

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT - A PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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OVERVIEW

- Crisis and emergency communications is just like any other communications endeavour – only done with far less time, under far more demanding circumstances, with far less information and preparation, with much higher stakes, in a much more unforgiving environment...
- Emergency management is the province of the unknowable and unthinkable – so work in advance to try to know and control those variables within your power...
- Confidence is contagious – just like fear. And the measles. So inoculate yourself...



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

- Your community needs and expects it of you;
- Your job and reputation depends on it;
 - Research from Harvard and other universities indicates in North America, the majority of the populace form their overall view of government and leaders largely based on **crisis and emergency response** because that's the time when the general public pays the most attention to news / current events.
- The life you save may be your own...



OUTLINE

- Basic Tenets of Emergency Management
- Common Characteristics of Good Communications
- 6 Step Program
 - Make a Plan
 - Know Your Role
 - Get Some Tools and Training
 - Run an Exercise
 - Get Some Feedback
 - Commit to Improve
- Keys to Success, Helpful hints and free advice...



SOCIETAL TRENDS IMPACTING ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- **Increasing socio-economic complexity / vulnerability**

- Increasing interdependence and complexity means that small events can have unpredictable and catastrophic, cascading impacts and create often unforeseeable vulnerabilities
- “Whole of Society” impacts = Whole of Society Response
- Highly connected, Information addicted society

- **Increasing demands and expectations**

- Increasing dependence on external supports and entitlements
- Decreasing sense of personal responsibility / Decreasing awareness of risk and liability
- Expectation of perfect, personalized solutions

- **Finite resources / capacity**

- Discretionary vs non-discretionary funding dilemma
- Short term cost / benefit analysis
- Just in time delivery = often too late for need



HOW TO ADAPT AND SURVIVE: “THE 3 C’S”

- Communicate
 - Internal, External, Early, Often, Always, Carefully, Quickly, Completely...
- Collaborate
 - Before, during, and after events, across all sectors and interests
- Create a “Community”
 - Problem bringers can also be solution finders
 - Leverage “crisitunities” and “near misses”

BASIC TENETS OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. No amount of legislation or regulation can replace a **culture of cooperation and collaboration** in an emergency – so focus on **setting the conditions for successful collaboration under significant stress.**
2. Emergency Managers must work at the “**speed of trust**” to be successful, so invest heavily in **building your networks BEFORE** the event, and keep building them!
3. During an event, “open the tent wide” and **communicate, communicate, communicate!**
4. **Emergency Management is a PEOPLE Business!**

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD COMMUNICATIONS

- Clarity
- Brevity
- Accuracy
- Relevance
- Timeliness
- EMPATHY – you are talking to humans during an incredibly emotional event
- IMPACT – did it get someone to do something? Was it the thing you wanted?

MAKE A PLAN

- Your Public Communications plan should be part of your overall emergency management program
- **MULTIPLE CHANNELS TO REACH MAXIMUM AUDIENCE**
- Select, designate and train spokespersons beforehand
- Choose your spokesperson wisely...

KNOW YOUR ROLE

- Elected officials have a crucial role to play in both communicating out to public and back in to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- The Incident Commander and other technical experts must be prepared to brief IN PLAIN LANGUAGE.
- Ensure that you match up the authority, responsibility and the resources necessary to get your messages out
- Accept that you may not be the only / final source of information – or maybe you will...
- Resist the impulse to control all information all the time

GET SOME TOOLS AND TRAINING

- Leverage mass alerting / public information systems
 - Alberta Emergency Alert, social media, websites, broadcast, billboards – everything!
- Get some crisis communications training - not just key spokespeople, but for everyone!
 - AEMA has a Public Information Officers (PIO) Course
 - I'm guessing that there may be contractors out there that may be able to help as well...
- Ensure your tools are available in an emergency

RUN AN EXERCISE

- Best way to find the seams and gaps in your plan and training is to put it to the test against a realistic scenario
- Include a mock media availability and press release in any of your large scale exercises
- Include potential external stakeholders, like a key industrial partner or group
- Get some external feedback – especially from your target audiences
- Check your ego at the door...



COMMIT TO IMPROVE

- Act on feedback and seek continuous improvement
- Ensure that there is depth in your organization, if possible
- Try to make your crisis protocols follow or based on your routine as much as possible
 - Maximizes understanding and efficiency, while minimizing confusion



KEYS TO SUCCESS TO COMMUNICATING DURING A RESPONSE★

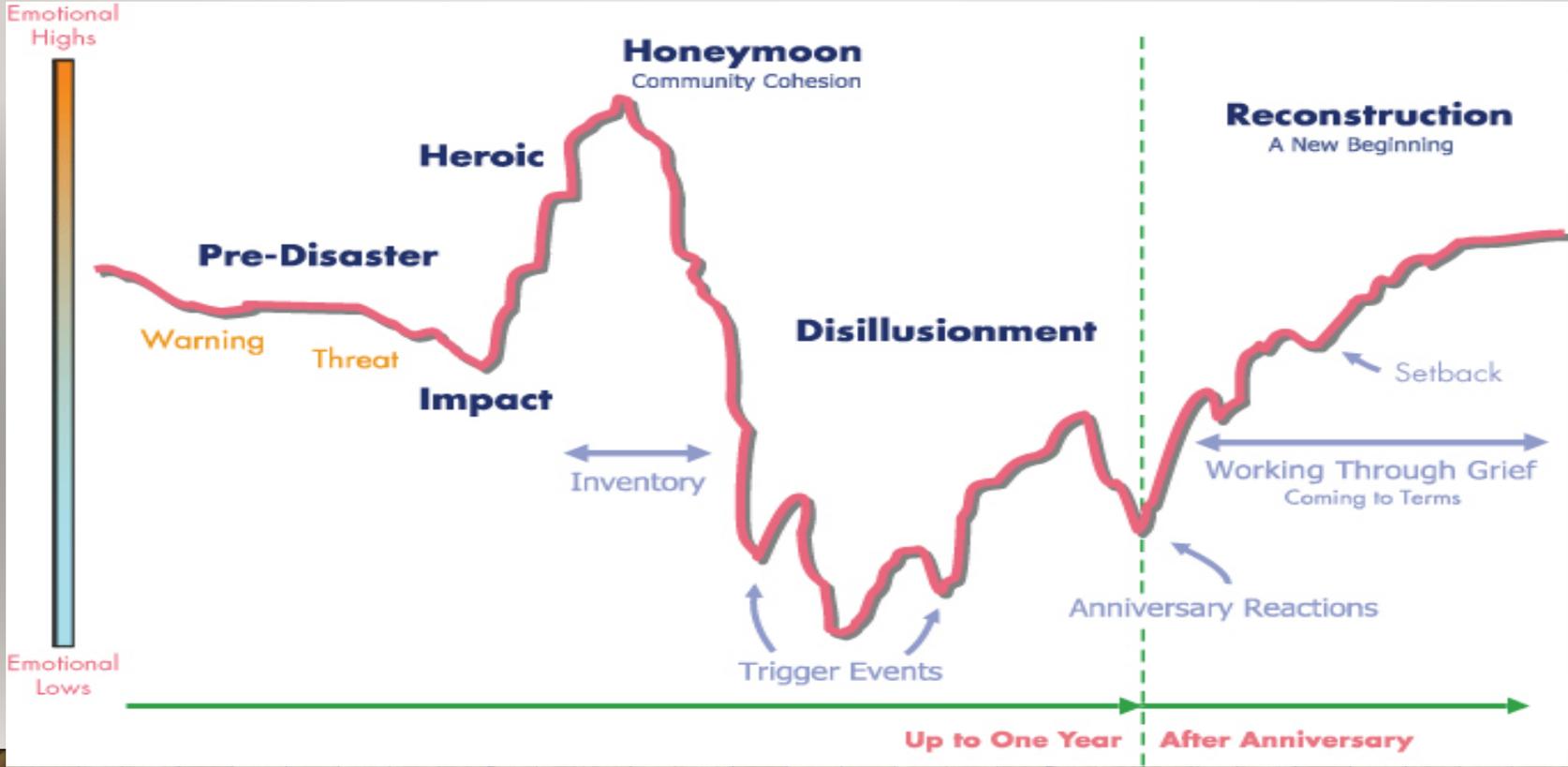
- Hold frequent and predictable Media briefs;
 - “Tell’em what you know, what you don’t, what you are doing, and what the public need to do...”
- Explain the response system and demonstrate what the responders are doing;
- Try to understand what the public believes and is thinking –
 - know your audience and tailor the message;
- Respond quickly to dispel unfounded rumours and gossip – as best you can;
 - Gotta be monitoring and working the internet / social media...
- Elected Officials need to be seen to care about individuals;
- Give the public specific actions that they can take to protect themselves;

KEYS TO SUCCESS (CONTINUED)

- Ensure the behaviour of public leaders is consistent with their advice and the conditions;
 - Vaccination anyone?
- Local knowledge and practical advice “plays” better than international “experts” in most cases;
 - More likely to accept information from someone you know and trust
- Follow general media events with in-depth technical briefs when you can;
 - less opportunity for factual error or “spinning”
 - Demonstrates actual expertise and creates confidence



PHASES OF DISASTER MENTAL HEALTH



FINAL WORD

- It's not easy, and it will be stressful, but you can do it.

THANK YOU!!!

