration, helplessness, fear, and a desire for revenge.

In any discussion of risk, a scientist may perceive one risk in 10,000 as an acceptable risk while the listener may anecdotally be familiar with that one adverse outcome and believe that the risk is much greater to them. Statisticians tell us that 1 person in 10,000 will die from the anesthesia during surgery. Yet, many people every day undergo surgery. However, if your Aunt Mae just died during surgery, you might be inclined to ask a few more questions when it's your turn for surgery.

Perception of risk is not about numbers alone. These and other risk perceptions must be considered during a crisis. **As a leader, expect greater public outrage and more demands for information if what causes the risk is manmade and, especially, if it's intentional and targeted**. The mistake some officials make is to measure the magnitude of the crisis only based on how many people are physically hurt or how much property is destroyed. Also, measure the catastrophe in another way, how much emotional trauma is associated with it.

Be careful with risk comparisons

Be careful about risk comparisons. Never compare a risk that is voluntary to a risk that is imposed on people to attempt to put risk in perspective. Bioterrorism is high-outrage and (for most of us, so far) low-hazard. You can't effectively compare it to a low-outrage, high-hazard risk such as driving a car—which is voluntary, familiar, less dreaded, and mostly under our own control. Even naturally acquired anthrax fails to persuade as a

This was the largest individual fire that's occurred in California's written history. We had three simultaneous fires burning in San Diego County and in the state of California 32 fires burning in that two week period. So you have a large volume of incidents, a large population of people all of whom want to know right now what's going on in their neighborhood. And as the spokesperson, I did not have that information. It was very frustrating.

-Jeff Bowman, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

I will say that - not anyone by name, but I was told by a lot of people in this community when certain individuals went on camera, the [public] clued out. They didn't have any interest in hearing what they had to say because early on in the event they were not telling anything. They were being very superficial.

-Jeff Bowman, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

basis for comparison. People are justifiably more angry and frightened about terrorist anthrax attacks than about natural outbreaks, even if the number of people attacked is low.

First message in a crisis

The public will be listening for factual information, and some will be expecting to hear a recommendation for action. Get the facts right, repeat them consistently, avoid sketchy details early on, and ensure that all credible sources share the same facts. Speak with one voice. Again, preparation counts. Consistent messages are vital. Inconsistent messages will increase anxiety and will quickly torpedo credibility of experts. Your first official message as a leader in a crisis to the public, either through the media or directly, should contain the following six elements in the following order (See CERC Tools):

1. **An expression of empathy.**
2. **Confirmed facts and action steps,** (who, what, where, when, why, how). It's not necessary to know all of them to go forward with a statement.
3. **What you don't know about the situation.**
4. **What's the process**. After, acknowledging there are questions unanswered, explain first steps being taken to get the answers. What help can people expect next. (That first statement may be simply, "we've activated the EOC.")
5. **Statement of commitment.** You are there for the long haul. You'll be back to talk to them in an hour. (Be careful not to promise what is outside your control).
6. **Where people can get more information.** Give a hotline number or a website. Again, tell them when you will be back in touch with them.

Audience judgments about your message

Expect your audiences to immediately judge the content of your message in the following ways:

Speed of communication

The speed with which you respond to the public is an indicator to the public of how prepared you are to respond to the emergency, that there is a system in place, and that needed action is being taken. If the public is not aware that you're responding to the problem, then you're not! The public may then lose confidence in the organization's ability to respond, and you will be attempting to catch up in convincing the public that the system for response is working.

Trust and credibility of the message

Research shows that there are five basic elements to establishing trust and credibility through communication. You can't fake these. They must be

truly present in the message. All messages, written or spoken, can incorporate these elements and should, especially when attempting to communicate during an emergency. The following are the key elements to building trust (You may note they repeat the important elements in executing a successful communication plan in an emergency described earlier):

- Empathy and caring
- Competence and expertise
- Honesty and openness
- Commitment
- Accountability

Empathy and caring

Empathy and caring should be expressed within the first 30 seconds. According to research, being perceived as empathetic and caring provides greater opportunity for your message to be received and acted upon. Acknowledge fear, pain, suffering, and uncertainty.

Competence and expertise

Obviously, education, position title, or organizational roles and missions are quick ways to indicate expertise. Previous experience and demonstrated abilities in the current situation enhance the perception of competence. Another useful means is to have established a relationship with your audiences in advance of the emergency. If that is not possible, have a third party, who has the confidence of the audience, express his or her confidence in you or your organization.

> ☑ **Reality check:** The farther in distance you are from the people who are suffering the more difficult it may be to express empathy initially because it seems a little abstract. However, during recent terrorism exercises, where leaders were getting fictional reports about tragic events across the country, the strain began to show. These fictional reports, coming through phone calls, were taking a toll. We need to have a certain detachment to be able to make tough decisions in a crisis response. But we don't have to give up our humanity.

Honesty and openness

This does not mean releasing information prematurely, but it does mean facing the realities of the situation and responding accordingly. It means not being paternalistic in your communication but, instead, participatory—giving people choices and enough information to make appropriate decisions. Be realistic about your communication systems and procedures and, if they do not permit you to comment on something or reveal information, don't pretend you don't have the information; tell the public why the information isn't available for release at the time (e.g., verifying information, notifying partner organizations, not your information to release, etc.). It means allowing the public to observe the process while reminding them that this process is what drives the quality of the emergency response.

Well, first I would say I wouldn't wish it on anybody. Secondly though, if you are in a government leadership position, you just need to prepare yourself. Do not wait until the event.

Jeff Bowmen, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

Commitment and dedication

State up front what your organization's objective is in this emergency response, and commit to reaching that objective. Show dedication by sharing in the sacrifices and discomforts of the emergency. Don't fake hardship for the cameras. Effective governors know that they'd better walk the territory in which they're declaring a state disaster area. Dedication means not leaving the emergency until the community is recovered. This often means staying in touch with the community long after the media lose interest in the story. Resolution and follow-up should be committed to from the start and carried through to the end.

Accountability

For most people that literally means "keeping the books open." If government or non-profit money is being spent in the response to a disaster, sooner or later the public and media will demand to know to whom that money or resources are being distributed. A savvy official would anticipate the questions and have the mechanisms in place to be as transparent as possible, perhaps keeping an accounting on an Internet site related to the disaster and updating it weekly or monthly as appropriate.

Make the Facts Work in Your Message

Consider the following when creating your initial communication to your audiences:

- For the general public, **present a short, concise, and focused message** (6th-grade level). It's difficult in a heightened state of anxiety or fear to take in copious amounts of information. Get the bottom line out first. In time, the public will want more information.
- **Cut to the chase**—*relevant information only* at this time. Don't start with a lot of background information. Don't spend a lot of time establishing yourself or your organization. One sentence should be enough.
- **Give action steps in positives,** not negatives (e.g., " In case of fire, use stairs," "Stay calm," are positive messages. Negative messages are "Do not use elevator" and "Don't panic.") Use positives, not negatives.
- **Repeat the message**—repetition reflects credibility and durability. Correct information is correct each time you repeat it. Reach and frequency, common advertising concepts, tell us that your message is more apt to be received and acted upon as the number of people exposed to the message (reach) and the number of times each person hears the message (frequency) go up.
- **Create action steps in threes or rhyme, or create an acronym.** These are ways to make basic information easier to remember, such as "stop/drop and roll" or "KISS—keep it simple, stupid." Three is not a magic number, but in an emergency, you should expect someone to absorb three simple directions. Research indicates that somewhere between three and seven bits of new information is the limit for people to memorize and recall. It makes sense in the stress of an emergency to

The best advice . . . is to disclose bad news sooner rather than later. Whenever a convoluted explanation is offered in favor of not disclosing, overrule the advice and disclose.

-Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book Leadership

ask you audience to remember fewer bits of information. (For example, Anthrax is a bacterium that is treated with antibiotics. Anthrax is not transmitted from person to person. Seek medical care if you believe you have symptoms of anthrax: fever, body aches, and breathing problems.)

- **Use personal pronouns for the organization.** "We are committed to . . ." or "We understand the need for . . ."

Avoid

- **Technical jargon** Cut the professional jargon and euphemisms; they imply insecurity and lack of honesty.
- **Condescending or judgmental phrases**—(e.g., "You would have to be an idiot to try to outrun a tornado." "Only hypochondriacs would need to walk around with a prescription for Cipro.") Many of us are neither idiots nor hypochondriacs, and both ideas have crossed our minds. Don't insult your audience by word or tone. That doesn't mean condoning the behavior; instead, validate the impulse but offer a better alternative and the reasons why it's better.
- **Attacks**—Attack the problem, not the person or organization.
- **Promises/guarantees**—only what you can deliver. Otherwise, promise to remain committed throughout the emergency response.
- **Discussion of money** —In the initial phase of a crisis, discussion of the magnitude of the problem should be in the context of the health and safety of the public or environment. Loss of property is secondary. Also, a discussion of the amount of money spent is not a surrogate for the level of concern and response from your organization (what does that money provide?).
- **Humor**—Seldom is humor a good idea. People seldom "get the joke" when they are feeling desperate. Humor is a great stress-reliever behind closed doors. Anyone who has responded to emergencies knows that sometimes inappropriate humor creeps in as a coping mechanism. Be careful not to offend others responding to an emergency, even behind closed doors. Be especially sensitive when speaking to the public. One person's attempt at humor may be another's insult.

Employ the STARCC Principle

Your public message in a crisis must be:

Simple—Frightened people don't want to hear big words
Timely—Frightened people want information NOW
Accurate—Frightened people won't get nuances, so give it straight
Relevant—Answer their questions and give action steps
Credible—Empathy and openness are key to credibility
Consistent—The slightest change in the message is upsetting and dissected by all

And sometimes we said, we don't have anything to tell you that's happened in the last day in the investigation because it's confidential information, but here's some tips on mental health, here's some things you can look for in the community, here's some tips on being a good witness. If we couldn't give them information on the investigation itself, we tried to give them other information everyday that would help them get through that day.

-**Douglas Duncan**, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, D.C. Sniper Attacks, 2002

SARS was unusual because it was an unknown pathogen. You remember at the very beginning we didn't know what was causing it and we had very frightening information.

-Julie Gerberding, M.D., Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

Crisis Communication Plan

No organization should consider itself prepared to respond to a crisis if it does not have a communication plan fully integrated into its overall disaster response plan. What makes a crisis communication plan a good one? Simple, it' s the process used to develop the plan that determines the value of the plan, not what ends up on paper.

One communicator put it this way: "You have to know who you're breaking bread with. It's one thing to know the eating habits of your family. If you sit down to dinner with them every day, you know who hogs the mashed potatoes. But, when company comes to dinner, things are a little more dynamic. You're not certain which way to pass the potatoes to make sure everybody gets some."

The planning process counts. Meeting with your partners and discussing the communication plans are most important. Don't expect to develop these understandings in the moment of the disaster. In the information age, decisions about what to release, by whom and when are too challenging to start from scratch with people whose attitude about mashed potatoes you know nothing about. Don't assume your partners see it the way you do.

☑ **Reality Check**: Don't be surprised if agreements made in the sunshine of business as usual are changed suddenly during the bleak realities of a crisis. Keep your plan simple and remain flexible. Get done what's in your control and try to move your important messages forward in a way that reaches the public and your partners as quickly and accurately as possible.

The plan should get as many of the questions as possible answered about the logistics of communication work and a clear cut understanding of who owns what information in the crisis. Do you know in your jurisdiction who "owns" the death numbers? Some of you automatically will say, the coroner or medical examiner? Is that always true? What about during a disease outbreak? Will the medical examiner be adding up the deaths or will the hospitals and health department? Start talking now. The key to avoiding public power struggles and confusion during the crisis is to get as much understood ahead of time as possible. Communicating to the public by the seat of your pants is not a plan.

The single most important responsibility that can be assigned to someone in your organization is the duty to keep the plan alive. Update the plan regularly—all of the elements. Schedule the review; don't just wait for so many changes to occur that the plan is useless when you take it off the shelf.

Longer is not better. Again, the plan will be the bones of your work. It does not have to spell out every required task. It must be the reference that will keep everyone on track and enable the tasks to get done with a mini-

mum of scrambling. Emergencies are chaotic enough without the disorganization of a planless office. You don't build lines of authority and relationships with your response partners during the crisis. Too often, the initial confusion and mixed messages that cripple an organization's credibility come from a lack of clear role and responsibility definition, and undefined lines of authority.

Working with the media

Disasters are media events. There are two good reasons, besides your commitment to the First Amendment, to cooperate with media during a crisis. One, they are your primary tool to get public safety messages to your community in a hurry. Two, they know their audiences better than you do. In some instances that may mean they are translating your message into a framework that is better understood by portions of your community. Bottomline: we need media involved during a crisis. Bottomline: they're going to be there whether we like them there or not, so consider them in your planning.

Early mistakes with the media

The following are some of the early mistakes leaders make when working with the media during a crisis:

They play favorites or hold grudges against some media with whom they've had good or bad experiences in the past. You should give all media equal access to information during a crisis so the public is not limited to your favorite reporters for their news.

They attempt to set arbitrary new rules about how media can interact with the official response group. If you have rules, state them in planning before a crisis. Reach out to media and explain why the rules exist and remain flexible.

They attempt to tell the media how to do their job. None of us likes to be given direction from outsiders about our work. Media do not like it either. From a leader, even a suggestion can sound like an order. Unless you've worked in the media business or know it very well, be certain to start any suggestion with, "I'm not certain this would be helpful to you . . . ." Chief Charles Moose, during the D.C. metro area sniper shooting investigation came out to his first press conference early and told the media. "You are going to follow these rules.... Don't make me look like an ass[xxxx]." It is not surprising that the media aired the Chief's directions to the media live as he was giving them. Really, media do not like to be told how to do their jobs. They will follow rules within reason. And you can enforce the rules within the bounds of the law.

If the crisis is big enough for the national or international media to show up, some leaders forget who they brought to the dance, local media, and become star struck. The fact is that national media have other ways of covering the story. If you are a leader at the community level, don't dis-

The one thing that surprised me, everyday I'd wake up, go to police headquarters and say, there's got to be less press today than yesterday. And everyday there was more. And we had crews from around the world. These three weeks just captured the attention of the world.

-**Douglas Duncan**, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, October 2002

count local media. Keep them high on your list. Research indicates, in natural disasters, local media get "it" right more often than national media. The national media will leave even before the disaster is fully resolved and then you'll be left with your jilted local media who, without question, have excellent long-term memories.

What reporters want

Reporters, especially during a crisis, want more than you can ever give them. Don't be discouraged. Instead help set reasonable expectations. If you surveyed reporters in your community about the ideal response to them during a crisis, they would tell you: "It's simple. I want a front seat to the action and all information NOW. Oh, and I also want an exclusive."

No one can satisfy all desires from the media. So ask them what they expect. They expect equal access to information. They expect you to honestly answer their questions. They expect timely release of information. They expect you to squash rumors quickly or they will continue to report the speculation. They expect you to commit to a schedule for media availabilities and updates. They expect your organization to provide subject matter experts if you want an official view reported. They expect their calls to be returned. They expect that what you tell them is accurate or you'll tell them that the information is preliminary and could change. They expect you to tell them if you do not have an answer and explain the process you're using to get it. They expect a consistent message from your organization and your partners in the response. They expect you to have some modicum of understanding about how the news business works. They expect to be treated with respect. You can meet their expectations if you have a communication plan and sufficient resources committed to the public information and media relations work.

Media are affected by crises too

Experience over time in various crisis situations have shown that media, who, after all, are part of the community can be affected by the crisis too. Like everyone, they will be concerned about their safety, the safety of their families and their pets. However, the way they do their job changes too.

For leaders, there are three important ways that the media change. Verification of facts goes down, media abandon their adversarial role early in the crisis, and many of them will lack scientific expertise.

Verification

Research indicates that 90 percent of first reports following a major news event contain errors. Journalists are taught that they should have two independent sources providing the same information before reporting it. Today, however, with the speed of electronic reporting, including the Internet, that concept is outdated in crisis reporting.

In fact, experts no longer refer to what reporters do in a crisis as reporting. Instead, they describe is as "news gathering." Essentially, electronic reporters are taking the public along on their news gathering process. You get to

We were worried that the facts that we might deliver might not be understood by the public. The public is a very intelligent public. The public understands, and they very rarely can go down the wrong path if you're delivering honest, simple messages. Say the truth, say what's happening, the public will understand and will follow."

-**John Agwunobi**, M.D., State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

watch them make the sausage. So, they report what they've gathered and correct or change it as more information comes in. They typically caution that the information is sketchy, but they do not apologize for the frequent first reports that turn out not to be correct.

Generals talk about the fog of war. In reporting during a crisis, it's the fog of information. Information comes in quickly from many sources, and reporters may be sorting it out on air. It's part of the quest to be first and to engage the viewer. This is another important reason to have a communication plan in place that can get official and accurate information out quickly in a crisis.

Adversarial Role

The natural order of things, at least with the media, is for them to have a slightly adversarial perspective toward officials. It's their job to preserve democracy through constant probing and questioning of the government. They hold government accountable. The court system typically adjudicates heavily in favor of a free press when government and media clash. So, if you are a public official, it may feel like media have only one note to sing. Yet, early in a crisis, the media prove to be extraordinarily helpful to their communities. Here's why.

Early in a major catastrophe, there are typically more questions than answers. This early uncertainty about what is happening causes great anxiety. Media are not immune to that anxiety and they want the same questions answered that the public want answered. For the initial phase of a crisis, one where questions out number answers and the magnitude and character of the crisis may not be known, the response officials, the public, and the media are focused on exactly the same thing. The media, intentionally or not, will don their "public safety" hats and be ready to report every word from the command post. That synergy works in the favor of all involved. However, as soon as the uncertainty is reduced and all affected have an understanding of what is happening and even what precipitated the crisis, the media will quickly revert to normal and put on their adversarial cloaks once again.

For example, during the major power outage in the summer of 2003 in the United States and Canada, the first question on most everyone's mind was, "did the terrorists do this to us?" That was the question the media focused on. As soon as they were satisfied that the anwser to that question was no, reporters started to critique New York City Mayor Bloomberg's performance at the press conference. They speculated he may have been "out of touch" with the average person's perspective about the outage and the possibility of spending the night on the dark streets of New York. The public safety hats are taken off and those adversarial cloaks are put on again very quickly during a crisis.

Take the media to school

Evidence strongly suggests that coverage by the media is more factual

You're talking about hugely emotional events typically. I have angry homeowners who are upset standing behind the television cameras wanting to hear what I have to say about their neighborhood. If you don't start with empathy I think you're going to dig yourself a hole. Understand those people are still hurting from their loss.

-Jeff Bowman, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

Well, you have to put yourself in their shoes otherwise you wouldn't understand what they're going through. And I know I was accused at times of having too much empathy when my voice would crack. You need to feel for the people, and I know if you don't have the empathy for the people you're not a good leader.

-**Patricia Owens**, Mayor, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Flood and Fire

when reporters have more information. They become more interpretive when they have less information. What should you conclude?

Simple. Do you want to reduce the number of times reporters are interviewing reporters about what other reporters have just reported? Then give them something more. Want to reduce the number of times you hear reporters and their paid experts suggest what you as the officials responding to the crisis should be doing (while you're actually doing it)? Give reporters something to report.

A crisis event provides only so much event-specific information in a day. Even so, media outlets have round the clock air time to fill. What are they going to fill it with? Consider this, not everything you share with the media needs to be event specific. Instead, educate the media with background information. Turn them into experts on the subject by teaching them what you want them to know to help put the situation in context. If a reporter hears new information about how a lab test is done to diagnose a disease, it isn't news, but it feels like news because it's new to the reporter. The public will feel the same way. Have the resources in place to help take the reporters and, by default, the public to school. A dirty bomb is detonated in the town square? Teach them radiation 101. Engage experts who you can partner with in advance of a crisis who can be trusted resources for accurate background information to the media. Ensure you have plenty of content resources available on subjects that could affect your community. Chemical plants in town? Have ready fact sheets on the chemical properties. If you don't "take the media to school," you can be certain someone else will and they may not be invested in the best outcome for you and your community.

Another reason to take the media to school is because many of them will need it. Only a small percentage of reporters will be experts on issues that come up in the crisis. For all the rest, they will need quick remedial training. It's not unreasonable to expect a health reporter would understand the difference between a virus and bacteria, but it may be unreasonable to expect the lifestyle reporter reassigned to the big outbreak story to know the difference. Plan accordingly and don't assume the media know what you know.

Keep reporters engaged at the command post

Early in a crisis, media will naturally flock to the command post. However, they will naturally begin to fade away and seek alternate perspectives on the crisis within a short time. If you want to lengthen the time reporters are willing to invest in the official story, make it worth their time to hang out with you.

If you apply the concept of taking reporters to school, you can go a long way in keeping reporters hooked up to the command post. Plan for some of your officials to take turns briefing media. Break loose subject matter experts to do briefings for background.

And, it's not a bad idea to make it comfortable for the media. In some instances that could mean sharing food and bathrooms with them. Small comforts can go a long way in building some rapport.

Also, consider the timing of your major media availabilities. After the initial phase of the crisis turns into the maintenance phase, you may be holding press briefings only once a day. If you want the media to stay close to the command post, perhaps you should schedule them for mid-day. Remember, media are interested in official information, but they also will seek outside perspectives.

☑ **Reality Check**: Don't allow your feelings to be hurt if you see media asking the same questions to outside experts. Instead, plan to ensure outside experts are well informed - make information widely available on the Internet. When an outsideexpert is called by a reporter to set up an interview, you can bet the expert will immediately do an Internet search for specifics. Make it easy for them and you to increase the probability messages will be consistent.

Successful press conferences

Press conferences take a lot of preparation to be successful. Decide to call a press conference based on these considerations in consultation with your communication director or public information officer:

- It's a fast breaking crisis and the public is clamoring to know who is in charge
- You have an urgent message or recommendation to give the public
- You've promised to update the public on a regular basis
- You have news

One of the toughest decisions in a crisis is to decide when or if to hold press conferences. After you commit to a schedule, the next tough decision is to determine whether you're doing too many updates, unnecessarily alarming the public. So don't hold press conferences if you don't have news or important messages for the public. Provide interviews outside a group setting if the message doesn't warrant a break into the daily soaps.

If you decide a press conference is warranted, in advance, all parties who will participate must agree on the subjects to be covered and who will answer what questions. A quick ticket to obscurity is to hold press conferences that appear unplanned and confused. The public does not like to see its officials appearing confused during a crisis.

Leaders must also consider what they convey to the media and public depending on the set up for the press conference. If you choose to line your experts up seated at tables, then you're implying that you have sufficient information to share, that everyone should stop and sit down. So if you have plenty of information to share and are prepared to take about 30 minutes of questions, by all means, sit your experts down at a table. On the other hand, if you don't have much information to share and plan to

The answer is to not say I don't know, I have no idea, isn't this awful, I'm ringing my hands with you. But to say listen, here's what we know now, we know A, we know B, and we know C; we're going to try to find out D, E and F, we're getting there, hang tough.

-**Frank Keating**, Governor, Oklahoma City, Bombing, 1995

take only a few or no questions, don't sit down. Instead, have a single microphone on a stand (not a podium, if possible) where the leader of the press conference speaks and refers to other experts only if needed. Whether you're sitting or standing, assume every microphone is live at all times.

The following are **guaranteed credibility crushers during a press conference**:

First mistake is having all the "hangers on" from your organization circling the back of the room where the press conference is being held. Reporters might have their eyes pointed toward you in the front of the room, but their ears are listening to off-the-cuff comments being offered in the back. A lot of nonverbal information can be given away by a nod or a puzzled look from the back of the room. Keep everyone out of the area of the press conference except: the media, your communication staff and the principals participating in the event.

Second major mistake is thinking the press conference doesn't begin until you step up to the microphone. Actually, the press conference begins the minute you enter the room. So any discussion, official or otherwise, you want to have with the others you're sharing the stage with should be done in a separate room. The minute you enter the room, the press conference has started. After all, the media, and sometimes the public too, will be observing every move you make. They're trying to gauge the mood and the seriousness of the situation by what you do.

Writing for the media during a crisis

The more information that is written in plain language and cleared in advance of a crisis, the smoother communication will go. The easier you make it for the media to do their job, the smoother communication will go. The media like to have things written as backgrounders that they can refer to when reporting. Get stuff written down that can be written down and clear it in advance. Work with your partners to ensure the messages are consistent.

Information that is event specific should go into a one-page press release. Think of the press release as a crisis update for the public. All other information should be put in backgrounders and fact sheets.

Not everything you'll want to convey to the public during a crisis can be generated in advance. Not all information the public wants conveyed to them during a crisis will be ready for release at the same time. **The mistake response officials make is waiting to release information until all the facts are in.**

Understand, you can not imagine the pressure that will come from the media and public to release information. It's better to accept now that

I've found over the years it's so much easier to be honest and tell the truth about everything that happened because three to five years from now when I'm in a courtroom, I'm not going to remember what I said. I'm going to just remember the truth.

-Jeff Bowman, Fire Chief, San Diego, California Fires, 2003

you're going to have to give them what you have when you have it than to believe they'll wait for it until you can wrap it up with a nice ribbon. Your speed at releasing information is a marker for your preparedness. You must have a system in place to piece meal information to the public to some extent early in the crisis.

Look at it this way. If you had a room of people who hadn't eaten for five days and you were cooking a turkey would you make them wait the five hours it would take for it to be done? Or, would you cut off the turkey wings, that get done first, and feed them the wings? You'd be merciful and give them the wings, then the drumsticks, and finally the whole bird.

In a crisis, people are starving for information. If you don't start feeding them what you have, someone else will feed them, and it might be dog food.

Simply, release what you know, acknowledge what you don't yet know and tell them how you're getting answers. Give them facts and give them your process to get more facts.

The Expected Questions

No matter what the crisis, the following are the questions that will always be asked and should be anticipated by you. Be prepared to address the following:

- What happened?
- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?
- Who is in charge?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- What can we expect, right now and later?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning?

The Leader as a spokesperson

Can what you say and how you say it be the difference between life and death during a crisis? Yes. The overwhelming research shows that a credible spokesperson can influence behaviors that could be life saving. Oh, that it would be as simple as reading a prepared statement! It's not.

For a leader to achieve such noble aims as saving lives, reducing anxiety and fear, and helping the community recover more quickly depends in great deal on not only the words delivered but also the way the words are delivered.

The older you get the more you understand that honesty is a tool. If you don't say things that aren't true, you don't have to remember everything that you said. So the older you get, the more important honesty is. In all seriousness, honesty is what allows you to come back the next time and be credible. If you aren't honest the first time, you don't have an opportunity to be honest the second time.

-**Ivan Walks**, M.D., Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

The media has deadlines. The 4:00 news is going to start at 4:00 whether you're on TV or not. And they're going to report something. So I think establishing relationships with the media ahead of time, understanding the media is going to report what they think is news, not necessarily only what you tell them is important. And then routine availability is going to be critical.

-**Ivan Walks, M.D.**, Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

A leader who becomes a spokesperson during a crisis is endowed with special responsibilities. First, if you are representing a part of the official response, such as the incident commander or head of a response agency, you are the human embodiment of that command group or agency. You take the EOC or your agency from an "it" to a "we." You're the human face. That's a hefty responsibility. Use it strategically.

The public is looking for an expression of empathy from the "powers that be." You're it. If you express in words a sincere understanding of what the members of your community are feeling, you have just made a giant leap toward gaining their trust. Remember, you do not have to personally be afraid to be able to express, "I can understand this situation may be frightening. I know you are looking for answers to important questions here. We want answers too and were taking steps to get them, including . . . ." Or, "This is a confusing time for us. It's such a horrible tragedy we face today. My greatest wish is that we would never have to put into action the plans we made for just such an event. We are in pain but we are going to work through this pain and keep helping the people we can. We will not stop until we help every one of our neighbors. I'm going to ask you to help us too. We may be asking you to endure some hardships here. We may ask for your patience as we work to get answers. We may call on you to volunteer in some way. We're a strong community, built on a foundation of firm values and I know one of those is a willingness to help each other when we're in need. I'm counting on that help from each of you today and tomorrow."

It would be unwise to try to "can" statements of empathy in advance of a disaster. If you are a leader whose community is suffering, the words will come. Trust yourself that what you speak from your heart is what the public needs to hear. If you shut down emotionally and attempt to appear unfazed by the event, you risk your credibility. Don't shed a tear if that's not you, but simply understand that some in your community are crying, are hurting, and want to know you understand. Be a leader, be a compassionate leader, and your community will not be victims, they will be helpers.

That sincere expression of empathy will help quiet anxious minds and allow people to hear your message. **Express empathy and then give directions for action**. These two steps, in this order, will help you and your community early in the disaster.

A leader has the ability in a crisis to rally his or her community. A leader who is sharing the risk, a part of the affected community, can call on his or her community to shoulder the burden and help others. A person frightened out of their wits will respond positively to a call for action and perseverance from an empathetic and committed leader. Ask your neighbors to be their strongest and they will be. Interestingly, following September 11, 2001, researchers discovered that able-bodied elderly people in lower Manhattan were an asset to the recovery of that community. They helped their younger neighbors cope with the worst tragedy of their young lives by

telling stories about other trying times from the past. Young people wanted to hear that their elders faced tragedy and were able to recover. Stories about World War II and the depression helped the young. In fact, Mayor Giuliani reached back to stories about the WW II bombings of London to help him keep hope for his city. An early reminder that we must "buck up" to help each other will give people something to concentrate on besides their own fears.

So early in the crisis, express empathy, give people things to do and ask more of them.

What makes a good spokesperson?

- Sincere expressions of empathy
- A willingness to risk saying, "I don't know, we're working on it"
- Telling the truth
- Confidence without arrogance
- Appropriate emotion
- Modulated voice
- Direct eye contact
- Humility or a lack of defensiveness

Any leader who has sat through media relations or spokespersons training has probably heard the instructor sum up the training with a last suggestion, "Just act natural." Well, if that's all it takes to be a good spokesperson, then why have we spent all this time and money for training? Here's a better suggestion than, "just act natural," instead, act like your agency. What are the best qualities of your agency? If your agency were a person, who would they be? Act like that person.

CDC has a culture that, when we're our best, is described as follows: CDC has a history of going into harm's way to help people. We humbly go where we are asked. We value our partners and won't steal the show." If that's the way CDC sees itself, then a CDC spokesperson, reminded of this, would express a desire to help, show courage (share the risk), and remember to acknowledge partners. The spokesperson would seem committed, not showy.

What are the values of your organization? What are the values of your political office? Know those and you'll know how to face the public during a crisis and be successful. Forget the bluster. Expect criticism. Focus on your neighbors.

Another sure fired way to be a great spokesperson is to always remember who your audience is. One of the mistakes even good leaders sometimes make is to confuse the media in your mind as the audience. So, when the media begin to aggravate you with their questions you react defensively, or disdainfully, or angrily. In a crisis, remember you are talking to the people who are hurt, confused, anxious and possibly angry. Don't let the intermediary between you and your public spoil the connection.

I speak to the leaders watching and listening. You don't have to be superman to run a response to a crisis. Be humble and don't think it serves the message well to stand up there pretending or acting as if you are a bigger person than everyone else. Let that humility shine through. It will protect the honesty of the message, it will prevent you from going down a road that is fraught with danger; that road where you try to know all the answers, that road where you try to be everything for everyone

-John Agwunobi, M.D., State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

Before you sit down to do an interview or stand up to speak in the microphone, remind yourself, actually form a mental picture of who you're speaking too, and the media's behavior won't cause you to act inappropriately. Picture your grandmother, your son or your sister and brother-in-law while they hold their baby. Humanize your audience because they are watching every move you make in front of that camera.

If you think you're answering the media's questions, you are wrong. You are answering the questions from the public. Forget that and you may frown or show anger or disbelief or impatience through your facial expressions. The public will think you don't care, not that you're tired and especially tired of the media questions.

Pitfalls for spokespersons during an emergency

- **Remember that jargon obfuscates communication and implies arrogance.** If you have to use a technical term or acronym, define it. If you can define it, do you need to use it? Jargon and euphemisms are security blankets. Try to give yours up.
- **Use humor cautiously.** Humor is a minefield. Soft, self-deprecating humor may be disarming for a hostile audience, but be careful.
- **Refute negative allegations without repeating them**. Don't own the negative by repeating the accusation.
- When possible, **use positive or neutral terms.**
- **Don't assume you've made your point.** Ask whether you've made yourself clear.
- Ultimately, **money will become an issue.** During the early stage of an emergency, don't lead with messages about money.
- At all costs, **avoid one-liners, clichés, and off-the-cuff comments.** Any statement that trivializes the experience of the people involved by saying something such as "there are no guarantees in life" kills your credibility.
- **Discuss what you know, not what you think.**

People seem to be able to tolerate you being wrong if you're honest about why you were wrong and what you were wrong about and what you're doing to correct it. But if you are ever perceived as being a dishonest broker of information, I think it's just about impossible to recover from it."

-Julie Gerberding, M.D., Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

Basic tenets of crisis and emergency risk communication

- **Give anticipatory guidance.** If you are aware of future negative outcomes, let people know what to expect. (e.g., side effects of antibiotics).
- **Be regretful, not defensive.** Say, "We are sorry . . ." or "We feel terrible that . . ." when acknowledging misdeeds or failures from the organization. Don't use "regret," which sounds like you're preparing for a lawsuit.
- **Acknowledge people's fears.** Don't tell people they shouldn't be afraid. They *are* afraid and they have a right to their fears. Don't disparage fear; acknowledge that it's normal and human to be frightened.
- **Acknowledge the shared misery.** Some people will be less frightened than they are miserable, feeling hopeless and defeated. Acknowledge the misery of a catastrophic event, then help move people toward the

future through positive actions.

- **Express wishes.** Say, "I wish we knew more," or "I wish our answers were more definitive."
- **Panic is less common than imagined.** Panic doesn't come from bad news, but from mixed messages. If people are faced with conflicting recommendations or expert advice, they are left with no credible source to turn to for help. That level of abandonment opens the door to charlatans and poor judgment. Candor protects your credibility and reduces the possibility of misbehavior, because your messages will ring true.
- **Be willing to address the "what if" questions.** These are the questions that everyone is thinking about and they want expert answers. Although it's often impractical to fuel "what ifs" when the crisis is contained and not likely to affect large numbers of people, it is reasonable to answer "what ifs" if the "what if" could happen and people need to be emotionally prepared for them. If you do not answer the "what if" questions, someone at much less risk regarding the outcome of the response will answer them for you. If you are not prepared to address "what ifs," you lose credibility and the opportunity to frame the "what if" questions with reason and valid recommendations.

What spokespersons should know when talking through the media

The media are important during the first hours or days of an emergency. They are the fastest and, in some cases, the only way to reach the public during an emergency. Media professionals accept their community responsibilities; however, your job is not their job. Respect the differences and look for mutual goals.

- **Go into any media interview with a purpose.** Have a message to deliver. If you don't have a message, you don't have a reason to do the interview.
- **Make sure the reporter gets your name and title right.** Keep your title as short as possible. It's better to make it descriptive of what you do than to give an official position title. For example, medical epidemiologist is better than "acting chief of the XXXXXXXX, section of the XXXX branch," etc.

General media interview pitfalls

- **Don't let a reporter put words in your mouth.** The reporter may use inflammatory or emotionally laden words. Don't repeat them.
- **If the question contains leading or loaded language,** reframe the question to eliminate the language and then answer the questions.
- **Don't assume the reporter has it right** if he or she claims that some one has lodged an allegation. Don't react to new information a reporter gives you. Instead, say, "I have not heard that" or "I would have to verify that before I could respond." Don't let the reporter start a fight.
- **If a reporter leaves a microphone in your face** after you've answered the question, *stop. Do not answer the question again or add to your answer.* Instead, say, "Do you have another question?" Say it matter of factly, without sarcasm or annoyance.

We had public meetings. And the anger was very, very hard to deal with but you just have to understand in your own mind that their whole life has been just torn apart, turned inside out. Most of the people, I'd say 80 percent of the people handled it very, very well but there were some that it just was too much for them to take because it had torn their lives apart.

-**Patricia Owens**, Mayor, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Flood and Fire

I think it's a mistake in any tragedy to bring somebody in who doesn't have communication skills, who isn't a part of the community or a part of the state whose accent is very different, [who says] 'well we'll take care of it and we'll have no further comment.' That's very, very bad. We were very transparent, very open, very willing to share the limelight. Nobody was trying to hog the camera.

-Frank Keating,
Governor, Oklahoma City, Bombing, 1995

- **Anticipate questions.** Work with your public information officer to anticipate as many expected questions as possible and draft the answers. Nuances count. A word change here or there may make the difference in how well your answer is received. Put the answer on paper (it will usually be too long to give in public) and then find the bottom line—what is the point you want to make? What rings true and doesn't sound evasive? That's your 20-second answer.
- **Make your point first.** Have prepared message points. Try to say it in 30 seconds and in fewer than 90 words.
- **Don't fake it.** If you don't know the answer, say so. If it's not in your area of expertise, say so. Commit to getting the answer.
- **Never speak disparagingly of anyone, not even in jest.** Your mother was right—it's not becoming. Don't assign blame or pass the buck. Stick to what you know and what your organization is doing. Don't fight your battle through the media. If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything. Remind reporters that professionals can differ in opinion but that does not mean they should attack each other in the media. There is a peer-review process to discuss differences.
- **Don't buy in to hypothetical questions.** Reframe the question in a way that addresses legitimate concerns of the public without being sensational or "entertainment."
- **Do not ask reporters to review their articles or interviews.** Offer to clarify information for them as they prepare their piece. If a reporter shows you the piece, understand that he or she expects you to correct errors in fact—not viewpoints that may differ from yours.
- **Break down multiple-part questions** and answer each part separately.
- **Don't raise issues** you do not want to see in print or on the news.
- **Don't say "no comment"** to a reporter's question. Instead, state why you can't answer that question. Say that the matter is under investigation, the organization has not yet made a decision, or simply that you are not the appropriate person to answer that question.

Your interview rights:

- Know who will be conducting the interview.
- Know the subjects the reporter wants to cover and limit the interview to those subjects.
- Caution the reporter when you are not the right person to answer a question.
- Know the format and duration of the interview. You can set limits.
- Ask who else will be interviewed or has been interviewed.

Not your interview rights:

Do not:

- Embarrass or argue with a reporter.
- Tell the news organization which reporter you prefer.
- Demand that your remarks not be edited.
- Insist that an adversary not be interviewed.
- Lie or cloud the truth.

- Demand that an answer you've given not be used.
- State that what you are about to say is off the record or not attributable to you. (Only reporters can bestow "off the record" status to what you say - and then it's very limited)

Grief and your role as spokesperson

In a catastrophic event in the United States, communities or the nation may face what experts call "death out of time." The death of someone who is not advanced in age and sickly (e.g., the death of a child) can be much more difficult to cope with. Leaders communicating to an individual or community experiencing the extreme pain and grief that accompanies loss through death must be especially aware of how this grief is suffered. Grief is a universal emotion, but no two people experience grief in exactly the same manner.

In a catastrophic event, many people are ill, dying, or in need of treatment and it may be your job to talk with individuals about what is happening. The following are some basic thoughts about communication styles in an intimate but highly emotional emergency situation:

Empathize with the patient and family

- People indulge in serious, meaningful communication only for short spans.
- Chitchat is a treasure trove of meaningful "hints" about what a person is worried about.
- Privacy is an important requirement. Assure that information shared will be kept private.
- Allow communication free from interruptions (e.g., crying shouldn't be interrupted).
- Try not to answer questions outside your area of expertise. Get permission from the individual to refer him or her to an expert.

Listen carefully

- Place the speaker's needs above your own.
- Use open and accepting body language (e.g., no crossed arms).
- Always be honest in responding.
- Try not to interrupt to give advice.
- Accept moments of silence.
- As much as 90 percent of communication is nonverbal.

Better communication

- Use the person's name in the conversation.
- Ask a clarifying question: "Can you help me understand?"
- Allow the conversation to evolve—don't push it where you hope it will go.
- Allow time for silence.
- Be sensitive to a person's nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, and feelings.

You know we doctors are notorious for using big words. I was doing the Oprah Winfrey show with Tom Ridge and Oprah asked me about the Brentwood Mail Facility. And I said, 'Oprah, it's a big old building.' Well that's not a scientific term but everybody understands a big old building is a big old building. Not trying to impress people with how smart you are, makes a big difference."

-**Ivan Walks, M.D.**, Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

- When possible, use the words the person uses.
- Self-disclosure may help the person expand on the topic.
- When responding to someone, say "you're crying" instead of "you're sad;" allow the person the opportunity to express the feeling behind the action.
- How something is said is often more important than what is said.

When speaking to grieving family members:

Your presence is more important than conversation. Family members may voice feelings with such strong emotion as "I don't know how I'm going to live without my husband," or "Why would God allow this to happen?" Short statements of condolence, such as "I'm so sorry," "This is a sad time," or "You're in my prayers," are enough of a response. If a persons tenses at your touch, withdraw.

Use "death" or "dying" not softer euphemisms. Many people feel patronized by words like "expired " or "received his heavenly reward." Use the same words as the grieving person to respect cultural differences.

Know the needs of your stakeholders

The media are demanding stakeholders during a crisis and the danger is you may think if you focus on satisfying the media, everyone else who wants communication from you will be satisfied. That's just not the way it works. You can't ignore the media, for lots of obvious reasons. You must plan, however, that other stakeholder groups will want a piece of you during and after the crisis.

Stakeholders are identifiable groups of people or organizations who can be reached in ways other than through the media. They self-identify as stakeholders. You don't get to decide whether they have something at stake in the crisis or not. They believe you are beholden to them in some way and they expect to communicate with you in some way other than through the media.

Since we haven't perfected cloning yet, you're going to have to make some tough decisions. The highest level of respect toward a stakeholder group is for the organization's leader to meet face to face with them. As that leader, you need to work with your communication and policy planners to determine who, in a crisis, should be invited to meet with you, or be called by you or receive a hand written note or special email from you. You can't do all of these things for all stakeholders. Do decide who you can delegate some of these activities to. Mayor Giuliani tried to attend as many funerals as possible for the firemen and policemen and government workers who died on September 11, 2001. He tried not to delegate that task. He chose wisely his stakeholder priorities.

Well, credibility is everything. Truth is everything. If you have an individual who is the spokesman, the representative of the government attempting to respond to a tragedy and people view that person cynically or with suspicion, if anything you're going to create more rumor mongering, you're going to create other false trails, and you're going to create the potential of chaos which is terrible. So whoever is the spokesman better be credible.

-Frank Keating, Governor, Oklahoma City, Bombing, 1995

Stakeholders are people or organizations with a special connection to you and your involvement in the emergency. Anticipate and assess the incident from the stakeholders' perspective. They will be most interested in how the incident will affect them. Stakeholders are expecting something from you. It could be as simple as information released through a Web site and email or as complex as in-person meetings with key organization officials.

In crisis communication planning, the first step in responding to stakeholders is to identify them. Stakeholders may vary according to the emergency, but core stakeholders will be interested in every emergency your organization becomes involved in and will expect a response from your organization. (See CERC Tools)

Not all stakeholders are supporters of your organization; nonetheless, it is critical to identify unsupportive stakeholders and be prepared to respond to them appropriately. In fact, stakeholders will fall into three categories based on their responses to you in a crisis: advocates, adversaries, and ambivalents. Your response to stakeholders will depend on which of the three groups to which a stakeholder belongs. The point is to anticipate stakeholders' reactions based on their affinity for the organization and the way that similar groups have reacted in the past when this type of crisis has occurred.

An emergency or crisis may be an opportunity to strengthen your partner and stakeholder relationships as they see you in action. A positive response will enhance the organization's credibility. Don't forget to consider existing stakeholder controversies or concerns and how the ongoing relationship will color their attitude during this incident.

If you plan ahead and identify as many stakeholders as possible before the event occurs, and the means you will use to communicate with them, you will be organized in a way to show stakeholders respect by attending to their special need for communication with you and your organization.

Expending energy on stakeholder communication during a crisis is valuable for at least two reasons besides the fact you may owe them this attention. First, they may know what you need to know. They have points of view outside your organization. Few stakeholders will be shy about pointing out deficiencies. Do you want them pointed out to you or to the media? And, they may also be able to help communicate your message for you. They may have credibility in some circles you don't. Be straight with them and you may face fewer problems during the crisis recovery.

Researchers tell us that leaders and their organizations make five mistakes toward stakeholders during a crisis according to stakeholders themselves. They include the following: inadequate access, lack of clarity, no energy for response to them, too little too late, and perceptions of arrogance. The truth is that most of these may actually represent a lack of resources and planning directed at stakeholder communication.

I thought the media did a good job. I mean there was some concern about releasing information but you know all the information they released they got from law enforcement. So you sort of expect leaks to happen. We were able to communicate to the public through the media and the public maintained the ability to function in the middle of all this fear and terror because the media was there relaying our message. So they were very helpful to us.

-**Douglas Duncan**, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, D.C. Sniper Attacks, 2002

There were a lot of times during SARS where we were trying to balance you know being first, being credible and being right. And we at CDC made the conscious decision that our credibility was the most important thing. And so that honesty of 'we don't know, we're sorry we don't know, we feel terrible we don't know and that we're all in this predicament,' it's a much better message than trying to pretend that you know something when you don't or try to reassure people when there really is no foundation for the reassurance.

-Julie Gerberding, M.D., Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

The dreaded town-hall meeting

Facing your community in a town hall meeting or citizen's forum during a crisis may be the toughest communication task you do as a leader. Don't shirk this responsibility. If you are a government official you owe the members of your community the opportunity to meet with you.

However, don't convene a town hall meeting without preparation and practice. You can undo good community will by blowing this meeting. Remember, people who come to a town hall meeting are not a cross section of the community. They are usually the most angry or frightened. Here are the basic concepts for a successful meeting.

- **Let people talk.** Don't let your experts lecture. The more people talk, the more successful they'll judge the meeting.
- **Ask questions**. Wait for their questions before you offer solutions. You may be surprised to find out that what you think are the issues are, in fact, not their issues. The key is not to offer solutions to problems rather help the audience discover solutions.
- **Every person's input is met with respect**. At least they're willing to offer ideas. Never do anything to discourage participation.
- **Tell the truth**. Admit when you don't know something. And always follow up to get people the information they are seeking.
- **Don't lose your temper**. People show up angry usually if they have been hurt (even emotionally), feel threatened by risks out of their control, feel they are not respected, or have had their fundamental beliefs challenged. Set aside your anger. Instead strive to understand.

Despite all the risks you face as a leader in holding a town hall meeting, it should be done. You work for the people. So, keep your goals for the meeting in balance. It's not your job to have every person who is willing to shut off their TV and drive to the school gymnasium to leave that meeting happy. Sometimes your goal should be to listen, simply listen. And never promise what you can't deliver, no matter how easy it would be to do so in the moment. Under promise and over deliver.

No one willingly accepts a lecture, and seldom have lectures changed anyone's mind or behavior. Lecturing is easy—the lecturer gets to vent his or her emotions and doesn't have to take others' points of view into account. A lecture does not engage the audience. If I'm upset, I want to be heard. Limit opening remarks from you and your experts to 5 minutes. The audience isn't hearing you. They are thinking about what they want to say to you. Let them say it.

Telling is easy, asking is tougher. Asking questions is a deliberate action. It forces the process to slow down and forces everyone to stop and think before replying. Instead of attempting to persuade an individual or community group to take an action, allow them to persuade themselves through a self-discovery process. *The key is to not give the solution, but help your audience to discover its own solution.*

How do you help an audience discover its own answers? By asking the right questions.

Using feedback as your tool, you can ask the audience questions that will create awareness about the situation in such a way as to empower them to make a difficult choice. As many therapists will attest, a person who comes up with his own answer and says something in his own voice will take ownership of that idea. It's better for you to ask a leading question than to make an interpretation. The right questions can help an audience to make the necessary connections. This strengthens the audience's tendency to claim ownership for the insight.

☑ **Reality Check**: Sometimes people appear angry because they are advocates for a particular position on an issue. These people get angry when the cameras are focused on them. Sometimes people appear angry because they hope to litigate. It's OK to set rules and remind people that in your town hall meetings every one behaves respectfully if they want to be heard. Don't let hecklers take over. Remain calm and take a little more abuse than most people would expect you to take. Do that, and before you know it, the legitimately angry community members will soon come to your rescue, demanding that hecklers behave.

For example, if a severe communicable disease outbreak were to occur, a challenge for officials in emergency response and public health is the possibility that civil rights may need to be temporarily suspended to control the spread of disease. An extreme case would be the need to quarantine individuals or communities. It makes sense that a population that understands the need to quarantine will be more likely to uphold the curfews or quarantine requirements.

Questions to help people persuade themselves

- Start with broad, open-ended questions.
  Example: What challenges have (you or your community) faced that required consensus building to solve the problem? How did it go? What did you learn from those experiences? Were there difficult choices to make?
- Then, ask questions to discover the explicit wants, needs, and desires of your audience.
  Example: What is most important to (you or your community) when faced with a problem to solve? Consensus building? Putting the greater good for the greater number first? Avoiding conflict? That the solution is fair and equitably distributed? Ensuring that everyone has a voice and is heard? That reasonable alternatives are fully explored?
- Follow with questions that are more specific to the situation now being faced by the audience.
  Example: What are the ramifications to (you, your family, your community, the nation) when faced with this current problem? What conse-

I've had some very focused training and that's been extremely useful. One of the things that I do is carry around the short version of that training in my wallet, and periodically I do still find myself referring back to it when I'm jammed and know that I'm going to give some advice on a short notice. Being able to refer to that cheat sheet helps me organize my thoughts."

-**Julie Gerberding**, M.D., Director, CDC, SARS, 2003

quences are you hoping to avoid? What do you see as the worst out come for (you or your community)? What courses of action do you believe could mitigate this outcome?

- Then, ask questions that encourage audience members to state the benefits they would like to see result from a course of action. *Example*: What benefits would (you or your community) expect if this disease did not spread further? Since you've brought up quarantine, what benefits would (you or your community) expect if you accepted quarantine as a course of action to reduce spread of disease?
- Once the audience sees and expresses the benefits, it will be much easier to demonstrate how your strategy can solve the problem. *Example*: "From what I understand, you are looking for a way to protect (yourself, family, community) from more illness or death? If I can go ahead and explain how quarantine will meet those needs, are you open to implementing it? If you think quarantine would work in this effort, how do you see the quarantine being explained to the entire community and implemented?"

Allowing people to persuade themselves is not an easy process. Done poorly, it can seem condescending or manipulative. It takes practice and a great deal of empathy. However, it's worth the effort, because it is truly the most effective way to gain acceptance in thought and behavior.

How to de-escalate the conflict?

Start by trying to agree on issues that may not be core to the conflict—not the hot button issue that no one is willing to concede. Agree whenever you can. It is hard to attack someone who agrees with you. You don't have to concede a thing. Find the elements that bring some agreement among both groups. Set up guidelines for interaction and make an effort to "humanize" each side for the other.

- At all times, seek common principles on which to base a common dialogue.
- Remain open to reason and allow yourself to consider that you might be wrong.
- Strive for fairness in the process, especially where a real or perceived inequity has occurred.
- Work to get input from *all* stakeholders.
- Leave the community or population better off than how you found it.
- Decision makers in the community should have access to open and complete scientific information.

Try to get as many "yeses" as you can. If someone says, "Your proposal is totally unrealistic," try this response: "Are you saying that you don't see how my proposal can (respect citizens' rights and stop the spread of disease)?" When the person says "yes," this transforms the relationship. Each question you offer that allows a "yes" answer from the other side further reduces the tension.

Town hall meetings were often held in schools. When people would scream, interrupt and bully, I would point out that we were in a school building and that this was no way to set an example.

-Rudolph Giuliani,
Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book *Leadership*

Don't say "yes, but"—say "yes, and"
Typically, people express their differences by prefacing their responses with, "but." The other group will be more receptive if you first acknowledge their views with a "yes" and then preface your view with an "and." *Example*: "Yes, we want to protect people's rights and we want to keep them alive to enjoy those rights."

Media Law

It's helpful to understand what legal rights the media have or do not have, especially when confronting a crisis. Consult a media law expert if you have doubts about restrictions or special access you may want to offer the media in a crisis. It's also a good idea to articulate, before the crisis, the principles of public information you embrace. For example, CDC holds the following as standards for releasing information to the public either directly or through the media. (See box below)

The First Amendment: The founding fathers gave the free press protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors.

Media's right to acquire news: The media have the constitutional right to acquire news from any source by any lawful means. The media are given no constitutional right to special access. They have the right to know what the public has the right to know. Case law supports that the media do not have the right to special access to crime scenes, disaster scenes, police stations, hospital labs and other places consistently restricted to public access. The media's access may be restricted if it interferes with legitimate law enforcement actions. The media may have access to what is available and open to the public historically. What does that mean to your hospitals, jails, courtrooms, meeting rooms?

The following are CDC's principles of communication regarding the public's right to know:
CDC will make available timely and accurate information-through proactive news releases or in response to specific requests-so that the public, Congress, and the news media may assess and understand its scientifically based health information and programs.

- Final reports, information, and recommendations will be made fully and readily available.
- Communication will be open, honest, and based on sound science, conveying accurate information.
- Information will not be withheld solely to protect CDC or the government from criticism or embarrassment.
- Information will be released consistent with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- Prevention messages will be based on supportable scientific data and sound behavioral and communication research principles. At all times, health messages will remain scientifically valid and accurate. CDC will honor embargo agreements with standards of peer-reviewed periodicals in the scientific and medical communities.
- Targeted health messages will be sensitive to language and cultural differences and community norms.

What surprised me and frustrated me was that everyone didn't understand right away how important it was to connect with the public. The public has to be a partner, and you have to get the public, again, to do that single behavior that is going to keep them safe.

-**Ivan Walks, M.D.,** Health Director, Washington D.C., Anthrax, 2001

I think once again you have to recognize that if there's no information, if there is a vacuum of information, it is likely to be filled with speculation and with incorrect messaging. It's tougher to take down the incorrect messages that are out there, to replace them with the correct messages. So I think it's important that you recognize the importance of speed. Let the public into the process, let them understand how the information is gathered.

John Agwunobi, M.D., State Health Director, Florida, Anthrax, 2001

Media's right to publication: Once the media obtain information the ability to restrict the publication of that information is severely limited. It requires a heavy burden to prevent or prohibit publication.

Assisting the media: The media have the right to access what the public has a right to, nothing more. If you invite the public onto private property, without permission by the owner, you could be inviting civil liability.

Employees access to the media: Freedom of speech is constitutionally protected, if public value outweighs detrimental impact. Think whistleblower. However, the employee may be required to first follow the chain of command before choosing to go public with his or her information.

Right to know versus need to know
When releasing information, elected officials and civil servants must weigh the public's right to know against the need for national security and individual privacy. Citizens expect to know how their money is being spent and how these resources are being used. They have a "right to know" about the government's activities.

The public's right to know is not strictly a legal concept supported by the Constitution or an act of Congress. Instead, it is a concept promoted by officials in all branches of our government as the proper approach to the disclosure of information because the government depends on the support of those it governs.

Keeping certain sensitive information secret is of paramount importance to the defense and operation of a government. The "need to know" concept is used to keep sensitive information in the hands of those whose duties require its use and away from potential enemies of the United States (Holsinger, 1991).

Definitions and Processes

Detention is the temporary holding of a person; ship; aircraft; or other carrier, animal, or thing. The length and location of detention is determined by the CDC director.

Isolation is the separation of a person or group of persons from other persons except the health care staff on duty in such a manner as to prevent the spread of infection. This isolation is for the period of communicability of infected persons or animals from others in such placed and under such conditions as to prevent or limit the direct or indirect transmission of the infectious agent from those who are susceptible or those who may spread the agent to others.

Quarantine restricts the activities of well persons or animals exposed to communicable disease during its period of communicability in order to

prevent disease transmission during the incubation, if infection should occur. There are two types of quarantine:

Absolute or complete quarantine limits the freedom of movement of those exposed to a communicable disease for a period of time not longer than the longest usual incubation period of that disease, in such a manner as to prevent effective contact with those not so exposed.

Modified quarantine is the selective, partial limitation of freedom of movement of contacts, commonly on the basis of known or presumed differences in susceptibility and related to the danger of disease transmission. This type is designed to meet such specific situations as the exclusion from school, exemption of those known to be immune, restriction of military to post, etc. This includes personal **surveillance** and **segregation**, defined as the following:

Surveillance of a person is the temporary supervision of someone who may have or has been exposed to a communicable disease. It is the practice of close medical or other supervision of contacts in order to permit prompt recognition of infection or illness but without restricting their movements.

A **surveillance order** is a notification delivered to a person who may have been exposed to a communicable disease, advising him or her of the potential exposure, the need for surveillance of the individual, the authority to perform the surveillance, and providing compliance instructions for the person being placed under surveillance. Instructions may include information about the symptoms, actions should symptoms occur, who to contact if the person relocates, time period of surveillance, penalty for noncompliance, etc.

Segregation is the separation of some part of a group, persons, or domestic animals from others for special consideration, control, or observation. Segregation includes removal of susceptible children to the homes of immune persons, or the establishment of a sanitary boundary (to protect the uninfected from infected portions of a population).

A *cordon sanitaire* is a sanitary cord or line around a quarantined area guarded to prevent the spread of disease by restricting passage into or out of the area.

These concepts may be critical in the response to suspected or confirmed large-scale bioterrorist events. Questions about people with active cases of illness and those who may be incubating the disease and infectious agent would have to be considered to protect non-exposed healthy people.

The public health response, timing, and degree of the response would depend on the following aspects of the outbreak:

- Number of cases and exposed persons
- Associated illness and death from the disease (severity of the disease)

Leaders ought to be as accurate as they can be about projections and, if they are going to err, make it on the side of underpromising.

-Rudolph Giuliani,
Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book *Leadership*

- Ease and rapidity of the spread of the disease (some spread so easily that these disease control measures may not be feasible).
- The degree of movement in and out of a community (how isolated the community may or may not be).
- Resources needed to separate sick or exposed people from well people
- Risk for public panic.

For individuals who are sick, the appropriate response may be isolation (home or congregate settings) and respiratory isolation. Sick people would need to be monitored to detect new cases and monitor disease treatment.

Keeping fit for duty in a crisis

People who respond to crises are typically extremely committed individuals who think of others before themselves. While it is precisely their generous outlook that calls them to this work, it is imperative that they—and those who care for them—be encouraged to pay close attention to *their* physical and emotional well-being.

> ☑ **Reality Check**: Research indicates that after more than 24 hours without sleep, job performance is roughly equivalent to that of someone who's legally drunk!

Remember that your response efforts are a gift of yourself—your time and your caring—that you couldn't give if you, too, were a victim. Few of us have experience with mass death or destruction. Workers need to understand and appreciate the intensity of their emotions, and those of others.

Although workers may function in superhuman ways during a disaster operation, the stress associated with this work takes its toll. Workers get tired, confused, hurt, and scared. It is critical for both the workers and those they are trying to help them understand the effects of stress and make an effort to deal with it.

Stress-relieving activities are not as difficult or time-consuming as we may think. A 15-minute walk, talking to someone, taking a "brain break" by going out to dinner or a movie, or just using deep breathing exercises, can significantly reduce stress.

During the operation, it's important to eat nutritional foods, avoid drinking large amounts of caffeine and alcohol, get some exercise whenever possible, and get as much sleep as possible.

Spokesperson resources—think redundancy

If the media interest is intense or enduring—what you'd expect in a crisis—stagger your spokespersons, too. Fatigue creates mistakes. Attempt to arrange interviews when you are most fresh (e.g., not at the end of a shift). Reduce stress with lots of support from the public information officer.

Initially in a crisis, a top leader may need to do a number of media avail-

> *We have done a lot of post-sniper training with our police department about the importance of communicating with the public, about the importance of working with the media. If you're not helping [the media] do their job they will question the job you're doing and that will lead to public distrust and start to make everything collapse.*
>
> -Douglas Duncan, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland, D.C. Sniper Attacks, 2002

abilities (think press conferences), especially at the community level if the status of the event is variable. However, as the crisis evolves, top leaders should expect to do no more than four separate TV interviews in a day, along with 2 or 3 telephone interviews if they're not too in-depth. That pace, however, can not be sustained day after day, and an organization director or hands-on leader of the response can't afford to do continuous interviews. You must save the big guns for important moments when the public expects to hear from a real policy-maker or decision-maker. If possible, substitute lower-level organization leaders or subject matter experts for more routine interview requests. The director should be reserved for the greatest possible reach and for pivotal moments. Overexposure of the top director may lead to accusations of grandstanding or perceived power struggles.

The media would love unlimited access to exclusive in-person interviews. Use your assets wisely and save leaders for the times that they're really needed.

Decision-making would be easy if it were always a choice between good and evil or right and wrong. In the real world, leaders have to make decisions . . . usually between two or more imperfect remedies.

-**Rudolph Giuliani**, Mayor, New York City, 2001, from his book *Leadership*

CERC: Leader Pre-event Checklist

The following are keys to successful crisis communication. Discuss these with your communication director.

I know:

- ❑ Public information and media response is perceived by us as critical to our operational success
- ❑ Spokespersons (by topic) are identified and trained (e.g., empathy, honesty, commitment)
- ❑ Crisis Communication plan is integrated into overall operational plan
- ❑ A written procedure and agreement on clearance procedures is in place
  - ❑ These clearance procedures take 15 minutes or less to accomplish
  - ❑ These clearance procedures ensure accurate information is released
  - ❑ These clearance procedures have been tested in drills/exercises
  - ❑ These clearance procedures allow for authority delegation to speed response
- ❑ Contact information (including after hours) for primary media is handy to all who need it
- ❑ Adequate manpower and equipment is set aside to keep a 24-hour media operation going for up to 10 days
- ❑ Our information telephone number (hotline) for public inquiries is ready with trained operators
- ❑ Our response partners are identified and know our communication role and expectations
- ❑ Our stakeholders are identified and know how we will respond directly to them
- ❑ We have the capability of holding a national press conference if needed
- ❑ We can monitor media reports and public inquiries for rumors and respond to rumors in real time
- ❑ Strategic National Stockpile communication tools are in place
- ❑ Our emergency response plan notifies the communication director in first wave of calls/pages
- ❑ As an important stakeholder, we know our elected officials will want to communicate to constituents about this crisis and we have a plan to ensure a consistent message is delivered to the public
- ❑ Our Internet site can post media and public information materials within 45 minutes of final clearance
- ❑ We have an accountability plan to public/media about resource allocations during and after the crisis such as a web page that shows where disaster response funds are going that is updated routinely
- ❑ We can conduct a meaningful town hall meeting during crisis recovery
- ❑ All potential incident command or department leaders are fully trained in Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication and understand their role as a spokesperson

CERC: Crisis Leader—First Message

Build credibility with these 6 emergency message components:

1. Expression of empathy (e.g., understand you are hurt, confused, anxious, frightened):

_____

_____

2. Clarifying facts (Fill in only VERIFIED facts, skip if not certain):

   Who_____

   What (Action)_____

   Where_____

   When_____

   Why_____

   How_____

3. What we don't know:_____

_____

4. Process to get answers:_____

_____

5. Statement of commitment:_____

_____

6. **Referrals (If possible, skip if not yet ready):**

   For more information_____
   Next scheduled update_____

Finally, check your message for the following:

Positive action steps	Avoid jargon
Honest/open tone	Avoid judgmental phrases
Say "we" not "I"	Avoid humor
Careful with early promises (can you do it?)	Avoid extreme speculation

Delivered: _____**Time** _____ **Date**

CERC: First Response to Media Inquiries

By phone to media:

- ❑ "We've just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- ❑ "All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I'm not going to speculate about the cause of the incident." How can I reach you when I have more information?"
- ❑ "I'm not the authority on this subject Let me have XXXX call you right back."
- ❑ "We're preparing a statement on that now. Can I fax it to you in about two hours?"
- ❑ "You may check our web site for background information and I will fax/e-mail you with the time of our next update."

At incident site or press availability:
Response to Inquiries (you are authorized to give out the following information)

Date: _____
Time: _____
Approved by: _____

This is an evolving emergency and I know that—just like we do—you want as much information as possible right now. I wish I could answer all of your questions here. While we work to get your questions answered as quickly as possible, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now:

☑ At approximately, _____ (time), a (brief description of what happened)
_____

☑ At this point, we do not know the number of _____ (persons ill, persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.).

☑ We have a system (plan, procedure, operation) in place for just such an emergency and we are being assisted by _____ (e.g., police, FBI, EOC) as part of that plan.

The situation is (under)(not yet under) control and we are working with (local, State, Federal) authorities to (e.g., contain this situation, determine how this happened, determine what actions may be needed by individuals and the community to prevent this from happening again).

We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within _____(amount of time, 2 hours or less) to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided. We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency. **For more information**: _____

CERC: Stakeholder Reaction Assessment

Stakeholder group _____

Importance to success of communication in this incident (circle):
Least 1 2 3 4 5 Most

Advocate _____ Adversary_____Ambivalent_____

Importance of this stakeholder group?

_____

Likely initial reaction? _____

What would cause a change in position?

_____

Key messages: _____

_____

Key contacts: _____

Opportunities for feedback: _____

_____

Agreed on strategies to inform/involve stakeholders:

_____

Products to provide: _____

_____

Contact updates: _____

Date, with whom, and how: _____

_____

CERC: Media Expectations in a Crisis

What do the media expect from you and your organization? No one can satisfy all desires from the media. So ask them what they expect.

- ❒ They expect equal access to information.
- ❒ They expect you to honestly answer their questions.
- ❒ They expect timely release of information.
- ❒ They expect you to squash rumors quickly or they will continue to report the speculation.
- ❒ They expect you to commit to a schedule for media availabilities.
- ❒ They expect your organization to provide subject matter experts if you want an official view reported.
- ❒ They expect their calls to be returned.
- ❒ They expect that what you tell them is accurate or you'll tell them that the information is preliminary and could change.
- ❒ They expect you to tell them if you do not have an answer and explain the process you're using to get it.
- ❒ They expect a consistent message from your organization and your partners in the response.
- ❒ They expect you to have some modicum of understanding about how the news business works.
- ❒ They expect to be treated with respect.

You can meet their expectations if you have a communication plan and sufficient resources committed to public information and media relations.

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CERC by Leaders for Leaders was adapted from the HHS/CDC ***Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication*** course book and from 2 years of course lecture by Barbara Reynolds, CDC Crisis Communication Specialist. The full text book (267 pages) is available at www.phf.org/bookstore.

Suggested further readings

Reynolds, B., Hunter Galdo, J., & Sokler, L. (2002). Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.phf.org/bookstore

Journal of Health Communication. Special Issue: Public Health Communication During the September 2001 Bioterrorism-Related Anthrax outbreaks: CDC Activities and Lessons Learned Volume 8, Supplement 1, 2003

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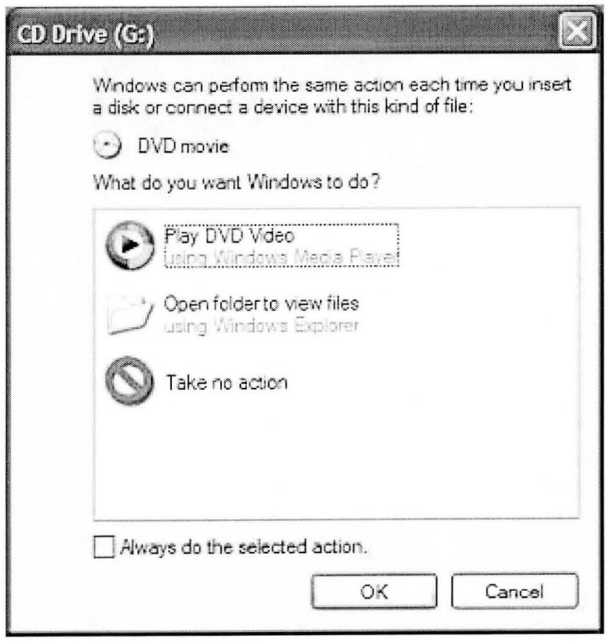
Playing DVD's from your PC

DVD is an acronym for **digital video disc** or **digital versatile disc**, an optical disk storage technology that has become enormously popular. These discs can store video, audio, and computer data. Movies are stored on DVD in **DVD-Video** format. Your Windows 2000/XP-based computer can play DVDs as well, if it's got a supported DVD drive and a supported DVD decoder installed.

When you insert a DVD movie into your DVD drive for the first time, you'll be prompted to play the DVD movie, as shown in the figure below.



If you select the **Always do the selected action** check box, you won't see this dialog box again when inserting a DVD. Click **Play DVD Video**, and then click **OK** to start Windows Media Player and start the playback.

At this point, one of two things will happen. Either your movie will begin to play right away, or you will get a Windows Media Player error message, saying that a compatible DVD decoder is not installed on your computer, so the DVD will not be played.

If you get this message, you need a DVD decoder. If you bought a PC equipped with a DVD drive, check with the computer manufacturer or with your IT personnel to install the appropriate player.