

# Crisis Ready: Master Your Message

## Welcome!

Meet Annie and Mike

# Our Goal Today

To provide a foundational toolkit to:

- Confidently manage media interactions during a crisis.
- Protect your board's reputation.
- Maintain public trust



# What is a Crisis Today? It Happens Fast.

## For a Vet Board, a crisis can be:

- A licensee's malpractice going viral.
- Animal welfare allegations against a clinic.
- A controversial or misunderstood board decision.

## Key Challenge: The Speed of Information

- A crisis can ignite in minutes from a single social media post.
- Preparation is your only defense.

# Case Study: The Vet Who Killed a Cat





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**Who:** Dr. Kristen Lindsey, a Texas veterinarian.

**What:** In 2015, she posted a photo on Facebook holding a cat she killed with a bow and arrow, with a bragging caption.

## **The Result:**

- The post went viral almost instantly.
- Global outrage, death threats, and intense media scrutiny.
- The focus immediately turned to her clinic and the Texas Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners.

# The Crisis Finds You

It's a perfect storm: visual, horrifying, and emotional.

The actions of a *single licensee* can create a massive crisis for a state board.

The story spreads faster than any official body can react.

**The Lesson:** The crisis will be on the public's terms. Your board's response will be judged by a global audience in real-time.



# The Dangers of a "Process" Response

In the face of intense public emotion, a response that sounds purely procedural or bureaucratic will be perceived as cold and uncaring.

## Avoid:

- "No comment."
- Legal or procedural jargon.
- A response vacuum (silence).

A proactive strategy is built on: **Timeliness, Transparency, and Truthfulness.**

# Case Study: Public Outrage Over Process

**The Scenario:** The Texas Vet Board followed its legal process, taking a year to investigate before suspending Dr. Lindsey's license for one year.

**Public Perception:** Too slow and too lenient.

**The Result:** A *second* crisis wave directed at the board itself, with accusations of corruption and incompetence.

**The PR Failure:** The board's legally-required silence allowed public outrage to fill the void and define the narrative.



# Communicate Your Process

Even when you are following the rules perfectly, you are still being judged in the court of public opinion.

## **You must:**

- Acknowledge the public's concern.
- Explain the steps of the process and a general timeline.
- Manage expectations for how long an investigation takes.

**The Lesson:** Showing that the board takes the issue seriously is critical to maintaining public trust.

# The 3 C's of Crisis Messaging

Develop three core messages that are clear, concise, and consistent. They must convey:

- 1. CONCERN:** Show empathy. Acknowledge the emotion of the situation. "We are deeply concerned by these allegations..."
- 2. CONTROL:** Explain what you are doing. "We have opened a formal investigation..."
- 3. COMMITMENT:** State your values and long-term goal. "We are committed to upholding the highest standards of veterinary medicine in our state..."



# Case Study: The Cincinnati Zoo (Harambe)



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**The Crisis:** In 2016, a child fell into the gorilla enclosure. Zoo officials made the difficult decision to shoot and kill the gorilla to save the child, sparking global backlash.

**The Response:** Zoo Director Thane Maynard held a press conference almost immediately.

- **Concern:** Expressed deep regret for the loss of the gorilla, validating public grief, while stating the first priority was the child.
- **Control:** Clearly explained *why* they made the decision (a tranquilizer was too risky). He stood by his team's expertise.
- **Commitment:** Outlined the safety protocols and committed to reviewing them.



# Be Visible, Empathetic & Decisive

In a tragedy with no easy answers, a leader must be visible. Do not hide.

Validate the public's emotion, even if you stand by your decision.

Explain your reasoning clearly and confidently.

**The Lesson:** A leader's calm, empathetic, and decisive presence can de-escalate even the most emotional crisis.

# The Media Interview is a Performance

It is **NOT** a conversation.

You are there to deliver your key messages, not to be led by a reporter's questions.

## Two key skills:

1. Bridging
2. Staying on Message



# Technique: Acknowledge, Bridge, Control (ABC)



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**Scenario (Mark Zuckerberg):** During his 2018 congressional testimony, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo asked a direct, challenging question: "Are you willing to change your business model in the interest of protecting individual privacy?"

**The ABC Technique in Action:** He avoids a simple "yes" or "no."

1. **Acknowledge:** He acknowledges the premise of the question (that change is needed).
2. **Bridge:** He immediately bridges to his prepared points: "Congresswoman, we're making a number of changes..."
3. **Control:** He pivots to his key messages, listing the specific actions they were taking: "...to lock down the platform... to give people an easy way to see all the apps they've connected with..."

**The Lesson:** The ABC technique allows you to handle tough, yes/no questions and pivot back to your message.



# Technique: Message Discipline



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**Scenario (Theresa May):** During a UK election, the Prime Minister was criticized for her robotic repetition of her campaign slogan, "strong and stable."

**Why it Matters:** While not always elegant, it shows extreme message discipline. In a crisis, you must know your key messages and repeat them. Every question is an opportunity to deliver one of your core points.

**The Lesson:** Know your message. Stick to your message. Repeat your message.



# Case Study: "United Breaks Guitars"



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- **The Scenario (2009):** Canadian musician Dave Carroll's guitar was broken by United Airlines baggage handlers. After nine months of getting the runaround from customer service, he wrote a clever, catchy, and funny country song about his experience and posted it on YouTube.
- **The Result:** The video went viral (it currently has over 23 million views), becoming a PR catastrophe for United and a legendary case study on how social media gives a voice to a single dissatisfied customer.



# Don't Ignore the "Little Guy"

**Why it worked:** The song is genuinely funny and well-produced. It's a lighthearted way to show a serious point.

**The Core Issue:** A simple customer service failure was ignored until it became a public crisis.

**The Lesson:** In the digital age, ignoring a customer service issue can turn into a massive, public reputational crisis. Every voice has the potential to be amplified.

# Control Your Own Channels

Your website and social media channels are your direct line to the public.

Use them to post your official statements and key messages.

Direct all media inquiries to your official spokesperson or statement.

**CRITICAL:** Do NOT engage in arguments or debates in the comments section. Stay above the fray.



# Key Takeaways

A crisis can ignite from the actions of a single licensee.

A poor or purely procedural response makes *you* the story. You must communicate your process.

A proactive, empathetic response with the 3 C's can manage public outrage.

Practice Bridging (ABC) and Message Discipline to stay in control of any interview.

# Start Preparing Now

**Identify** your designated spokesperson.

**Brainstorm** potential crisis scenarios relevant to your state.

**Draft** your core messaging (your 3 C's) *before* you need it.



# Q&A

# Thank you!!



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09.17 - 09.20

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