

FIRST RESPONSE STRATEGY: THE GOLDEN HOUR

The most challenging aspect of readiness for urgent situations is the strategy for first response; literally, what you do first, second, third, etc. Problems become emergencies, crises, or disasters due to the hesitation, timidity, and confusion that occurs as the threatening nature of a situation is recognized.

A successful first response is the activation of appropriate counter measures and proactive decision making that were pre-authorized during the crisis response planning process.

The Golden Hour

Perhaps the most useful and appropriate model for first response strategy is “The Golden Hour” concept, which comes to us from wartime battlefield medicine. It was probably the Korean War that taught us the benefit of bringing medical care to the front lines rather than dragging the wounded behind the lines for medical treatment. The lesson was that the severely wounded who received medical treatment within minutes of injury had a survival rate enormously higher than the soldier who was treated outside the first 60 minutes of injury. Time and again, major problems turn into crises or worse due to lack of initial momentum to do something, to make decisions, and to begin grinding down on the problem.

When people or organizations fail to promptly address a problem and resolve it, the resulting crisis creates victims who are left untreated and situations left unresolved. In the minds of the public, the victims, and survivors, delay equals denial. Refusal to promptly commit to a course of counteraction is equivalent to arrogance, which is the lack of empathy.

The First Response Checklist

An appropriate, scenario-based first response checklist will help deal with the most urgent, crucial matters and decisions as early as possible. This is possible because crisis managers considered a wide variety of decision points during the planning and testing phases of readiness preparation, and pre-authorized many of those decisions to achieve a more prompt response.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."