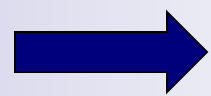




# Business Communication MGT 3201



**Crisis Communications**

# Crisis Communications

- Sometimes organizations experience a **crisis** – an unexpected event that shocks the organization:
- CEO and entire board killed in plane crash (Sundance Resources)
- BP oil spill in Gulf of Mexico
- Trader loses company \$7billion (Societe Generale)
- Medicine kills children (Johnson and Johnson)



## 4 Characteristics of a Crisis

- Element of Surprise – we did not see it coming
- Lack of information – we do not have all the facts; they emerge later
- Quick pace of events – we are swept up by fast changing circumstances
- Intense scrutiny – everybody is watching us very closely



# Communicating during a Crisis

- How we communicate affects the outcome of the crisis
- Johnson & Johnson – Tylenol contamination
- Perrier – Benzene contamination
- Pepsi – syringe in a can scare
- Mattel – Poisonous Chinese toys



# Crisis Communications Plan

- Organizations should have a Crisis Communications Plan in place...how will we respond in a crisis?
- Who will be the spokesperson?
- What information should be released/withheld?
- How will we communicate with key audiences?
- When and how often should we communicate?



# Communicating during a Crisis

- Organizational communications in a crisis are different because:
- The CEO is highly visible (but needs briefing/ coaching)
- The media becomes a key stakeholder
- We are responding to questions / criticism; not just initiating the communication
- What we say has a huge (national / international) audience

# 8 Crisis Communication Steps

- Step 1: Take control of communications. Centralize and tightly manage all external communications
- Step 2: Gather as much information (facts) as you can relevant to the situation. Check for inconsistencies and concerns
- Step 3: Have a dedicated crisis team / centre where the communications is handled

# 8 Crisis Communication Steps

- Step 4: Communicate early, clearly, honestly and with details to all stakeholder groups. Be consistent in your messages
- Step 5: Take the offensive in communicating your position
- Step 6: Understand the media's mission in a crisis
- Step 7: Communicate internally to maintain employee morale and reassure employees





# 8 Crisis Communication Steps

- Step 8: Correct biased or incorrect reports on the crisis

# Defensive and Offensive Communications

- During a crisis we need to use offensive and defensive communication tactics:
- **Defensive** helps limit the damage to our brand name and reputation and also fights off strong criticism.
- **Offensive** communications allow us to put out positive stories or good news about the crisis. We can say what we are doing to fix the situation



# Other considerations

- Just like our other topics in this course, crisis communications demands:
- Careful audience profiling
- Appropriate use of communications channels
- Appropriate use of language / style



# Case Study – Crisis Communications

Applying what you now know about Crisis Communications, you will work in small groups on a case study. The case is called “**Chicago Transit Authority**” and is also on the L Drive in the ‘Class activities’ folder.