

Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication Leader's Role

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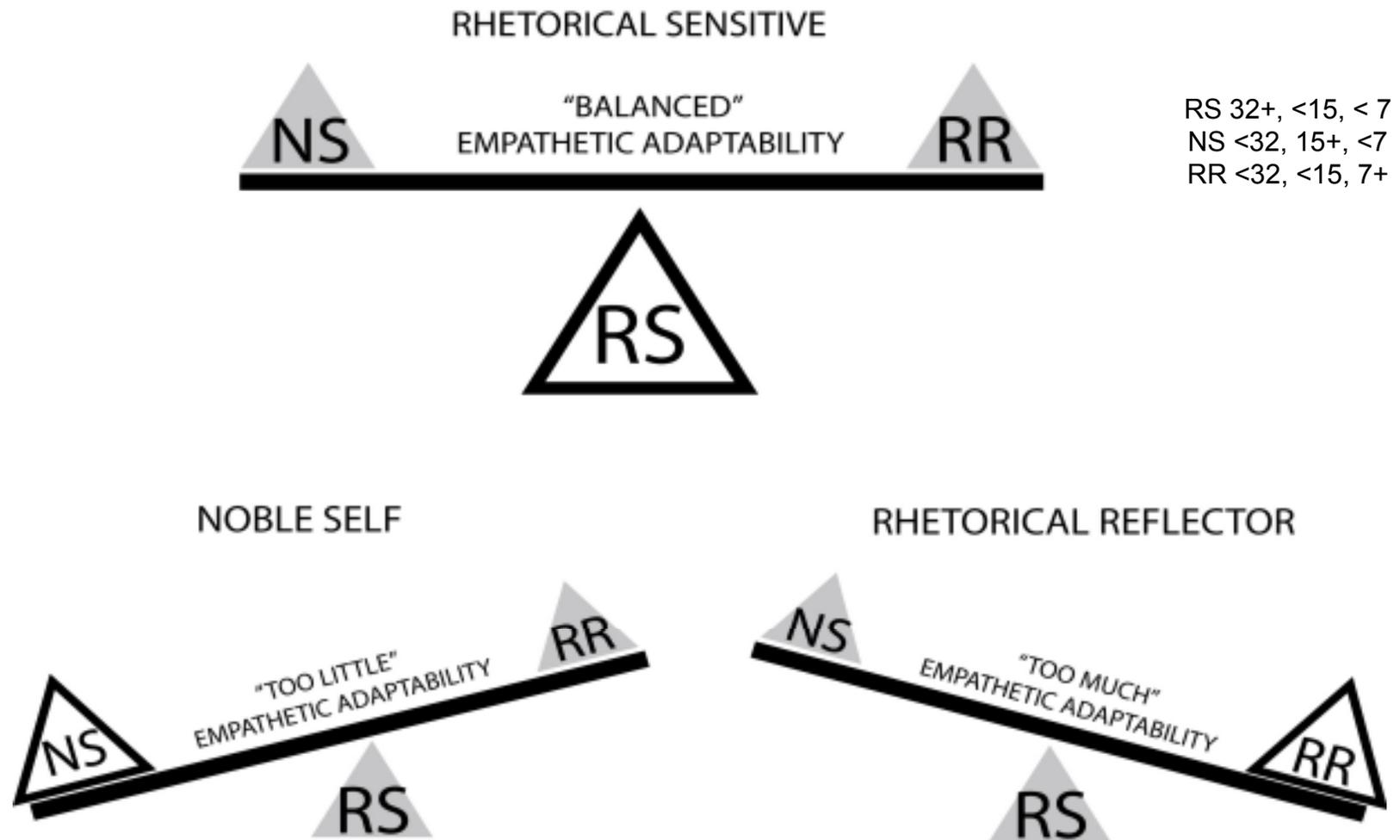
Communicating in a crisis is different

- In a serious crisis, all affected people . . .
 - Take in information differently
 - Process information differently
 - Act on information differently
- In a catastrophic event: communication is different
- Be first, be right, be credible

The Crisis Leader

- Influences others to achieve goals
- Power and influence
 - Depends on past interactions
 - Incompetence causes loss of legitimate authority
 - Symbol of order and authority
 - Use rational appeals and inspirational appeals

Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale



Yes, leaders communicate, and

- In a catastrophic event, your . . .
 - every word,
 - every eye twitch,
 - every passing emotion. . . resonates with heightened importance to the public

Crisis leadership traits

- High tolerance for stress (unstructured situations, intense political competition, rapid change)
- Confident decision-making
- Ability to engage in critical thinking under stress
- Gentleness, great strength, trust, caution, high self-confidence, high self-criticism, toughness

Leadership styles

- Authoritarian, high levels of control
 - Democratic, solicit input from subordinates
 - Laissez-faire, delegate authority
 - Transformational or visionary
-
- Which is best suited in a crisis?

Transformational Leadership

- Inspirational motivation, individual consideration, charismatic influence, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985)
- They display empathy, project self-assurance, dramatize the mission, and assures followers of competence
- Mobilize emotions to motivate others to do more with less self-interest

Overarching crisis leader role

- A symbol of order and authority during a crisis
- Influence can be acquired and lost
- Early behavior sets the tone in the crisis
- Transformational leader has the needed attributes to lead in a crisis—adaptability and social modeling skills

Crisis Leadership: What goes wrong?

- Chaos ensues and the leaders sensemaking is overwhelmed—behaviors are no longer predictable
- Crises: unstructured, relationships strained, and authority confused
- Need to balance need to accomplish task with preserving relationship and adjusting to change

Impact on Followers

- Survival arc: denial, deliberate intention and decisive moment
- Processed intuitively and analytically
- Must be treated with respect
- Warnings must tell why, not just what

Followers strengths

- Altruistic and positive social behavior
- Need a sense of direction
- Self-efficacy, mastery, perceived control, self-esteem, hope and optimism
- Help increase survival

Followers' vulnerabilities

- Greater danger, greater emotional impact
- Trauma comes from hopelessness and helplessness
- Leader should try to reduce situational uncertainty, give people things to do, model optimistic behavior, be rhetorically sensitive
- Chaos increases possible miscommunication

Rhetorical sensitivity

- Social understanding of self and others and balance in communicating needs
- Expressed empathy is a communication tool
- Postal workers: “having professionals demonstrate empathy, concern, and caring . . . is absolutely necessary” (Quinn, 2008; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005)

What the public seeks from your communication

5 public concerns. . .

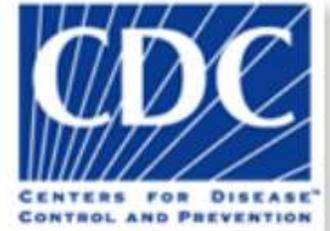
1. Gain wanted facts
2. Empower decisionmaking
3. Involved as a participant, not spectator
4. Provide watchguard over resource allocation
5. Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy

5 communication failures that kill operational success

1. Mixed messages from multiple experts
2. Information released late
3. Paternalistic attitudes
4. Not countering rumors and myths in real-time
5. Public power struggles and confusion

5 communication steps that boost operational success

1. Execute a solid communication plan
2. Be the first source for information
3. Express empathy early
4. Show competence and expertise
5. Remain honest and open



Psychology of a Crisis

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What Do People Feel Inside When a Disaster Looms or Occurs?

Psychological barriers:

1. Denial
2. Fear, anxiety, confusion, dread
3. Hopelessness or helplessness
4. Seldom panic
5. Fight or flight

Individuals at risk—the cost?

- Demands for unneeded treatment
- Dependence on special relationships (bribery)
- MUPS—Multiple Unexplained Physical Symptoms
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Stigmatization

Community at risk—the cost?

- Disorganized group behavior (unreasonable demands, stealing)
- Rumors, hoaxes, fraud, stigmatization
- Trade/industry liabilities/losses
- Diplomacy
- Civil actions

Communicating in a Crisis Is Different

- Public must feel empowered – reduce fear and victimization
- Mental preparation reduces anxiety
- Taking action reduces anxiety
- Uncertainty must be addressed

Decisionmaking in a Crisis Is Different

- People simplify
- Cling to current beliefs
- We remember what we see or previously experience (first messages carry more weight)
- People limit intake of new information (3-7 bits)

How Do We Communicate About Risk in an Emergency?

All risks are not accepted equally

- Voluntary vs. involuntary
- Controlled personally vs. controlled by others
- Familiar vs. exotic
- Natural vs. manmade
- Reversible vs. permanent
- Statistical vs. anecdotal
- Fairly vs. unfairly distributed
- Affecting adults vs. affecting children



Messages and Audiences

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Judging the Message

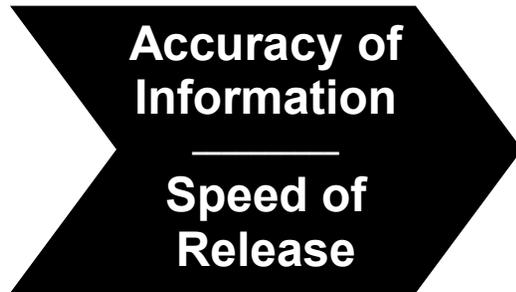
- Speed counts – marker for preparedness
- Facts – consistency is vital
- Trusted source – can't fake these

5 Key Elements To Build Trust

1. Expressed empathy
2. Competence
3. Honesty
4. Commitment
5. Accountability

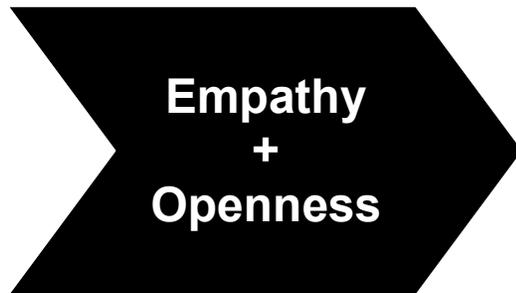
Emergency Information

- Any information is empowering
- Benefit from substantive action steps
- Plain English
- Illustrations and color
- Source identification



CREDIBILITY

+ **=**



TRUST

**Successful
Communication**

Initial Message

Must

- Be short
- Be relevant
- Give positive action steps
- Be repeated

Initial Message

Must *Not*

- Use jargon
- Be judgmental
- Make promises that can't be kept
- Include humor

The STARCC Principle

Your public messages in a crisis must be:

Simple

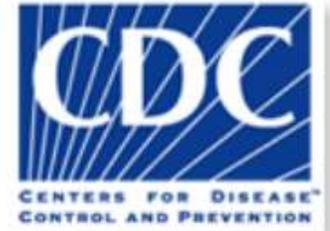
Timely

Accurate

Relevant

Credible

Consistent



Spokesperson

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Information sought by media

- Casualty numbers, condition, treatment
- Property damage
- Response and relief activities
- Resulting effects (anxiety, stress)
- Questions are predictable

Media and Crisis Coverage

- Evidence strongly suggests that coverage is more factual when reporters have more information. They become more interpretative when they have less information.
- What should we conclude?

What the Public Will Ask First

- Are my family and I safe?
- What have you found that may affect me?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who caused this?
- Can you fix it?

What the Media Will Ask First

- What happened?
- Who is in charge?
- Has this been contained?
- Are victims being helped?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this happen?
- Did you have forewarning?

Spokesperson Qualities

- What makes a good spokesperson?
- What doesn't make a good spokesperson?

Role of a Spokesperson in an Emergency

- Take your organization from an “it” to a “we”
- Build trust and credibility for the organization
- Remove the psychological barriers within the audience
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right

Spokesperson Qualities

- Be your organization; then be yourself.
- What's your organization's identity?

Spokesperson Qualities

- It's more than “acting natural.” Every organization has an identity. Try to embody that identity.
- Example: CDC has a history of going into harm's way to help people. We humbly go where we are asked. We value our partners and won't steal the show. Therefore, a spokesperson would express a desire to help, show courage, and express the value of partners. “Committed but not showy.”

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Don't overreassure
- Acknowledge that there is a process in place
- Express wishes
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

Six Principles of CERC

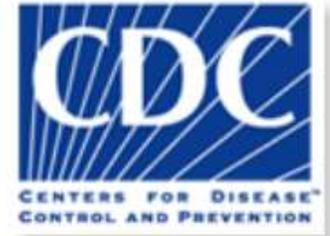
- **Be First:** If the information is yours to provide by organizational authority—do so as soon as possible. If you can't—then explain how you are working to get it.
- **Be Right:** Give facts in increments. Tell people what you know when you know it, tell them what you don't know, and tell them *if* you will know relevant information later.
- **Be Credible:** Tell the truth. Do not withhold to avoid embarrassment or the possible “panic” that seldom happens. Uncertainty is worse than not knowing—rumors are more damaging than hard truths.

Six Principles of CERC

- **Express Empathy:** Acknowledge in words what people are feeling—it builds trust.
- **Promote Action:** Give people things to do. It calms anxiety and helps restore order.
- **Show Respect:** Treat people the way you want to be treated—the way you want your loved ones treated—always—even when hard decisions must be communicated.

Command Post

- Media will expect a command post. Official channels that work well will discourage reliance on nonofficial channels.
- Be media-friendly at the command post—prepare for them to be on site.



Stakeholder/ Partner Communication

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Stakeholders can be . . .

- Advocate—maintain loyalty
- Adversary—discourage negative action
- Ambivalent—keep neutral or move to advocate

Sources of Social Pressure

- What will I gain?
- What will it cost me?
- What do those important to me want me to do?
- Can I actually carry it out?

Trust and Mistrust

- Stakeholders judge the response to an issue or crisis based on trust
- Trust is the natural consequence of promises fulfilled
- Mistrust is an outgrowth of the perception that promises were broken and values violated
- CDC fulfills trust by combining our best science with strong ethics and values

Consequences of mistrust

- Health recommendations ignored and disease and death go up
- Demands for misallocation of resources
- Public health policies circumvented
- Opportunists prey on others in the “trust gap”
- Fiscal and medical resources are wasted

We can't accomplish our mission

Causes of conflict: perception by either party of

- Superiority
- Injustice
- Distrust
- Vulnerability
- Helplessness

Egregious Mistakes

- Deny the problem exists
- Shoot the messenger
- Respond with silence
- Respond with evasion/half truths
- Selectively tell the story
- Overtell the story
- Take an “I” perspective
- Point fingers

Why do people come to the town hall?

Then why do we conduct meetings the way we do?

Don't lecture at the Townhall

- Easy but not effective
- Doesn't change thoughts/behaviors
- Key: don't give a solution, rather help audience discover solution by asking questions

Dealing With Angry People

Anger arises when people. . .

- Have been hurt
- Feel threatened by risks out of their control
- Are not respected
- Have their fundamental beliefs challenged

Sometimes, anger arises when . . .

- Media arrive
- Damages may be in play

Acting Trustworthy

- Share information early
- Acknowledge the concerns of others
- Under-promise and over-deliver
- Select a spokesperson who is never condescending
- Use third-party validators/advocates