Crisis Planning and Response: Preparing for the Unexpected

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How prepared is your organization for a crisis, whether caused by people or by nature? Carefully developed and implemented crisis management plans are vital for lessening the potential impact of an unforeseen event.

At the core of crisis planning and response are the principles of *prevention, preparedness, response, recovery,* and *mitigation*.

Ideally, a plan would be created to deal with every conceivable threat to an organization, but that's not realistic. You should prioritize potential crisis scenarios based on plausibility of occurrence. For example, consider whether your geographical location makes the organization vulnerable to natural disasters or political/civil unrest, whether crime data in the area supports certain types of threats, and what crises similar organizations have experienced. Crisis response plans can never be "one size fits all" or so rigid that they cannot be adjusted or scaled to address a specific event.

Development of Crisis Response Plans

In crisis response planning, it's necessary to designate leaders who will have key roles and responsibilities. This "command and control" team may include senior-level people within the organization and "on site" individuals capable of leading efforts in the midst of stress, uncertainty, and changing dynamics. Members of the team should have clearly defined actions to be taken for each type of crisis event, such as initiating evacuations, activating fire suppression systems, contacting emergency services, and coordinating medical care.

Communications roles and responsibilities during and after an event must be considered when developing the plan. Effective communications helps ensure that people impacted understand what is occurring and the actions required. A single spokesperson should be designated to collect and disseminate accurate information as quickly as possible. Be sure to consider the role of social media as an information-sharing tool among employees, the media, and other external audiences.
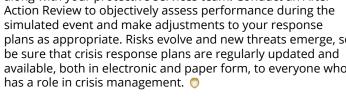
If your organization has an existing agreement with a protective services provider, be sure to understand the capabilities and resources that are available. Securitas USA, for example, assists clients with "best practices" recommendations during crisis planning, and its on-site officers often are certified First Responders, which can include First Aid, CPR and AED, and other specialty training. Securitas can quickly augment the normal security team with additional uniformed officers, armed officers, mobile patrols, and executive protection in the event of a crisis.

Crisis Response Plan Exercises

Crisis response plans mean very little until each component of the plan is validated and functions appropriately when activated. Table-top exercises and simulations can be used to test the ability of your organization to successfully navigate through the challenges of a crisis. Consider organizing a simulated event that includes local police, fire, and EMT personnel, along with your protective services team. Conduct an After-Action Review to objectively assess performance during the simulated event and make adjustments to your response plans as appropriate. Risks evolve and new threats emerge, so be sure that crisis response plans are regularly updated and available, both in electronic and paper form, to everyone who has a role in crisis management.

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