Four-Step Crisis Recovery Plan

The organizational crisis has exploded, immediate responses have been issued, the dust has begun to settle and the aftermath has begun -- which means that the work to bring the organization’s good name back to anything approaching its previous heights is just beginning.

What needs to happen next can be viewed as a four-step process, with some overlap along the way. Regardless of the degree of difficulty, your organization’s future will largely be determined by the extent to which your efforts to **reassure**, **reassert**, **reaffirm** and **recapture** are successful.

**Reassure**: Clients, customers or donors must be reassured that their previous decision to support the organization, financially or in other ways, was a good decision. Trust has been shaken (but hopefully not shattered) and confidence may be wavering. Individuals prefer to believe that their past decisions and actions were correct. Your task is to reassure them that they were. Your key audiences may be somewhat skeptical, but generally tend to remain open to being reassured. Irreparable breaks happen, but usually damage can be repaired. Reassure them by what you do, not merely what you say.

**Reassert**: Past clients/customers/donors must be reminded – vigorously, consistently and frequently – that their support is an investment (either in time or money or both) with clear, discernible benefits. They may have thought this to be true in the past, or may not have been particularly concerned about details at the granular level. They are now. Or they may have forgotten the specifics, with support, participation or a business relationship becoming a habit based on the overall mission, objectives or track-record of the organization, with only general and vague knowledge of the details. They need some details now.

**Reaffirm**: As for those who stood by the organization through the explosion and immediate crisis, their support must be reaffirmed and appreciated demonstrably. They also must be provided sufficient information to continue to stand by the organization in their own individual spheres of influence. You can’t thank them enough, but one way of doing so is to reward their steadfastness with information to permit them to continue reaffirming their initial decision to stick with you. This extends to everyone with any connection to the organization, formal or informal, past or present. If they have stuck with you, you need to stick with them. Expressing appreciation is always good – never more than right now.

**Recapture**: In any crisis, some instantly say that they will no longer support the organization; others are hesitant, wavering and uncertain. Efforts should be made to recapture the support of individuals in both categories. The best way to do so is with personal contact – one-on-one conversations to dispel concerns, enhance understanding and reestablish confidence. Multiple contacts by various people – especially those with a prior connection to the individual – are most effective, but broader outreach and a backdrop of message-consistent marketing can be effective in supporting such efforts. Candor and consistency are key.

The world may have been built in a week, but Rome wasn’t built in a day. The aftermath of a crisis – especially one with a public dimension - is rarely of short duration, and rarely without an occasional aftershock from the initial eruption. Stay the course. Don’t be deterred from efforts to reassure, reassert, reaffirm and recapture. Be sufficiently flexible to respond to new developments in the ongoing situation, but don’t lose sight of your objective: to get through not only the crisis but its aftermath, and in doing so steady the ship and proceed forward to future accomplishment.