Toolkit Template

Crisis Communication Plan

Objective: This template has been developed to document critical activities and information related to your business in the event of the incapacitation of your executive leader or owner. This toolkit provides a guide for managing banking, record keeping and maintaining secure signing authority during a leadership absence.

When a business or other emergency occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. This is a critical component of business sustainability if a business owner or key person is unable to work in his/her normal capacity due to disability. If business operations are disrupted or even perceived to be interrupted, customers or patients will want to know how they will be impacted. Regulators may need to be notified. Vendors will have concerns. Employees and their families will be worried about the future of their jobs and want information. Each of these "audiences" will want information before the business has a chance to begin organizing statements or communicating in a regular manner.

An important component of the Business Operating Expense component of the Business Growth & Continuity Service is the crisis communications plan. A business must be able to respond promptly, accurately and confidently during an interruption to the normal state of business affairs. Many different audiences must be reached with information specific to their interests and needs. The image of the business can be positively or negatively impacted by perceptions of the handling of the incident. The only way to manage the message is to have a communications plan in place prior to an incident, whether an emergency, disaster or the inability of a key person to continue in the business.

This step of the BOE Service provides direction for developing a crisis communications plan. Understanding potential audiences is key, as each audience wants to know: "How does it affect me?" Guidance for scripting messages that are specific to the interests of the audience is another element of the plan. The Contact & Information Center tab explains how to use existing resources to gather and disseminate information during and following an incident.

Audiences

Understanding the different audiences that a business needs to reach during the interruption of the normal manner of business is one of the first steps in the development of a crisis communications plan. There are many potential audiences that will want information during and following an incident and each has its own needs for information. The challenge is to identify potential audiences, determine their need for information and then identify who within the business is best able to communicate with that audience.

The following is a list of potential audiences.

- Customers or patients
- Employees
- Vendors
- Other company management, directors and investors
- Government elected officials, regulators and other authorities

Contact information

Contact information for each audience should be compiled and immediately accessible. It is recommended that the contact information for each audience be made a part of the documents maintained by the company in the secure BG&C/BOE vault. Existing information such as customer, supplier and employee contact information may be exportable from existing databases within the company. Include as much information for each contact as possible (e.g., organization name, contact name, business telephone number, cell number, fax number and email address). Lists should be updated regularly, secured to protect confidential information and available to the designated person and senior management at the company. Hard copies of lists should also be available at an alternate location.

Customers or Patients

Customers or patients are the life of a business, so contact with customers is a top priority. Customers may become aware of a problem if their phone calls are not answered, if the person answering the call is unable to assist them or their orders are not processed. Included as part of a business continuity plan should be action to redirect incoming telephone calls to an authorized person who can assist the customers or to a voice message indicating that the business

values their call and will return their call within a given period of time (generally a few hours). The business continuity plan should also include procedures to ensure that customers are properly informed about the status of orders in process and the procedures to fulfill orders in a timely, organized fashion.

Customer service or sales staff normally assigned to work with customers should be assigned to communicate with customers with an escalation plan in place that does not include the disabled key person. If there are many customers, the list should be prioritized to reach the key customers first.

Vendors
The crisis communication plan must include documented procedures for notification of and communication with vendors. The procedures should identify when and how they should be notified, who will be the person communicating with vendors, and an agreed upon script to explain the absence of the key person. Vendors will likely need as much reassurance as customers.

Management
Protocols for when to notify management should be clearly understood and documented. Consider events that occur on a holiday or over a long weekend. It should be clear to the designated person what situations require immediate notification of management regardless of the time of day. Similar protocols and procedures should be established for notification of directors, investors and other important stakeholders. Management does not want to learn about a problem from outsiders. They will be looking to the designated person to provide reassurance and a sense of continuity.

Government officials and regulators
Communications with government officials depends upon the nature of the business and the role the key person served as well as regulatory requirements. Businesses that fail to notify a regulator within the prescribed time risk incurring a fine. Notification requirements required by regulations, the nature of the business and the key person's role must be documented in the crisis communications plan.

Employees
Human Resources (HR) is responsible for the day-to-day communications with employees regarding employment issues and benefits administration. HR management should work with the designated person to assume a similar role on the crisis communications team. HR should coordinate communications with employees. Close coordination between the designated person, management,

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and HR is needed when managing the sensitive nature of communications related to an incident involving death or serious injury. Employees need reassurance that the business will continue in its previous manner and that the company has preplanned for the loss of the key person.

News media
If the key person is well known or if there is publicity surrounding the disability of the key person, the local news media may have questions or try to obtain details. There may be numerous requests for information from the media and the challenge of managing large numbers of requests for information, interviews and public statements can be overwhelming. Prioritization of requests for information and development of press releases and talking points can assist with the need to communicate effectively.

Develop a company policy that only authorized spokespersons are permitted to speak to the news media. Communicate the policy to all employees explaining that it is best to speak with one informed voice and to follow this policy even if the media caller says the conversation is "off the record."

Determine in advance who will speak to the news media and prepare that spokesperson with talking points, so they can speak clearly and effectively in terms that can be easily understood.

Messages

When a business owner or a key person is unable to perform his/her duties and is absent from the business for an extended period, each audience will seek information that is specific to them. "How does the incident affect my order, my job, my payments…?" These questions need to be answered when communicating with each audience.

After identifying the audiences and the spokesperson assigned to communicate with each audience, the next step is to script messages. Writing messages during an incident can be challenging due to the pressure caused by "too much to do" and "too little time." Therefore, it is best to script message templates in advance if possible.

Pre-scripted messages should be prepared using information developed during the baseline assessment of the business. There may be many unknowns at the beginning of the key person's absence, but the need for communications will relate to the impact on audiences and to reassurance that the business is positioned to continue operations in the key person's absence.

Messages should be scripted to address the specific needs of each audience, which may include:

Customer - "When will I receive my order?" "What will you give me to compensate for the delay?"

Employee - "Will I have a job?" "Will the company be ok without this person?" "Will I have a new boss?" "Are we at risk from competitors or even at risk of going out of business?" "Is the company going to be sold?" "Who will perform the role of the key person?"

Government Regulator - "When role did the key person play in the company?" "Who will be in charge of compliance during the key person's absence?" "Is that person properly trained in regulatory compliance?" "What impact will this have on the company and its customers?"

Vendors - "Will we be paid in a timely manner?" Who will make purchasing decisions?" "Who should we speak to if we have questions or concerns?"

Management - "What happened?" "When did it happen?" "What is the impact on the business?" "Who is running the day to day operations in the absence of the key person?" "Will we be taking on extra duties during the absence of the key person?" And if so, who will make that decision and assign the extra duties?" "Are we going to hire a temporary or permanent replacement?"

Messages can be pre-scripted as templates with blanks to be filled in when needed. Pre-scripted messages can be developed, approved by the management team and stored in the secure BG&C/BOE Vault for quick editing and release when needed.

Another important element of the crisis communications plan is the need to coordinate the release of information. When there is a prolonged absence of a key person which may have an impact on the business, there may be limited information about the incident or its potential impacts. The "story" may change many times as new information becomes available.

One of the aims of the crisis communication plan is to ensure consistency of message. If you tell one audience one story and another audience a different story, it will raise questions of competency and credibility. Protocols need to be established to ensure that the core of each message is consistent while addressing the specific questions from each audience. It may be helpful if all

information is not yet known to use phrases such as, "based upon current information…" or similar ones so people understand that things may change. And the company will not be viewed as hiding information or being false in the communications.

Another important goal of the crisis communications plan is to move from reacting to the incident, to managing a strategy, to overcome the incident. Management needs to develop the strategy and the crisis communications team needs to implement that strategy by allaying the concerns of each audience and positioning the organization to emerge from the incident with its reputation intact.

Contact and Information Centers

Communications before, during and following the absence of a key person, particularly when the absence is sudden or a surprise, is bi-directional. Stakeholders or audiences will ask questions and request information. The business will answer questions and provide information. This flow of information should be managed through a central communications person and plan.

The key contact person forms the "hub" of the crisis communications plan. The company receive requests for information from each audience and disseminates information to each audience. Employees from multiple departments may be assigned to communicate with a specific audience.

The company will field inquiries from customers, suppliers, the news media and others. The company should have properly trained personnel to answer requests for information, and the personnel should be provided with scripts, talking points and a "frequently asked questions" (FAQ) document to answer questions consistently and accurately.

The "information center" consists of existing staff and technologies (e.g., website, social media accounts, call center, bulletin boards, etc.) that field requests for information from customers, employees and others during normal business hours. The information center and its technologies can be used to push consistent information out to audiences and post information for online reading.

The crisis communications team, consisting of members of the management team, should manage the message coming from the company. The goal of the crisis communications team is to gather information and craft a statement, monitor questions posed to company personnel, review emails received by customer service as well as social media chatter or stories broadcast by the

news media. This allows the crisis communications team to craft appropriate responses, stay on message and disseminate information approved for release.