

INDUSTRY VIEW

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Opinions and advice from business leaders and people in promo

BY MERILEE KERN



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The COVID-19 pandemic has understandably spurred renewed conversation around business crisis management. Companies need to better plan for and preempt unforeseen disruptions – and optimally emerge on the other side stronger than before. Novel challenges like the coronavirus demand fresh ideation instead of just regurgitating old mindsets and methodologies.

With this in mind, I turned to Kiya Dowdy Frazier and Oscar Frazier, principals at nDemand Consulting – a global crisis management firm that designs and implements leading-edge techniques helping federal government agencies, heads of state, corporations and entrepreneurial small businesses maneuver

through, and beyond, menacing circumstances. This includes countering violent extremism (CVE) across seven countries within Africa.

"The very thought of the word 'crisis' tends to spur a sense of panic," Kiya Frazier says. "Even so, it's wise to take emergency situations head-on and with a laser focus. Any crisis management plan that tries to take on too much, or otherwise veers away from the core crisis at hand, is one that's likely to fall short at best or, worse, fail altogether.

Affectionately known as the "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" of crisis management, the Fraziers offer three modern crisis management techniques.

1. Gain Trust Through Vulnerability

To lead in a crisis, people need to trust you. Gaining that trust and building relationships requires radically different approaches in today's post-pandemic world. People have grown weary of misinformation and contradictory statements from those in positions of authority and are perhaps more jaded and doubtful now than ever before. When there's a lack of understanding, or there are credibility concerns, fear and defensiveness take over. Here's a reframe: The ability to gain trust isn't entirely futile, but rather it's the method of connecting with people that requires change. The first step now begins with "me too" – connecting through relatability and authenticity.

Many customers, partners and employees are facing the exact same challenges, whether related to COVID-19 impacts or otherwise. So be empathetic, approachable and forthcoming about your own challenges. That level of vulnerability – demonstrating that you're just as affected as the person you're meeting – is an effective way to build trust. Instant validity without emotional drivers is going by the wayside. Sentiment matters.

2. Do More Than Just Provide Data

Collecting and analyzing data to drive decision-making internally is no longer enough. Today, transparency about what that data "means" is paramount. Even a simple, unintentional oversight or dulling of data can have costly implications. Business owners must be spot on with interpreting those data analytics and reporting in kind. What makes it harder in this new environment is that we have to find ways to do more with less – less resources and fewer shots to take. Naturally, the first step is clearly communicating key findings. But companies often miss the second and third piece: helping the audience, whether internal or external, make sense of everything, as well as following up with a clear plan of action to mitigate risk, resolve current issues and position themselves for a stronger future. It's one thing to provide data, it's very different to provide data with actionable tactics. "When people panic, they tend

to inflate or deflate factual data to fit their own needs, desires, agenda or gut instincts," says Oscar Frazier. "This is the single biggest mistake a company in crisis can make, since processing data objectively is key. Situation analysis requires taking a hard look at realities and making even the most difficult – if not painful – of decisions to get back on a recuperative course."

3. Demonstrate Messaging, Don't Just Speak It

Validation-driven micro-communication is now where it's at. Rather than just asserting positioning and talking points, companies need to demonstrate the impact of their messaging in as specific terms as possible. Everything a company conveys to the masses needs to be demonstrated with results and reference points people can access. The ability to effectively communicate virtually and remotely via digital solutions is no longer an option, but rather an imperative. Companies must be ever-mindful that there's increased awareness of – and desire for – community, connection, humility and social responsibility that should now underpin most, if not all, communications in this post-pandemic era.

Companies must also make a concerted effort to control their message across all platforms, including social media where information (and misinformation) spreads quickly. The right words conveyed with the right tone and with the proper imagery are what's required.