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# Crisis Communication in Low Trust/High Concern Situations

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# What Not To Do





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# Key Takeaways

## ■ Five-Step Crisis Response

1. Acknowledge the situation early:

**care/respond & inform**

2. Show empathy for all impacted:

**care/connect & inform**

3. Take immediate action: **control & inform**

4. Provide frequent updates: **commit & inform**

5. Deliver future promise:

**continuously improve & inform**



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# Low Trust, High Concern Leads to Outrage

- **Fear – what I do not know**
- **Conflict – varying views & agenda**
- **Control – can I impact outcome**
- **Choice – is this forced upon me**
- **Benefit – what do I get for the risk**



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# ***An Axiom to Remember***

**I do not care what you know  
until I know that you care.**

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# Declining an Interview

- You have the right to decline an interview
- Politely greet reporter or community resident
- State “I am unable to talk or do an interview”
  - At this time, my focus is the response
  - I am not the authorized person to speak
  - I do not have updated/additional information
- Defer to someone who can answer questions
- Offer to schedule a time for the interview



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# How to Survive an Interview

- Identify & anticipate scenarios & have prepared statements, or
- Write a brief statement with your main points
- Try to “background” the reporter before
- Maintain a confident posture
- Look at the reporter
- Speak in sound bites; repeat sound bites
- Transition, bridge or defer



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# Effective Generic Messages

- **We regret the incident (if appropriate)**
- **Our primary concern is the safety of our ....**
- **We are committed to safe operation**
- **Explain what you are doing to resolve the situation**
- **Establish that you have engaged experts, local officials & agencies**
- **Cause of incident is under investigation**
- **Show empathy and commitment**





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# Techniques to Communicate in High-Concern, Low-Trust

- **Listen, sincerely**
  - Find out what people know, think & want done about issue and/or risks
  - Let all parties with interest be heard
- **Demonstrate you are listening**
  - Let people know what you understand
  - Find & state where you agree
  - Tell them what actions will happen



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# Techniques to Communicate in High-Concern, Low-Trust

- **Empathize with your audience**
  - Try to put yourself in their place
  - Acknowledge validity of emotions
- **Deliver a future promise**
  - Outline steps to improve
  - Provide examples
  - Give a timeline to report back



# Crisis Messaging – Level Six

- Express empathy or concern
  - Include a personal story
- Provide conclusion
  - Positive 7-12 word sound bite
- Provide 1<sup>st</sup> supporting fact
  - Story or analogy for one fact
- Provide 2<sup>nd</sup> supporting fact
  - Transition from facts to conclusion
- Repeat conclusion
- Describe future action



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# Template to Handle Questions in High-Concern, Low-Trust

- I can relate to your concern, I had same feelings – I drank water & brushed my teeth before told of boil water notice
- Our water was safe, as our water quality expert expected and a local county expert expected
- We followed TCEQ rules, yet that is not good enough for you or me



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# Template to Handle Questions in High-Concern, Low-Trust

- **We already are taking steps to improve our testing & our communication**
  - **Our operator has met with the sample collection and testing lab officials to improve their testing process**
  - **Our board has met with the operator and attorney to improve communication**
  - **The board is committed to improve plan, better prepare & practice the plan**



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# Contact Info

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