

# Key Principles of Crisis Management

On the afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup> June, during one of our Security Awareness and First Aid (SAFA) courses, the venue that we use for most of our residential training suffered a major fire which significantly damaged approximately 50% of the entire property. Shortly after the fire service arrived to tackle the blaze, the whole venue was cordoned off leaving us in a position of having a full set of participants from various different organisations (some from overseas) without overnight accommodation, access to their belongings or means to communicate with their employer or family. In addition, all of our training kit and equipment stored at the venue and crucial for the delivery of our SAFA courses, was at risk of being completely destroyed.



So rather than us providing advice and guidance to our clients to prepare and become more resilient to crises, we found ourselves in the midst of our own crisis! Whilst we recognise that this happened in a very different setting and under very different circumstances to those which we would typically support our clients with, it was apparent to us on reflection that the same concepts and principles for managing a crisis apply and have meaning; regardless of whether the crisis takes place here in the UK or elsewhere.

- **Prepare for the worst-case scenario.** We all hope that we, or the organisations we work for, never have to face a crisis; however, this is something we simply cannot guarantee (in our case, it was caused by something outside of our control). So, as much as we seek to prevent incidents and crises from occurring, an equal amount of time, energy and resources should be placed into preparing to respond to them. Make sure you have a Crisis Management or Business Continuity Plan, that you have staff trained to use them and both the plan and people are tested.
- **Do not wait for an incident to become a 'crisis'.** Whilst it is useful for an organisation to define what a crisis is against its own risk tolerances, regular scope of business or capacity to manage with or without wider strategic or operational support, it is recommended that you do not place too many boundaries on when a Crisis Management Team should be activated or see this as a last resort. Always exercise 'prudent overreaction' when you are faced with an incident that has the potential to escalate to a crisis or where there are any uncertainties. It is much easier to disband a Crisis Management Team when no longer needed, rather than beginning to manage a crisis on the backfoot.
- **Build a team that has the right skills, not seniority.** Managing a crisis will always need senior representation, but it should not always default to a Senior Management Team or equivalent. Crises are often complex and will require many different skills and experience to manage them effectively. Therefore, structure your Crisis Management Team so that a breadth of skills and experience are represented and members have the personality to work in an environment where collaboration, logical thinking and emotional resilience are key.



- **Think Broadly.** Sometimes it is easy to focus too much attention on resolving the crisis, and neglect some of the wider consequences of it. As such, always consider how business can continue whilst dealing with an ongoing crisis. Think about:
  - What support is needed for those not directly involved in the crisis, but who might be affected by it?
  - What support is needed for the family of those that are involved?
  - What steps are being taken to ensure that your finances, reputation or staff morale are not going to be too negatively impacted?
- **Communicate effectively.** At the onset of a crisis it is important to establish who communicates with who; vital information can quite easily be lost if communications fail. Assign individuals to maintain strong communications with prioritised stakeholders. When communicating to the family of those involved or speaking to the media, carefully consider your messaging prior to making any contact.
- **Do not fixate on a singled solution.** A crisis usually has many moving parts meaning that some of the circumstances surrounding it, or consequences of it, can quickly change the possible outcome. Therefore, you should remain adaptive and flexible in your approach. It is recommended that you plan for different scenarios as the crisis progresses so that you are well prepared and well-resourced to manage each of them should the crisis go down a certain route.
- **Record everything.** Particularly at the start of a crisis, when it is often chaotic and frantic, do as much as you can to record all information and actions taken. This is not only with the aim of supporting the Crisis Management Team to make informed decisions as the crisis progresses, but to support lessons learned or possible legal action when the crisis has been resolved. Phone calls, emails, meetings, informal discussions, Skype, texts and WhatsApp messages may be happening simultaneously; think about how information that is exchanged through these means can be centrally captured.
- **A crisis may not end at its resolution.** Once resolved, both those involved in the crisis, their family and those tasked with managing it, need to feel well cared for and supported. Just because a crisis has been resolved, it does not mean the management of it is complete. Dealing with the aftermath (psychological and medical support, human resource issues, contractual and legal issues) may take years and may continue to need dedicated resources.
- **A crisis is also an opportunity to reflect.** Whilst the desire is usually to move on from a crisis, they must always be reviewed and reflected on. You should focus on what factors contributed to the crisis and how effectively you were able to respond to it. Agree steps that should be taken to prevent any future reoccurrence of a similar crisis and to improve your response capabilities. Ensure that any actions that are agreed are properly implemented by assigning owners and clear timeframes.

Thankfully, our own crisis is now over, and we have been able to quickly replace our kit and equipment and find a temporary venue to continue running SAFA courses throughout the remaining part of 2018. If you would like to speak to us about developing your own Crisis Management Plan or undertaking Crisis Management Training, please contact Heather Hughes, Director of Risk Advisory Services ([heather.hughes@locationsafety.com](mailto:heather.hughes@locationsafety.com))