

# When It Hits the Fan – Crisis Communications for Credit Unions

Presented by:

Denise Gabel & Chris Lorence



## The Question:

“How confident are you that your credit union could handle a crisis tomorrow?”



# What Crisis Communications IS

- Planned
- Honest & Transparent
- Unified
- Accountable
- Member-Focused



# What Crisis Communications ISN'T

- Guesswork
- Finger-pointing
- Silence
- Spin
- Only the CEO's Job



# Why It Matters

## Examples:

- Sudden leadership change.
- Closure of a nearby CU.
- Negative/unfavorable media coverage.
- Community emergency (storm, fire, flood).
- A data breach from a retailer(s).
- Unexpected closure or layoff announcement from a foundational sponsor or SEG.
- A negative social media campaign designed to expose or harm.



# Anatomy of a Crisis Communications Plan

- Designated spokesperson(s)
  - On-site coordinator for the facilities. For example, if the location needs to be closed: signage placed, or curtains drawn for privacy, etc.
- Pre-approved key messages
  - In collaboration with Compliance and/or legal counsel
- Monitoring & adapting
- Speed + Accuracy + Empathy



# Staff Roles in a Crisis

- **Everyone has a part to play:**
  - **Frontline staff:** Know what not to say, redirect to spokesperson.
  - **Managers:** Keep teams informed, reinforce consistent messaging.
  - **Executives/CEO:** Activate plan, deliver official messages.

NOTE to FRONT LINE STAFF: Listening to what's being said and passing it along to credit union leadership is an important component and responsibility.



# Engaging the Plan

- Assemble the crisis team quickly.
- Confirm facts before sharing.
- Control the flow of information.
- Communicate clearly and often.
- Reassure with prevention & next steps.



# 10 Fundamentals of Crisis Communication

## 1. Respond Quickly, But Thoughtfully

- Speed matters, but accuracy and tone matter more. Silence creates a vacuum others will fill.

## 2. Tell the Truth

- Be honest about what you know, what you don't, and what you're doing to find out more.

## 3. Acknowledge the Situation

- Recognize the issue directly. People want to feel heard, not ignored.

## 4. Be the Single Source of Truth

- Designate spokesperson(s) and stick to consistent messaging across all channels.

## 5. Stay Calm and Professional

- Emotions are contagious. Composure from leadership helps reassure staff, members, and the public.



# 10 Fundamentals of Crisis Communication

## 6. Avoid Speculation and Blame

- Share only verified facts. Do not guess, assume, or shift responsibility.

## 7. Show Empathy

- People want to know you care. Pair information with compassion for members, staff, and community.

## 8. Own What You Can Control

- Take accountability where appropriate, and explain the actions being taken to address the situation.

## 9. Communicate Clear Actions and Next Steps

- Tell people what you are doing now and how you are working to prevent recurrence.

## 10. Keep Communication Flowing

- Update regularly, even if only to say, “nothing new at this time.” Consistent updates build trust and credibility.



**Thank you!**

**Questions?**

