CHECKLIST 7

Communicating During a Crisis

PURPOSE: *Keep communication calm, factual and on schedule from the first minutes of an incident through the post-mortem.*

Incident: *What is happening*	**Started:** *MM/DD/YYYY, HH:MM*	**Single source of truth:** *Owner or channel*	**Update cadence:** *e.g. every 2 hours*

WHEN TO USE

Use this during incidents, outages, emergencies, or organizational crises. Work the phases in order: immediate actions, first communication, ongoing updates, resolution, post-crisis.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ☐ Acknowledge the situation quickly
- ☐ Gather facts before communicating
- ☐ Identify who needs to know what
- ☐ Establish communication cadence
- ☐ Designate a single source of truth

FIRST COMMUNICATION

- ☐ State what's happening clearly
- ☐ Explain impact and severity
- ☐ Share what you know AND don't know
- ☐ Outline immediate actions being taken
- ☐ Provide timeline for next update
- ☐ Give contact info for urgent issues
- ☐ Stay calm in tone and language

FIRST MESSAGE: DRAFT

What's happening	*Clear and factual*
Impact and severity	*Who and what is affected*
What we know	*Confirmed facts only*
What we don't know yet	*Be transparent about unknowns*
Immediate actions	*What is being done right now*

Next update	*Date and time*
Contact for urgent issues	*Name and channel*

ONGOING UPDATES

- ☐ Update on schedule even if nothing changed
- ☐ Share progress and setbacks honestly
- ☐ Explain the “why” behind delays or challenges
- ☐ Recognize people working on the issue
- ☐ Adjust timeline estimates conservatively
- ☐ Answer questions promptly
- ☐ Correct misinformation quickly

UPDATE LOG

Date / time	Audience	What was shared	Next update due

TONE AND APPROACH

- ☐ Be calm and factual, not alarmist
- ☐ Show confidence without false optimism
- ☐ Acknowledge anxiety people are feeling
- ☐ Be transparent about unknowns
- ☐ Take responsibility appropriately
- ☐ Don’t blame individuals publicly
- ☐ Your words match reality (no false promises)

DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

- ☐ Your team: More detail, focus on their role
- ☐ Leadership: Impact, actions, needs from them
- ☐ Customers: Impact on them, what we’re doing
- ☐ Broader company: Awareness, not panic

RESOLUTION COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Announce resolution clearly
- ☐ Thank everyone involved
- ☐ Share what was learned
- ☐ Outline what will change to prevent recurrence
- ☐ Frame as teachable moment for organization
- ☐ Don’t dwell on blame

POST-CRISIS

- ☐ Conduct blameless post-mortem
- ☐ Share learnings broadly
- ☐ Follow through on promised changes
- ☐ Check in on team well-being
- ☐ Document for future reference

POST-CRISIS — NOTES

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ☐ Disappear or go silent
- ☐ Sugarcoat or minimize serious issues
- ☐ Promise things you can’t deliver
- ☐ Point fingers at individuals
- ☐ Make jokes when inappropriate
- ☐ Provide conflicting information
- ☐ Forget to update when resolved

Watch-Out: Silence is the most damaging message you can send in a crisis. Update on schedule even when nothing has changed; people fill a vacuum with their worst assumptions.