

Stuff Happens...

But you can sleep at night by
making your **association**

Reputation
Resilient

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my daughter, Michelle, who has helped me with many of life's crises.

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Acknowledgements

My knowledge of crisis preparation and management is borne on personal experience across a wide range of situations. There are many people who have been with me along the way. They have taught me about grace under pressure and the importance of preparation. Most of all, they have been shining examples of living by their values, no matter what. These people have been my teachers and my mentors.

There are three people who reviewed early drafts of the book and gave me honest feedback that improved it tremendously. Each is a valued professional colleague and friend.

Jeanette Jones co-delivered one of my early workshops on this material with me. Professionally, she is an expert herself at managing corporate crises and she is the model for a crisis management professional.

Fabrice De Dongo has been “in the trenches” of issues management in professional services, banking and politics. He has a unique point of view that always gives me a fresh perspective.

Eric Bergman knows how to get a point across. He always gives constructive feedback and, as an author himself, he knew just where to tweak the draft.

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Stuff happens

In 1980, I was part of a global video conference call. The meeting was convened by P&G's chairman, Ed Harness, to discuss the Rely tampon, which had been linked to the illnesses and deaths of several women from toxic shock syndrome (TSS). During this sombre event, I watched Ed ask difficult questions, listen intently to the answers, invite discussion and debate. At the end of the call, Ed gave a statesman-like speech in which he explained that he had weighed the facts and decided that we would withdraw Rely from the market — a decision he made based on P&G's values; a decision that cost the company billions of dollars.

That event showed me that even when “stuff happens” you can sleep at night if you ground your decision-making and actions on your values. Little did I know then that it would be the beginning of a career during which I have been in many boardrooms and involved in making some tough decisions in critical circumstances.

Now, three decades and a few crises later, I have become an advocate for proactive reputation management. I believe that organizations that are proactive will be resilient when a crisis comes.

Can you really prepare for a crisis or an issue?

I don't own a crystal ball, nor can I forecast the future. What I can tell you is that most accidents, issues and crises are predictable at least in terms of their probability. For example, if your association represents health-care professionals, it is predictable that at some point, there will be a client or patient who claims to have been harmed by one of your members. Or, if you maintain membership files and subscriptions using a database, you may have a security breach.

There is an old saying, “Not planning is planning to fail.” That applies as much to preparing to manage an issue as it does to achieving more positive goals. Associations that ignore the possibility of something going wrong are deluding themselves. A little bit of preparation and forethought can be that extra ounce of protection to mitigate damage and speed recovery after a disaster.

People don't like to think about terrible outcomes. It's more fun to build the next membership acquisition campaign or conference than it is to think about what could go wrong. At the same time, when asked to think about what keeps them up at night, executives will cite a list of issues for which they are only somewhat prepared.

The reality is that for many executives, crisis preparation only makes the top of the priority list after they have lived through a disaster that caused them and/or their association harm.

What if the tables were turned? What if preparing for a crisis was part of overall business planning? What if crisis planning helped you to improve some of your existing processes and gain efficiencies? Now, the task doesn't take on the appearance of a doomsday scenario. Rather, it is a business improvement exercise.

This book is a guide for associations to prepare themselves to navigate the crises that could affect their association, their members, their industry or other stakeholders.

My goal is to make preparing for a crisis a value proposition for your association and to provide you with tools to make it easy for you. While you won't be any closer to having a crystal ball, you will be able to sleep at night knowing that when the proverbial "stuff" hits the fan, you will be ready to face the issue and get back to business.

Questions to ask yourself now:

Is crisis preparation on your business agenda?

Do you think you have support for crisis preparation?

Do you see value to your business in crisis preparation?

About the author

Jacqui d'Eon is a communications strategist with over three decades of corporate experience. In 2008 she was honoured by the International Association of Business Communicators Canada (IABC Canada) as a Master Communicator in recognition of her contributions to the communications profession. Jacqui is a business member of CSAE and has presented at both CSAE's annual conference and CSAE Trillium Network's winter summit.

A chemical engineer by training, Jacqui joined P&G after graduating and, over the next 20 years, moved from product development to human resources to consumer affairs and, finally, to public affairs. In 1997, she started her communications business, JAd'E Communications Ltd. Five years later, she became chief communications officer for Deloitte Canada. In 2011, she "retired" from Deloitte but retirement didn't last! Jacqui reinvigorated JAd'E and continues her work as a communications strategist, helping organizations and their leaders enhance and maintain their reputations through effective planning and smart strategy.