

CEEP 2021: PANEL RECAP

COMMUNICATIONS PRE-CONFERENCE TRACK

Long Term Crisis Communications: *Sustaining Sanity while Surviving*

PANEL

CRAYTON WEBB

CEO Sunwest PR (COMMS)

<https://sunwestpr.com/team/crayton-webb/>

Chief of staff for former Dallas Mayor Laura Miller and broadcast journalist for nearly ten years

RYAN CASEY WALLER (THERAPIST)

<https://ryancaseywaller.com/>

Attorney, Priest, Therapist, Author with a unique perspective

Want to talk with Ryan? Contact him at ryan@ryancaseywaller.com

KENDALL MARTIN

Communications Manager at Episcopal Migration Ministries

<https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/author/kmartin/>

CHARIS BHAGIANATHAN

Communications Specialist | Editor ECF Vital Practices

<https://episcopalfoundation.org/about/staff>

STEVE HAAL (Moderator)

Director of Communications

Saint Michael and All Angels Dallas

shaal@saintmichael.org

<https://about.me/stevenhaal>

www.haalphotography.com

DESCRIPTION

After 12+ months of responding to the pandemic, social unrest, and myriad other concerns...are we still in "crisis communications"? Or has that given way to an unprecedented paradigm of a new status quo? Is this current reality sustainable? And at what cost to each of us as we continue on, either emotionally, physically, or psychologically? In his book, *Ongoing Crisis Communications*, Tim Coombs defines "Crisis Comms" as, "a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted." Another agency, Rock Dove Solutions writes,

“Preparing ahead of time for a crisis ensures that relevant personnel can quickly and effectively communicate with each other during moments of threat...”

The subtext is the duration of time. Generally speaking historically, the adrenaline-filled period of time responding to a crisis moment has not been indefinite. The question of what to do now, yet also how to maintain our own health as we communicate to the masses, will be the primary goal of these sessions.

The first session will be a moderated panel discussion with industry thought leaders on this subject, and the second session will predominantly focus on guided breakout room discussions in response to the panel. Panelist currently include CEO of SunWest PR, Crayton Webb, and Certified Therapist, Author, and Priest, Ryan Casey Waller. *Stay tuned as we confirm more panelists.*

TOPICS

What are your functional stages of crisis communications?”

PANEL ALL-PLAY:

- Have a plan--ahead of time
- When crises arrive, don't hesitate to activate the plan
- If you don't tell the story--someone else will. Or worse; no one will
- The 24-hr cycle has become the 24-second cycle where social encompasses non-stop content
- DON'T make the common mistake of “hunkering down” thinking it will go away
- Transparency and authenticity are key--but we should also strive to be hope-filled if possible.

Are we still in Crisis Communications? I mean it's been a year of continual crisis response--can we even sustain this? Or has “normal” been redefined as this new paradigm?

CRAYTON: Simply put, yes. And yes--we are, and this is the new normal.

The “Whiplash Effect”: I survived the crisis whiplash back in March/April--but now how can I actually thrive again amidst this ever-changing landscape of unrest?

CHARIS:

- Remember you are not alone
- You may survey your constituents to inform decision-making paradigm
- Double-down on basics
- Don't isolate yourself--rely on the team

What are the “bedrock” activities that ground what you do? How can one regain focus on core activity and basics when we’re constantly being pulled in multiple directions? *We’re talking about sustained STABILITY.*

KENDALL: This is about INTENTIONALITY; on multiple fronts:

- Know your mission and values
- Continually self-assess that your tasks and actions are furthering the mission and values
- Remember and be okay with the fact that we are not in control. “Hope and prayer” actually helps.

Are there long-term effects of which to be cognizant with long-term exposure to crisis—especially as a leader? How do we maintain sanity in the process? Maybe it’s simply how we can care for ourselves amidst the turmoil?

RYAN:

- Remember that you are experiencing the SAME trauma as your constituents
- This is absolutely that thing you always hear on airplane flights, “put the mask on yourself first”
- Health is not a static state of being. It’s not binary: Healthy vs No—rather it is our behavior skewing towards one or the other. So work to skew healthy.
- 3 things that help:
 - Have a support network, and lean on them
 - If needed, speak to a “professional”
 - Seek medication, if appropriate—and “medication” might simply be better care of your body: nutrition, activity, self-care etc...
- PRIORITIZE YOURSELF

What words of encouragement and advice might you have for those who are either a 1-person-shop or perhaps wearing multiple hats besides comms—how should they approach this work of communicating?

KENDALL:

- Have priorities. Get on the same page as the team.
- Surround yourself with teammates that are smarter than you—and listen to them
- Have reasonable priorities

CHARIS: Give yourself permission to be flexible

CRAYTON: Ask for advice and get opinions to get out of our own heads. This helps to keep us calm. Focus on others.

It is so easy to become completely detached as we do our jobs—how can we stay connected and authentic to OURSELVES, connecting with our own humanity and emotions while at the same time staying professional, functioning at a high level?

RYAN:

- One of the most powerful things we can do, when in distress, is to help someone else.
- This is associated with “Compassion Fatigue”. Strive to:
- SELF
Remember you are human
Help others
Self-asses
Maintain balance
CARE FOR YOURSELF
- WORK
Be Intentional
Be Strategic
Prep for the future
Be transparent

Sooo, I feel like I have to be perfect all the time....

RYAN: Kill the idea! We are not perfect. We cannot be perfect. Instead ask the question, “what does GOOD look like vs. perfection”

CHARIS: Refocus; remembering why we’re in our current roles--Jesus is behind it all.

How can one maintain proper priorities when the “Urgent” threatens the “Important”.

KENDALL:

1. Have a clear understanding of urgent is--it can’t be everything
2. Have a plan of when to pivot to urgent status

CHARIS: Remember that something will always feel urgent, and assess.

Being desensitized: How to recognize and respond to new crises amidst a global landscape of continual crisis?

CRAYTON: Actually, perhaps it’s not bad to be a *little* desensitized. It has been said that we are either going INTO the storm, are IN the storm, or EXITING the storm. Assess and take notes of key factors so they are recognized in the cycle. Remember that if you don’t tell your story--someone else will. We are creating “deposits in the bank of goodwill” of parishioners’ trust.

What is The one thing you want everyone to walk away with?

KENDALL: Be flexible

CHARIS: Remember you’re doing incredible work! Find community.

CRAYTON: Be prepared and proactive.

RYAN: In ANY year, “1 in 4 struggle with mental health”. Now is the time to care for yourself

QUESTIONS

1. **What's the right frequency for communicating? Proactive transparent communications help address anxiety vs. flooding people with communications can cause anxiety...**
 - a. What's the right balance? Know your constituents and how they consume.
 - b. Have a steady "drumbeat", creating a reliable connection where people know when you are posting.
 - c. Create a plan ahead of time, that speaks to frequency and taking into account, generically, what you know about your people.
 - d. Create a list of content types: news, questions, non-news data, anything else
 - e. That way you can post in the prescribed frequency, but you know what to post when there is no new news at the posting time.
 - f. Make sure that a post REALLY is adding value
 - g. It's a 2-way street. Listen.

Additional questions submitted online that contributed to the 2nd session breakout discussions:

2. As we may have taken on more daily and weekly projects to accommodate things within the last year, how might we possibly find the time and energy to work on projects outside of the same checklists of tasks that have to be taken care of each week/day?
3. Most of us have taken on many new responsibilities during the pandemic while still doing all that we were doing before. This may not change. Meanwhile, some of the members of our staff are doing less than usual. Which duties and responsibilities might be appropriate to shift to non-comm staff who have extra bandwidth?
4. What's the balance between dedicating internal/parish/crisis communications and being more intentional to focus on external/visitor communications?
5. If your boss' anxiety and trauma are helping drive the need for perfection and doing too much—something I already struggle with anyway—how do we stay healthy?
6. How do you, or do you, employ humor/lightheartedness, in crisis communications?
7. Have you addressed the increase with your supervisors? Will the new things continue or are they temporary? Is it time to ask for more hands even just for a small period of time?
8. I am curious as to how folks on here who work with children or have children have found their messages in crisis communications or communications while in a crisis has changed or shifted because of the audience of children.
9. How has your definition of "crisis communications" changed over the last year?

10. Assess your ability through this last year to both do your job but also stay grounded to your humanity, being sure to also take care of yourself. What do you think?