

Tips for Staying on the Right Side of Social Media and Creating Ambassadors

A Practical Workbook for Getting Important Messages Right

Step 2 - Prioritize Two Possible Incidents Begin Planning

Eventually, we need to start prioritizing possible incidents. Consider minor issues that are not too serious but are likely to happen frequently and that require some proper communication planning. Find one on your list and write it in the mini chart below. .

Now, consider a more scary item from the list. What situation could cause your company to lose money, sales, partners, customers or cause long term reputational damage? More seriously, what sort of situation could result in illness, injury or death? If it keeps you up at night, you may want to start planning around it. Write it in the chart below.

THE TWO NEGATIVE EVENTS I INTEND TO PLAN FOR ARE:

Step 3 - Planning Possible Responses Should These Incidents Happen

What would you say to employees, partners, customers or consumers if one of these incidents actually happened? As tough as it may be, people need to hear the bad news from you, first.

Turns out, we as humans like to hear certain types of information delivered in certain ways. Therefore, when we need to communicate bad news, we have communication goals and an order in which the information should be delivered.

We'll start with planning for the minor incident. Your goals in communicating with people are:

- **Show Accountability - be the first to inform people** that this incident happened and provide clarifying information, such as reason or cause
- **Re-establish Trust - list actions already taken to remedy the situation** to show you are on top of things
- **Demonstrate Leadership - reassure people you are committed** to fixing the situation to ensure it never happens again and that your partners will be involved in this

Your first steps are to create simple statements that illustrate these goals and deliver the information in the order people need to hear it.

A Message Map is a simple plan that prioritizes, structures and strengthens communication for maximum impact based on the goals outlined above as well as the order people generally need to receive information. Created in the form of a chart, the Message Map can be used for all communication situations, such as employee meetings or internal communications, letters or phone calls to partners or customers, posts on social media or your website and interviews with reporters. *Message Maps are especially effective when communicating bad news.*

For help using this process for a specific incident, call 403 998 8209 or email ted@baserep.com

The Map forces you to create short, powerful statements (the Message) that are organized and supported by supplementary information (1st Most Important Detail, etc). Messages and details should be short and concise - research shows when we try to communicate more information, we end up muddying our effort and reducing its effectiveness. This is called communication regret. To avoid regret, a Message Map allows for only three key messages and only three supporting points for each message.

Message 1 <i>(informs what happened)</i>	Message 2 <i>(explains what you are doing / intend to do about it)</i>	Message 3 <i>(combines explaining future joint actions and demonstrates you value this partnership)</i>
1st Most Important Detail	1st Most Important Detail	1st Most Important Detail
2nd Most Important Detail	2nd Most Important Detail	2nd Most Important Detail
3rd Most Important Detail	3rd Most Important Detail	3rd Most Important Detail



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Step 4 - How To Use A Message Map - Minor Incident

Starting with Message 1 at the top left of the chart, write the most important piece of information the person needs to hear. Write the message in point form or in a short sentence no more than 25 words. In the space immediately under Message 1, write an important detail that explains your message or provides detail, again either in point for or a short sentence. Do the same in the next space below, making sure the point relates to the overall message.

As an example, we may need to communicate with a partner or customer that our delivery will be late. Our most important message will be - surprise, surprise - that the delivery will be late. We should then provide some detail around why. So our first column of the message map will look like this:

Message 1
Our delivery will be late.
Reason it is late - our written procedures are confusing
New employee, 1st time performing this role
I am sorry it will be late.*

* It's always good to apologize early on in your communication.

Next, people will want to know what you are doing about the late delivery. That will form the basis of our next message column, as well any other new details that might arise from this quick-changing plan. Remember, our goal in this column is to try to re-establish trust that may have been lost when we communicated that the delivery will be late. The last column needs to remind the partner that you value your relationship and want to include them in overcoming this problem. Here, our overarching goal is to reinforce that we care about them long term.

Therefore, a Message Map for a late delivery might look like:

Message 1	Message 2	Message 3
Our delivery will be late	We are fixing this	We are committed to improving so this never happens again
Reason it is late - our written procedures are confusing	Our immediate steps	Here are the actions we intend to take
Compounding factor: new employee, we didn't support them well	Timelines - what you should expect to happen	These are possible new procedures
I am sorry it will be late	Possible challenges	We value your input on these changes and are committed to make this transition seamless

Step 5 - Message Map Planning For More Serious Incidents

More serious incidents require us to communicate that we care and to communicate this immediately. If the incident you are planning for could cause injury, death, damage to the environment or moral outrage (such as offensive, hurtful comments made by an employee, say perhaps on social media), our communication goals are to:

- **Show Empathy and Accountability** - name the incident (fire, dangerous item in food, equipment failure), apologize, express concern and care for victims and others
- **Re-establish Trust by providing context** - explain what happened, list actions taken, such as calling for help, initiating a special response, administering first aid
- **Keep People Safe and Demonstrate Compassion** - give people actions to take to avoid harm (if the issue involves potential for further harm, such as returning product to the store or throwing it out), explain that you continue to support victims, reassure people you are committed to continuing to address the situation to ensure it never happens.

Therefore, our message map based on a more serious scenario, such as workplace injury, might look like this:

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Message 1 <i>(name the incident, apologize, show concern)</i>	Message 2 <i>(explains what actions people took)</i>	Message 3 <i>(combines message of care and commitment to prevent future incidents)</i>
Today two employees were hurt	As soon as this happened, we took action immediately	We want to be a better company
A machine failed and caused...	Called 911	We will continue to support our hurt employees
We are very sorry this happened	Administered first aid	We are committed to improving to prevent future incidents
We are supporting the families of those injured	Shut the plant down	We are working with others (government, partners, associations, etc) to help us improve

Step 6 - Using The Message Map For All Follow Up Communications Following An Incident

The message map is the starting point in your communication. Whether you intend to use the map in an employee meeting, to call a partner to break the news or in a message to be posted on social media, your communication might require transitional sentences to make it sound conversational and make it flow. Ask someone to help you write it.

Enlist sympathetic employees or those who exude care and compassion. Ask them: Does what you have written truly reflect the situation? When spoken, does it sound sincere enough? Refine and improve until it feels right.

MESSAGE MAP FOR INCIDENT _____

<p>Message 1 <i>(informs what happened)</i></p>	<p>Message 2 <i>(explains what you are doing / intend to do about it)</i></p>	<p>Message 3 <i>(combines explaining future joint actions and demonstrates you value this partnership)</i></p>
<p>1st Most Important Detail</p>	<p>1st Most Important Detail</p>	<p>1st Most Important Detail</p>
<p>2nd Most Important Detail</p>	<p>2nd Most Important Detail</p>	<p>2nd Most Important Detail</p>
<p>3rd Most Important Detail</p>	<p>3rd Most Important Detail</p>	<p>3rd Most Important Detail</p>