



3/5/2012

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ROLE OF THE FRONTLINE IN A CRISIS: HOW  
TO THRIVE IN THE 'TRUST' ECONOMY

# 2012 ICRC Conference

International Crisis & Risk Communication Conference  
Cultivating Trust in Uncertain Times  
Hosted By: Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida  
Dates: March 5-7, 2012 Location: FAIRWINDS Alumni Center at the University of Central Florida  
WWW.ICRCOMMUNICATION.COM





## Role for the Frontline in a Crisis: How to Thrive in the “Trust” Economy

We know what a crisis is; it is that “show-stopping, people stopping event in a single moment of time that puts the ‘media spotlight’ on you, your brand and your response”. *Your reputation is on the line and trust will determine your success or failure/future.*

How many of you know that a crisis can happen any minute? And more importantly, how many of you think that you or your CEO will be in the perfect place at the perfect time to make the perfect response? We **all** know that rarely happens!

The real question **that** we will address **in this presentation** is how many trust the frontline of your organization? More importantly, do you know who they are and are they factored into your crisis communication planning and training. The bottom line is the frontline is the ‘lifeblood’ of your organization, the glue, the oxygen – indeed, your most important asset. Empowered they are the key to your success in a crisis – under-powered, undervalued and uninformed could quickly move your crisis into a disaster. They are the heart – and when you engage the head and heart of an organization in a crisis you succeed. Lastly, we will look at the ‘Trust’ bank. Do you know what your balance sheet looks like?

“CEOs are important but not sufficient voices for their companies, as engagement is created by mid-level employees with serious knowledge of products and less perceived bias to exaggeration.”  
*Richard Edelman (6 A.M. blog)*

We will look at the frontline using several case studies; the first Case Study (Attachment 1)



demonstrates how Asda values were effectively communicated by its frontline during a crisis. Their frontline was not only empowered and informed but embodied Asda’s values. You will learn to identify who your frontline are – the night watchman, the bus driver, the security guard, the 1-800 number or front door receptionist – they are the lifeblood, heart and soul of your organization.

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**“Never underestimate their [stakeholders] general need to know and be reassured that the organization is acting ethically and with professionalism”**  
*Dr Robert Chandler (Disaster Recovery Journal)*

What is this “head & heart” thing and why is it important before, during and after a crisis. We learn how it is both an internal and external aspect that needs to become part of your ‘culture’. We learn how it reflects the emotional health of your organization. It reflects your values and addresses your ability to deal with a crisis.

>> The Head – what we are ‘told’ to say or not say (does your organization empower or ‘muzzle’ the frontline?)

>> The Heart – compassion, emotional connection, demonstrating values.

We will better understand through several examples how “Head & Heart” not only applies internally throughout an organization but how we communicate to our external stakeholders (e.g., community, traditional media, social media, partners, clients). “Head & Heart” MUST come together and your body language must match the words, particularly in a media, TV interview OR your You Tube and Web Site video.



***“Trust is the new black [standard] – People will invariably turn to the sources of information that they trust the most [in a crisis] and increasingly this may not be the official sources of information”*** cited in [The Four Highly Effective Stages of Crisis Management; by Jane Jordan-](#)

One look at the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Results (The 12<sup>th</sup> Edition) leaves you in no doubt that we are in a “trust economy” where the global currency is ‘trust’! We have prepared a summary of the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer (Attachment 2) to address not only credible people but to look at trusted places of information.

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Realizing it is all to do with values; do you know what is in your 'Trust' bank?

Do you understand how to make deposits and when to make withdrawals – internally and externally? Throughout the presentation you will understand that you cannot have a secure investment without an empowered, 'trusted', frontline. You will better understand the "trust economy".

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## Attachment #1

### Case Study: Asda Averts Crisis

Swift action averts full-blown crisis for UK retailer: right choice of spokespeople, right strategy by British retailer, Asda; showed their savvy when they encountered an online “attack” on their values.

An ex-Asda/ Wal Mart employee (Asda is now part of the Wal Mart family) captured a series of his unpleasant exploits - licking raw chickens, egg-throwing competitions, and slashing staff chairs - on video; an incident that had all the hallmarks of the disgusting food episode with a rogue employee that plagued Domino’s earlier in 2009. There was a crisis in the making for Asda.

Let’s assume that Asda asked themselves the key questions.

What impression do we want to create? No doubt they wanted to demonstrate that the behavior of the ex-employee was abhorred at Asda, and that such contemptuous acts were extremely rare, not part of a widespread culture. Who better to create such an impression than the employees at the store in question?

Early Stage Two for Asda. The spotlight was turning away from the incident to Asda’s response.

How smart of Asda to have store employees offer their personal reaction to the behavior of their former work-mate? Four workers from the shop-floor at the Fulmore store, including the store manager and security, were filmed giving their personal reactions. “Shocked, outraged, confused” were their genuine, unscripted responses which were posted to YouTube: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5zs5fUhspE>).

The approach worked because it matched Assad’s values. Asda is “known as a down to earth, straightforward and approachable company. Its crisis response personified these qualities.”

It is absolutely critical to be true to your brand in a crisis, and Asda demonstrated just that. During a crisis your organization and its values are scrutinized under the microscope not only by the media but by customers and competitors, friends and foes alike. It is imperative when a crisis hits that you act true to what you stand for. So if you are a suited-up sort of company then act in a suited-up way, but if you are a laid-back type then act that way.

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Asda's smart, swift action and choice of spokespeople focused the response and online conversations to "admiration for the colleagues" featured in the video rather than the incident itself. The choice matched their values.

Well done Asda!

*This case study is an extract from Jane's book: [The Four Highly Effective Stages of Crisis Management](#)*



## Attachment #2

### Who can you trust? How can you establish or repair trust?

*(Based on 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Results)*

For a business or government agency operating in today's 24/7 hyper-connected news cycle, creating and maintaining trust is paramount.

Transparency builds trust according to the international public relations firm Edelman. Transparency puts discourse on a constructive or productive path. To create transparency, tap into new ways of communicating — social networks, Tweeting — and put power into the hand of an average person, your employees.

When Edelman released its 12th annual global Trust Barometer, the survey of 25,000 college-educated, well-informed, top earners in 25 countries showed the “extremely” or “very” credible people were:

- 68%: Academic or expert
- 66%: Technical expert in the company
- 65%: A person like yourself (**Up from 43%**)
- 50%: A regular employee (**Up from 34%**)
- 50%: NGO (non-governmental organization) representative
- 46%: Financial or industry analyst
- 38%: CEOs (**down from 50% in 2011**)
- 29%: Government officials or regulators

Of note: when asked “How much do you trust each of the following places as source of information:” traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio) rose from 29% in 2011 to 32% in 2012; online multiple sources: increased from 22% to 26%, social media increased from 8% to 14%.

Government leaders, when compared to business leaders, are seen as less transparent. Respondents said, “I do not trust them at all” 46% of the time for business leaders, 27% for government officials.

To counter these trends, a business or government agency can practice “radical transparency” which starts establishing operational and societal goals, then regularly reporting on the success or failure in meeting them. This helps the organization to shape the public discourse. Key to radical transparency is talking with employees.

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To the public, they can be trusted “people like me.” Empowered, employees can guide conversations with their peers.

This helps the organization shape the public discourse as employees and their peers counter or mute public criticism.

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## Resources:

- [www.crisismanagementbook.com](http://www.crisismanagementbook.com) (Website for “The Four Stages of Highly Effective Crisis Management – How to manage the Media in the Digital Age” by Jane Jordan-Meier)
- [www.judyhoffman.com](http://www.judyhoffman.com) (“Keeping Cool in the Hot Seat” e-Zine)
- [www.trust.edelman.com/trust-download/global-results/](http://www.trust.edelman.com/trust-download/global-results/)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5zs5fUhspE&lr=1>
- <http://socialmedia.policytool.net/welcome/wizard> (quiz & sample policy)



## Who We Are

Our Team – world experts with extensive experience in all facets of crisis management: unique combination of public relations and risk management skills

### Jane Jordan-Meier

Jane Jordan-Meier is a former journalist with more than 25 years' experience in the media and communication management. She is a licensed and accredited media trainer and coach and has a Masters Degree in Communication Management.

Jane has been at the forefront of media training for 15 years developing unique and powerful methodologies in crisis media management. She is recognized as one of the top media and crisis management trainers and is comfortable consulting and training at CEO level or guiding a novice through the media maze.

Throughout her career Jane has worked at the highest level in strategic planning and communication including the Australian bicentennial celebrations the Sydney Olympic Games. Many of her programs and training have won awards from her peers in the public relations and communication professions.

She co-founded the Media Skills™ Network with former high profile journalist, Susan Templeman developing methodologies for media training and crisis management. The Media Skills™ methodology is now licensed to a network of trainers and used in several countries around the globe.

Jane is a frequent guest speaker on crisis communication and media management at conferences in Australia, New Zealand and North America. She has also run several professional development programs and workshops for the Public Relations Institute of Australia, IABC and PRSA.

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Norm Meier

With the highest international certification and expertise in business continuity (FBCI #23), disaster recovery and emergency response (CERTTrainer), Norm brings broad expertise to our clients.

He has extensive international consulting experience in these fields as well as information security, corporate governance and business ethics. This experience was gained dealing with multi-national clients, international government agencies, major global and Fortune 1000 companies covering a broad scope of industries. Norm also served two terms as mayor after serving several terms on both the Planning and Environmental Boards bringing significant change to the town's local infrastructure.

In the field of training, Norm has designed and taught courses in business continuity, crisis management, disaster recovery and computer and network security. He has chaired several international conferences and symposia, and spoken nationally and internationally on business continuity, crisis communication and operational risk management.

Norm leads our team in the business continuity assessments, diagnostic work and preparation with his unique Report Card methodology. He provides a very calm head in the midst of a crisis having dealt with several national disasters. His wisdom (and wit) are highly valued not only in training and coaching but at the post-crisis debriefs.

Norm has a MS in Engineering Management from NJIT.

### Contact

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