



**National  
Transportation  
Safety Board**

# **The Accident – Now What?**

**Managing the Aftermath through  
Effective Crisis Communications**

Robert Sumwalt

# Lac-Mégantic, Quebec

July 6, 2013



# Could this be you?

- Reputations suffer
- Credibility destroyed
- Confidence shattered



# Could this be you?

Your organization may survive after a poorly handled crisis, but your career may not.



# Could this be you?

Your organization may survive after a poorly handled disaster, but your career may not.





Could this be  
**YOU?**



**NTSB**

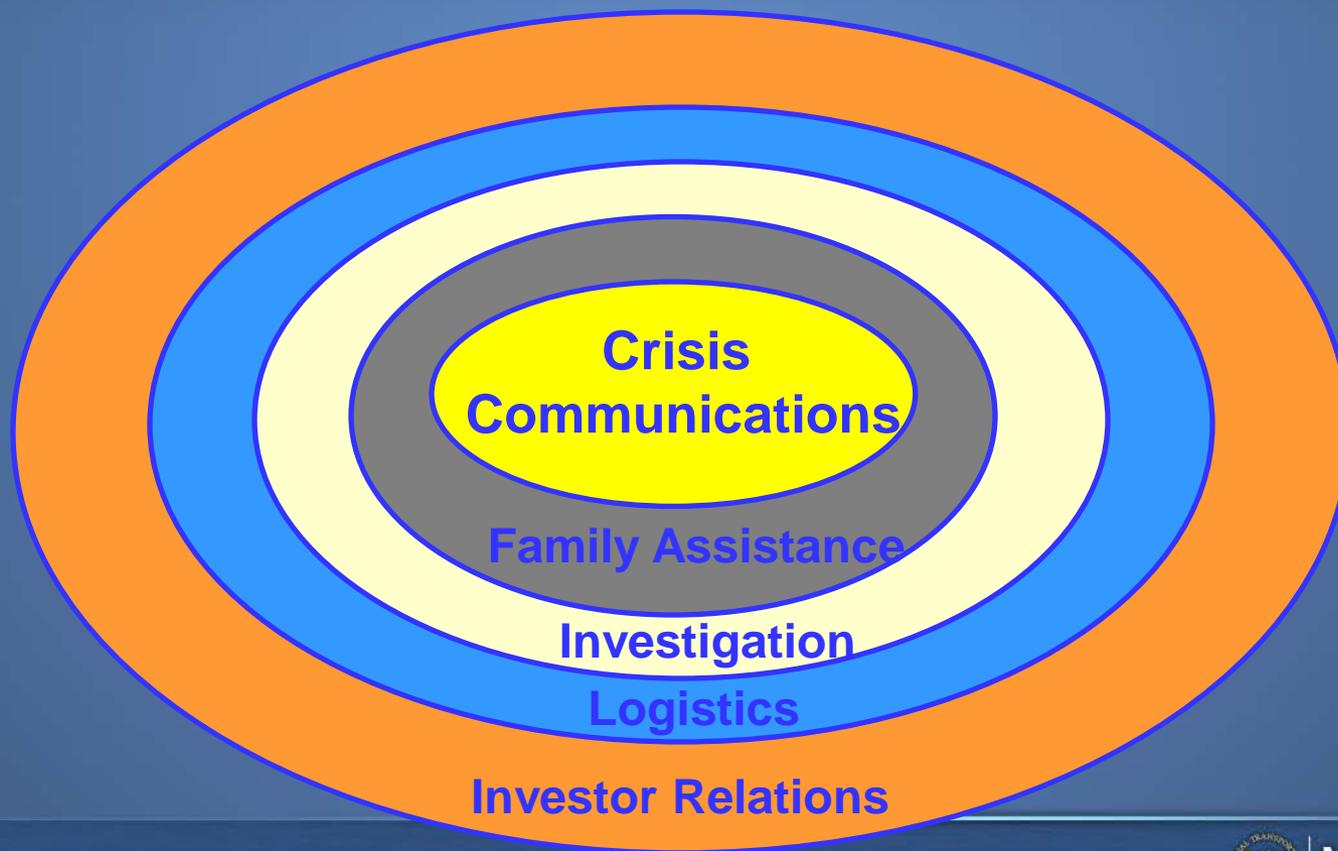
**The way a crisis is publically handled can  
either make or break you.**



**NTSB**

# Crisis Communications:

The backbone of an effective emergency response plan



# Effective Crisis Communications

Advance Preparation

Good Execution



NTSB

First,

## A word about working with NTSB

- If you are a party to an NTSB investigation, all information related to the actual investigation must come from the NTSB.



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# This is not a gag order



- We want one voice of the investigation.
  - The NTSB is that voice.
- Parties may discuss things not directly related to the actual investigation.

## RULE OF THUMB

If you can say it the day *before* the accident, you can probably say it *after* the accident.



The French-owned Airbus said in a statement that the crashed airliner was built in 1997 and had accumulated more than 56,000 hours of flight time. Metrojet acquired the plane in 2012, Airbus said.

*Washington Post*  
November 1, 2015



**NTSB**

## A GOOD PRACTICE

To be safe, clear press releases with NTSB Investigator-in-Charge or Public Affairs Office before releasing information.



# Effective Crisis Communications

Advance Preparation

Good Execution



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# Advance Preparation



# Advance Preparation

In order to effectively manage after a crisis, you must prepare before the crisis.



# Advance Preparation

- Plan – have one
- Practice the plan
  - Drills, table-top exercises
- Anticipate
  - Prepare media templates in advance
  - Website and other marketing considerations



# Do you want to send a “business as usual” message?

The image shows a screenshot of a travel booking website interface, tilted at an angle. The top navigation bar includes 'Book', 'Flight', 'Hotel', 'Car', 'Vacations', 'CHECK IN', 'FLIGHT STATUS', and 'CHANGE FLIGHT'. Below this, there are search options for 'Round trip' (selected) and 'One-way'. The 'DEPART' field is empty, and the 'ARRIVE' field is also empty. The 'DEPART DATE' is set to '10/29' (Thu, Oct 29 2015). The 'RETURN DATE' is set to '11/01' (Sun, Nov 1 2015). There are input fields for 'ADULTS' (set to 1) and 'SENIORS' (set to 0). A 'Search' button is visible. Below the search fields, there are links for 'Where we fly', 'Map search', and 'Flexible dates'. A 'PROMO CODE' field is also present. The interface is divided into sections for 'Special Offers'. The first offer features a woman in a hammock on a beach, with text: 'There's still time to use those vacation days' and 'Save up to \$150 on flight + hotel'. The second offer features a modern hotel building, with text: 'Cool weather brings hot deals on hotels' and 'Save up to 30%'. The third offer features a child on a beach, with text: 'Sun, sand, and sea Catch great fares to Mexico and the Caribbean' and 'Book by 11/5'. At the bottom of the page, there is a Windows taskbar with various application icons.

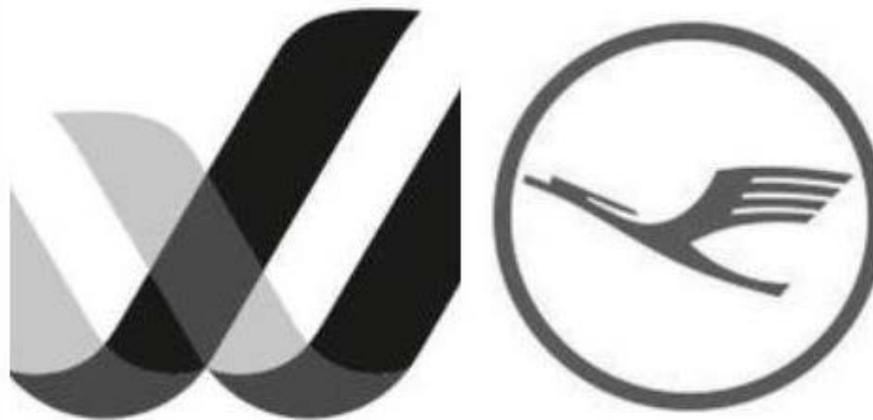


**BBC News (World)**   
@BBCWorld

 Follow

Airlines @germanwings & @lufthansa change their logos to grey after crash in French Alps [bbc.in/1LSgxjV](http://bbc.in/1LSgxjV)  
[pic.twitter.com/4iJhc41oRQ](http://pic.twitter.com/4iJhc41oRQ)

9:02 AM - 24 Mar 2015



  479  192



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Follow

# Dynamic International Airways flight safely diverted. Flights continue per schedule Oct 30 2015

RETWEETS 18 FAVORITES 9



2:07 PM - 29 Oct 2015



**Dynamic**  
@flyairdynamic

Dynamic International Airways LLC is a Worldwide Boeing 767 Air Carrier based in Greensboro, NC. We provide our customers with the world-class travel experience

701 North Terminal Road Greens  
airdynamic.com

TWEETS 5,365 FOLLOWING 99 FOLLOWERS 176K FAVORITES 122 LISTS 1

Tweets Tweets & replies Photos & videos

Pinned Tweet

**Dynamic** @flyairdynamic · Oct 9

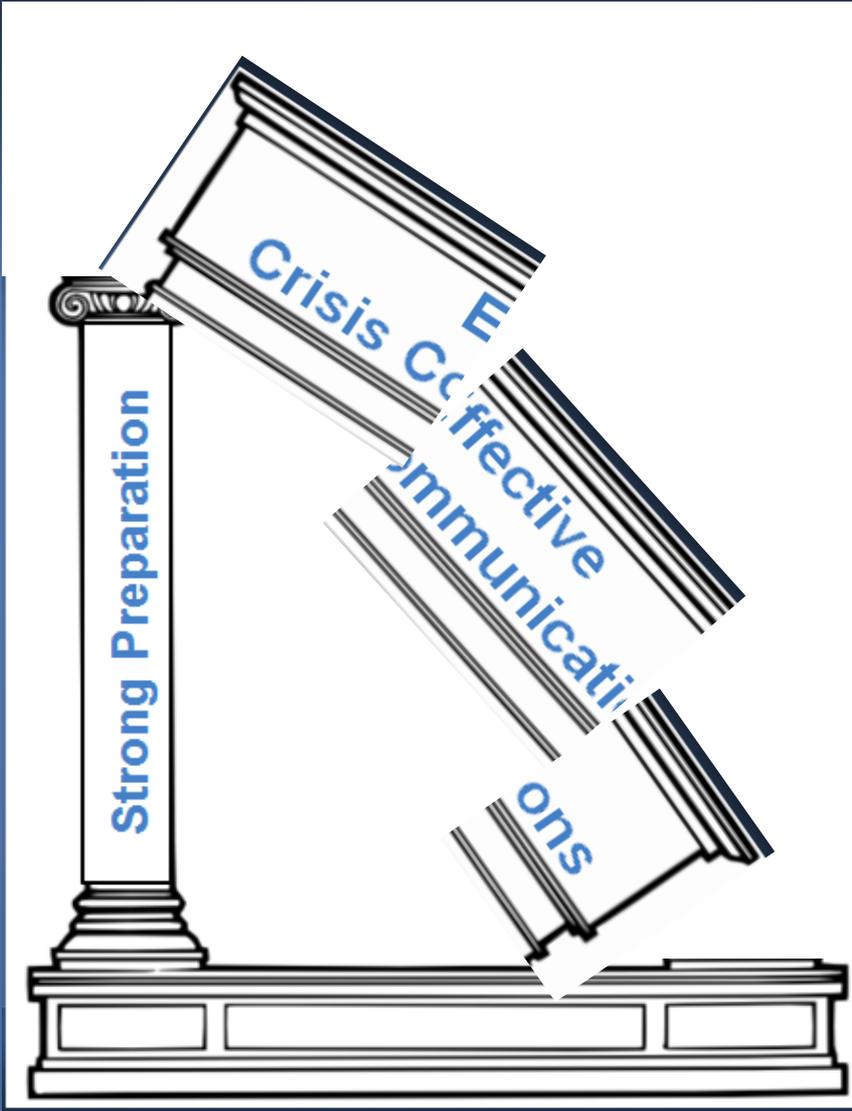
**BOOK NOW! Caracas - New York, starting November 14th!**  
Check the #flight schedule at [bit.ly/1hufSav](http://bit.ly/1hufSav) #NewYork

Ready to go? BIG APPLE is waiting for you!

CARACAS - NEW YORK NEW YORK - CARACAS Starting November 14th

For further information go to [www.airdynamic.com](http://www.airdynamic.com)

Dynamic @flyairdynamic · 1h



# Effective Crisis Communications

Advance Preparation

Good Execution



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# Good Execution



# Execution Strategies for Effective Crisis Communications

- 1) Prepare Yourself
- 2) Display Command Presence
- 3) Show Compassion
- 4) Demonstrate Transparency
- 5) Project Credibility
- 6) Remember Your Message



Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #1

# PREPARE YOURSELF



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# Prepare yourself

- Know the facts
- Identify your talking points
- “Murder board”



# Snow brings traffic to a standstill in Atlanta

Updated: Wednesday, January 29 2014, 02:22 PM EST

Like 2 Tweet 0 Pin it 2



**3 KENT  
LECCU**

**VANGUARD CHARTER ACADEMY**  
Closed - All Evening Activities Canceled



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Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #2

# DISPLAY COMMAND PRESENCE



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# Command Presence

- Be in control; control the environment
- Don't be overrun by the media



# Command Presence

- Be in control; control the environment
- Don't be overrun by the media



# Command Presence

*Please raise your hand.  
When I call on you, state your  
name, your media affiliation,  
and ask your question.  
Thank you.*



# Command Presence

- Articulate clearly
- Use good eye contact
- Speak with authority



Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #3

**SHOW COMPASSION**



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At approximately 9 this morning, a flight operated by ...

Before I go any further, on behalf of the NTSB, I would like to extend our condolences to the families and friends of the victims of this tragic accident.

- Don't *read* this – speak from the heart!
- Show that you care!
- Show compassion!



Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #4

# DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY



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# The way you answer *does matter*

*What was the speed of the airplane as it departed the runway?*

“I can’t answer that.”

## If you are the investigator

“One of the many things the investigation will do is develop a complete timeline of events, including speeds throughout the accident sequence.”

## If you are the operator

“The NTSB is conducting the investigation, so that question would best be directed to them.”



Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #5

# PROJECT CREDIBILITY



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# “Stay in your lane”



Don't talk about things that are outside of your area.



Crisis Communications Execution Strategy #6

# REMEMBER YOUR MESSAGE



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# The Pivot – your best friend.

- When asked a question that you are not prepared to answer, pivot to your message.



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NTSB

# Execution Strategies for Effective Crisis Communications

- 1) Prepare Yourself
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**Good Luck!**



# National Transportation Safety Board