

Which leaders do you think have contributed to improving their community's situation through communications during recent disasters?

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When I wrote this piece during the last week of September, the chaos of hurricane season led me to crisis communications. Then, preparing to distribute today, October 2, 2017, stunning reports from Las Vegas overwhelmed the news. Chaos with a capital C: communications implications endure.



Our extraordinary hurricane season – which isn't over yet – inspired me to remind everyone about crisis communication planning. Texas, Florida and the jewel-like islands of the Caribbean have been relentlessly ravaged by hurricanes in the space of just a few days. Though most of the affected sites are far from us, we see, hear of and feel the trauma instantaneously and through multiple communication channels. Seeing and hearing the stories, we consciously or unconsciously gauge how well various leaders and their communities are dealing with the impact of these natural disasters.

Did anyone else feel a sense of respite, even comfort, when the mayor of Houston, Sylvester Turner, was on camera providing news updates? I submit that our perception of his competence was influenced by the clarity of his communications. His conversational tone and his unwavering authority left no doubt he was in command of the situation. He is, of course, an accomplished professional; but he also had a crisis communications plan in place that was immediately put into action as soon as watches became warnings for Harvey. We saw the storm unfold and wreak havoc on millions of people's lives, yet as we heard leadership walk us through status updates, describe resource deployment, and tell us how to help and what might be coming next, there was at least a hint of a light at the end of the tunnel.

In contrast, this morning's opportunity to observe crisis communications has, so far, been less reassuring. We assess the terrible Las Vegas situation via briefings from multiple sources and communication channels. A sheriff's phone call. The president's remarks. An anchor's reporting. What's happening on the ground is crazy, chaotic. We will watch carefully as organizations and their leaders begin to manage the chaos.

When we can assimilate all the information that emerges from such situations, we are on the receiving end of careful crisis communications preparation. Ideally, step-by-step checklists, guidebooks of protocols, training, carefully pre-assigned roles, rehearsals and dry runs assure that the most valuable and helpful information gets disseminated quickly and effectively. Amid the horror, such circumstances underscore the importance of revisiting

your own crisis communication plan on a regular basis.

If you'd like some help on your crisis plan or need an objective review, give us a call. We'd like to hear your opinions on this topic, as well.

Comments and questions: pkhendricks@phprinc.com



We send sympathy and hope for healing to those suffering in Las Vegas (and their friends and families), on the Texas Coast, in Florida, in the Caribbean and wherever disaster strikes.



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