**Crisis Communications – the Emotionally Intelligent Leader**

Updates and opinions on the COVID-19 crisis and its economic consequences are hitting the public faster than most know how to process and react to. The effects and missing context created by social distancing and virtual/written communications can compound the problem.

Communicating in complex and emotionally charged environments requires emotional intelligence.Uncertainty amplifies fear and survival-based mindsets and behaviors***.* Rule number one in communicating through crisis is to deliver valuable information that will help audiences make the best choices.**

Below are a few suggestions

1. **SELF-AWARENESS** A leader’s ability to “tune in” to her own fears, concerns, unknowns and complexities to transcend them is fundamental. It is the leader’s job to acknowledge and then release self-concern to provide actionable information for constituents.
2. **AUDIENCE-AWARENESS** Every group has varying needs, priorities, perspectives and ability to respond to information. Any messaging should have a clear purpose, a clear understanding of the group’s ability to take actionable behavior. Messaging development should anticipate potential misunderstanding and deliver as much clarity as possible.
3. **FACTS (even unpleasant ones) ARE YOUR FRIEND** While the facts don’t change, the needs and abilities of people to use them effectively will vary. Rely on your experts to provide **accurate**, **concise, digestible** and **relevant** data, even speaking directly to your audience where appropriate. (“Data” presupposes that information is *credible and verifiable*, and *useful*.)
4. **POSITIONALITY DOES NOT UNIFY** The leader’s job is to guide others through difficulty. Crisis communications are not the forum to espouse beliefs, position information, assert foresight, or put simply, to “be right” about how we got here. Keep editorializing to your most trusted advisors, and provide digestible, actionable information for your audiences to carry through.
5. **COMMUNICATE IN THE ABSENCE OF INFORMATION** NC=MSU is a simple mantra for leadership communications. It means, with **N**o **C**ommunication, (people) **M**ake “**S**tuff” **U**p. In an uncertain environment, complete command of data is often unlikely, if not impossible, so do not let too much time go by without communicating. Avoid committing to knowledge you do not have or making assurances based on incomplete information.
6. **WORDS MATTER** Sensitivity to word choices are fundamental to effective communication. With social distancing measures, **word choice matters more than ever.** Notice the tendency to use metaphor and assumption and consider how this could impact the engagement and behaviors of your audience. Two simple examples: (1) references like “bloodbath” to emphasize market conditions carries emotional images and (2) asserting that we are “entering a depression” can create scarcity behaviors that can tip toward an undesirable outcome.
7. **EMPATHY**   
   Emotionally intelligent leaders discern that delivering information that anticipates what people feel and need is different than managing the emotions of their listeners. False hope, sugar-coating/spin, ambiguity and overpromising can be debilitating to both trust and outcomes in the long run. Sometimes the empathetic answer is a difficult one; delivering the message as compassionately and as factually as possible is the balance the emotionally intelligent leader is seeking.

**Need to deliver a crisis communication? Ask yourself these questions:**

* 1. What are this group’s conditions, perspectives, needs, fears and concerns?
  2. What are my own fears, concerns, uncertainties and pressures that could unintentionally skew a factual delivery?
  3. What is the purpose of my communication; i.e. what do I need them to “do” with the message I am giving them?
  4. What information is critical for this group to take appropriate action?
  5. What channel, video, audio, email, text, press release, intranet etc.…is the most accessible for my listeners and appropriate for my delivery style?

Last but certainly not least, offer resources and feedback channels for continued updates, give listeners the chance to voice concerns and to rely upon your guidance.