

PUBLIC RELATIONS CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed to assist you in creating a crisis communications program for your hotel.

Each hotel is responsible for deciding who is on the crisis management team and for ensuring that this manual is distributed to each member of that team. The last section (contact and telephone numbers) should be regularly updated by whomever is made responsible for co-ordinating the crisis management team; we recommend that the General Manager holds this responsibility. We also recommend that a copy of this manual is kept at each member's home, as well as in their office.

Section 1	Preparation for crisis communications
Section 2	Examples of crisis and how to handle them
Section 3	Important telephone numbers – to be updated for each hotel / region

The Time to Prepare for a Crisis is NOW!

In uncertain times, hotel properties, management companies and brand marketing teams are well advised to examine their procedures for responding to the media and other key audiences should a crisis situation arise on property. A crisis communications program has to be in place.

Crisis preparedness is essential for protecting a property or brand's image and safeguarding its reputation as a safe and welcoming travel destination. Although terrorist incidents have dominated the recent news, there are many kinds of crisis that can impact a property's ability to service guests and conduct or build business, such as:

- Fire
- Labour strikes or unrest
- Kidnapping or hostage-taking
- Assault or other crimes committed on, or by, hotel personnel or line staff
- Natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes or floods

The following guidelines should get you started on the road to adequate preparedness.

The Importance of a Plan

Crisis management is a field endeavour unto itself, and the surest way to stay prepared is to work with a specialist to create a program that meets your needs. Short of that, start by creating a communications plan that enables your team to respond in a rational, systematic and effective way should a crisis situation arise. here are some elements that such a plan should include:

1. A clear chain of command among responsible management and staff

In the event of a crisis, it should be clear who is designated to investigate and gather the facts, who will report to whom, and who will serve as the property's liaison to guests, employees and the media. Participants in this group may include the property's General Manager, marketing personnel, human resources and department heads.

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2. Lists of critical phone numbers, fax and e-mail contact information

Every member of the group should be able to reach and talk to any other member at a moment's notice, including in the event of a power outage. Relevant members of the group should also have direct contact information for important off-property individuals who may become important players, such as property owners, police and fire authorities, federal authorities, lawyers and key vendors.

3. Designating of a spokesperson to handle media inquiries – and media relations training

Hotels are diffuse operations, with dozens, hundreds or even thousands of individuals working on property at any given time. Every hotel or corporate brand management team should have one or two individuals who are solely responsible for speaking to the media on the property's behalf at a time of crisis. The most important point is making sure that the property seeks to the public with a single voice – and that the voice is one of calm, reason and reassurance.

The best way of assuring reasoned, effective communication with the media is to provide training for your spokespeople from professionals who perform “media relations” for a living.

4. Understanding your audiences

While communicating with the media is important – and can be the “make or break” factor in managing a crisis successfully -, there are many other critical actors with whom you will want to communicate effectively at a time of crisis. These may include current and future guests, line staff and management personnel, stockholders or shareholders, local public officials and authorities, key vendors and families/associates of victims of a crisis.

In planning to confront a potential crisis in the future, make lists of these key audiences now, and up-date them regularly.

Understanding the Media

PR professionals earn their livelihood working with the media. Responding effectively in a crisis situation can be the most challenging task of all. While elaborating a comprehensive crisis media relations program could fill an entire book, here are a few basic principles:

1. Know your local media contacts personally

A crisis situation is no time to start winning friends and influencing people. By establishing good relationships with key media in your community – a sound and valuable practice for any hotel at any time -, you create an environment of trust and open communication should a crisis arise. This is key for assuring that the right facts are communicated to the public via the media, quickly, efficiently and comprehensively.

2. Let your lawyer, designated crisis team leader and/or spokesperson do the talking

Again, the principle is to speak with one voice – and make that voice the right one. Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to prepare written statements to guide spokespersons and to issue written statements to the press. Such statements should be drafted and carefully reviewed with legal, financial and other experts.

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3. Co-operate with the media, as with all investigating authorities – and never say “no comment”

The media has a job to do, and that job is reporting the facts and the news to the public. In a crisis situation, returning media calls promptly and being forthcoming will let reporters know that you want to help them do their job – and the likely result of that is balanced, fair coverage.

In a crisis situation, designated spokespersons with a clear understanding of the facts and the important messages to be conveyed should share information with reporters in a prudent but timely way, and should keep clear and concise records of what they say.

If the facts of the situation are not clear, journalists should be assured that all efforts are being made to get all the facts on table, and should be kept up-dated regularly. Saying “no comment” conveys a sense of arrogance or ignorance and prevents you from framing your story and getting the facts out as fully as possible. In contacts with the media, that phrase should be avoided at all costs.

Plan Ahead

These times demand vigilance, not only for the countries we are represented but for our business. Whereas for a nation the price of lax preparedness can be compromised security, for a hotel it can be jeopardising your ability to communicate and market effectively to guests, potential guests and other sources of new business.

Thinking about crisis preparedness now could save you time, energy – and lots of money – in the future.

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I. SECTION 1

2.2 COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

Journalists are a major source of help in marketing the hotels and the Group and the PR department devotes much time and energy in developing good relationships with them. During a time of crisis, they should not be treated as “the enemy” but should be treated with respect and co-operation. Once the news has broken, journalists will be looking for a story – not just that fact that it has happened. This manual on communication in a crisis is a guideline for controlling the amount and sources of information.

The general principles of dealing with the media apply during a time of crisis and can be summarised in the following points:

1. Treat contact with the journalists as an opportunity rather than a threat. The occasion can be used to present the Group as a responsible member of the service industry with concern for the safety and comfort of the guests being of paramount importance.
2. The spokesperson (*only specific, select employees*) must always be available to respond to the media even if it is only with a holding statement. We highly recommend that only the General Manager is assigned to be the official spokesperson of the hotel. No other staff is allowed to make comments to the media in any form in a crisis. It is imperative that GM's make sure staff don't talk to the press in such a situation.
3. The spokesperson has a responsibility to be aware of what is happening, especially during a crisis when events move quickly.
4. All statements must be considered as “on the record” and liable to be published. Care should be taken when making any comment either written or spoken.
5. Communicate clearly without the use of jargon or complicated technical language.
6. Depending on the importance of the crisis, always take contact with the Head Office first and co-ordinate with the relevant executives (Crisis Team MH&R) the appropriate strategy to deal with the media (defined statements, defined Language Regulation) etc.
7. Inform the relevant executive(s) at corp. Head Office constantly about the development of the crisis information and recorded contacts and statements to the media.

We highly recommend that the GM do practice runs, as they do with fire drills, on actually preparing and giving a media briefing.

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II. SECTION 2

EXAMPLE CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANS

This form indicates how crisis plans can be prepared and completed.

3.1 General Frame for Crisis:

CRISIS	Brief description of potential crisis
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	<p>Name of one spokesperson and backups in order of priority with all contact phone numbers. Include home phone and out of hours contacts, name and extension numbers of secretaries.</p> <p>(Note: the spokesperson does not have to be an expert on the technical details of the crisis, but he/she should be kept informed by the rest of the company of events, and remain available to the media throughout the crisis.</p>
STATEMENT	An outline statement in response to the crisis (Language Regulation) to be used as a basis for all public comment. The outline should be approved. If there is time, the first statement should also be approved by Head Office before being used. this should be a holding statement until more facts are known. The second statement should also be approved by Head Office.
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	Names, phone numbers and addresses of all individuals and organisations to be informed in the earliest stages of a crisis and to be kept updated during the progress.
CRISIS TEAM	<p>A crisis team should be designed to handle each major crisis. While this team should be put together in co-ordination with operations, a list, including phone numbers, should be included here.</p> <p>A central meeting point or crisis centre should be designated in each hotel where the team can meet.</p>
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	An outline action plan for communications during the crisis.
OTHER INFORMATION	Legal, cultural or operational implications which may affect the crisis should be noted.

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3.1. EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: FIRE IN THE HOTEL

CRISIS	Fire in the hotel
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General Manager 2. Resident Manager 3. PR Manager
STATEMENT	<p>“At around XX am/pm, a fire broke out in one of the guest rooms. The fire services department were called immediately. A guest, who was found in the room, has been taken to hospital and has been reported in satisfactory condition. His family has been advised.</p> <p>The hotel’s fire and smoke alarm system was activated and, following practices which are frequently rehearsed in regular fire drills, the hotel staff had the situation under control before the arrival of the fire brigade. The fire department is now at the scene. The cause of the fire has not yet been identified.</p> <p>Some smoke escaped into the hotel’s ventilation system, but there is no danger and guests have not been evacuated. The situation has now returned to normal.”</p>
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	<p>Fire Brigade Police General Manager Resident Manager Chief Security Officer Assistant Manager Head Office, Regional Office</p> <p>Guest’s next of kin Embassy</p>
CRISIS TEAM	<p>Resident Manager Chief Engineer In-house Fire Fighting Team Operator PR Manager</p>
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	-
OTHER INFORMATION	-

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3.2. EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: FOOD POISONING

CRISIS	Food Poisoning
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	1. General Manager 2. Resident Manager 3. PR Manager
STATEMENT	“A guest has been hospitalised with a stomach disorder. The guest has been taken to hospital where he is currently undergoing treatment and is in XXX condition. We are in close contact with the medical authorities.”
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	General Manager Food & Beverage Manager Executive Chef Health Department Hotel Doctor Guest’s next of kin (if serious)
CRISIS TEAM	General Manager Resident Manager Executive Chef F&B Manager PR Manager
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	Issue statement only in response to query. All calls to be referred to the spokesperson. Make all efforts to contact next of kin as soon as possible. Senior management representative should visit guest and send flowers. A note of sympathy may be sent , but it should not in any way accept responsibility. i.e. “I am so sorry to learn that you are not well. Please let me know if there is anything we can do for you or if there is anyone whom you would like us to contact”. NOT “I am sorry that you believe you contracted food poison in our restaurant. This is most unfortunate or I am looking into it immediately ... “.
OTHER INFORMATION	-

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3.3. EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: DEATH OF GUEST (accidental or suicide)

CRISIS	Death of guest (accidental or suicide)
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	1. General Manager 2. Resident Manager 3. PR Manager
STATEMENT	“The body of a guest was found in one of the hotel’s rooms this morning. The police and the relevant embassy have been notified and we are currently trying to contact the guest’s next of kin. The matter is in the hands of the police who are currently at the hotel and have asked us in the interest of their inquiries, to provide no more information than we have been able to give you.”
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	General Manager Police Medical Mortuary Services Head Office / Regional Office Guest’s next of kin Embassy or Consulate
CRISIS TEAM	General Manager Resident Manager Chief Security Officer Assistant Manager Rooms Executive Housekeeper PR Manager
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	Maintain discretion Make all efforts to contact next of kin as soon as possible unless police are doing this. No speculation should be made as to cause of death. No name or details of the guest should be given.
OTHER INFORMATION	-

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3.4. EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: LIFT FAILURE OR ACCIDENT

CRISIS	Lift Failure or accident
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	1. General Manager 2. Resident Manager 3. PR Manager
STATEMENT	“At 10 am today, one of the hotel’s guest lifts stopped between floors 17 and 17 for one hour. Two guests were in the lift when it stopped but were helped out by the hotel’s engineering staff within ten minutes. The lift company is checking all the lifts and the one in question will be returned to service shortly.”
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	General Manager Resident Manager Chief Engineer Lift company Head Office / Regional Office
CRISIS TEAM	General Manager Resident Manager Chief Engineer PR Manager
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	Prepare statement and issue only if there are questions asked.
OTHER INFORMATION	-

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EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: OVERBOOKING

CRISIS	Overbooking
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	1. General Manager 2. Resident Manager 3. PR Manager
STATEMENT	<p>“We regret that some of our guests have had to be accommodated in other hotels. This is a problem which sometimes occurs in the travel and hospitality industry due to delayed or missed flights or other changes to guests’ original departure times</p> <p>Transfer of the guests and their first night’s accommodation will be paid for by the Bavaria Hotel XYZ.”</p>
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	Rooms Division Manager General Manager Head Office, Regional Office PR Manager
CRISIS TEAM	General Manager Resident Manager Rooms Division Manager
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	<p>GM should be on the scene to discuss the matter on a case by case basis. A personal letter from the GM should be sent as soon as possible.</p> <p>Send letter of apology as follow up to guest and to travel agent/source of reservation. Ensure that travel agent is paid his commission anyway.</p>
OTHER INFORMATION	-

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EXAMPLE BRIEF for Crisis: INFECTIOUS DISEASE

CRISIS	Infectious disease in hotel staff (including AIDS)
DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON	1. General Manager
STATEMENT	<p>“One of our kitchen staff has been diagnosed as suffering from typhoid. He has immediately been relieved of his duties and is now undergoing treatment in hospital. The hotel medical doctors and the medical authorities are at the hotel and we are co-operating with them fully.”</p> <p>The Department of Health has been informed and has assured us that guests are not in danger of infection.”</p>
IMMEDIATE CONTACTS	General Manager Hotel Doctor Housekeeping F&B Manager
CRISIS TEAM	General Manager Personnel Manager PR Manager Hotel Doctor Department of Health
IMMEDIATE PR ACTION	Maintain discretion. There should be no statement unless there is an inquiry. Inform all relevant staff accordingly.
OTHER INFORMATION	<p>While ensuring guests of their continued safety, it is important that any implications of dismissal of the affected staff member be treated very carefully, especially in the case of infectious disease (AIDS).</p> <p><i>Note: previous experience in many countries with infectious diseases showed that all too often, employees (incl. GMs) “thought” the employee was infected with something only to find out later through medical analysis that it was something harmless.</i></p> <p><i>We therefore suggest that references to specific diseases and food poisoning causes are not labelled by name but that the press is referred to the respective health authorities.</i></p>

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III. SECTION 3

4.1 CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM CORPORATE HEAD OFFICE

TITLE	NAME	CONTACT
CEO		
Regional Director		
Area Manager		

4.2 CRISIS MANAGEMENT EMERGENCY CONTACTS

(Complete relevant data)

TITLE	NAME	CONTACT
Doctor		
Police		
Fire Department		
Ambulance		
PR Company		

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4.3 CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM HOTEL

(Complete relevant data)

TITLE	NAME	CONTACT
General Manager		
EAM		
Front Office Manager		
Food & Beverage Manager		
Executive Housekeeper		
Director of Engineering		
Director Sales & Marketing		
Security Chief Officer		
Director Human Resources		
Director Finance		