Chapter 2

Acknowledging the Relationship between an Organization, Its Stakeholders, and Brand

Building a successful crisis management strategy includes three important components and is grounded in two assumptions. The three components, the organization, its brand, and its stakeholders will be discussed at length and throughout the book. The assumptions will be treated now and will service as an organizing theme for this chapter and the book as a whole. The first assumption is that the organization, the brand, and the stakeholders are inseparable. Each relies on and, in turn, is relied upon by the others. This is true for all organizations regardless of their type or function. The second assumption is that stakeholders, internal or external people or groups that believe they have some vested interest in the organization and brand, define the relationship between the organization and its brand. This means that stakeholders are the key to successful crisis management effort.

Building an Inclusive Crisis Management Strategy

A strategic crisis management plan is a detailed document, sometimes comprising many pages and the work of several people. Chapters 8 and 9 outline the elements of such a plan. These plans are multidimensional and, ideally, grounded in the material presented in chapters 3 through 7.

Often, however, the demands created by the emerging crisis don’t allow for the immediate development of an elaborate plan. Immediate action may
be essential to reduce loss associated with the crisis but even a quick response should be organized and designed to meet a potential range of needs created by the crisis. To engage a quick response to a crisis, something to use to guide immediate activities, we propose creating a “Crisis Management Template” as a starting point until a fuller, more detailed strategic plan can be prepared. This template enables structured, immediate action and, importantly, can serve as a sketch for the preparation of a more detailed plan.

Developing the Crisis Management Template is a straightforward process, probably familiar to most. What makes our plan different is its emphasis on three things. First, it distinguishes between the event and the crisis or effects to be managed. Second, it stipulates the stakeholders involved and their relationship with the organization as defined by the stakeholder network. Finally, it takes a quick, “long view” of the effects of the crisis on the organization, its brand, and its stakeholders without specifying what long-term actions will entail. This orientation seeks to resist the temptation to simply “get the crisis behind us” by building a plan that is timely, inclusive, and yet still with a sense of the future for all involved.

The Crisis Management Template is a working document comprised of four elements. The first of these characterizes the situation or circumstances the plan is to address. This is more than a statement explaining “where we are versus where we want to be”; it is a concentrated focus on the effects of the crisis and not the event causing it.

The Template’s second element is a brief but complete summary of ways the crisis affects the three key components: the organization, the brand, and the stakeholders. This analysis includes a description of each of the three components, how each is affected, and the foundation for these observations.

The third element defines the desired results. What will success look like? How will the plan’s goals meet the needs at hand? Which needs are “musts” — needs the organization, brand, and stakeholders must have addressed? Last criteria defining how success be measured must be included.

Finally, the Crisis Management Template outlines internal and external resources required. It notes those available and how those not available will be obtained. Anticipated expenses are outlined with specific details regarding how they will be addressed. To close, data supporting the conclusions are presented.

Again, the template is a tool, a sketch, or a guide of what is a larger, more-involved process. Once finished, the template will provide a quick summary of the nature of the crisis and essential information needed for immediate action. Suggestions for using the template to produce a formal crisis management plan are covered in the following chapters. That material outlines an approach to the design of a crisis management strategy while helping the strategist address trauma associated with a crisis.