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Crisis Communication, Government/ Media Cooperation, and U.S. Military Public Affairs

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Crisis defined

• Your organization's competence or honesty is threatened
• The public learns about the threat
• Communication about the crisis is ongoing and outside your control
Crisis occurs when one or more of these happens -

• An employee makes an error in judgment
• A product is defective
• Critical information is lost
• Workers protest or strike
• A natural disaster occurs
• You lose control of your work

…and the outcome is seen as a ‘public issue’
Examples

• Tiger Woods (poor!)

• L.A. ‘Carmageddon’ (good!)
Best strategy

• Be proactive, to avoid crisis in the first place!
  – Know your community inside and out
  – Create and practice a crisis management plan
  – Don’t cut corners, be ready for anything
  – Is the crisis your fault? (*different response?*)

• When crisis happens, work fast
  – Communicate clearly and honestly
  – Accept blame, and ask for forgiveness
  – Spend the money needed to make things right
  – Learn from your mistakes
Government-media cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>News media</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Uses the media’</td>
<td>‘Watches the government’</td>
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The balance is affected by:
- Nation’s cultural standards, political system, or religious ideas
- The media environment (ratings, profits, competition)
- The nature of the story itself (traditional standards for reporting)
- Media gatekeeper bias, personal sense of ethics/ responsibility
- Bribery or other perks directed toward gatekeepers (or withheld)
Examples

• **Self-serving**
  – World-wide, more than 1,000 government-issued Disney postage stamps + media excitement about them

• **Interdependent**
  – Embedded journalists in war zones

• **Cooperative**
  – Ronald Reagan + helicopter = “photo opportunity”

• **At odds**
  – China accuses Google of “sneaking in” to country (2006)

• **Hostile**
  – Richard Nixon’s “enemies list”
Military Public Affairs
Journalism, Photography, Public Relations and Event Planning

Aboard the USS Ronald Reagan
USS Reagan Facts

- The largest Nimitz class (nuclear) carrier
- 1,000 ft. length; 252 ft. beam; draft 37 ft.
- 97,000 tons - 2 1/2 acres on deck
- 2 nuclear reactors; 4 steam plants; 4 props
- Top speed 30 knots
- Range unlimited
- 6,500 personnel (1/3 female)
- 9 air wings w/ 90-95 jets and helicopters
- 50 billion gallons of jet fuel delivered since 2003
- Extensive armament incl. 4 Sea Sparrow missile batteries
- 10 radar systems with world-wide observational capacity
- Motto: ‘Peace Through Strength’
USS Reagan Graphics Media Unit

- Twice-weekly print publication *The Great Communicator*
- Two web sites (one for crew, one for families)
- Media archive (still photos, raw video)
- Four channels of *Gipper Vision* ship-produced TV
  - Training/development
  - Captain’s messages
  - Crew news
- Four channels of movie TV (entertainment)
  - Movies from an outside supplier; programmed by GMU
- Four channels of satellite TV (entertainment)
  - Navy news
  - Networking programming rebroadcast
  - Fox, CNN, and ESPN
USS Reagan Graphics Media Unit

- USS Reagan Cruise Book
  - 80-100 pages, full color, every sailor must be included ‘in action’
  - (Printed by an outside supplier.)
- Podcasts
  - (Still in development)
- Portrait photography
- Feature photography
- Support/ assistance for burials at sea
- ‘Distinguished Visitors’ and other event planning and mgt.
  - Average of 16 visitors per day, regardless of ship location
  - Many guests are flown on/ off the ship
- News conferences/ diplomacy assistance at port calls
  - Working with each embassy
  - As many as 80 media members/ each port
Graphics Media Unit

• Responsible for ALL public affairs work for the Reagan and the ships in Carrier Strike Group 7
  – Cruiser
  – Destroyers (2)
  – Frigate
  – Submarine (occasionally)
• LT in charge of GMU answers to a minimum of seven supervisors
  – Admiral of the fleet (3,5,7)
  – Captain of the Reagan
  – CG7 Commander
  – Captain of each CSG7 ship

Plus ‘other duties as assigned.’
Distinguished Visitor Program – 16 visitors per day average, many are flown on and off the ship. “People of influence, folks that we want to help us get our message out.” (Lt. Flanders)

Lt. Flanders with CBS television actor Gary Sinise, a visitor to the Reagan
Examples of **Graphics Media Unit** work

- Family members website [http://www.reagan.navy.mil/family_services.html](http://www.reagan.navy.mil/family_services.html)
Photos from my visit
Photos from my visit
Change in attitude (my opinion)

• 1980s, 90s and earlier
  – Military tried to stay isolated from media
  – Tried to ignore ‘bad news’ / promote ‘good’ news
  – Buried investigative journalists in paperwork

• Today
  – Military attempting to ‘build relationships’ with media
  – Fewer traditional journalists to work with
  – Big need to reach young people with positive portrayals of military life – especially through social media
  – Still, much concern about security/ image issues
Thank you for letting me visit with you about these topics!

You are welcome to contact me via e-mail any time, or visit my website for more information:

http://www.djswansonapr.net/
Sources


