



**City of Plano**  
**Crisis Management and Communications Plan**  
**(Public Relations Crises)**

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# **City of Plano**

## **Crisis Management and Communications Plan**

### **(Public Relations Crises)**

#### **Definition**

A crisis is a significant unexpected or unwanted event or issue that threatens to harm the City of Plano's brand, reputation and/or its employees, customers, clients and other key audiences and stakeholders. It is any incident or situation that has the potential to negatively affect citizens' trust and/or confidence in the City of Plano shall be considered a public relations crisis.

#### **Executive Summary**

Any crisis can be looked at as a potential disaster, or an opportunity to tell the "rest of the story." The universal factor governing all crises is that they all require detailed and continually updated preparation and practice. A crisis is any event that causes people to have to react to a situation. It can be acute or chronic, good or bad. But it will, in all likelihood generate media interest. How it is handled in the media can have a tremendous impact, either positive or negative, on the City of Plano.

The stakes are much too high to overlook crisis management and communications planning. Many organizations now have a Crisis Management Team (CMT), whose principal duties include working together to develop a strategy for minimizing the impact of the PR crisis.

Preparation is only the first step. It must then be rehearsed with all concerned.

Crises almost always generate a significant media response. The manner in which the City of Plano, from an organizational level and department level to you and your staff, handle the investigation and media will often cement the image of our organization in the public's eye. The image is what drives public support, and ultimately the success or failure of our organization.

This crisis management plan develops strategic planning considerations for major crises that could occur within our organization, creates a model outline for a crisis communications plan, and creates internal staff actions as well as external media considerations for any disaster.

The City of Plano believes crisis management and communication demands a “pro-active” approach. It is neither philosophically nor practically feasible to suppose that a crisis will not happen.

We are what we project. In a crisis situation what we project, because of the emotions of the moment, may be unrelated or not an accurate image of what we are. “What we are” is a mosaic, an amalgam of everything we do, have done and intend to do. Our public perception must be an honest portrayal of our internal image. If not, it may often appear staged, pretentious and “framed for the occasion.”

This crisis management and communications plan is intended to be a working, living document that truly reflects how our management feels about our employees, constituents and our operations. If it is practiced, the results during media exposure will mirror honest integrity through both words and body language.

Public Relations crises can include data breaches, data interruption, major lawsuits, governmental malfeasance, citizen activism, rumors or hoaxes. The duration of a crisis situation can vary significantly, lasting from only a few hours to several weeks or months.

The purpose of this Crisis Communications Plan is to aid our City of Plano, and specifically our Crisis Communications Response Team, in quickly and effectively:

- anticipating issues that could escalate into a crisis
- assessing the potential impacts of a crisis on key audiences
- developing communications plans and strategies
- disseminating information or instructions to key audiences directly or indirectly impacted by the crisis

The Crisis Communications Plan is designed to mitigate the impact of the crisis, protect our organization’s reputation and preserve the trust of important audiences. The plan recognizes every crisis is different and will require critical judgment to evaluate different options and outcomes. This document provides a set of guidelines, templates and checklists to guide and support strategic decision-making in a crisis.

# ACTION PLAN

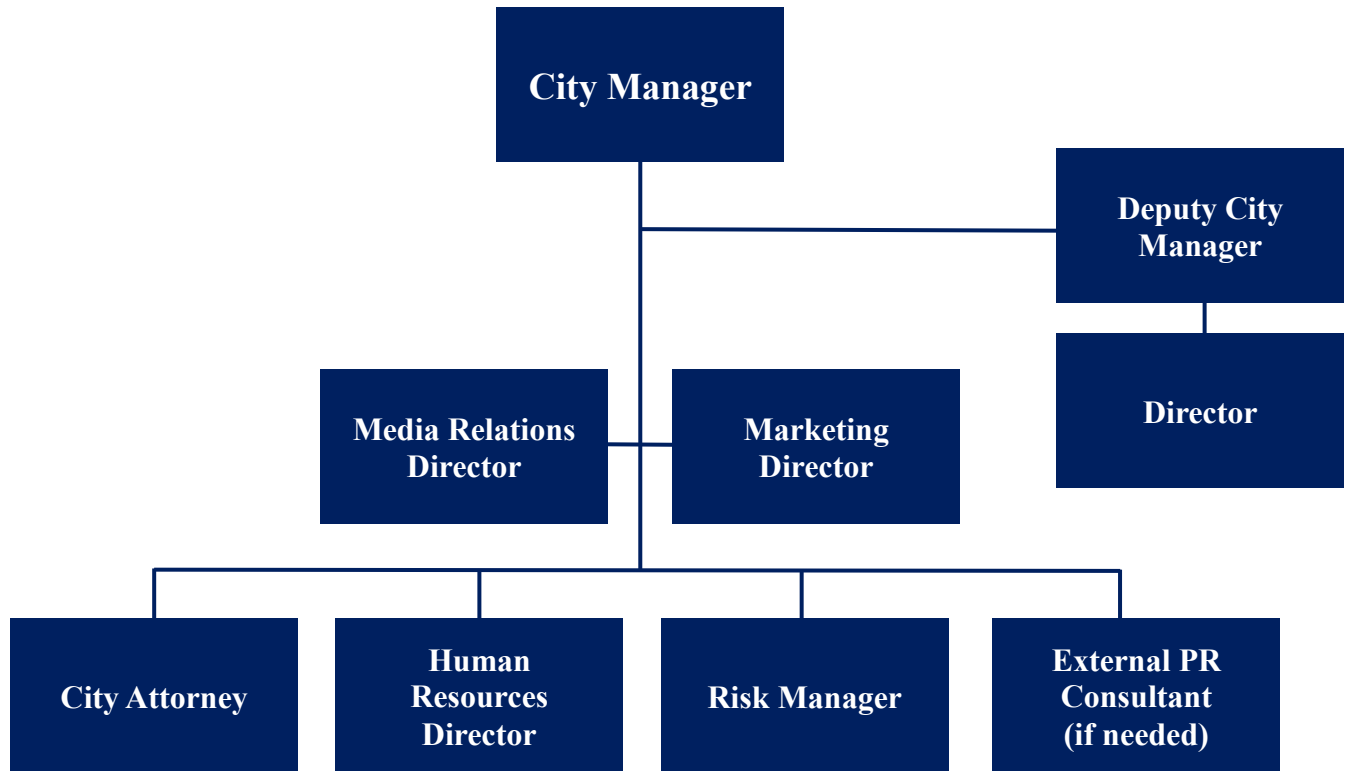
## Crisis Management Steps

1. **Notification** – Notify the City Manager and Media Relations Director immediately.
2. **Definition of Public Relations Crisis** - Any incident or situation that has the potential to negatively affect citizens' trust and/or confidence in the City of Plano.
3. **Crisis Communications Response Team (CCRT)** – Key staff, including the City Manager, affected Deputy City Manager, affected Director, Marketing and Community Engagement Director, Media Relations Director, City Attorney, Human Resources Director, Risk Manager and when necessary, an external PR consultant (at the City Manager's discretion), will convene via email, phone or in person to strategically review the situation and manage the external communications surrounding the issue. Separately, the City Manager and Marketing and Community Engagement Director will convene via email, phone or in person to manage the internal communications surrounding the issue.
4. **Crisis Communications Response Team (CCRT)** - Convenes immediately after crisis is identified. Information shall not be released until the core CCRT convenes, reviews the situation, and develops a strategy.
5. **Assessment/Strategy** - The CCRT will assess the situation, determine facts, and begin delegation. Questions to help devise appropriate crisis communications response, include, but are not limited to:
  - a. What is the situation? What will happen next?
  - b. Who on staff needs to be involved?
  - c. What immediate steps need to be taken?
  - d. What is known and who knows it?
  - e. Is there potential public interest? Does the issue have traction (will it become anything more than a blip on the evening news)?
  - f. Who will be affected?
  - g. What are people feeling – what emotions need to be considered?
  - h. What information is needed and who beyond City staff need to get it? When will it be available?
  - i. What should the City do about it? Proactive vs. reactive?
  - j. What CAN and CAN'T be said? What are the City's privacy, legal and insurance policies?
  - k. Is legal counsel needed?
  - l. How will the response be communicated?
  - m. Should a resource list be compiled of additional City spokespeople?
  - n. What media will be contacted? What legislators? Others?

6. **Developing Key Messages** – The Crisis Communications Response Team (CCRT) will develop factual, responsive messages to be used by the City. It will also provide a script for the receptionist and voicemail system. All media inquiries should be referred to the Media Relations Director for comment. Public inquiries should be referred to the Marketing and Community Engagement Department.
  - a. These messages should be prepared for media inquiries, member updates, and proactive phone calls to critical audiences.
  - b. Messages should reflect the City’s overall message, leadership role, and resource status. They should attempt to reinforce the positive and be action/solution oriented, if possible.
  - c. Consider what media know about the situation and what their potential interest is.
  - d. Recognize that unfavorable, inaccurate information, if not corrected, could have future negative consequences requiring additional responses.
  - e. Consider questions that will be asked in order to prepare answers for them, including the questions you hope will not be asked.
  - f. Develop a written statement for the receptionist and/or the representatives greeting members of the general public. Decide if it is appropriate to change the City’s or particular staff members’ voicemail messages.
  - g. Consider need for additional materials such as a fact sheet, backgrounder, web site resources, FAQs, etc.
7. **Staff Notification** – As soon as practical, the City Manager will communicate information regarding the crisis to employees, if appropriate. If the crisis occurs at a time when staff are not in the office and disseminating the information is critically time-sensitive, the director of the affected department will be responsible for communicating information to his or her staff. Affected staff’s needs and input on the situation should be taken into consideration. If necessary, make resources such as an employee assistance program available to staff. Staff should be reminded that all inquiries (media, etc.) should be referred to the Media Relations Director and that they should refrain from commenting.
8. **Media Releases** – If determined necessary, the Media Relations Department will distribute a release to media.
  - a. The release should be posted on the web site and distributed to the Executive Team.
  - b. The prepared written statement should guide all interviews.
  - c. Media access to City facilities and job sites should be supervised. Know ahead of time who the journalist is and what he or she is planning on covering. Be sure the area into which the media are invited does not have sensitive information such as reports, personnel information or other papers visually available.
9. **Key Group Notification** – Notify legal, etc. (Some of these parties may need to be contacted prior to contacting the media.)

10. **Record Keeping** – Document critical conversations, decisions, details and media questions regarding the crisis situation in order to effectively evaluate crisis communications management.
11. **Media/Message Evaluation** – Evaluate appropriateness and traction of messages throughout the situation. Revise as appropriate, but don't stray from original theme.
12. **Communications Updates** – Ensure key audiences are kept up to date. Methods may include:
  - a. Sending communications to members via email.
  - b. Promptly returning phone calls.
  - c. Posting a statement on the web site and updating it regularly.
  - d. Updating the City's voicemail.
  - e. Post-crisis wrap up communication and calls.
13. **Loose Ends** – Ensure all loose ends are secured (i.e. follow-up calls, email updates, etc.)
14. **Evaluate the Management of the Crisis**
15. **Post Crisis Clean-up** – File notes, clips and lessons learned from crisis.

## Crisis Communications Response Team





## **Crisis Communications Guidelines**

1. Communicate quickly, even when not all the facts are available to the City of Plano.
2. Be honest and transparent in all communications.
3. Exhibit empathy for those affected by the situation.
4. If the City of Plano caused the situation, accept responsibility and apologize.
5. If the cause of the problem is unknown, describe the steps the City of Plano are taking to resolve it.
6. Ensure all messaging is consistent to all audiences.
7. Reassure key audiences by providing frequent updates.
8. Explain how you are going to fix the problem.
9. Demonstrate that you are listening to stakeholder concerns.
10. Announce the resolution of the issue.

# City of Plano Communications Policy

1. All crises should be reported to a supervisor, Director, Deputy City Manager or City Manager immediately.
2. Only designated spokespeople or the Media Relations Director should release information to the media and to the public. This includes information via social media. All other employees should be professional and helpful to the media by connecting them with the Media Relations Director, but are discouraged not to speak with the media or provide any information.
3. The City of Plano Media Relations Director is the designated crisis management lead person, directing and coordinating all aspects of the City's response, including managing the messages and the media. The Media Relations Director actually interacts with the media and other inquirers. In some cases, this role may be shared with other designated spokespersons.
4. All comments should be guided by professionalism, transparency, and serve to mitigate the crisis.
5. *"No comment"* is never an acceptable response. If an answer is unknown or cannot be immediately answered, make note of the question, tell the inquirer you will get back with him/her, and do so. If the question cannot be answered due to a policy (such as sharing personnel information, etc.) let the inquirer know that.
6. Personnel matters are to remain confidential.
7. When possible, responses should be proactive, responsive, and action-oriented.
8. The City of Plano recognizes the importance of media relations to public trust. In times of crisis, maintaining effective media relationships will be particularly critical in bolstering public confidence in the City as a whole.

# Media Briefings

Media briefings will be organized by the Director of Media Relations. When the City of Plano holds a media briefing it is because, first of all, the City has made sure it has something to say. The City will not call a media briefing without new facts or elements of the story that it considers vital. Frequent briefings are a good habit to keep the media from wandering around trying to get information elsewhere. The goal is to give information to the media often, accurately and as complete as we can.

If necessary, the City of Plano will provide media kits and make them available to all members of the media as soon as they sign in. The media kits may include “one-pagers” with relevant and interesting information about the situation. The kit will also provide industry information on this one-pager that tells the rest of the story - anything that helps state our case in full.

The following is a list of spokespersons in order of their priority:

## **City Spokespersons:**

## **Phone:**

Steve Stoler, Director of Media Relations      972-941-7321

## **Backup City Spokesperson**

Shannah Hayley, Director      972-941-5669  
Marketing and Community Engagement

*Note:* All spokespersons should not only have a backup person immediately available when they are not on location, but should also let the main switchboard know where they are, and how they can be reached. Spokespersons should have with them at all times, when not on the premises, a mobile phone.

**City of Plano  
1520 K Avenue  
Plano, Texas 75086**

**Emergency Names & Numbers**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Extension</u>
Mark Israelson	City Manager	5112
Steve Stoler	Director, Media Relations	7321
Shannah Hayley	Director, Marketing and Community Engagement	5669
Greg Rushin	Deputy City Manager	2114
Jack Carr	Deputy City Manager	7225
Shelli Siemer	Deputy City Manager	5960
Paige Mims	City Attorney	5235
Carrie Little	Director, Emer. Mgmt.	4818
Ed Drain	Chief, Plano Police	2406
Sam Greif	Chief, Plano Fire-Rescue	7041
Brandi Youngkin	Director, Govt. Relations	7544
Shante Akafia	Director, Human Resources	5310
Jim Revis	Risk Manager	5651
Gail Cooksey	(Cooksey Communications)	972-580-0662

## **Crisis Communications Tools**

- Checklist (internal & external)
- Additional Tools
- Key Audience Checklist
- Media Statement Template
- Frequently Asked Questions in a Crisis
- Tweet Template
- Media Log
- Media Guidelines for City Employees
- Social Media Guidelines
- Spokesperson Guidelines
- Emergency Communications Kit

# Crisis Communications Checklist

This checklist is designed to offer ideas to enhance your ability to reach key audiences in a crisis. Some of these checklist items are handled by the City of Plano. Circle or check the communications tools that your department currently has in place or has access to:

## **Internal**

- Conference call service
- Employee email lists
- Employee cell numbers
- Voicemail notification system
- Text message notification system
- Intranet
- Media policy (see template)
- Social media guidelines (see draft)
- Other:

## **External**

- Email addresses for key audiences/influencers
- Office and cell numbers for key audiences/influencers
- E-blast capability
- News release distribution service (PR Newswire/Cision, Business Wire, etc.)
- Website – Media page
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Free news coverage monitoring (Google Alerts, etc.)
- Social media monitoring (by personnel)
- Paid news and social media monitoring (Meltwater, Cision, TV Eyes, etc.)
- Customer inquiry monitoring
- Other:

## Additional Tools

In a crisis impacting public health and safety, property or the environment or has gained major public attention, consider adding one or more of the following tools to enhance your communications efforts:

- Media log (see template)
- Media email address to direct incoming emails to one location
- Media voicemail to direct incoming calls to one location
- Media alerts/invitations to media briefings and press conferences
- Media briefings – for larger groups of reporters/bloggers in person or via live stream video or conference call
- Live video streaming – Periscope, Facebook Live etc.
- Media interviews – one-on-one
- Separate website or web page dedicated to a prolonged crisis
- Instructional videos
- Apology letters and videos
- Infographics
- Podcasts
- Conference calls with influencers/key customers
- Crisis hotline: 800-number with recorded message or call center
- Phone scripts to assist customer service, other personnel in responding to incoming calls
- Outbound phone calls/automated call scripts
- Community/Town Hall meetings
- Flyers, letters, door hangers
- Door-to-door visits
- Local/national ads

## Key Audience Checklist

Consider all of the audiences that you may want to reach or influence in the crisis. Prioritize your list to help you select communications tactics to target the most important audiences.

- Management
- Employees
- Employees' family members
- Strategic Partners
- Investors/Shareholders
- Affected constituents
- Donors/Sponsors
- Influencers/Advisors
- Volunteers
- Vendors
- Subcontractors
- Consultants
- Neighbors
- General public
- Facebook followers
- Twitter followers
- Elected officials
- City/county/state staff
- Government regulators
- Public agencies
- Industry/trade association leadership
- Professional association leadership
- Nonprofit leadership
- Nonprofit members
- Environmental organizations
- Consumer advocacy organizations
- Local news media
- National news media
- International news media
- Trade/professional media
- Ethnic/specialty media
- Other:



# Media Statement Template

At the first sign that a crisis is brewing, the CCRT will develop a “standby statement.” The standby statement will enable the City to quickly respond to media calls, social media posts and internal and customer inquiries. Know that you won’t have many facts early in the crisis, when the pressure for information is most intense. Offer the facts you have at the time. Update the statement as you learn more.

When you release the statement to the media, you may choose to post the statement on your website, relay it via social media and provide it to key audiences via email, text, Intranet and other communications tools.

## Template

On (date/time), (describe situation) occurred OR (name alleged XYZ incident occurred.)

We have learned (describe known facts about the situation). We understand that (estimate/number) of (people/property/other) were involved. This is all we know at this time.

*We are in the process of (gathering the facts about the situation/working with investigative authorities/other actions) to determine (how/why) this happened. OR, we have investigated and concluded that (describe conclusion.)*

## Additional Messages

In the event of illness, injury or death, add an empathy statement:

- a. We are in the process of notifying the families of these individuals. Our heartfelt concern/condolences go out to all of them.

Describe any instructions for people to follow or plans to continue to communicate:

- a. We are working with (police/fire/health/other authorities) to protect the (health/safety/other) of our (employees/residents/volunteers/other).
- b. We have advised the (employees/residents/volunteers/other) to (describe action you have asked them to take).
- c. We will post more information on our website at (address) as it becomes available. We will also provide updates via (describe communications tools)
- d. We plan to (hold a press conference/issue a news release or statement) on (day/time).

# Frequently Asked Questions in a Crisis

## Core Questions

- What happened?
- Who was impacted?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- What are you doing about it?

## Other Potential Questions

- Was anyone harmed? Who?
- Are those that were harmed getting help? How?
- Are people out of danger?
- Is the situation under control?
- Has this ever happened before?
- What does this all mean?
- Who is in charge?
- What can we expect next?
- What are you advising people to do?
- When do you expect to resolve the situation?
- Who else is involved in the response?
- Did you have any forewarning that this might happen?
- Why didn't you prevent from happening?
- Could this have been avoided? How?
- What else could go wrong?
- Who is to blame?
- When did you find out?
- When did you respond?
- When did you disclose the situation?
- Who is conducting the investigation?
- What are you going to do after the investigation?
- What have you found out so far?
- Has anyone broken the law?
- Has anyone made mistakes? Who?
- Have you told us everything you know?
- What are you not telling us?
- What effect will this have on the organization, constituents and the public?
- Do you accept responsibility for what happened?
- Can this happen in another location?

- What is the worst-case outcome of this crisis?
- What lessons did you learn?
- What will you do to prevent this from happening again?

# Tweet Template

Potential tweet elements:

- @ (author)
- # (initialsAlert/MediaAdvisory/Update/Today)
- # (event/incident/subject)
- links to your website and/or external authority websites (police, fire, American Red Cross, etc.) for more information
- photos/instructional videos/other images as appropriate

Sample tweets regarding backpacks found on Boston Marathon finish line, April 2014:

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 16

UPDATE: One Arrested for Hoax Device at Marathon Finish Line

<http://bpdnews.com/news/2014/4/16/update-one-arrested-for-hoax-device-at-marathon-finish-line> ...

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 15

#BPDSafetyPublicAlert: To ease fears & concerns relating to backpacks - #BPD again discouraging their use at this year's #BostonMarathon.

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 15

#BPDPublicSafetyAlert: #BPD confirming a male suspect in custody in connection to the unattended backpacks found at the Finish Line.

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 15

#BPDMediaAdvisory: For officer safety - media outlets are discouraged from showing any live video of backpacks found near Finish Line.

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 15

#BPDPublicSafetyAlert: #BPD Bomb Squad still on scene in the area of Marathon Finish Line investigating call for 2 unattended backpacks.

**Boston Police Dept.** @bostonpolice Apr 15

#BPDPublicSafetyAlert: Boylston St has been closed & MBTA Green Line service temporarily suspended. Community members asked to avoid area.

## Media Log

In a major crisis, you are likely to receive a barrage of media calls immediately and throughout the duration of the crisis. A media log will help track of reporter/blogger inquiries, evaluate interview requests and respond with consistent information.

Date	Time	Outlet	Name	Phone & Cell	Email	Questions

# Media Guidelines for City Employees

The goal of our media guidelines is to try to prevent unauthorized spokespeople from talking to the media. While these are part of the City's guidelines, it is good to distribute at the first warning signs of a crisis or when it has hit.

## Sample Memo

**TO:** All City of Plano Employees  
**FROM:** (NAME)  
**DATE:** (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)  
**RE:** Media Guidelines

The City of Plano has Media Guidelines regarding calls or visits from reporters and bloggers. If a member of the media wants to talk with you, please do not answer any questions. Follow these steps:

1. Say, "**I am not an authorized spokesperson** for the City of Plano. Please contact Steve Stoler, our media relations director at 972-345-1393 or [Stevest@plano.gov](mailto:Stevest@plano.gov)."
2. If a member of the media attempts to ask you questions in person, repeat the above. Do not agree to go on camera or answer any media questions. Ask, "Do you have a business card?"
3. Immediately call in, text or email the complete contact information to Steve Stoler, Media Relations Director.

We appreciate your cooperation in following this media policy.

# Social Media Guidelines

The goal of our social media guidelines is to try to prevent unauthorized spokespeople from speaking on behalf of the City via social media.

## **Protocol/Rules of Engagement:**

- Abide by City of Plano social media guidelines and policies.
- Pause all prior scheduled social media posts until the crisis has passed.
- Posting authority:
  - Marketing and Community Engagement staff may access the social media channels and the social media dashboard.
  - During a Public Relations crisis: Any content posted on social sites needs to be approved by Director of Marketing and Community Engagement, Senior Marketing Coordinators responsible for Social Media or Marketing Manager.

# Spokesperson Guidelines

1. Express compassion to those directly impacted by the crisis. Offer empathy messages first, before the facts.
2. If you're not sure who caused the crisis, say you are sorry that the incident occurred or apologize for the person's experience.
3. Think of messages as your quotes. Persuasive messages interpret, explain and educate. Simplify complex information.
4. Take an active role in the interview. Ask the reporter for a quick overview before you begin. Make the first answer count to ensure you get your key points across.
5. Focus 100% on the interview. If you're on the phone with a reporter, remove all distractions. Have the Q&A or statement handy either in print, on your smart phone, tablet or laptop. Jot down reporter questions to help you focus on what they are asking and how to respond.
6. Practice bridging to the information you want to convey. Briefly answer a negative or irrelevant question, then introduce or bridge to your message. Elaborate when asked positive questions. "Yes, that's correct, and what's more..." Provide brief answers to negative questions. Set the record straight when the reporter has his or her facts wrong. Say, "No, that is not correct, and let me explain."
7. Decline to speculate on the motives or actions of others. Politely say, "I wish I could help you, however you should contact them directly."
8. Don't feel obligated to answer every question on the spot. It's perfectly fine to say "I don't know" vs. risking off-the-cuff answer that may turn out to be wrong. If you don't know the answer, say so. Add that you or someone from the organization will *try* to get back to them with the answer as soon as possible.
9. Explain "no comment" answers. Give a reason why you cannot comment, either because of confidentiality, litigation or because police, fire or other authority has requested that you refer questions to them.
10. Never say anything "off the record." The reporter could inadvertently use your comment. Or, your "anonymous" quote could be traced back to you.
11. Stay on message. Even if the reporter uses an accusatory tone or is rude, remember that it's often an act to get you to react. Don't take it personally. In 99% of the time, no one will read or hear the questions. If the reporter persists in using a hostile tone, consider ending the interview and suggest talking at a later time.



12. The toughest rule for most people to follow...and the most important...is to stop and think before answering questions. It only takes a few seconds to shape a quote that will be on the record for years.