



A Resilient Partnership:

Crisis Communications and Public Relations

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It's a normal Wednesday morning in the Bursar's office. Your co-workers grab coffee and discuss the commute as you boot your computer. While accessing student tuition records, you notice the university's billing portal is malfunctioning. A prompt appears: **"Pay us \$5,000 in the next 24 hours or we'll release social security numbers."**

As the fall semester winds down, health services begins receiving an uptick in visits from students showing symptoms of meningitis. The university soon discovers **a meningitis outbreak has occurred in one of its dormitories**. Your administration faces angry parents and an inquisitive media as it deals with absent students, cancelled classes and a quarantined campus building.

A controversial speaker is hosting a rally on campus grounds. Student groups begin openly protesting the speaker's visit while outside interests, unaffiliated with the college, organize their own counter-protest. Pressure mounts as social media targets administration and **crowds of angry people start arriving on-site**. Campus police prepare for conflict.

What do these scenarios all have in common? And how do you successfully address them? The answer to both questions lies in the need for crisis communications strategies.

Communications strategies are a major part of crisis response, and stakeholders come from within and without: students, staff, their families, vendors, the authorities, the public, the media and so on. Navigating the questions and concerns—including the worry, anger or fear associated with a given event—can quickly escalate to the point of chaos.

The advent of social media has tangled the communications knot further, creating a digital platform of immediacy into which everyone can insert themselves as a crisis unfolds.

Organizations have varying levels of communications resources, expertise and time. Most are focused on everyday or anticipated communications needs, but readiness for the unexpected—and more specifically traumatic events—is often limited.

Preparing an organization for successful crisis response means investing in and understanding the power of communication. Partnering with external crisis consultants that specialize in public relations, crisis communications and the human impact of crisis enhances your internal crisis response team's ability to confidently and effectively address situations before, during and after a critical incident.

"Partnering with external crisis consultants enhances your ability to address critical incidents."

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