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Media Relations and Risk Communication

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What Makes News?

- **Conflict**
 - Can range from neighbors fighting to nations at war
- **Controversy**
 - Usually has something to do with people's beliefs
- **Timeliness**
 - Happening NOW
 - If it happened yesterday, it's not news, it's history
- **Impact**
 - Number of people affected
- **Proximity**
 - Nearness to audience



What Makes News?

- **Prominence**
 - Important or highly-visible people or events
- **Uniqueness**
 - Never happened or been tried before
- **Human Interest**
 - Kids and animals (Babies and beasts)
- **Sound/Visual**
 - Common event can become news on a slow news day if there is a video “story”
 - Can be a positive way of establishing a working relationship with local media



Impact of Local High-Impact News Story



Within 24 hours, you could have hundreds of members of the media on your doorstep.

What is a Reporter?

- Usually Has a Journalism Degree
- Operates Under a Code of Ethics (Most)
- News Slant and Tactics Set by Employer (Fox News vs. CBS News)
- Your Impressions from dealing with the media?



Why Talk to the Media?

- What the public thinks about depends to a large degree on what the public sees, hears and reads.
- The public now has unprecedented access to immediate news. (Radio, TV, Print, Web Sites)

“Its name is **Public Opinion**. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it is the voice of God.”

-Mark Twain



Why Talk to the Media?

- They provide an effective channel of communication for disseminating information about a crisis/emergency.
- They will tell the story with or without you or...
- We can establish a symbiotic relationship as they need us to get their facts straight and we need them to get our message out to the public.



Effective Channel of Communication

Retention of information after 3 hours:

- Radio – 70 percent
- Newspaper – 72 percent
- Television – 85 percent

Retention of information after 3 days:

- Radio – 10 percent
- Newspaper – 20 percent
- Television – 65 percent



Why Talk to the Media?

- Sometimes the media want to hear from a subject matter expert, not a spokesperson.
- Public wants reassurance from an expert with direct knowledge of the crisis/emergency about what is being done to protect them.
- The media generally will not resort to sensationalism during a crisis.



What the Media Wants

- Reporters want to answer six key questions:
 - Who, what, when, where, why and how.
- Looking for clear, concise sound bites and quotes free of technical language and jargon.
- Reporters have deadlines.



What the Media Wants

Reporters ask three types of questions:

- Over-arching – Seeking general information
- Informational – More probing questions seeking more detail
- Challenging – Usually the most dangerous to deal with as they can be confrontational



Media Relations

- Reporters are not your enemies, but neither are they your friends. They owe you nothing, and you should not expect anything more than fairness and courtesy.
- Be polite; avoid being hostile, rude or argumentative.

“Never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel, paper by the ton or has an FCC license.”

-William Jefferson Clinton.



Let's Take a 10-Minute Break



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Tips on Working With the Media

- Listen carefully to a question before you answer it.
- Never repeat a negative question, especially in front of a TV camera.
- Never lie. You won't get away with it.
- Never give information "off the record."
- Remember: a reporter may be looking for conflict, criticism and/or controversy.



Tips on Working With the Media

- Be confident and positive. Speak in clear, simple sentences, keeping your goals and key points in mind.
- Speak for your agency using the pronoun “we.”
- Never disagree with the agency you represent.
- Be patient when answering and re-answering questions.
- Never say anything you are not willing to see on tomorrow’s front page or on the evening TV news.



Tips on Working With the Media

Preparing for an interview:

- Ask who will do the interview.
- Ask what information is needed.
- Ask for a general idea of the questions or at least what the interviewer considers to be the most important question.
- Ask who else will be interviewed on topic.
- Find out information on where you will be interviewed (Indoors/outdoors, background color, etc.).
- Set a time limit and stick to it.



Tips on Working With the Media

Conducting the interview:

- Deliver your key messages.
- Offer to get any information you don't have.
- Don't raise issues you don't want to explain.
- Don't let a reporter hand you a document.
- Don't speak for others.
- Don't be led off message.
- Always stand up when doing interviews over the phone.



Tips on Working With the Media

After the interview:

- Assume the microphone is always on.
- Don't get too comfortable with the reporter.
- Watch the resulting newscast or read the newspaper story to see how message was perceived.
- Only correct errors that affect the point of the story.



Responding to Negative Editorials

- Get a letter to the editor as quickly as possible.
- If possible, get a third party to write a response in some cases.
- In responding, be respectful but forceful.
- Go after the weakest, most absurd points (if there are any) first to undermine the credibility of the editorial.
- After stating how the editorial was wrong on its facts or analysis, offer strong, assertive points of your position.
- Don't make the response too technical – tie it to something most of the public understands and supports and get it out quickly.
- Letters need to be short and are best if punchy, not pompous or dogmatic.



TV Interviews and News Conferences

- Wear proper attire.
- Make effective use of visuals and handouts.
- Stick to the specified timeframe and format.
- Audience members are fair game to be photographed (don't look at the lens).
- Calmly exit the room right on schedule.
- Don't talk in whispers or say "good job!" to your colleagues afterwards.
- Be mindful of the background.



Be Aware of Background for a News Conference

West Nile virus arrives in Alberta

EDMONTON (CP) — West Nile virus has been found in Alberta for the first time when a dead mosquito tested positive for the disease, health officials announced Wednesday.

The dead insect was found near Camrose, 300 km southeast of Edmonton.

"This confirmed West Nile virus as active in Alberta this summer," said Margy Pybus, a wildlife disease specialist with the province.

"It (the virus) has been traced across North America by migratory birds."

After initial tests, the mosquito was sent to the national health lab in Edmonton. The confirmation was received Wednesday.

A second mosquito near Medicine Hat has also been sent for further testing. The first was collected on June 27, but it was not tested at the provincial lab on July 8. Pybus said the date for this date is human error. Results on the second test are expected in a few days, she added.

Over 100 mosquitoes have tested positive since June 27. Last year, the virus was found in birds in Canada, New York, Saskatchewan, Minnesota and Quebec.

Earlier Wednesday, New Brunswick health officials said 100 samples of birds in a town in that province who may have the virus will not be available for at least another week.

If the virus is positive, it would be the first human case of West Nile in Canada this year. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control announced this week the first human case for this year in the United States, a man in South Carolina.

The virus is believed to have killed 24 people in Ontario.



Margy Pybus, a wildlife disease specialist, speaks at a news conference in Edmonton on Wednesday announcing the West Nile virus has arrived in Alberta.

It is believed that most people — roughly 90 per cent — who become infected do not show any symptoms at all. Most of the rest develop flu-like symptoms, but a small fraction suffer severe illness.

Two people in Alberta tested positive for West Nile last year but contracted the disease silently. Alberta officials cautioned the public to avoid being bitten.



Nonverbal Communication

- Body language or nonverbal physical clues can tell an audience more than you realize about:
 - What you say
 - How you feel
- Some body language can reinforce your key points or add to what you are saying
- Improper body language distracts your audience and causes them to focus on what you are doing instead of saying



News Interview Tips

- Stand up or sit up straight with a slight forward lean
- Reduce nervous habits, including:
 - Involuntary smiles
 - Playing with your hair
 - Touching your glasses or face
 - Jiggling coins or keys in your pocket
- Tone down excessive hand movements
- Try not to squint under the lights, bright sun
- Look at the reporter, not the camera
- Pay attention to grooming (hair, makeup, etc.)



More News Interview Tips

- Avoid negative body language: crossed arms, hands in pockets, finger pointing or jabbing, little or no eye contact, smirking or sneering.
- Avoid mixed messages – saying one thing while your body language says another.
- Keep hand gestures within the “golden triangle.”
- Take a deep breath, and don’t be intimidated by a microphone or bright lights.



Radio Interviews by Telephone

- Have informational material handy for quick reference.
- Always stand while being interviewed over the phone.
 - Lengthens the diaphragm and improves vocal resonance and tone.
 - Prevents becoming too “conversational.”
- Close office door or use signs to prevent interruptions.



Public Service Announcements

- Stations are required by the FCC to provide free air time.
- FCC does not specify when: PSAs could be shown late at night with little or no audience.
- Kansas Association of Broadcasters has a PSA rate that is affordable that ensures primetime airplay.



Public Service Announcements

- 30 second spots are easier to place than 60 second spots.
- Keep message to 3-4 key points.
- Look for an angle that attracts attention.
- Beware of flashing phone numbers or Web addresses too fast.

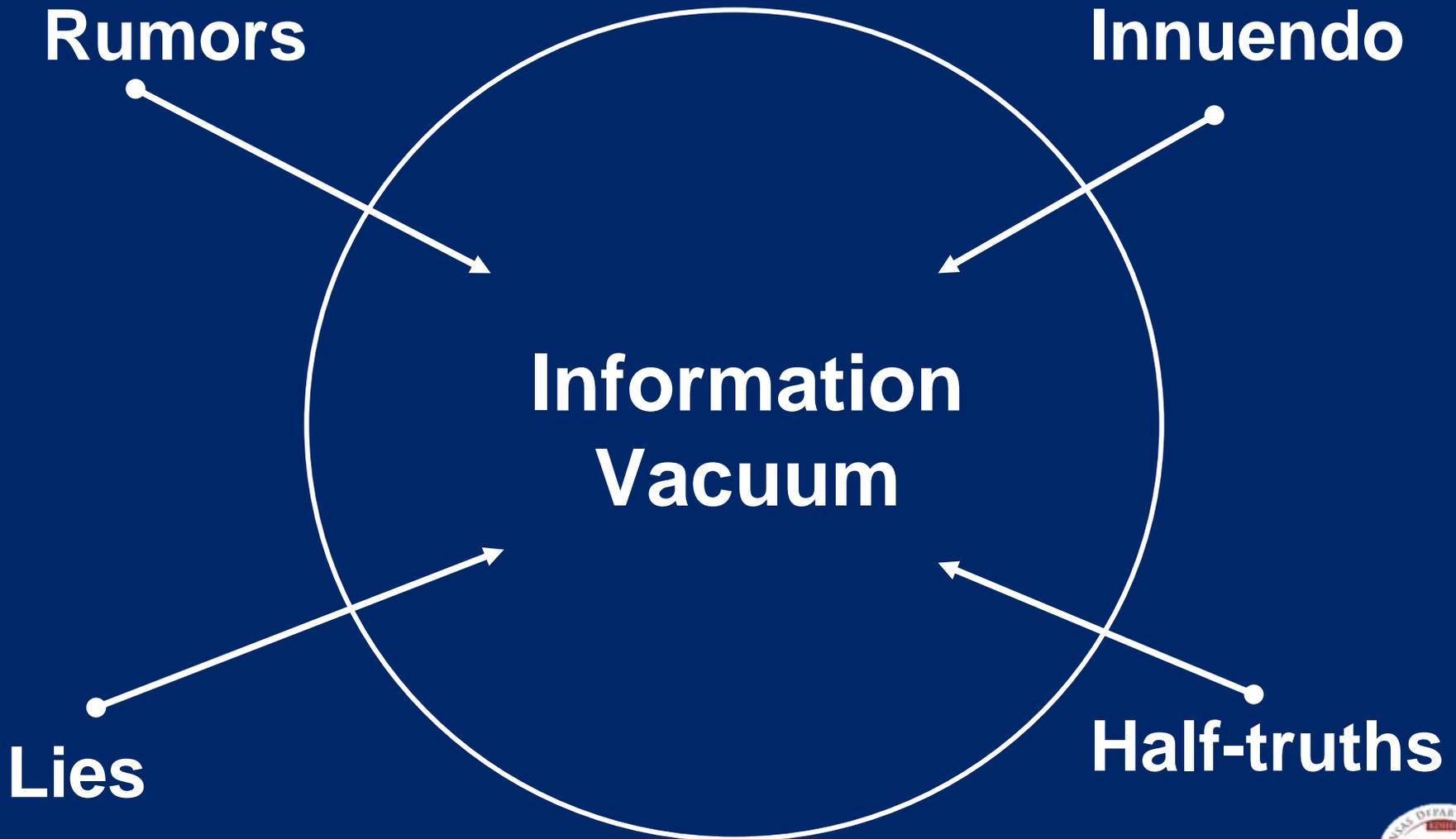


Preventing Misinformation

- Strive to be “first, right and credible” in providing information to the media.
- Provide information in small chunks versus “big bites.”
- Control rumors, lies and innuendo by filling “the news void” as soon as possible.



Information Vacuum



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News Void

“A news void is an incubator
for rumors and distortions.”

- Barbara Shelly, Member of The KC Star Editorial Board



Old Style Communication Plan

- First, answer phone call from a reporter.
- Then, try to answer questions intelligently.
- Finally, watch the TV news that evening and read the newspaper the next morning and see how it went.



New Style Communication Plan

- Be first (proactive) – Contact the media before they contact you, if possible.
- Be right – Verify information with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).
- Be credible – Express empathy and caring to establish trust.
- Be honest and open; never lie.
- Be sure messages are consistent – Work with stakeholders.
- Be prepared – Establish key messages and stick to them.



Risk Communication Definition

**“A Science-based Approach for
Communicating Effectively in:**

- **High-Concern**
- **High Stress**
- **Emotionally Charged, or**
- **Controversial Situations”**



Risk Communication

Why Is It Needed?



CRISIS

+ Heightened
public
emotions

+ Limited
access to
facts

+ rumor,
speculation,
assumption
and inference

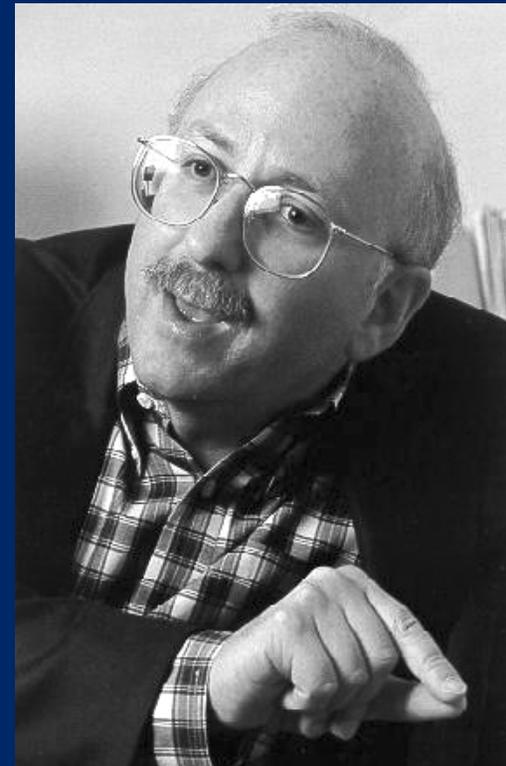
= an unstable
information
environment

Risk Communication Gurus



Vincent Covello, PhD

www.centerforriskcommunication.com



Peter Sandman, PhD

www.psandman.com

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Crisis Communication:

Six “Easy” Strategies by Peter Sandman

1. Don't over-reassure.
2. Acknowledge uncertainty.
3. Treat emotions as legitimate.
4. Establish your own humanity.
5. Offer people things to do.
6. Stop worrying about panic.



Covello's Main RC Templates

- Rule of 3 Template
- CCO Template
- 27/9/3 Template
- KDG Template
- IDK Template
- Mental Noise Template
- AGL-4 Template



Rule of Three or Triple T Template

- Three messages repeated three times
 - Tell them what you are going to tell them
 - Tell them
 - Then tell them what you just told them
- What three-part message does nearly every child know about fire safety?



CCO Template (Churchill)

- **Compassion**
- **Conviction**
- **Optimism**



Origin of CCO Template (Trust Theory)

When people are stressed, they often are distrustful of others.

“People want to know that you care before they care what you know.”

- Will Rogers



27/9/3 Template

27-9-3 Sound Bite Rule (AKA Attention Span Rule)

- 27 Words
- 9 Seconds
- 3 Messages, Ideas, Points



KDG Template

- Tell people what they need to **K**now.
- Tell people what they need to **D**o.
- Tell people where they can **G**o for more information.



IDK Template

- Never say “No Comment.”
- Admit you don’t know/can’t answer/wish you could answer.
- Give the reason(s) why you don’t know or can’t answer.
- Indicate follow up with deadline.
- Bridge to what you can say.



Bridging

- “What is really important is...”
- “What this boils down to is...”
- “I want to remind you that...”
- “And as I said before...”
- Always try to turn “What if” questions into “What is” answers.



Mental Noise Template

- When people are stressed or upset, they often have difficulty hearing, understanding, and remembering information.
- In high stress situations, people often lose as much as 80% of the information that is communicated to them.



Overcoming Mental Noise

- Clear (e.g., 6th grade comprehension level per AGL- 4 theory)
- Brief (e.g., 27 words, 9 sec.)
- Concise (e.g., 3 messages)
- Avoid using negatives as much as possible (1N = 3 Ps)
- Avoid using technical language, jargon or acronyms



AGL-4 Template

- Average Grade Level (AGL) of target population minus 4 grade levels
- Current AGL in America is 10th grade
- Message must be readily understood by someone in grade 6



What is a Message Map?

- A roadmap for displaying detailed, organized responses to anticipated questions or concerns.
- Useful visual aid that provides at a glance the organization's messages for high concerns or controversial issues.
- Prevents having to “wing it” during a media interview or news conference.



77 Questions Commonly Asked by Journalists During a Crisis

- A study concluded that these questions, in one form or another, will be asked during a crisis.
- Prepared answers facilitate being first, being right and being consistent.
- NYC Mayor Giuliani had his staff message map responses to these 77 questions for the top 10 disasters that could happen in NYC.
- No. 1 disaster was the collapse of the World Trade Center.



Seven Steps in Constructing a Message Map

1. Identify stakeholders.
2. Identify stakeholders questions and concerns.
3. Identify common sets of concern.
4. Develop key messages.
5. Develop supporting information.
6. Conduct testing.
7. Plan for delivery and practice.



Message Map
Stakeholder:
Question/Concern

Key Message/Fact 1.

Key Message/Fact 2.

Key Message/Fact 3.

Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 1.1

Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 2.1

Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 3.1

Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 1.2

Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 2.2

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Keywords:
Supportin
g Fact 1.3

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Message Map

Stakeholder: General Public

Question: How will the state of Kansas protect people from pandemic flu?

Key Message/Fact 1.

The state of Kansas has been preparing for pandemic influenza for many years.

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 1.1

The state has emergency response plans, including a plan for responding to pandemic influenza.

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 1.2

The CDC and other agencies are providing ongoing guidance and support to aid in state and local preparedness efforts

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 1.3

Increased funding has been used to strengthen the ability of public health agencies to respond.

Key Message/Fact 2.

Despite the government's best efforts, the effects of pandemic influenza could be devastating

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 2.1

Individuals should be prepared by creating an emergency prep kit – water, food medications, etc.

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 2.2

Disruptions to normal life are to be expected (i.e. closing of schools, cancellation of public events

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 2.3

Health care facilities are preparing for and increase in people seeking medical treatment.

Key Message/Fact 3.

Federal, state and local governments have systems that can help in responding to a pandemic.

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 3.1

Systems are in place to receive and distribute emergency medical supplies to respond to the pandemic rapidly

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 3.2

State and local governments have technology to receive and share emergency health information.

Keywords:
Supporting Fact 3.3

State and local officials will work to assure that the public gets the information and help it needs.

Putting Message Maps to Work

- Prepare answers and practice with key spokespersons and subject matter experts.
- By sticking to key messages, you have a better chance of getting most important points across.
- Use message maps for town hall meetings or public information forums.

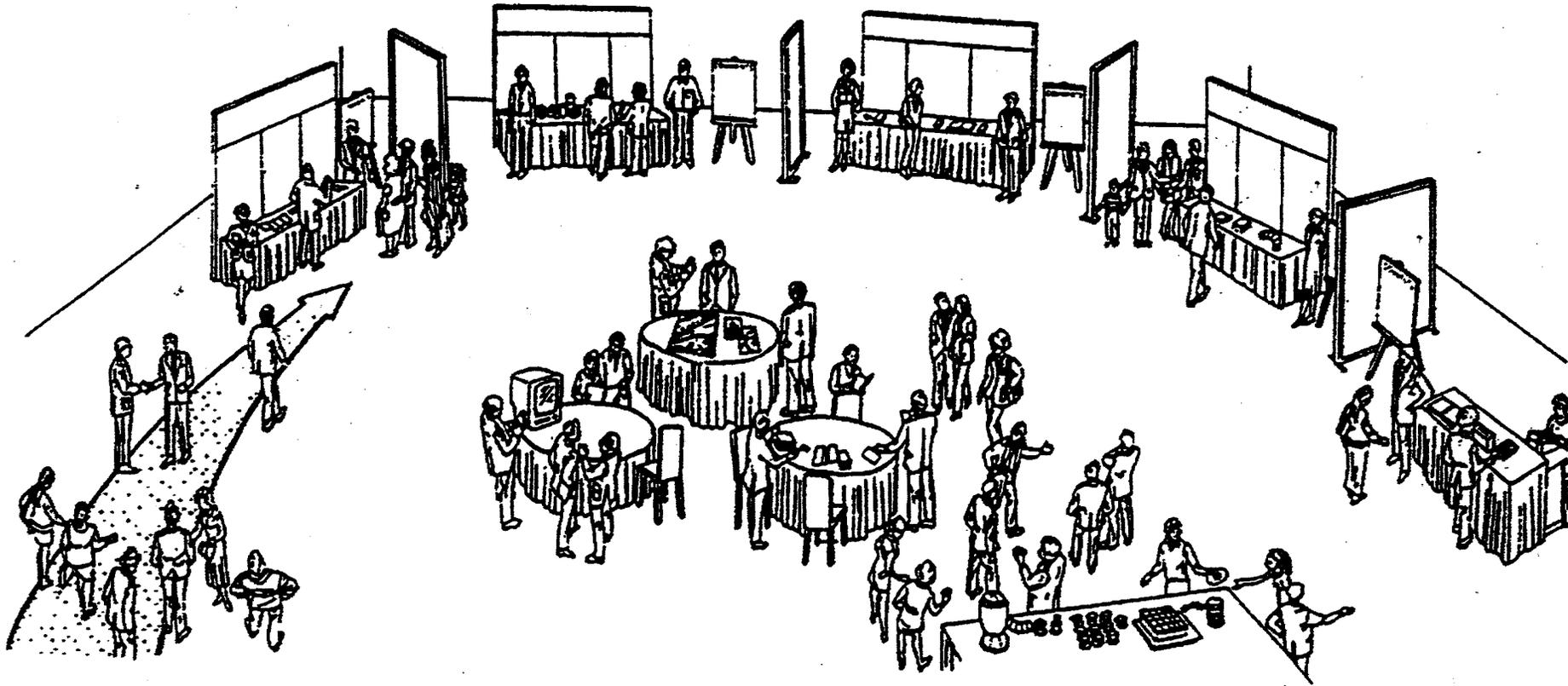


Perils of a Town Hall Meeting

- Easy for emotions to get out of control and for you to become the focus of those emotions.
- Very dangerous during a crisis or if dealing with a “hot button issue.”
- Use Information Forum setup prior to town hall meeting to increase knowledge level of crowd and hopefully defuse anger.



Information Forum



From: *Risk Communication PowerPoint Slides*, Vincent T. Covello, Ph.D., Director,
Center for Risk Communication/Consortium for Risk and Crisis Communication

Message Mapping Exercise and Mock Interviews

- Read scenario.
- Message map 3 key messages and 3 supporting messages or key words.
- Prepare two spokespersons to field questions from the media.



Suggested Reference Material

“Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communications Guidelines for Public Officials” - Available at no cost from SAMHSA at:
www.mentalhealth.org or by phone at:
1-800-789-2647, reference document
SMA 02-3641



Information Resources

- Mike Cameron, Risk Communication Specialist, KDHE Office of Communications
Phone: (785) 368-8053
Email: mcamero1@kdhe.state.ks.us
- Peter M. Sandman, Ph.D. on the Web:
www.psandman.com
- Vincent T. Covello, Ph.D. on the Web:
www.centerforriskcommunication.com





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