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*Communic@tions*

# THE RISK OF SILENCE

Crisis Communications For  
Government Leaders

*Oct. 8, 2025*



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# Christopher **Mannino**



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# Christopher **Mannino**

Vice President of Julie Parker Communications

Retired Chief of Police

FBINA Graduate

25-Year Law Enforcement Veteran

Master's Degree in Political Science

FEMA-Trained in Tabletop Exercises



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**CRISIS  
HITS  
HOME**

Park Forrest, IL | 2013

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July 27, 2013

**“ELDERLY MAN DIES  
HOURS AFTER BEING  
SHOT BY POLICE WITH  
BEANBAG ROUNDS”**

CBS NEWS  
CHICAGO

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A screenshot of a Twitter thread on a dark background. The first tweet is from @jessicanegrete6273, posted 10 years ago, with the text: "Survive the most bloody war in world history as we know it only to be killed here at home 60 years later. Im a vet and so is my husband. This is just sickening." It has 288 likes and a reply icon, with a "Reply" button and a link to "8 replies". The second tweet is from @MrJonsound, posted 9 years ago, with the text: "the cops carry extra knives and guns to put at scene in case they didn't have one." It has 139 likes and a reply icon, with a "Reply" button and a link to "4 replies". The third tweet is from @sieracki001, posted 11 years ago, and is mostly obscured. At the bottom of the screenshot is a blue banner with the text "JULIE PARKER *Communic@tions*".

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A presentation slide with a dark blue background and a light blue border. In the center is a white icon of a flipchart with a play button symbol on the screen. Below the icon, the text "Chicago Tribune Follow-Up" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. Underneath that, "Oct. 31, 2013" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the slide is a light blue banner with the text "JULIE PARKER *Communic@tions*".

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## Maui Fires = Directed Energy Weapons?

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# THE AGE OF **DIS**INFORMATION

False information spreads rapidly across social media, online platforms, and even news outlets. The impact is significant; false narratives distort public opinion, undermine trust, and influence behavior.

For gov't agencies, managing misinformation with speed and precision is essential, especially during times of crisis.



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# THE POWER OF **SOCIAL**



As of November 2024, **21% of U.S. adults** regularly get news from social media influencers—rising to **37%** among those **aged 18 to 29**.

In summer 2025, Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism reported that for the first time, social media is **American's top news source**.

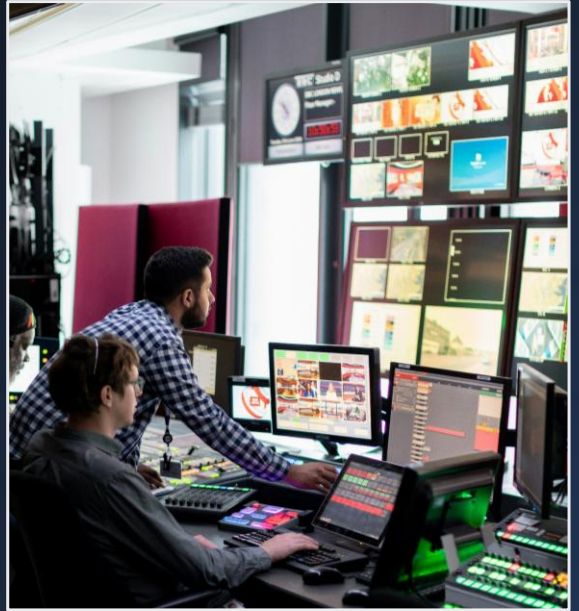
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# RUN IT LIKE A **NEWSROOM**

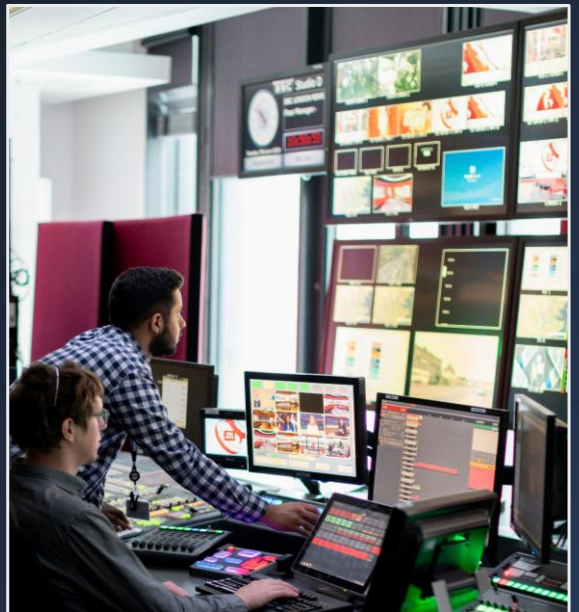


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# RUN IT LIKE A **NEWSROOM** OR GET **RUN OVER**



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# »» The Newsroom: ««

**Assigns  
Beats**



**Knows Its  
Audience**



**Fills  
Info Gaps**



**Breaks the  
News First**



**Operates on  
Deadlines**



**Verifies  
Fast**



**Reviews  
Meticulously**



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# »» The Newsroom: ««

**Speed**



**Simplicity**



**Clarity**



**Visuals**



**Access**



**Emotion**



**VALUES:**

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»» The Newsroom: ««

# IS YOUR COMMS TEAM



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**BREAK YOUR  
NEWS FIRST OR  
FIGHT FOR**

# **RELEVANCE**

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# What if you're late?

- X Misinformation spreads
- X Others define your crisis
- X Your voice gets **buried**
- X Trust **erodes** fast

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# What if you're late?

- X Misinformation spreads
- X Others define your crisis
- X Your voice gets **buried**
- X Trust **erodes** fast

# Mitigate being late by:

- ✓ Posting first, even with limited but **verified facts**
- ✓ Using visuals/being vocal
- ✓ Prepping for a **24-hour** cycle
- ✓ Speaking like a **human**

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## BE FIRST OR FIGHT FOR RELEVANCE

### 00:00 – Crisis Occurs

Internal alerts triggered, comms team mobilized

### <30 min – You Must Say *Something*

Initial statement acknowledging awareness is critical

### <2-3 hours – Public Confidence *Forms*

Initial impressions of your response solidify

### <15 min – It's Public

Social media mentions begin, citizen journalists on scene

### <60 min – Internal + External *Must Sync*

All stakeholders need consistent information

### <4-6 hours – National Eyes *May Be Watching*

Crisis may escalate to broader attention

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## BE FIRST OR FIGHT FOR RELEVANCE

**A comms failure in  
hour one becomes  
a leadership crisis  
by hour six**

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**THERE ISN'T  
TIME IN A CRISIS  
TO CREATE A  
PLAN.**



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**THERE ISN'T  
TIME IN A CRISIS  
TO CREATE A  
PLAN.**



**IT MUST  
BE MUSCLE  
MEMORY.**



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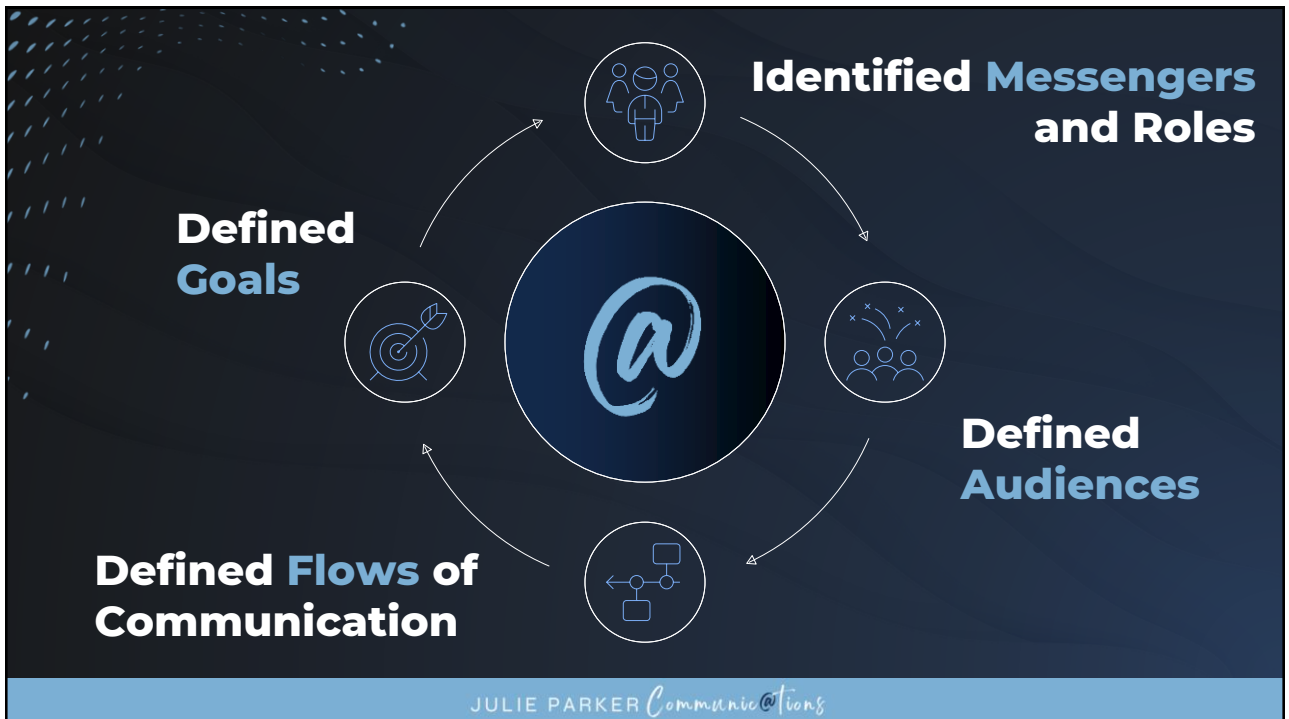


# Let's walk through an effective crisis comms plan.

There are **four** elements ✓

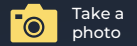
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# Defined Goals



## Public Safety

Ensuring public safety through timely calls to action

## Trust Building

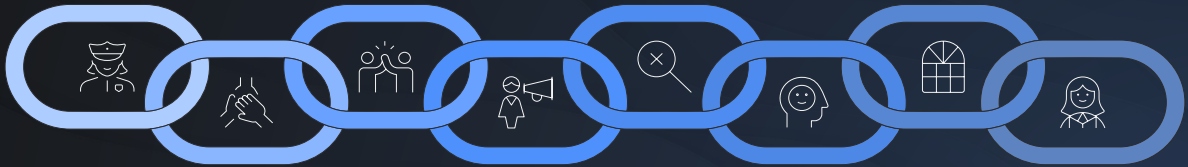
Establishing and maintaining trust in crisis response efforts

## Combating Misinformation

Addressing and correcting misinformation when it arises

## Transparency

Demonstrating openness and honesty in communication



## Public Cooperation

Encouraging public cooperation to aid in a crisis response, if warranted

## Information Dissemination

Keeping the community and media informed with accurate facts

## Emotional Relief

Alleviating fear, anxiety, and anger during crises

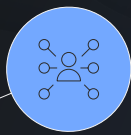
## Humanizing Government

Portraying gov't entities as relatable and approachable

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# Defined Audiences



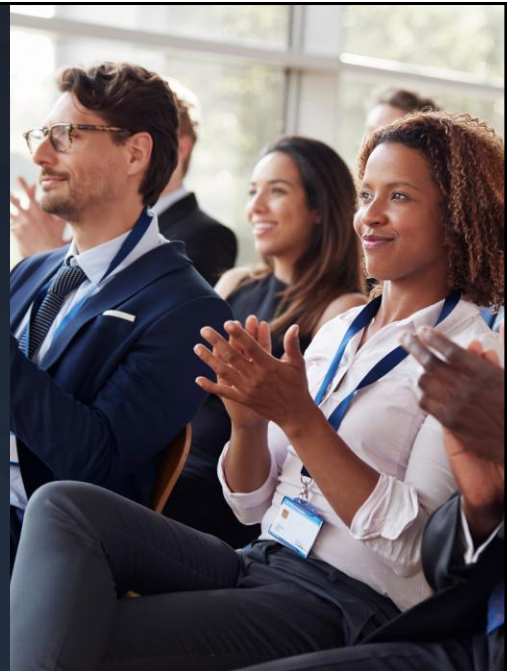
Create Exhaustive Audiences Lists



Map Communication Channels



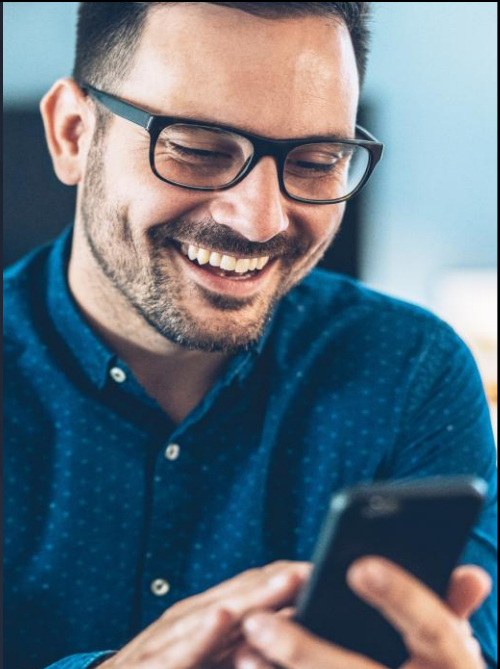
Consider Different Perspectives



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# Defined Messengers



## Skills Over Rank

Prioritize emotional intelligence and effective communication traits over job title when selecting messengers



## Plan Backups in Advance

Identify primary and backup messengers to avoid crisis scramble



## Formalize Responsibilities

Document roles to eliminate overlap and ensure accountability



## Audience Alignment

Select voices that resonate with different audience groups



## Messenger Training

Frequently rehearse messaging and handling of difficult questions

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# Defined Comm Flows

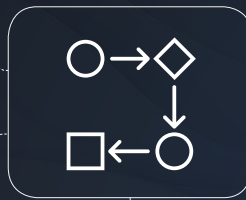
**An Internal Diagram Maps Responsibility**

**Messengers Are Kept In The Loop**

**Gatekeepers Verify Facts & Limit Access**

**Information Moves Flexibly & Clearly**

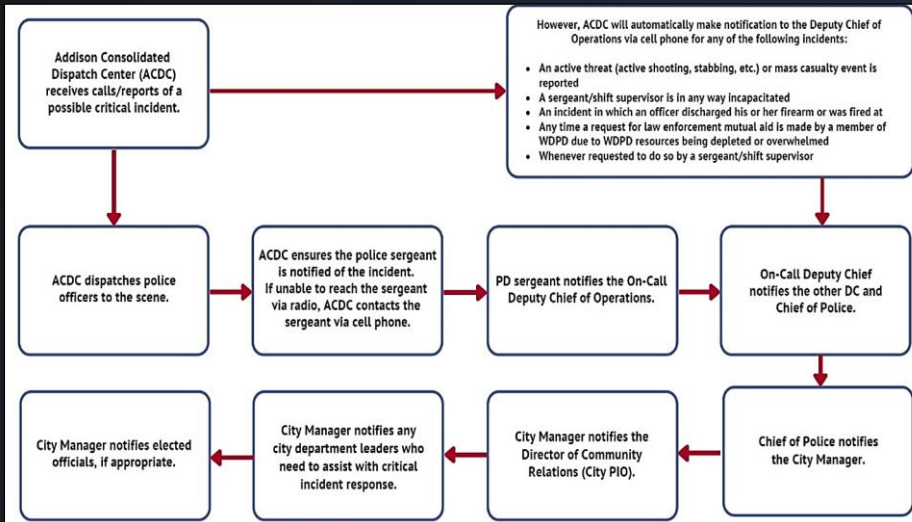
**News Breaks Internally First**



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# Defined Comm Flows Example



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Before You Need the Plans and Checklists,  
**Build Trust**

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# CRITICAL INCIDENT **CHECKLIST**

For **communicators**



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**1. Leadership is notified of the crisis; comms team is included in leadership briefings.**

**2. Gather verified information and confirm facts through trusted sources.**

**3. Communicate internally before going public; take steps to mitigate leaks.**

**4. Post promptly on social media to share what is known or urgent, life-saving information.**

**5. Assess whether media interviews will help inform the public or are advantageous.**

**6. Monitor social and traditional media for misinformation or emerging narratives.**

**7. Prepare a holding statement: a brief, accurate update for media and public use.**

**8. Plan for a potential news conference by identifying speakers, location, and timing.**

**9. Issue a news release that provides plain-language details. Share it across all platforms.**

**10. Continue to monitor developments, address misinformation, or adjust messaging as needed.**

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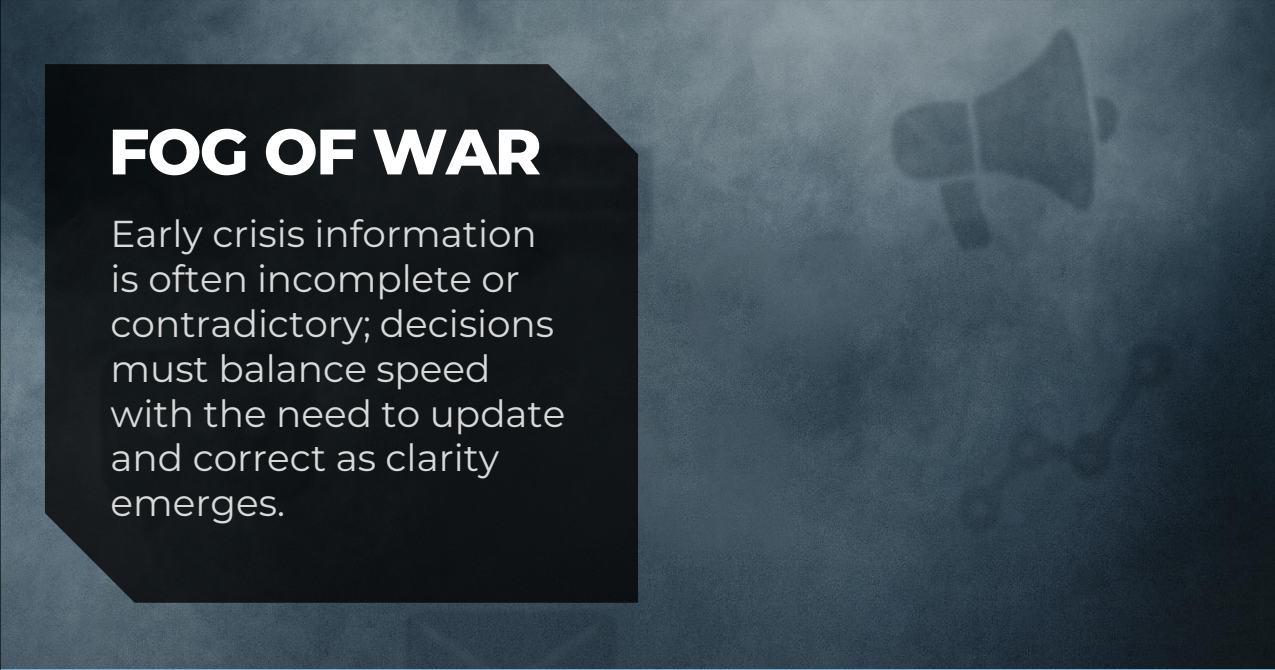


**Even with an ironclad comms plan, you'll have to deal with** ↴

**FOG OF WAR**

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**FOG OF WAR**

Early crisis information is often incomplete or contradictory; decisions must balance speed with the need to update and correct as clarity emerges.

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# FOG OF WAR

Early crisis information is often incomplete or contradictory; decisions must balance speed with the need to update and correct as clarity emerges.

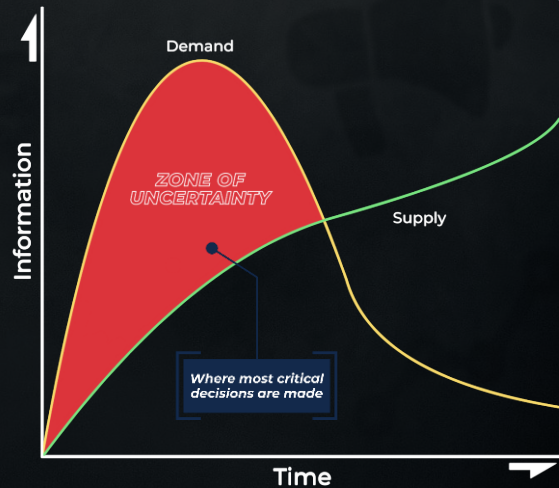


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# FOG OF WAR

Early crisis information is often incomplete or contradictory; decisions must balance speed with the need to update and correct as clarity emerges.



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# Comms Plan: ✓ Checklist: ✓ Training: ?

Here's how we trained  
City of Raleigh, NC



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# You will be tested when a **CRISIS** **ARISES**

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# ONE MESSAGE, MANY MESSENGERS

*There are three goals when preparing your message during a crisis:*



## Speak with One Voice

Maintain consistent messaging across all platforms and personnel, presenting a unified front.



## Avoid Confusion

Eliminate conflicting information to maintain clarity, build trust, and prevent misunderstandings.



## Speed Up Response

Streamline communication channels for rapid information dissemination and effective action.

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## JOINT INFORMATION CENTERS (JIC)

### Centralized Hub

A coordinated command center for crisis communications that synchronizes public information dissemination

### Multi-Agency Collaboration

Brings together communicators from different departments and organizations under one operational umbrella

### Consistency Assurance

Ensures all stakeholders receive accurate, timely, and aligned messaging across all communication channels

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# 3 REASONS TO STAY **SILENT**

And why we think you **shouldn't** ✓

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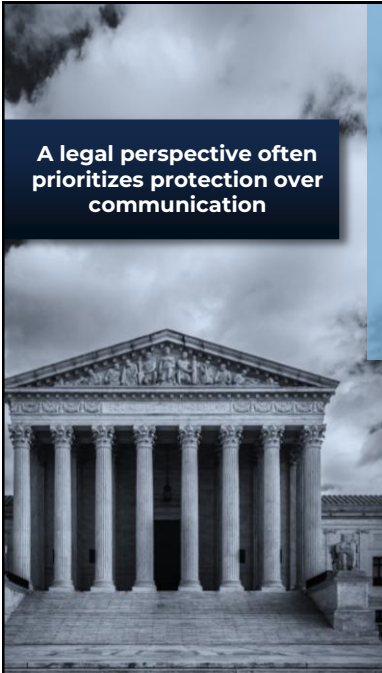


## REASONS TO STAY **SILENT**

Silence may  
seem like a  
good strategy.  
But it's **risky**.

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A legal perspective often prioritizes protection over communication

# Reason One

“Anything you say can and will be used against you . . .”

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# Reason One

“Anything you say can and will be used against you . . .”

## Counterpoints:



Transparency = Leadership

Concealment fuels suspicion and invites investigation

Accurate information builds trust with your audience

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**I think the currency of leadership is transparency. You've got to be truthful. I don't think you should be vulnerable every day, but there are moments where you've got to share your soul and conscience with people and show them who you are and not be afraid of it.**

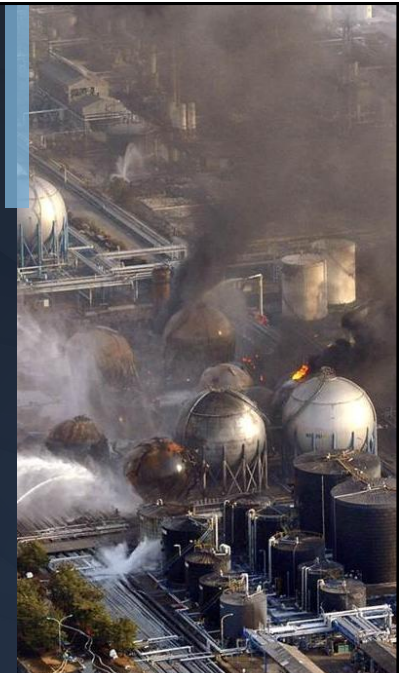
— Howard Schultz, former CEO of Starbucks

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## **Reason Two**

**“We don't want to panic the public.”**



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# Reason Two

“We don't want to panic the public.”

## Counterpoints:

### Research Findings

Studies consistently show that more information reduces fear and anxiety, not increases it



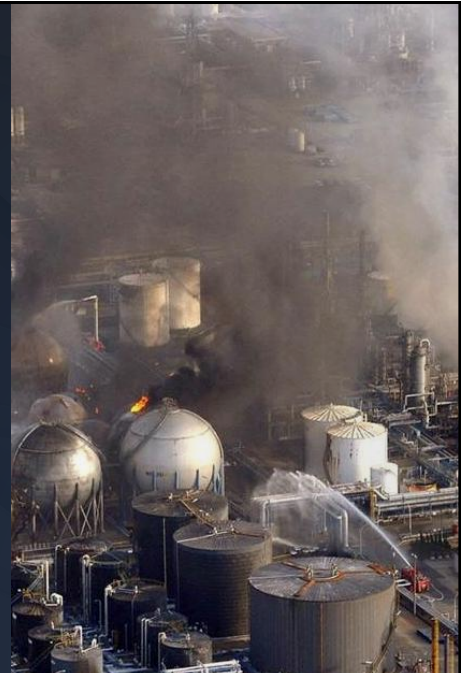
Source: Olson et al., "Impact of Hazard Naming in Wireless Emergency Alerts," under review, University at Albany

### Naming the Hazard

Specifically identifying threats improves understanding and establishes credibility

### The Digital Age

The story will likely spread online without your input



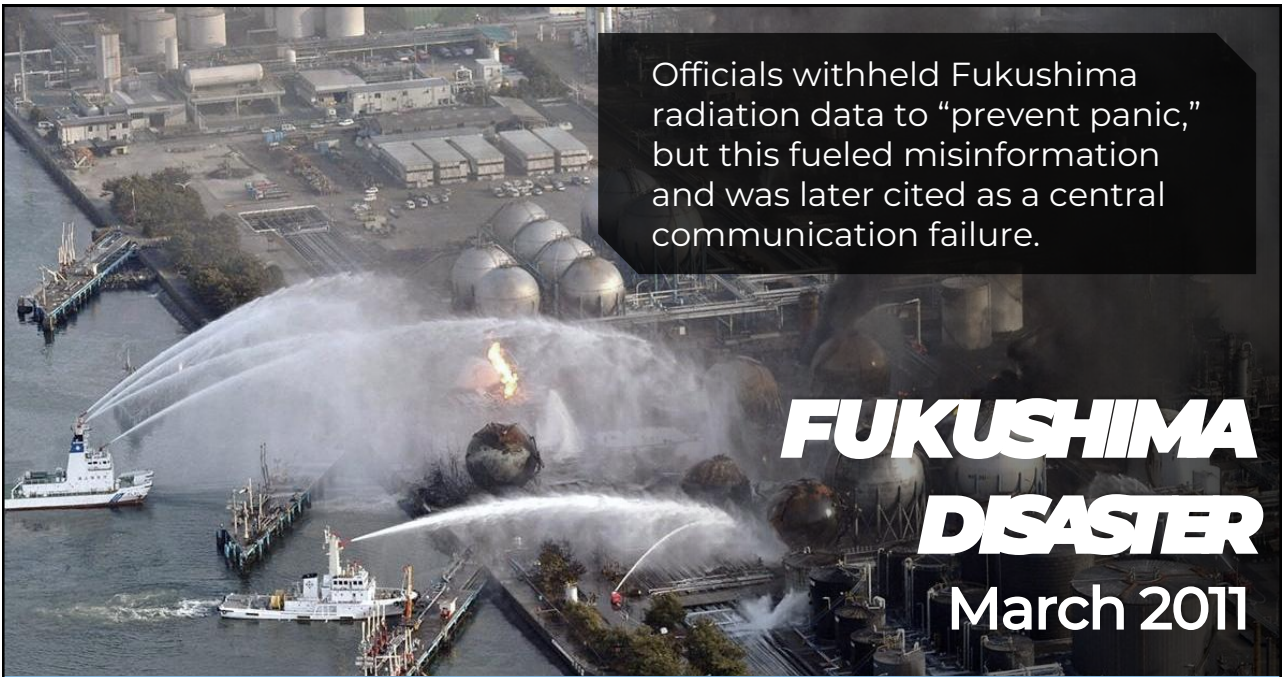
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Officials withheld Fukushima radiation data to “prevent panic,” but this fueled misinformation and was later cited as a central communication failure.

# FUKUSHIMA DISASTER

## March 2011



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# Reason Three

**“We don’t know what to say.”**

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# Reason Three

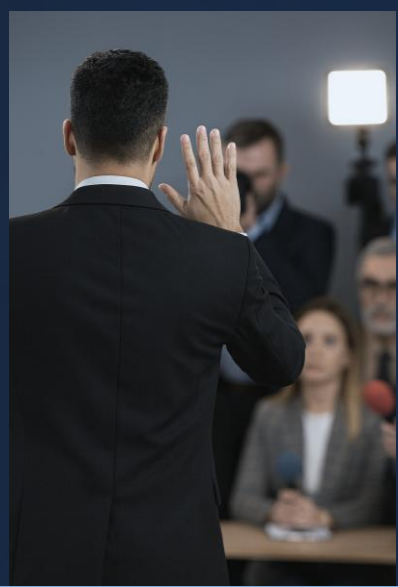
**“We don’t know what to say.”**

**Follow this simple strategy:**

- 1**  
**Define**  
Define the problem and show appropriate concern
- 2**  
**Describe**  
Explain what you're doing to address it
- 3**  
**Direct**  
Provide clear guidance on what your audience can or should do

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# The only **three** answers you'll give to the media:

- 1** I know, and here is the answer.
- 2** I know, but can't share, and here's why.
- 3** I don't know, but I'll find out.

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# To share or not to share?

Ask yourself: Will this eventually be public?



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# Key Questions to Consider

1

## Investigation Integrity

Will sharing this information compromise an ongoing investigation? Consider whether premature disclosure could impede fact-finding, influence witness testimony, or alert subjects under investigation.

2

## Privacy Concerns

Will sharing this information invade a reasonable expectation of privacy? Evaluate whether the information contains personal details, confidential employee matters, or sensitive data protected by policy or ethical standards.

3

## Legal Restrictions

Is there any legal prohibition to sharing this information? Consider contractual obligations, non-disclosure agreements, regulatory constraints, or statutory limitations on disclosure.

4

## Information Stability

Is it possible this information may change? Assess whether the information is preliminary, subject to revision, or likely to evolve, which could create confusion if shared prematurely.

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WAYS TO QUALIFY WHEN YOU'RE

**REASONABLY**

**CERTAIN**



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- **1** While this information is subject to change ...
- **2** At this time, it is believed ...
- **3** We have reason to believe ...
- **4** According to witnesses ...
- **5** To date we have determined/found/discovered ...
- **6** While this matter is still under investigation ...
- **7** What we know now is ...

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**When it's a  
reputational  
crisis, pop  
the bubble  
on bad news**



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# When it's a reputational crisis, pop the bubble on bad news



JJ Watt ✓  
@JJWatt

I was just told somebody leaked some personal information about me and it's going to be reported on today.

I went into A-Fib on Wednesday, had my heart shocked back into rhythm on Thursday and I'm playing today.

That's it.

12:14 · 10/2/22 · Twitter for iPhone

7,900 Retweets 5,525 Quote Tweets 133K Likes

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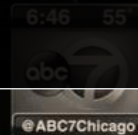
# Officer Tim Jones

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March 19, 2016

# “Police officer critically injured, man killed in Park Forest”



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**BREAKING NEWS UPDATE**

**Park Forest Officer Shot Gunman Dead**

10:05 35°

abc7chicago.com

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**Park Forest Police Department**  
Published by Christopher Mannino [?] · April 6, 2016 · 🌐

For Immediate Release:

Officer Timothy Jones, who was critically wounded in the line-of-duty on Saturday, March 19, 2016 after suffering gunshot wounds while attempting to take a suspect into custody, has been released from the Intensive Care Unit of Advocate Christ Medical Center and has been transported to a rehabilitation center at an undisclosed location. Officer Jones is not on life support, and his condition has stabilized to allow transport to this new facility. He is minimally conscious, and while he has a very long road to recovery and his long-term prognosis is uncertain, the steps he has taken in less than three weeks after suffering such a devastating injury give cause for hope, and also demonstrate the strength and will with which he is fighting.

The Park Forest Police Department would like to thank the professional medical staff of Advocate Christ Medical Center for the excellent care of Tim while he was with them, the numerous law enforcement and other public safety agencies that have given support during this time, as well as the incredible outpouring of support from the community. Your continued prayers, concern, and support are greatly appreciated.

The photograph of Tim accompanying this post was taken in the fall of 2015, just as his career in law enforcement was beginning. In a short time, his work in uniform demonstrated enthusiasm, integrity, charisma, concern, and compassion. He is now demonstrating fight, strength and resiliency. We will continue to stand by Tim and his family through this journey, and will share updates as we are able, in coordination with the privacy naturally requested by the family. Thank you again, to everyone who has offered concern and well-wishes, in whatever form it has taken.

#TimStrong

1,718,078 people reached

Boost Post

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## Tim Jones, Five Years Later

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# NEW AT 6

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# Let's Connect



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Mannino**



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 Julie Parker Communications  
 @ChiefMannino  
 Christopher Mannino

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