Do’s & Do Not’s of Crisis and Emergency Situations

[Expanded from information in Excellence in Business Communication, 3rd ed, by John Thill & Courtland Bovee, 10.]

Do’s

• Until you have accurate and complete details about a crisis, do respond with statements such as “This situation is serious and we are working to solve it as quickly as possible” or “We are investigating what happened and will respond as soon as we have the facts.” Then investigate and consider possible solutions and responses before issuing a statement.

• Do build positive community image.

• Do keep employees informed.

• Do arrange for trained counselors and other professionals as needed for nature of crisis to be available as soon as possible and for as long as needed.

• If a mistake is made in handling a crisis, address the mistake in a straight-forward manner and attempt to rectify it.

• Do thank employees and others (such as members of community) as appropriate.

• Do prepare for trouble. Identify potential problems in advance. Appoint and train a response team designated before a crisis occurs. Prepare and test a crisis management plan.

• Do set up a news center for company representatives and the media (equipped with phones, computers, and other electronic tools for preparing news releases).

• Do arrange for ways to communicate should electrical and phone lines be disrupted.

• Do prevent issuing conflicting statements. Provide continuity. Appoint a single person (trained in advance) to speak for the company.

• Do arrange for receptionists and employees, if appropriate, to direct all calls to the information center.

• Do tell the whole story—openly, completely, and honestly. At the same time, be careful about releasing sensitive information. If you are at fault, apologize.

• Do demonstrate the company’s concern by your statements and your actions.
**Do Not’s**

- Don’t blame anyone for anything.
- Don’t speculate in public about unknown facts.
- Don’t decline to answer questions.
- Don’t release information that will violate anyone’s right to privacy.
- Don’t use the crisis to pitch products or services.
- Don’t play favorites with media representatives.
- Don’t immediately assume a defensive stance. Such an approach is counterproductive. When responding to questions or initiating responses, don’t state “The situation was not our company’s fault” or “We are not legally responsible.”
- Don’t ignore impact of crisis on employees or community.