

## **MORE POWERFUL THAN A PANIC BUTTON or MANAGING YOUR UNWANTED MEDIA MOMENTS AND MESSAGING**

If your station has ever had to manage a crisis, you know the true meaning of “the power of the press.” If your station hasn’t, may it ever be so. Either way, establishing a plan that details the PR messaging and who’s doing the talking will improve your ability to respond to a crisis coherently, cohesively and even with some positive spin.

=====

### **Scenarios:**

- Your general manager gets fired. Or suddenly retires.
- Congress initiates cuts to public broadcasting funding.
- Your transmitter tower goes down in a storm...and your over-the-air viewers won’t be able to see you for months.
- A volunteer spills the beans about your station to the press.
- A program airs on your station...it’s about a contentious social topic and it offers two opposite perspectives ...and it doesn’t air when viewers expect it. Consequently, there’s an uproar..in several papers...by a radio talk show host...and by a local blogger.
- Your budget’s not balancing: staff are going to be laid off and there’ll be a significant change in your programming. Or worse...your station is threatened with foreclosure.

### **Whether it’s a crisis created within our station’s realm, a natural disaster, or a PBS hand-me-down, the sooner we gather our wits and:**

- designate a crisis management team,
- anticipate reaction,
- map out a response plan and timeline, and
- begin to implement it...
- the better off we are.

### **Our bad news can appear in so many places now (viralness of the electronic age):**

- Calls, e-mail or letters to the station
- Newspaper articles or cartoon or op-ed or letter to the editor
- Radio and TV stories in your market
- Organizations with strong viewpoint rally members
- Posted on website or blog
  - Voice and images can be captured and preserved for posterity online, and viewed by anyone anytime, over and over again.

### **Tactics for managing crises have changed:**

- **Holding your cards close** and your lips sealed to ward off media moments is an old strategy that drains an organization, and leaves it vulnerable to further stress.
- The **new and better strategy** is to manage your station's message in a manner that appears transparent and open, and is directed internally within your organization as well as externally.

### **Framework for a plan:**

1. **Plan for likely scenarios.** Many situations aren't a surprise and can be anticipated.
2. **Flag potential problems** before they escalate. Monitor chatter.
3. **Know what's on the minds of your station's stakeholders...and adversaries.** Build bridges with supporters and detractors. Know who you can contact for support and "information correction" on both fronts.
4. **Identify staff spokesperson(s)** to talk with the media, and train them on how to respond to newspaper reporters, radio reporters, and television reporters. Make sure they have their message points in hand.
5. **Keep your organization informed** and let them know who can respond to their questions and concerns. This will reduce the whisper-down-the-lane effect.
6. **Get ready.** Get message points in place. Test them. Decide how to disseminate them internally and externally: press release, media calls, website, e-message.