

Effective Communication through Crisis and Controversy

Practical Advice for District Leaders

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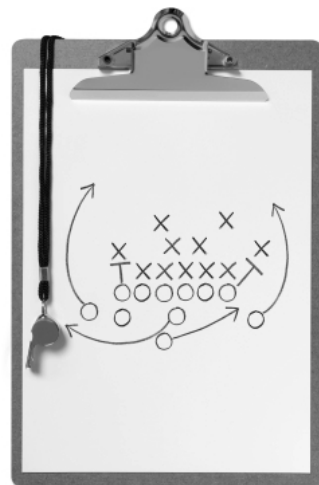


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Effective leadership
requires strong
OFFENSE and
DEFENSE.



Crisis

Incident

Emergency

Controversy

Scandal

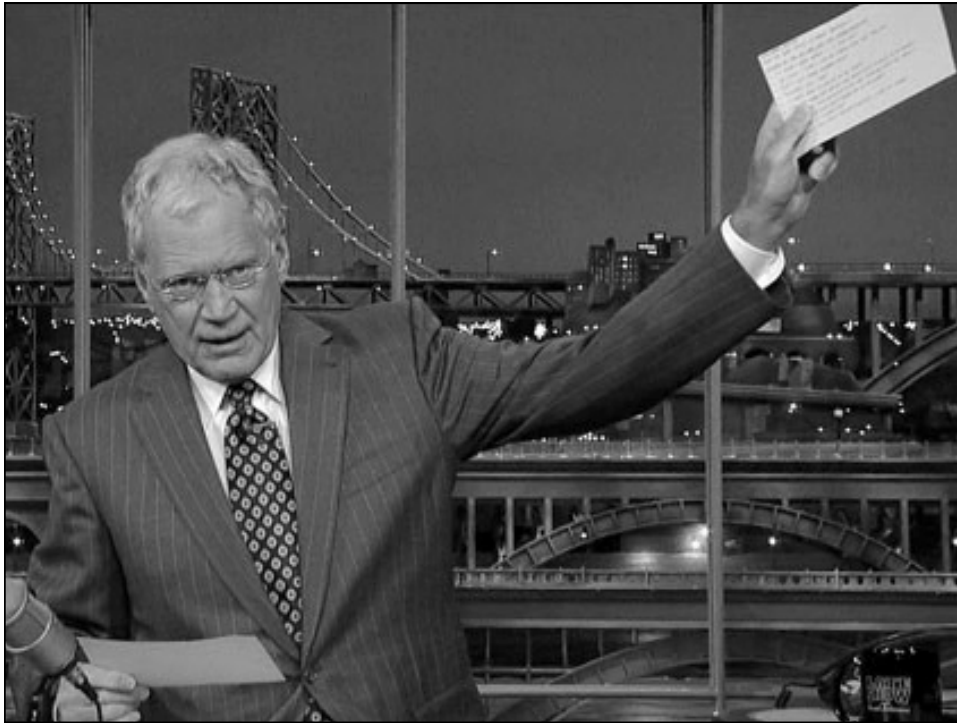
Roles and Responsibilities



School Committee



Superintendent



1

Be proactive.

J

Don't wait for crisis to strike.

Put policies and procedures in place that **reduce the risk** of crisis...

... and communicate broadly about them.

2

Establish protocols.

S

Develop clear channels for **crisis communication**.

- ✓ at the **school level**
- ✓ at the **district level**
- ✓ with the **School Committee**

Be explicit about who is (and is not) authorized to speak to press.

3

Develop relationships.

3

... with the **press**

... and with the people in your **community**.

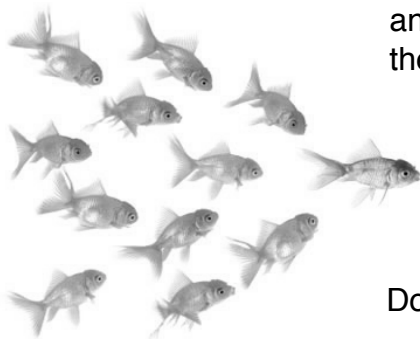
Cultivate **ALLIES**
and **AMBASSADORS**.



Cultivate ALLIES and AMBASSADORS.

Parents and Students
Employees: Educators and Support Staff
Union Leaders
Business Community
Higher Education
Clergy
Elected Officials
Non-Profit Leaders

Cultivate ALLIES and AMBASSADORS.



Communicate with them regularly,
and help them communicate with
their constituents.

Do not turn to them only in crisis.

Maintain two-way communication.
LISTEN and INFORM.

4

Tell your own story.

Don't rely on the **media** alone to convey your messages.

Establish proactive means of reaching your **audiences directly**.

Become your own news outlet!





Ask the right questions.

- What do we know about the situation?
- Does the situation still present any ongoing danger/risk?
- What is the specific timeline of events?
- Who has been involved, and in what way?
- Who is affected by the incident?



Ask the right questions.

- Have the correct policies and protocols been followed?
- Is this an isolated incident, or could there be others?
- Does the situation disrupt instruction, sports, other activities?
- What are the next steps?

6

Consult with attorneys.

e

Always seek a legal perspective, and respect student and staff **confidentiality**.



7

Craft your messages.

\

- Adhere to **legal parameters** about *what you can and can't say*.
- SUMMARIZE the **key facts** and events. Avoid excess detail.
- Mention any **other agencies** or parties involved.
- Describe the school / district **response**, including reference to relevant policies and protocols followed.
- Address whether **instruction** or other activities are affected.

7

Craft your messages.

- Outline any **next steps**.
- Provide a **contact** for questions / follow-up.
- Affirm **student and staff safety** as the top priority.
- Be mindful of both the **content** and **TONE** of your messages.
- Emphasize both the community **challenge** and **solution**.

When appropriate...

Own it.



Always reinforce the mission.



EVERYTHING is ultimately about **student learning.**

8

Keep your staff informed.

8

Clear, honest, *ongoing* **internal communication** is essential.

Equip **principals** in particular with communications tools.

9

Keep families informed.

a

Consider all available options for communicating with **parents and students**, including:

- Automated phone calls, texts, e-mails
- Website(s)
- Social media
- Backpack letters
- Meetings

Social Media





10

Work with the press.

10

Local media play a critical role in shaping public information and perception.

Types of **PRESS OUTREACH**: Written

PRESS
RELEASE

PRESS
STATEMENT

MEDIA
ADVISORY

GUEST
OP-ED

LETTER TO
THE EDITOR



Types of **PRESS OUTREACH**: Live

NEWS
CONFERENCE

PRESS
BRIEFING

1-ON-1
INTERVIEW



Never, **ever** say,

“No comment.”



After crisis strikes:

- Deal with the aftermath. Tend to those most affected (e.g., make counseling available).
- Take any steps to prevent such incidents in the future, such as changes in policy or practice.
- Update all stakeholders on actions taken and other developments, including any resolution.
- Determine whether or not to re-engage the press with updates and developments.

Throughout the crisis:
In your words and actions, demonstrate...

- Leadership
- Skill / Knowledge
- Empathy / Compassion
- Transparency / Honesty
- Accountability (for yourself and others)

31

Upcoming MASS Webinar:
Crisis Management & Communication

Wednesday, November 29

Register: www.massupt.org



Questions & Discussion

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