Kith

Your reputation is valuable.
Protect it.

10 Things You Can Be Doing Now to Prepare for a Crisis (in No Particular Order)

#1. Find the most recent version of your crisis plan. If it hasn't been updated recently, ensure key information is still correct:

- Are the people still correct? Is their contact information still accurate?
- Is the organizational structure still correct? Are there any new departments or executives that aren't included but should be?
- Is the branding still correct? Are the institution's slogans, values, and standard responses – your holding statements – still accurate?
- Are your risks still an accurate reflection of what your institution may face? Has the institution added any new programs or policies that create new risks?
- Does your crisis plan provide the process and guidance for weighing in on social issues?

#2. Ask "What if?" The easiest way to do this is to hold up a newspaper (or iPad) during a key staff meeting and ask, "What if this had happened on our campus?" If your team can't detail your plan, schedule a practice session.

#3. Map your most important stakeholders. If you can't name the top five, gather your leadership team and evaluate who matters to your institution most. Then figure out the best way to communicate with them.

#4. Map your risks based on the likelihood of their occurrence and the potential impact they might have on your operations AND your reputation.

#5. Prepare holding statements for high-likelihood, high-impact risk situations. Get them approved in advance so that an immediate response can be issued when the incident first occurs. Pre-prepared holding statements save valuable hours in the early stage of a crisis and allow you to start telling your side of the story as early as possible with only minor edits.

#6. Identify your subject matter experts (SMEs) and outside experts for your most likely situations and build relationships with them. SMEs will be internal, but you may need to bring in other experts such as outside legal counsel, specialized consultants, third-party validators, independent auditors, and crisis communications firms. Don't wait until you need one to select one – do it now. These need to be "instant on" resources.

#7: Identify any procurement or other administrative roadblocks that would prevent you from bringing in immediate outside help. Even if you know exactly who you'd call, you may not be able to activate them instantly depending on your vendor qualification and procurement policies. Take steps now to reduce this kind of friction, such as pre-qualifying a vendor, putting in place an MOU that enables instant-on activation, or creating an emergency exception to procurement policies.

#8. Understand your reporting obligations. What incidents need to be reported to law enforcement, occupational health agencies, insurance companies, or governmental entities? When is the deadline for reporting? Knowing these in advance saves time and, most importantly, reduces the risk of non-compliance.

#9. Emphasize mission and values. If you stopped an employee in the hallway and asked them about the institution's mission and values, would they know what they are? Clarity on mission and values is crucial not only to effective crisis response but also to strategic decision making. Start an internal communications campaign to promote mission and values.

#10. Think about past crises and ask, "Did we commit any unforced errors that made the crisis worse, or harder to solve, or last longer?" Think about ways those errors could have been prevented and see how those preventive actions could be incorporated into the crisis plan.

BONUS: Ask, "And then what?" This question keeps you looking forward, peeking around corners, and considering the consequences of an ever-evolving situation.

Kith is a crisis management advisory that uses senior counselors' decades of experience to provide clients with elite guidance to prepare, mitigate, and recover from reputational threats.