

HR's Role in Crisis Management and Humanitarian Assistance

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America in Crisis

Since 1989, America has endured a number of incidents of serious crisis involving fatalities, as well as serious injury and property damage that has totaled billions of dollars. In the majority of cases, these incidents have caused disruption to the day to day business activities of many companies both large and small. Most companies, public and private, have learned the hard way of not being prepared for a crisis involving their business activities or the well being of their employees. Some examples of crisis are 9/11, shootings on college campuses, food or drug contamination in stores, and acts of nature, such as hurricanes and floods.

I maintain that most businesses need to have a crisis plan of a magnitude that fits the needs of their business and employees. Trying to manage a crisis at the time it has occurred can be very stressful, embarrassing to the company and, from a legal standpoint, very expensive with the liability laws that exist in the US legal system.

Why do we concern ourselves with being prepared for a workplace crisis? What is Crisis Management and Humanitarian Assistance and what role should the Human Resources professional play?

The Business Case for Crisis Management

Companies that are prepared to handle a work place crisis demonstrate its commitment to the health and wellbeing of its employees and the community in which it operates, as well as to protect its most valuable assets – the employees and the company's reputation. A well laid out plan to deal with crisis won't eliminate liability, but it may help to minimize exposure to such claims after the crisis has been resolved.

HR's Role in Crisis Management

As HR professionals, we are responsible for ensuring that processes and programs are in place that protects employees and the company. HR can provide the leadership to senior management in identifying where the needs may be for a crisis plan, develop the business case for such a plan -- including costs -- so that, as a management team, they can make the best decision for the business. There are some core elements to a crisis plan, but no one plan can fit all businesses. For example, a plan written for a manufacturing facility may not be the kind of plan required for a business located in a 50-story building in a major city.

What is a crisis?

Anything that can cause major financial harm to your organization!

- ❑ Fire and explosion at a company facility
- ❑ Contaminated food or drugs on the store shelves
- ❑ Robbery, shooting, kidnapping

- ❑ Accidents
- ❑ Employee violence
- ❑ Hurricanes, tornadoes and other acts of nature

How does one go about preparing a crisis management humanitarian assistance plan?

If you are going to propose establishing a formal Crisis Management/Humanitarian Assistance plan, you must first determine your company's appetite for such a formal plan. Then you should ensure your plan fits with your company's philosophy and culture.

- ❑ What are your company values?
- ❑ What is your Risk and Exposure tolerance?
- ❑ What are your basic principles and behaviors
- ❑ Is there alignment across business units, functions and corporate?
- ❑ Do you have a performance management culture with clearly defined accountabilities?

Building your plan

Using three basic steps, you can build a plan that demonstrates your company's commitment to its employees, the community in which you operate, and to the environment. These steps are:

1. The Impact of the Incident
2. Regaining Stability
3. Post incident

IMPACT –This is the first few hours immediately following the incident. In this stage it is critical to regain control as quickly as possible.

- ❑ First, determine who is impacted? (internal/external/community) What needs might they have?
- ❑ Next, determine what needs to happen in the first few hours following the incident?

Key actions to consider in this stage are how to account and track employees, victims and their families. What humanitarian assistance is needed? Who will do death and injury notification – have they been properly trained to do so. What communication will happen to employees, families, and the community and by whom? Who is to handle media relations? How will their message be crafted? Have they been properly trained? *NOTE: The initial media correspondent is never the lead person as they need to be focused on the crisis at hand.*



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STABILITY – This is the stage that begins hours after impact and can last for several days. In this stage, it is critical to regain stability for your employees and your business.

- Who will receive what assistance and how?
- What psychological and physical events will need to take place?
- Who will communicate to whom, what are the key messages?
- What needs to happen in the first week following the incident?

Key actions to consider in this stage are the type of physical and psychological support needed to be continued. What employee and family relations activities will need to take place? Are there hospital visits, funerals, or employee assistance required? What kind of environmental impact has taken place and what kinds of mitigation, if any, needs to happen? What community and media relations should take place? What are the customer and supplier relations that need to be protected? What needs to happen for business resumption?

POST INCIDENT is the period following stabilization, usually beginning late in the first week after the incident. In this stage focus is given to recovering and resuming normal activities.

- How are employees and family members coping?
- What potential liabilities loom?
- What needs to happen in period after the first week following the incident?

Key actions to consider are on-going survivor support, disability and workers compensation, employees returning to work, understanding how employees are coping and what support they might need, litigation mitigation, activities to resume normal business operations, continued community and media relations.



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Crisis Management Audit

An important step in developing a crisis plan for your business is to conduct a crisis management audit. This will help to determine where the business may need resources that are presently lacking in order to meet the effectively handle a work place crisis. The following questions need to be answered to identify where the business needs to make improvements and policies set so that individuals can respond as quickly as possible with little disruption to the process. The following represents a suggested audit for a crisis plan:

- Policies that describe what benefits will be provided to employees, contractors and their families during and after a critical incident
- A team designated to respond to crisis with clearly defined accountabilities for each member, including someone identified to be the decision maker on the ground
- A communication plan for employees, families, and the community
- A call tree and a process for notifying and initializing the Emergency Response Team
- A plan for personnel tracking
- A process for obtaining and communicating incident-related information internally, externally and to the community
- A process for receiving and responding to information inquiries
- A plan for evaluating the impact on customers and suppliers and communicating to them accordingly
- Members of the HR team trained in death notification
- Someone trained to address the media at the time of crisis
- Defined EAP and legal support
- A process for monitoring and discussing early warning signs of potential disasters
- A formal training and simulation plan
- Performance standards and measures

ABOUT US: Henry Davis, JR, S.P.H.R. is a senior management consultant specializing in crisis management and humanitarian assistance. As a former executive with BP/Amoco, Henry was involved in managing and directing crisis management, employee assistance and health programs for the Americas. Henry works in concert with W.I.S.E.-HR to bring rigor to the crisis management process. Wind In Sails Experience-HR, Inc. (W.I.S.E.-HR) is a consortium of senior-level Human Resource professionals dedicated to supporting business leaders and HR professionals alike, creating people practices powerful enough to impact the bottom line. With more than 100 years of collective experience, we are the consultancy of choice with a long history of successes.



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