

Five Ways to Face Down a Crisis and Survive, Reputation Intact

“As my mom said, ‘Your reputation is all you really have,’” says Jan Smith, principal, Castle Rock Ranch Group, LLC (Loudonville, NY), and consultant in reputation management. And while protecting your organization’s reputation can be challenging when hit with a crisis, Smith shares five specific ways to behave and tools to use to keep your reputation as unblemished as possible:

Be genuine. The first most important thing is to recognize the people affected. Smith says it’s about acting the way you normally would if you weren’t on the spot. “It’s normal behavior to ask how people are doing or offer condolences. We just don’t always remember those things in the moment.”

Start with the truth. “It’s important to say what you do know and not say what you don’t know. Remember, sometimes, ‘I don’t know’ is the truth,” says Smith.

Utilize spokespeople accordingly. In a major crisis, the community is going to want to hear from the highest-ranking person. Train these key people for this role. After initial comments, another spokesperson can take over, so long as that person remains consistent. The spokesperson can state how your organization’s leader is working on the matter and is in regular contact. Seeing the same person provides credibility and comfort in a crisis.

Formalize feedback. Create a feedback group to regularly contact the media so reporters don’t have to constantly track you down for answers, reducing reporters’ frustration.

Be aware of your environment. The right approach can depend on cultural aspects specific to your environment.