

# THE EXECUTIVE

## CRISIS CODE



## Your Reputation Is Your Most Valuable Asset

In a world where headlines move faster than facts, one misstep can unravel decades of credibility. Whether it's a tweet gone wrong, a data breach, or allegations against your team, your response as a leader will define what happens next. This guide is your insurance policy against panic, guesswork and reputational freefall.



## The 5 Early Warning Signs of a Crisis

1. **Unusual Silence** — Your employees, partners, or clients suddenly stop asking questions or offering feedback.
2. **Leaked Internal Emails** — Any sensitive internal communication surfacing externally is a massive red flag.



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3. **Sudden Drop in Trust Metrics** — Rising refund requests, negative reviews, or internal surveys showing staff unease.
4. **Social Media Flashpoints** — One viral post or influencer callout can ignite a media storm.
5. **Leadership Disconnection** — When execs stop communicating clearly or inconsistently.

*Crisis rarely knocks. It whispers until it screams.*



## The First 90 Minutes: Your Executive Response Blueprint

**When a crisis hits, these 90 minutes matter more than the next 90 days.**

### **Step 1: Confirm the Facts**

Do not speculate. Assemble a micro-team to verify what is true and what is a rumor.

### **Step 2: Lock Down Internal Comms**

No leaks. No rumors. Send a controlled internal statement immediately.

### **Step 3: Draft the External Holding Statement**

Short, clear, and calm: acknowledge awareness, share action steps, and promise follow-up.

### **Step 4: Assign Roles**

Who's speaking to the media? Staff? Legal? Clarity reduces chaos.

### **Step 5: Monitor Social and Media in Real-Time**

Use dashboards, not anecdotes.





## The CEO Apology Formula

1. **Start with Empathy** — Acknowledge the pain or confusion people are experiencing.
2. **Own It Without Over-Admitting** — Take responsibility where appropriate, without inviting liability.
3. **Explain the Fix** — What are you doing about it now?
4. **Invite Accountability** — Commit to transparency and follow-up.

*“We failed to meet the standard you expect—and that we expect of ourselves. Here’s what we’re doing now.”*



## What the Board Must Know—and Do—Immediately

- Require hourly updates during acute crisis windows.
- Engage external PR counsel before making public decisions.
- Assign one spokesperson, preferably *not* a board member.
- Document all decisions for post-crisis legal review.

*Inaction from the board is often perceived as complicity.*



## Communicating with Employees, Media, and Regulators

- **Employees:** They're your first and most credible storytellers. Keep them updated before the public.
- **Media:** Don't hide. Control your narrative with facts and sincerity.
- **Regulators:** Honesty is non-negotiable. Assume everything you say is going public.



## Post-Crisis Rebuilding—Three Reputation Repair Moves

1. **Third-Party Validation** — Secure endorsements, testimonials, or partnerships that reinforce trust.
2. **Visible Change** — Show, don't tell. Change leadership, update policies, make real investments.
3. **Storytelling** — Use long-form content, interviews, and town halls to reshape the narrative.

*Reputation is rebuilt in actions, not statements.*



## Bonus: 10 Questions to Ask Your PR Team Before the Next Fire

1. Do we have a current crisis plan?
2. Who is our designated spokesperson?
3. How fast can we get a holding statement drafted?
4. What is our social media escalation protocol?
5. Who monitors our brand 24/7?
6. Have we done a tabletop crisis exercise in the past year?
7. Are we covered legally if a team member says the wrong thing?
8. Do we have pre-approved templates for cyber/data breaches?
9. What's our dark site or emergency microsite setup?
10. Are we confident in our internal communication speed and clarity?



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## About Tim Brown + How to Work Together

Tim Brown has spent four decades leading companies out of their worst moments—and into their best reputations. From billion-dollar brands to public figures, he has served as the calm in the storm for those who can't afford to lose.

To request a **confidential consultation**, email: [tim@candidcom.com](mailto:tim@candidcom.com); call: **801.557.1466**; or visit: [crisiscompro.com](http://crisiscompro.com).



## Quick Reference: Crisis Playbook Snapshot

- **Verify the Facts.**
- **Speak Calmly and Quickly.**
- **Own the Problem. Fix What You Can.**
- **Communicate With All Stakeholders.**
- **Lead Through It. Don't Hide.**

*Stay ready. Stay respected.*

