

Communicating in a Crisis

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Warrego Communications

- Show CONCERN
- Show RESPECT
- Explain your ACTIONS
- Put it in PERSPECTIVE

the four steps



How it works



A media crisis may involve you responding:

- Personally
- Professionally
- On behalf of your organisation

When would I use this?

- Leadership
- Legal advice

Other factors at play



Personal crisis



Professional crisis



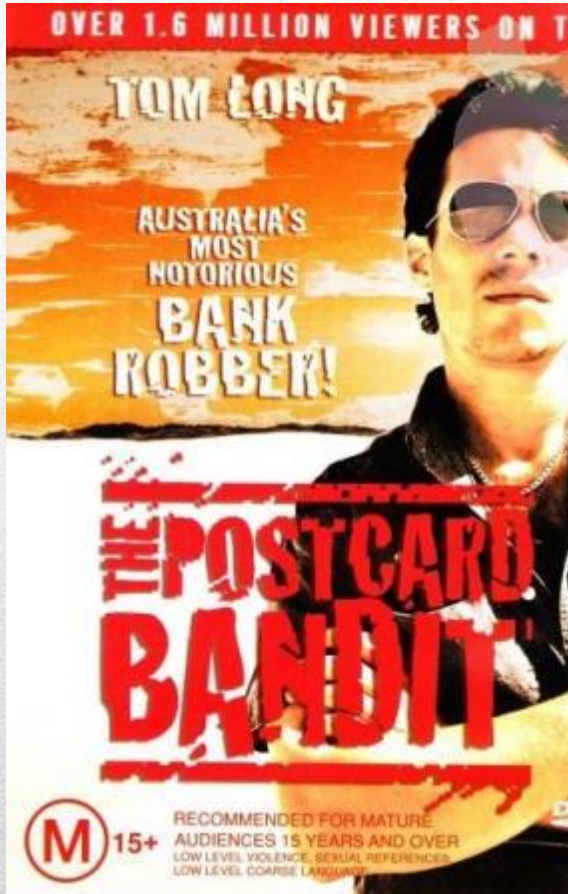
**American
Red Cross**

Together, we can save a life

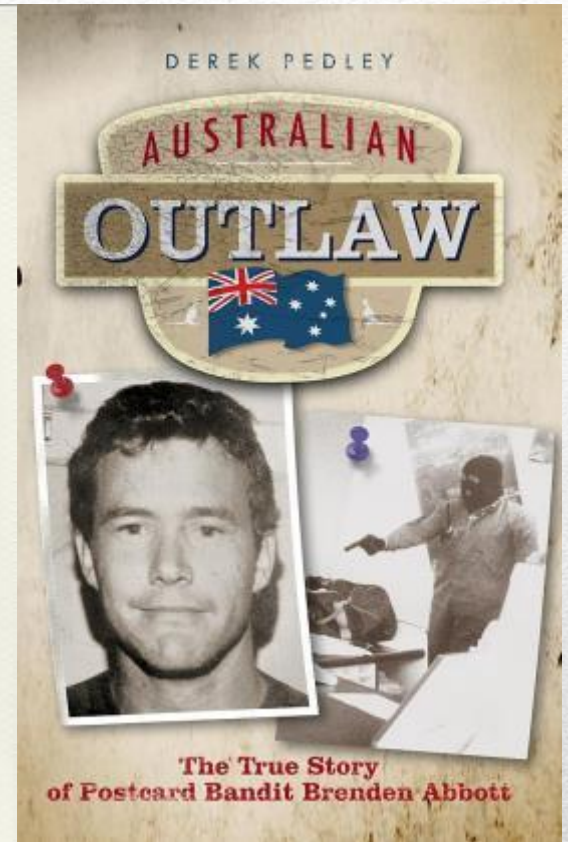
Organisational crisis

- We are like you – we get it
- We share your fear/anger/concern
- We are human – not a faceless organisation

Concern



THE POSTCARD BANDIT
ENJOYING FREEDOM



Concern

- Acknowledging the problem = truth
- Frank admission = respect
- Identifying the affected parties = reduces anger

Respect



- Toyota customers expect reliable and safe cars and we have let them down.
- We have identified the problem and we owe it to our customers to fix it.

Respect

- Speak in Plain English about what you are doing
- Explain what, when and how
- Correct misconceptions and misreporting
- Fast, early and often

Action

Target waited six days after first reports to confirm up to 40 million customers details had potentially been accessed by fraudsters



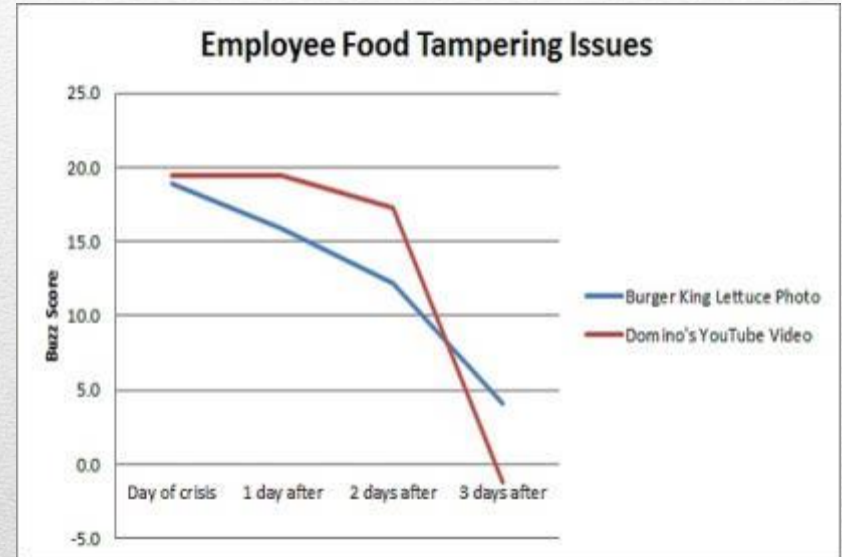
Only a fraction of that number were affected but the lack of information about what they were doing led to widespread concern.

Action

- Don't let the issue define you
- Give a perspective to what you do and how you do it
- Third party endorsement

Perspective

- This is the lettuce you eat at Burger King



This is not business as usual...

- 650,000 homes damaged or destroyed
- 8.5 million people without power
- \$50 billion in damages.
- Tens of thousands without homes a year later



Superstorm Sandy

- 130 years experience
- 17 million meals
- 17,000 volunteers
- Gave out ~\$300 million in aid

Red Cross

- Public Relations over People

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/red-cross-defends-response-hurricane-sandy-two-years/>

What went wrong

- Victims
- The Public (Donors)
- Employees/Volunteers
- Government

Who are we talking to

- Show **CONCERN** – we agree there are problems
- Show **RESPECT** – we respect your gifts and efforts
- Explain your **ACTIONS** – this is what we did and what we are doing to make it better
- Put it in **PERSPECTIVE** – huge crisis, 90% volunteers, millions helped.

the four steps

- GWEN IFILL: Let me ask you very specifically about some of the findings in this report.
- One of them is that, for instance, when we thought that Hurricane Isaac was headed to Tampa, that the Red Cross deployed a lot of folks to Tampa. The hurricane never hit, and the people never moved. (3.49 seconds)

Response from Red Cross

- We rely heavily on our volunteers and no-one wants to see any of their time or effort wasted. **Concern**
- Red Cross volunteers answer the call every time we ask sacrifice and I think all Americans respect them for that. **Respect**
- We took advice that some volunteers were needed in Tampa – a community with lots of vulnerable seniors and we responded. When the forecast changed we should have made a decision sooner to move this group. But we didn't and we regret that. **Action**
- Over 17,000 volunteers from 50 different states answered the call of Sandy, and in moving them around, we made a mistake. The Red Cross has been helping people in need for over 130 years but we continue to ask ourselves - what could we do better next time. **Perspective**

Resources diverted

No concern or respect for volunteers



- SUZY DEFRANCIS: Well, I wish weather forecasting could be — hindsight is 2020.
- We were following the cone, the hurricane cone that the National Hurricane Center puts out. And we have to move people five days in advance. We can't wait until everybody know where's it's going to land. Tampa is a very vulnerable area, has a lot of seniors. It was prone to flooding. And, yes, we put our people there because that was the right thing to do. We had an agreement with local officials in Tampa that we would staff about 100,000 people in shelters.

Action but in the form of excuses



Contradictory



Response from Red Cross

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Response from Red Cross

- **Patti (Ohio)** *The top of the Red Cross pyramid seems out of touch.*
- **Beebo** *There is no point in wasting my time and donor money when the people at the top seem determined to make a hash of it at every turn.*
- **Rich** *While the Red Cross might win a "Spinmeister" award from the PR Society of America, the ProPublica reporters might win a Pulitzer Prize for exposing this sham of disaster response.*
- **Claims** – *a Republican stunt, free holiday, PR fundraising drive*

Response from the public

- GWEN IFILL: What about the charges or the findings that so much happened because of public relations purposes, trucks were deployed to back up press conferences, for instance? (4.40)

Resources wasted

No concern
– something
to smile
about



- SUZY DEFRANCIS: Well, this one, I have to really smile at, because I'm the chief public affairs officer at the American Red Cross. And I don't tell anybody where those emergency response vehicles go.

Denial – it
wasn't me



- That's the job of the disaster responders. That's the lens through which it is done. And the example that ProPublica cited, that was a staging area where we were sending relief trucks, primarily at the request of the borough president from Staten Island, because they had huge needs in Staten Island.

Someone
told us to put
them there



- Those trucks were full of food. They were — they were delivering food. So when the cameras went away from a press conference, the Red Cross was still there delivering food.

Failed to
give any
perspective



Response from Red Cross

- *“The Red Cross could be seen everywhere. But when we finally got one of their trucks to stop we found out that it was empty, literally empty, and had nothing to offer anyone.”*
- *“When we asked the driver (a volunteer) why they were there, the immensely frustrated driver said...*

...I honestly don't know.”

Response from the public

- GWEN IFILL: How about the food that wasn't delivered, the meals that were wasted, that went to the wrong place, the people who remained hungry even after the effort?
(5.24)

Resources wasted

No concern
– denial



- SUZY DEFRANCIS: Well, as I said, we served 17.5 million meals and **snacks**. At one point, Gwen, if you took all the people in a sold-out Yankee and Giants stadium, we were **reaching** all of them every day for weeks.

Statistics and
cliches



Admitting it
but no detail
on actions
taken



- Now, there's also going to be in that much food some waste, but **certainly nothing** along the lines that was reported by ProPublica.

Failed to
give any
perspective



Response from Red Cross

- GWEN IFILL: So what did you mean then, just coming back full circle, to multiple systems failing? What was that admission? (5.56)

Multi-system failure

No comment –
never happened



- SUZY DEFRANCIS: Well, I don't — can't comment on multiple systems failing.

No Concern



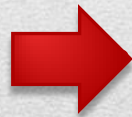
- What we saw was a very effective response that served millions of people when their help was urgently needed. And we learned some lessons from it that we continue to

Vague
acknowledgment
of problems



- apply and we continue to improve. We haven't been a response organization for 130 years without making some changes to get better.

Weak attempt at
perspective – no
specifics



And we will be there at the next response, and we will be even better.

Response from the Red Cross

- I am a 10+ year volunteer with the Red Cross working primarily in Disaster Response.
- The leadership knows these issues exist, but ignore them. They skirt around the issues by spewing statistics and numbers.
- They should instead be **admitting to these obviously documented shortfalls**, be more transparent, get a plan to fix this and do some work.

Response from the public

Salaries

i hate donating to an "non" profit organization that execs makes 200+k. it makes me ***** sick.

Other lies

“The 91 cents in the dollar is a lie – its more like 19c.”

The vacuum of truth

- "The public's expectation for an important, well-known organization like the Red Cross is complete, accurate fundraising and spending information," Sen. Grassley, an Iowa Republican.
- The Red Cross faces more federal scrutiny in an investigation begun in 2013. Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat, asked the U.S. Government Accountability Office to audit the charity's disaster-response activities.

Government

On call assistance

In house legal counsel

Specialist legal advice

- <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/bill-cosby-refuses-to-answer-sexual-assault-allegations/>

Legal advice

Leaders speak in a genuine crisis because:

- It shows the level of your concern
- It shows respect for your affected parties
- They can share their perspective/experience

Exceptions

- They are the problem
- They don't have the skills
- It's not a crisis

Leadership



American Red Cross

@RedCross

Ryan found two more 4 bottle packs of Dogfish Head's Midas Touch beer.... when we drink we do it right [#gettngslizzerd](#)

HootSuite • 2/15/11 11:24 PM

First tweet



[@riaglo](#)
Gloria Huang

Rogue tweet frm [@RedCross](#) due to my inability to use hootsuite... I wasn't actually [#gettingslizzard](#) but just excited! [#nowembarassing](#)

4 hours ago via HootSuite ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply

Second tweet

- "Listen, we deal with huge, natural disasters all the time... this wasn't one of them." Wendy Harman – Social Media Director

Third tweet

- Show CONCERN
- Show RESPECT
- Explain your ACTIONS
- Put it in PERSPECTIVE

C.R.A.P.

Questions?

- **The Management of Crises Response (MLD-381):**
Harvard Kennedy School,
- **Enterprise Risk Management: Strategy and**
Leadership in the Face of Large-Scale Uncertainties
(HBS 1518): Harvard Business School
- **Crisis Management and Emergency Preparedness**
(MGMT E-5090):

Harvard resources
