

# Why Crisis Communication Plans Fail

By Gerald Baron, CEO Agincourt Strategies

**You have a plan.** Not everyone who should does, but you do. It's taken weeks, months or maybe even years to get done. But, you're still a bit uneasy. Will it work when everything is on the line? What will you find in the After Action Report as a fatal miss?

The following is a list of the types of plans that are almost certain to result in significant disappointment when push really comes to shove. This list is based on years of reviewing and developing plans for many different types of organizations including federal government agencies, nuclear facilities, military organizations, global oil and energy companies, non-profit organizations from local to global and even family-owned agri-businesses. This list has also benefited from the contributions of many readers of the Crisis Comm blog on [emergencymgmt.com](http://emergencymgmt.com) who responded to the request for additions following a summary blog post on January 7, 2013. My thanks to all those who contributed and commented.

Most plans will help maneuver through the dangerous waters of a major crisis or disaster. But reviewing dozens of plans has made it clear that the vast majority suffer from potentially fatal weaknesses. The intention here is to help you identify weaknesses and biases in your plans before your organization's future depends on their effectiveness. This list has benefited from the contributions of many readers of the Crisis Comm blog on [emergencymgmt.com](http://emergencymgmt.com) who responded to the request for additions following a summary blogpost on January 7, 2013. My thanks to all those who contributed and commented.

## 1. Last Event Plans

These are plans based on the last event experienced. Crisis management plans are similar to battle plans and failures of these plans often point to preparing to fight the last war instead of the next one. "Last Event Plans are highly dependent on the past experience of the planner. If you did fire response in northern California, then your plan looks like a northern California fire response plan. If you are an



experienced fire department PIO, then your plan looks like a plan for a large fire. If your organization recently went through a painful product recall, chances are your crisis communication plan is not going to be prepared for a toxic release or the sudden death of a high profile executive.

There is nothing per se wrong with this plan if the only event you face is, say, a Northern California wildfire. But if your plan is intended to be "all-hazards" then you have to look carefully if it is equally applicable to a pandemic, a calculated social media attack, a terrorist event, a major storm, hacking of confidential information or other types of events.

### **Solution:**

The solution to this problem starts with making certain that you do a thorough risk or vulnerability assessment. You can review the available online or printed information about comprehensive risk assessments. Your planning team should include those with experience in a variety of events. It may be helpful to have your draft plan reviewed by experienced crisis communication experts with deep experience in different events.

## 2. Past World Plans

These are plans based on a news environment that long since disappeared. These are plans for the Dan Rather, or even Walter Cronkite, era of news instead



of the Jon Stewart, Reddit and Twitter era. This is a fundamental miss that shows up in many ways throughout the plan. To know if yours is a “Past World”

plan, ask yourself a few questions:

- Is it focused on getting out press releases?
- Is it focused on press conferences and media briefings?
- Is it focused on spokespeople and what they say?
- Does it place monitoring social media and the entire Internet at the core of response planning as well as communications?
- Does it include the technical capability to reach out in multiple forms to stakeholders and members of the public?

The result of implementing “Past World” plans will be the surprising discovery that the media are paying little attention to what you have to say because they are getting more relevant information faster from other sources—mostly citizens. You will also likely be surprised to find that you disappointed an awful lot of important people. Today, key stakeholders expect to get information about an event that affects them from you. If they are forced to get it from the media, they will be getting it from a source that may be intent on profiting from your troubles. Not to mention their disappointment that you did not consider them important enough for you to communicate directly and personally with them.

### **Solution:**

Your planning team needs to include people who have a deep understanding of how the news and public information environment have changed. You may want to look for the twenty-somethings in your organization who are “digital natives” and who live in a continually-connected world. Ask those in your organization who gets most of their news from Jon Stewart and Reddit, and you will find those who can

contribute significantly to your plan. Changes in our public information environment are changing almost daily, which also means that a plan that is two years or more old is most likely seriously outdated.

## 3. Directionless Plans

You might think this an oxymoron. After all, a plan provides direction. That’s true, but most plans include a lot of specific actions to take without a clear explanation of the reasons behind those actions. In short, they don’t include clear policy guidance. What is the intention and goal of senior leadership in the communication response? How will they measure include a lot of specific actions to take without a clear explanation of the reasons behind those actions. In short, they don’t include clear policy guidance. What is the intention and goal of senior leadership in the communication response? How will they measure whether or not the effort is successful? How would they want those responding to think through some of the difficult dilemmas and issues that will be faced?



For example, a policy or guidance statement that says “Our goal is to build trust and we will let nothing stand in the way of that goal,” is a powerful way to help response leaders and team members think through difficult decisions. It also provides an important means for evaluating success. A policy statement such as “We recognize the right of news reporters to do their job and we will do all we can within the limits of safety and response effectiveness to assist them,” will provide important guidance to those working with reporters. At the same time, it may very well stimulate some important and valuable discussions at the highest levels of the organization. Ultimately, these policy statements reflect the organization’s culture, values and priorities.

The process of engaging the organization’s leaders in preparing an effective plan and identifying these policy statements or guidelines is itself extremely helpful. It helps highlight and focus some of the key issues and decisions that will need to be made. For example, how will the organization deal with issues where there is a clear conflict between protecting the organization in the court of law vs. the court of public opinion?

### **Solution:**

Working out policies that will be effective in meeting today’s communication expectations requires some in-

depth experience in contemporary crises. For example, what is your policy on who can talk to the media? Most will immediately say, “only authorized organization spokespersons can talk to the media.” But, as was seen in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, any attempt by an organization, including the federal government to limit who reporters can talk to will likely become a major story and will cast the organization as “hiding” or covering up. Because of the severity of media criticism National Incident Commander Thad Allen issued a media policy that made it clear that anyone involved in the response, including BP employees and contractors, were allowed to speak to the media. A policy that takes this into account will state that the organization specifically allows all employees to talk to the media. However, they should restrict their comments to their area of responsibility, never speculate, and refer the reporter to an authorized spokesperson designated to provide organization information and positions.

This example of media access policies is only one of many examples of important policy decisions. These need to be discussed before an event occurs, and all realistic plans include a summary of these important decisions so that everyone involved is clear on what is expected from them.

#### 4. Same but Bigger Plans

Organizations that are involved in routine communications, particularly routine media communications, often make the mistake of thinking that a major event is merely an extension of their daily routine. This is seen mostly in how the crisis communication team is organized and how they are to work together to make decisions. For example, universities tend to be very collaborative and run by committee on a day-to-day basis. So the crisis communications team is going to be run by committee as well with various people needing to be consulted and involved in decisions. It is likely to be a recipe for disaster in an event of any significant scale.



Organizations typically organize their work teams around a combination of some reasonable logic and the specific capabilities of individuals. So a communication team working on daily

communications may have Pete doing this work, Amber doing that, and Sue doing all the other stuff. But, can this structure be applied to a crisis?. There are some advantages in this in that Pete, Amber and Sue are known entities and their capabilities are proven.

The problem comes in when there are truly large events that overwhelm the existing team. This is especially true when an event is protracted and various people have to be rotated into key positions. That's when very clear job descriptions and an organization structure designed to plug people in to an on-going work team becomes critical. So, while some events may work fine using existing structure, the fact that such a structure won't work for all events means you end up with a variety of plans based on events (See Plan 6 below). It's much better to have a single organization structure that is highly scalable.

Crisis events in some ways are like daily communications, but on steroids, and in other ways they are something completely different. There are likely to be gaps in your existing team and organization chart that are critical in major events. For example, does your daily team include those capable of phoning high-level elected and governmental officials to coordinate meetings, or planning community meetings that may be rowdy, boisterous and potentially dangerous?

#### **Solution:**

The best solution to organization structure is to build on proven crisis communication team organization structure such as the Joint Information Center Model used by federal government agencies. This structure is highly scalable so that it works for a team of two as well as a team of 200. It has the added advantage, discussed below, of creating consistency when responding with other organizations, particularly government agencies (see Plan 5 below).

#### 5. Fly Solo Plans

The vast majority of plans look at what their organization will do and will need to do in a response, without looking at others who will also be responding. Assuming you have done a good job of identifying potential crisis scenarios, look at how many will involve others. For natural disasters you are certain to be coordinating to some degree with local emergency management departments or even perhaps FEMA. For crime events, environmental events, major accidents you will likely be working with law enforcement, regulatory agencies, federal and state agencies with authority over the



response. For almost any event involving fatalities or injuries you are going to work with hospital and medical providers and possibly coroner's offices. An all-hazards approach suggests that relatively few events you need to prepare for are truly "fly solo" events.



It is much better to work in concert with others who are responding. In many cases you may be working with highly experienced emergency management professionals. Your stakeholders and the

public would much prefer to see those responding working effectively together, and while reporters may like to see conflicting and confusing information coming from different sources, consistent information from those responding does much to build stakeholder and public confidence.

### **Solution:**

Evaluate your scenarios. Assuming they are fairly complete, identify which will involve other agencies or response partners. If it is likely you will be involved with government responders, make certain your emergency response plan or crisis management plan uses the Incident Command System (ICS). There is much information available from FEMA on creating plans compatible with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the ICS. For communications, this is a major reason to base plans on the National Response Team's Joint Information Center Model. While this provides an excellent model to follow and is proven in hundreds of events, those facing federal government response involvement should also become familiar with the Emergency Support Function #15, the external affairs element of the National Response Plan. This structure is very different from the JIC Model and is designed specifically to allow much greater control over response messages with political significance and is not recommended as an operation model. It also is not designed for collaborative response. But, as it will be implemented by the Department of Homeland Security in any major disaster event, including human caused events, it is valuable to understand how this structure works and how to connect with it.

## **6. Too Many Plans Plans**

Hurricane plans, tsunami plans, toxic release plans, worker fatality plans, active shooter plans. And a

dozen more. There is some real benefit in working through the specifics of different scenarios and it is clear that not all events are the same and require the same response. But, if you have a different plan for every kind of event you face, there's a good chance things will not work as planned. An all-hazards plan provides a basic framework for response that is applicable to all or nearly all events your organization may face.

A crisis or emergency requiring activation of a crisis communication plan means there is an urgent need to communicate important information to different people and audience groups. A process that can efficiently do that will work for virtually any scenario. And that means you don't have to sift through a dozen red binders to pull the right one off the shelf when you need it (more on plan access on Plan 12).



### **Solution:**

Develop a basic plan structure focused on the need to gather, produce and distribute information to multiple audiences. Include a realistic means of managing realities of interaction, engagement and numerous inquiries. This kind of basic plan is the foundation. Different events may require different actions which can be built around this core and perhaps included in appendices.

## **7. Failure of Imagination Plans**

Katrina, Haiti, Deepwater Horizon, Fukushima, Sandy—all mega-disasters. In many mega-disasters the causes are more complex than a single event. In New Orleans the hurricane led to levee collapses that were the real cause of flooding. The oil industry could not imagine that a complex trail of events could lead to a deepwater well being unable to be stopped for 90 days. In Japan, the earthquake led to a tsunami which led to nuclear plant disaster. It may be relatively easy to plan for the single-cause event. It is much harder to think how one thing might lead to another and another, or apparently unrelated events happening in quick sequence. That's why one of the key questions to ask in the early minutes of a response is "how could this get worse?"

Scenario planning today requires thinking about the unbelievable if not impossible. Our attention on the unexpected and unpredicted was highlighted by the popular book *The Black Swan* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. As James Roddey of Readysetprepare.org and Mike Brown of Brainzooming pointed out, using the

Black Swan ideas can help organizations better prepare for mega-events.

One reason such events may not be considered is that when they are included in planning it becomes clear very quickly that the resources of the organization will quickly be overwhelmed. True, but this problem does not go away using the head in the sand approach. In the Deepwater Horizon event of 2010, as many as 300 communicators were involved



during the height of the event. Organizations don't have anywhere that number on their staffs. But, plans that include mega-events consider where they will find the people they will need in these extreme circumstances. This includes sometimes contracting with global or local public relations firms for access to their staffs, or with experienced response management or crisis communication responders. It also may mean including VOSTS, or volunteer operations support teams. Technology, including social networks, is making it much easier to engage the services of experienced team members regardless of location.

## 8. Top Down Plans

Top Down Plans make the assumption that the leader at the top is going to make all the decisions. These plans are essentially there to make certain that nobody does anything without getting proper approval. One experienced Public Information Officer explained his plan as essentially calling all the available support staff into the room and then handing out assignments.

Communication leaders accustomed to doing a lot of the communication functions themselves may find it difficult to properly delegate so that all essential tasks in a large event are managed. And political leaders understandably concerned about the impact of the event on their electoral future often demand complete control over all information flowing from the event. But Top Down Plans are almost certain to fail. There is definitely a need for strong, highly visible and compassionate leadership in an event and political and organization leaders need to be seen as in control and communicating key messages. But effective plans, including communication plans, delegate decision-making and information release authority as far down as possible. The reason is simple: there is too much going on too fast to have a burdensome decision process slow everything down. Issues and concerns rise on social media, spread into mainstream media just as spot fires are spread by a stiff wind in a wildfire. If there is only one person with a hose or shovel, little will get done.



### **Solution:**

This is ultimately a corporate or organization culture issue and therefore may be very difficult to overcome. One way to raise the issue to the forefront is through a discussion of the policies. Organization leaders may question the need for these because they think they will be making the critical decisions. Leaders who have been through major, complex events are much more likely to understand the need for delegation. Short of that, the best way to make this requirement clear is through a full-scale drill or exercise that is realistic in complexity. Then, an honest discussion after the fact can help to make this requirement clear.

## 9. Approvals Required For Everything Plans

This is closely related to the "Top Down Plans" but is specific to information releases. Those familiar with the Incident Command System will note that the Incident Commander is the only one with the authority to approve information to be released by the PIO and the JIC. While this has been standard practice for some time, events have proven that if that authority is exercised in the



traditional way, the communication team may as well go home because the media and everyone else will learn all they want and need from other sources. There are many corporate leaders who demand full and complete authority over all information about the event regardless of whether they are actually leading the operational response or not. One global company's plans demanded that any information about an event be approved by the CEO even though headquarters was located half a globe away from where the events were likely to happen.

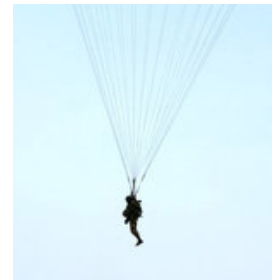
#### ***Solution:***

The solution is rather obvious but exceedingly difficult. Approval for some kinds of information must be delegated as low as possible. This requires training and trust—and clear guidance (back to the policy statements). To make this more workable, the best plans make a clear separation between response information and organizational messages. Response information consists of facts about the event and the response. Wind speed. Feet of boom deployed. Numbers of people responding. Deployment of resources. Organization messages are different. They include expressions of empathy, regret, sorrow or concern. They include upcoming plans and commitments, characterizations of the scope of the event, comments on cause or investigations, comments on impact and treatment of victims or those affected. In other words, anything that can be seen as reflecting views of the organization or its leaders. These “messages” need highest level approvals. The “information” including updates and rumor corrections relating to response facts should be released by those in a position to positively verify the accuracy of the information.

## **10. Big Shots Know Everything Plans**

Closely related to Plans 8 and 9, this one assumes that the organization or response leaders will assume control and make it up as they go along without regard to preparations. In reality, this problem may not show up in the plans. The plans as written and practiced may not include the senior leaders, leaving response management to those with experience and education. And that's the problem. Because in actuality, in major events the organization's leaders will get involved whether they have any background in response or crisis communication management or not.

This is remarkably typical of major events. Those who have spent years preparing to respond and have had experience in exercises and real events are pushed aside by the big bosses who assume control without regard to the preparations that have been put in place. They can do that because, well, they are the big bosses. This is often very true of political leaders as well as CEOs of major corporations. These busy people don't have the time, interest or inclination to participate in the training and drills used by the professionals to establish best practices and prepare. But, when the bad stuff hits, they don't have the humility to recognize that people well below them in organization structure are likely the best ones to manage the response. Of course, as the senior leaders they have an important supervisory role to play. But to push aside the well-honed plans, structures, training and experience of the experts is a recipe for disaster. This happens far too often not just in the operational response, but also in the communication response. A smoothly-running Joint Information Center operation was completely destroyed by a company executive in a major event who had no background in crisis communication and who put in place a “press office” operation for the few days he was in charge. It was what he knew and was comfortable with, but a complete disaster. When he left, the pieces were picked up and put back in place.



#### ***Solution:***

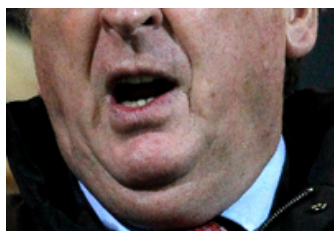
In a perfect world, senior leaders including the elected officials who oversee jurisdictions, department and agencies would be required to get Incident Command System and Joint Information Center training. They would be there during every major drill. They would see all the planning and preparation that went into it, and



why a response organization is not like their management team. And, in that perfect world, that would have sufficient humility and delegation skills to allow the experts to do their work and the plans to be implemented. Because we don't live in a perfect world, the best thing is to do all that can be done to include the senior leaders in the training and exercises, include a clear and meaningful role for them in the crisis communication plan and have a good and honest discussion about how things can go wrong when plans and experienced people are pushed aside.

## 11. All Words, No Actions Plans

One of the best aspects of the Incident Command System and the Joint Information Center is including the Public Information Officer (PIO) as one of three members of Command Staff. This puts communication squarely into the Command decision-making process. If planned and implementing properly, this not only gives the response leadership direct input on critical



communication issues, but also puts the communication lead in the position of assisting in major response decisions. Wait, you say, that's not their job. But, it **is** their job because the success of the

response ultimately will be determined by the perceptions of stakeholders and the public. Much research and experience has made clear their judgment is primarily about the character of the leaders made clear through their actions. Actions, it turns out, really do speak louder than words. Therefore, if the communication leader has a major role in the public perception of the event and response, he or she **MUST** have a voice—preferably a strong one—in the actions taken. Certainly, they must play a role in advising Command or the senior response leaders on the perception impact of any proposed actions and what those actions may mean for the long-term reputation and viability of the organization.

Crisis communication, in its simplest form, can be seen as communicating the actions of the decision-makers in responding to the event. Bad decisions well communicated still equate to response failure. Good decisions poorly communicated also equate to failure. So the crisis communication plan must

include the role communication plays in **making response decisions as well as how the entire organization works to effectively communicate the decisions that are made.**

### **Solution:**

If a crisis communication plan is based on ICS and JIC, this issue is addressed in the plan. However, many response leaders focused on operations may not properly appreciate the role the communication leader needs to play in participating in all response decisions. By that I mean being in a position to recommend and advise on proposed actions taken as well as advising on public communications. If that is not the understanding of organization or response leaders now, conversations about it should be held before an event. They can be included as part of pre-event training, discussions and exercises. The plan should make clear that the job description of the Communication Lead or PIO includes being an active participant in the response leadership team and active in the actions as well as words.

## 12. Not There When You Need Them Plans

A group of utility managers who had managed significant events were asked how many major events occurred between the hours of eight and five. None. Not one. Most events are going to happen when you or other key leaders are away from the office and in off hours. Where is your plan? If it is in a big red binder on the shelf behind your desk, it won't do you much good. Increasingly response management depends on a team that is dispersed in many locations. Do they all have access to the plan?



### **Solution:**

The solution is rather obvious: the internet and/or mobile apps. For some organizations private networks that can be accessed 24/7 may work just fine. Those smart devices in our pockets give us access to a world of incredibly valuable information.

But, do they give you access to the very important information you need when a crisis or emergency hits? The great thing about internet-based plans is that they not only contain the static information about what to do in an event, but they can be dynamic. In other words, you can and should be able to act on those plans through links and software directly from the plan.

### 13. Measured by the Pound Plans

Sometimes plans look like whoever created them got paid by the word—or the pound. They are lengthy, detailed, and their complexity makes it almost impossible to find what you are looking for when you most need it. These plans will clearly not do much good during an event. But, this highlights a real problem. A very simple plan that is just a few pages long is likely not to include all the vital information needed. On the other hand, go beyond a few pages and the plan won't be useful in the early crush of an event.

#### **Solution:**

One solution is how the OnePage Crisis Communication Playbook is structured. The entire plan, including all-important guidelines, are captured on a single page in graphic form. This includes the organization structure of the crisis communication team as well as the initial steps needed immediately after an event occurs. But, this one page guide is backed up by a detailed manual that explains all the nuances and specifics of the actions to be taken. Job descriptions for each of the roles is included in the Workflow and charts make clear how each role interacts with the others. The analogy is to a football team. The OnePage Guide is the quarterback's wristband that contains all the plays, but it is supported by the playbook which the team has used to practice with before the big game.

### 14. Engineless Plans

These are plans that do not include the use of communication technology to support the team's efforts. While it's hard to believe, too many plans today depend on handing out photocopies of press releases to media gathered at the scene or waiting outside the JIC. News doesn't happen this way anymore. The "engineless" plans are typically related to the "Past World Plans" above. Today's crisis and emergency management requires at least these elements involving technology:



- website content management, preferably on a dark site specific to an incident and fully prepared in advance
- email distribution to pre-established contacts that are accessible 24/7
- inquiry/interactive management—systems for tracking, facilitating and reporting on the questions and comments received and the responses sent
- text and automated phone calling—text is particularly important
- email and text list management—method for easily maintaining the contact information for those people who want to get response information
- social media—use of social media channels for distributing information, monitoring, and for interaction
- internal communication management—easy way for dispersed team to gather info, collaborate on preparing it, getting updates, and coordinating plans and activities
- Media and social media monitoring—online tools to capture and analyze media reports, social media conversation, and sentiment

#### **Solution:**

I am most familiar with PIER (Public Information Emergency Response), a technology I created in 2000, the system is now provided by Witt O'Brien's. It has the advantage of combining many of the requirements in a single platform. However, a wide variety and rapidly expanding list of technologies and tools are available. It is helpful to keep in mind that today's plans and supporting technology need to accommodate three modes of communication: push, pull and interactive. That is proactive distribution to multiple contacts and audience groups (push), ability for those interested to get the info they need from you (pull), and a way to manage the high levels of personal interaction (interactive).

### 15. Say Nothing and It Will All Go Away Plans

Here's one of the suggestions generated by the original list. It may be the most common plan of all. It may spring from the idea that to plan is to bring on disaster. However, I'm not sure too many say after experiencing a major crisis that they wasted their time on too much planning.

#### **Solution:**

Make a plan and practice it.



## 16. Because We Needed a Plan Plan

Some plans are too obviously created as a check box exercise. They said we needed a plan, so there, we have a plan. They may be simply adapted from an overly general plan template and not reflective of the organization's specific risks and challenges. These plans generally become Plan 17 (see below) because no one takes them very seriously. The cause is generally a directive from senior leadership to those below saying: we need a plan, without follow up, review or showing real interest in the quality and use of the plan.

### **Solution:**

The degree to which crisis plans are taken seriously in the organization is based primarily on the level of interest of senior management. If plans seem to be after-thoughts or box checking exercises, a discussion with senior management about the role and importance of plans would be appropriate. Direct involvement of the most senior leaders is the best way to resolve not only this issue, but many of the problems identified here.

## 17. Dust Gathering Plans

Plans that fit Plan 16 above usually become Dust Gathering Plans. These are ones which sit around month after month which can turn into year after year without use, review, updating or testing.

### **Solution:**

Same as Plan 17 above. Senior leadership must be engaged. Effective plans are ones that are seen as a continuous process including exercises, training, review, evaluation and updating. This happens when either a preparation champion in the organization pushes the issue or, more likely, when senior management recognizes that the plans and how they are used is important to their future and the future of the organization. If that is not happening, time to have a discussion with senior leadership and determine the level of interest in these plans.

## 18. Hopelessly Out of Date Plans

The fact is, almost all plans are out of date. Our world just changes too fast and it isn't reasonable to

have someone changing it every day. People change, with those changes come organization change, plus in the communication world there are new channels, tools and challenges popping up regularly. Many of these have impact on the status of your plan. But Hopelessly Out of Date plans

mean that they have essentially lost their value because of the volume of changes or the time between updates. The biggest issue tends to be people and contact information.

Plans typically identify team members and how to reach them. But, if you look at the plan and see that a number of the folks have moved on, or if the contact information has pager numbers, it's probably quite certain that plan is Hopelessly Out of Date.



### **Solution:**

This problem is part technological. Paper is just not a very dynamic medium. If you are keeping all your important details from the plan on paper, in binders, then it is very easy to have a Hopeless plan. Much better to keep contact information, templates, pre-staged information and other needed items on a platform that can be reached and updated continually. Crisis communication platforms used for managing crises can be integrated with employee databases through something called APIs to enable on-going updating of team contact information without requiring any work. The vital information needed in implementing a plan should not be limited to paper form. Doing so it likely to result in the plan being Hopelessly Out of Date.

## 19. In a Perfect World Plans

A hint whether or not your plan fits this category can be found by looking at how the plan suggests you activate your team. Does it say to call their office extension? Won't do much good for those events that happen outside of office hours. Does it say call them on their cell phone? Works as long as cell phones work—which is not much in events affecting significant parts of the population. Does your plan identify a specific person as heading the crisis communications response? What if

that person goes down in the same crash that takes



the Chairman and CEO. Or if she is on the beach on Barbados and can't be reached? Perfect world plans simply don't take into account the realities that not everything will be in order when an event hits. You've

planned for working with the local hospital. What if the beds are full?

### **Solution:**

The ironic thing is that crisis plans also need their own business continuity plan. In other words, they need built-in redundancies and backup plans. Every major position should have at least three people identified and trained to fill that position. Various means of contacting key people should be considered including possible use of satellite phones. More reliance in contacting should be placed on text messaging because of the resilience of the cellular data vs. voice networks. No one single method should be relied on for activating the team and for maintaining either internal or external communication.

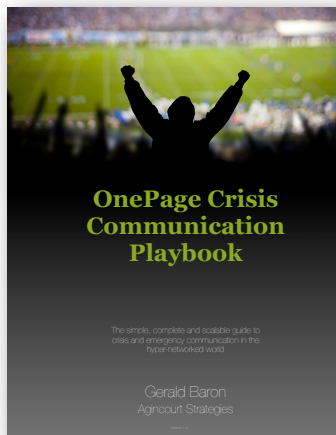
## **Creating Plans that Won't Disappoint**

The above list is far from exhaustive. Crises and emergencies are just too complex, varied and unpredictable. No plan is bullet-proof. Hopefully, this list will provide food for thought and some ideas on where your current plan can be improved. Returning to the football analogy, the game is won on the field and that finally comes down to who is on the field and critical decisions that are made in the heat of battle. The best game plan in the world will do little if not supported by top-notch players who know their game, are fully committed to the best outcome and who coalesce as a powerful team under inspired leadership.

## **About Gerald Baron and Agincourt Strategies**

Gerald Baron is the creator and developer of the PIER System, the crisis communication management system employed by numerous government, corporate and non-profit organizations. He's the author of *Now Is Too Late2: Survival in an Era of Instant News*, called the best guide to crisis communication in the digital era. He blogs at Crisis Comm for Emergency Management and at [crisisblogger.com](http://crisisblogger.com). He is the founder and CEO of Agincourt Strategies.

**Agincourt Strategies** provides education and training products and consulting services in public affairs, crisis and emergency communications. The OnePage Crisis Communication Playbook is a plan and training template including a video and online training series. The Agincourt Gap Analysis providing a comprehensive evaluation of current crisis communication plans and is supported by a network of highly experienced and respected crisis communication experts.



### **OnePage Crisis Communication Playbook**

- OnePage Guide
- 130 Page Training Manual
- Train-the-Trainer Power Point
- Fifteen Training Videos
- Online Tests

## **Are You Ready?**

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