

**THE CRISIS  
COUNSELOR**

# THE CRISIS COUNSELOR

A Step-by-Step Guide  
to Managing a Business Crisis

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# Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	x
<b>PART I Preparing for a Crisis</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b> Crisis Management and <i>The Crisis Counselor</i> <i>How does crisis management apply to your business?</i>	3
<b>2</b> Where Could Your Business Get Tripped Up? <i>How vulnerable is your business to a crisis?</i>	41
<b>3</b> Preventing Crises in Your Business <i>Will a preventive approach work?</i>	77
<b>4</b> How to Plan for a Crisis <i>Has your business planned sufficiently for a crisis?</i>	93
<b>5</b> The Crisis Itself <i>What is there to know about a crisis?</i>	125
<b>PART II Communicating During and After a Crisis</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>6</b> What to Say and Do When a Crisis Strikes <i>How do you know what to say and do during a crisis?</i>	141



# Introduction

A fruit market. A Fortune 500 company. A law firm. A computer-services business. A hospital. A dry cleaner. A school district. A university. An automotive supplier. An accounting firm. A bank.

All of these businesses have one thing in common: they face problems every day. Many of the problems are managed quickly and dissolve. Others fizzle out on their own. And, many others erupt into crisis situations that needlessly damage corporate reputations and executives' careers.

These crises aren't necessarily the high-profile, sensational ones featured on the front pages of newspapers or the covers of business magazines. They're not necessarily the ones that are easy to brush off as the type that "will never happen to *our* business." All businesses face more common crises that, in their own ways, can be as scary and potentially damaging for the individual organizations as the Bhopal disaster was to Union Carbide, the *Valdez* oil spill was to Exxon, and the breast implants crisis was to Dow Corning.

These "common" crises include employee downsizings, negative media coverage, corporate lawsuits, government probes, quality problems, product recalls, boycotts and strikes, unexpected death of a senior executive, and many others.

Businesses of all types—from the smallest, entrepreneurial start-up to the largest, most powerful corporation—need to be aware of ways to

prevent crises from occurring and how to manage them before they ignite into potentially debilitating and crippling events.

*The Crisis Counselor* is a practical reference guide for any aspiring executive, CEO, business owner, franchisee, attorney, accountant, or marketing professional or anyone else who wants to broaden his or her perspectives about managing a business in the most effective and enlightened way.

This book was written with the recognition that *most* businesses operate without sufficient concern about managing the most important and fragile of assets—their reputations.

Many executives believe that the management concept of planning for a crisis makes a lot of sense. However, most just don't do it. The reasons for putting it off are many, and you can almost hear the mantra of those saying, "We have a well-managed company, and a major crisis will never occur in our business."

The problem actually begins when they think of *crises* only as the high-profile, spectacular ones that cause catastrophic results, and they forget about the ones that—like termites—weaken and gnaw away at the foundation that underlies the company's success. When the damage is finally identified and confirmed as something to be taken seriously, it's often much too late to fix the problem without lengthy, costly repairs to the cornerstone of the foundation—its credibility, reputation, loyalty, and trust.

Even if you agree that a crisis *could* occur in your business, it's all too easy to set aside *crisis planning* in favor of keeping up with the daily pressures of running the business.

Executives often talk about "disaster control" or "crisis communications." A primary premise of *The Crisis Counselor* is that this is only a small part of the crisis-management process. You will learn how crises can be prevented and managed effectively by focusing on the larger crisis-management continuum. This includes identifying vulnerabilities in an organization; preventing crises from occurring; planning for crises; recognizing when a crisis ignites; communicating during a crisis with your employees, customers, news media, and other important publics; evaluating your crisis work and making adjustments along the way; insulating your business to protect it from a future crisis; and beginning the process again with identifying any new vulnerabilities.

This is a new way of thinking in business, and the most effective business executives and owners have *The Crisis Counselor* mind-set.

I hope you like the unusual format of this book. It is intended to be a quick, easy-to-read guide that offers specific tips and techniques that you can immediately implement in your business or department. Most of the book is written in Q&A format to make it possible to digest in small, bite-size portions. It describes *The Crisis Counselor* perspective in preventing and managing crises and, through detailed tips and anecdotes, provides practical and easy ways for you to incorporate it at your work.

Every chapter—except for Chapter 13, the conclusion—opens with a quick test you can take to assess your level of crisis preparation. And each features a summary list of tips to consider for immediate application in your business or department.

To get you into the swing of things, here are some answers to a few questions you might have on your mind:

### **How can *The Crisis Counselor* help me?**

If you run a business, manage a department, or are trying to work your way up the corporate ladder, learning and adapting *The Crisis Counselor* principles will help broaden your perspective and make you more effective. It will provide a strong foundation of knowledge that will help *structure* your way of problem solving and managing your planning, communications, and reputation.

### **How is *The Crisis Counselor* different from other books on crisis management?**

Nearly every book written on the subject has focused on critiquing high-profile crises you've seen reported by the news media. Plane crashes. Product tamperings. Oil spills. Plant explosions. Product recalls. The authors provide insight into the crises and offer professional criticism on ways the situations could have been better managed. Others on the subject offer extremely academic, theoretical solutions to planning for and managing crises. Both types of books can be interesting reading. However, I've always felt they didn't help the real business executive, who would have to translate those thoughts into practical steps that can be taken in an individual business.

This book is very different. It is a practical guide that makes it easy for you to apply the information to your own company or department. It is much easier to read and absorb than any previous crisis-management book. Most important, it features crises that could likely affect any type of business, at any time, and includes examples to which every executive can relate and that they can integrate into their businesses.

**What should I expect in *The Crisis Counselor*?**

As you progress through the chapters, you'll begin to see the ways each part of *The Crisis Counselor's* crisis-management process works together with the others. The "Tips to Consider" at the end of each chapter will provide the cement you'll need to build a strong and effective foundation for your company or department. You should expect to become increasingly enthusiastic as you assemble the concepts and determine the most effective ways to apply them. I hope you enjoy the journey.

# THE CRISIS COUNSELOR