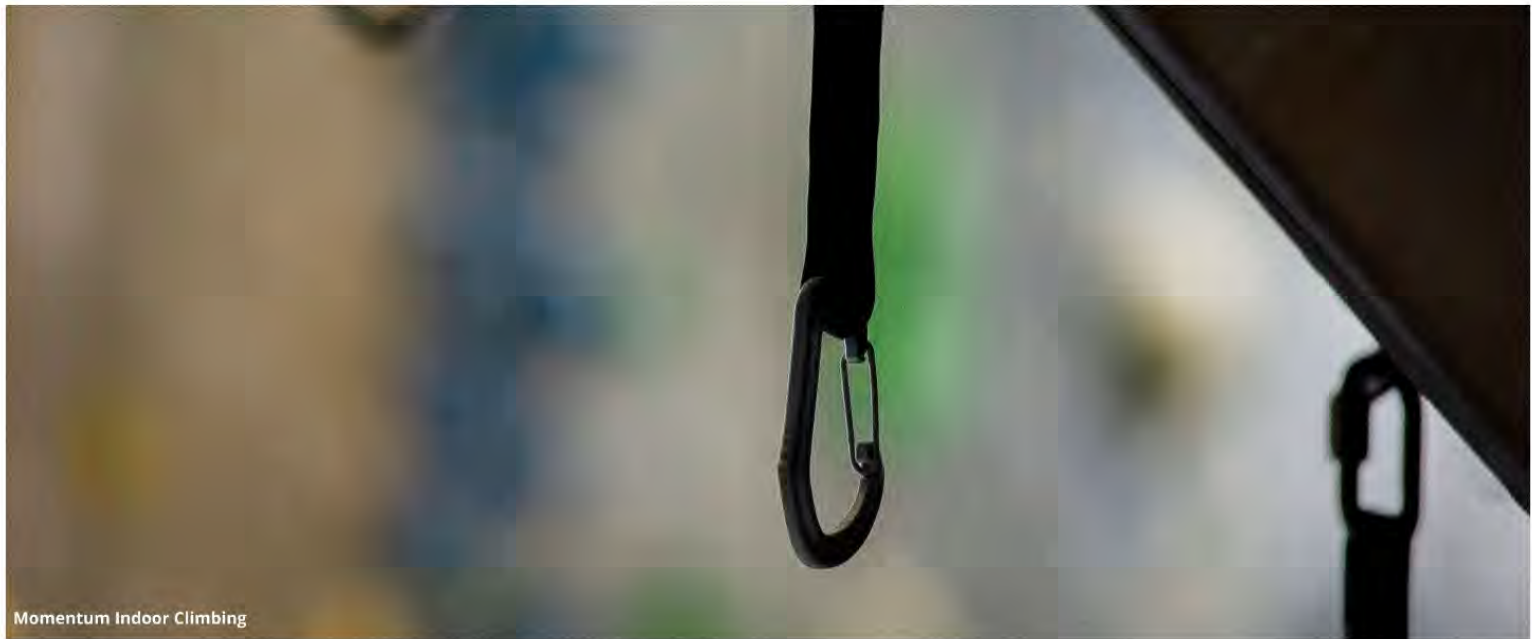


Be Prepared For Crisis At Your Gym

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Do you know what you should and shouldn't do or say if a serious accident or other calamity occurs at your gym? Do you know what actions to take in the aftermath? Do you know who will speak on behalf of the gym, and take those actions?

At the 2012 CWA Summit, the CWA explored crisis management and communication in a plenary panel discussion. Recent accidents and litigation have brought this issue to the forefront once again. What follows are excerpts from the talking points in the 2012 discussion.

A Crisis Is:

1. A stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point.
2. A condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change.
3. A dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life.

Crisis management is the process by which an organization deals with a major event that threatens to harm the organization, its stakeholders, or the general public.

Three elements are common to most definitions of crisis:

1. A threat to the organization
2. The element of surprise
3. A short decision time

Crisis communication is part of the larger process of crisis management and is sometimes considered a sub-specialty of the public relations profession that is designed to protect and defend an individual, company, or organization facing a public challenge to its reputation. These challenges may come in the form of an investigation from a government agency, a criminal allegation, a media inquiry, a lawsuit, a violation of law or regulation, or any of a number of other scenarios involving the legal, ethical, or financial standing of the business entity.

Crisis communication professionals maintain that an organization's reputation is often its most valuable asset. When that reputation comes under attack or scrutiny, protecting and defending that reputation becomes the highest priority. This is particularly true in light of the 24-hour news cycle, government regulation, lawsuits, and nefarious or factually inaccurate reporting. When crisis events occur, regulators, media, the public, and affected parties will all have expectations of you as a business representative. A huge part of crisis communication is providing timely and accurate information so speculation cannot spread.

For tips to develop your own crisis communications plan, watch our [Crisis Communications Community Call with Adele Cehrs and Chip Massy of the When and How Agency](#).

Responding to the challenges of a crisis in the indoor climbing context requires more than the typical skills of the public relations professional. It requires field knowledge and experience, such as an understanding of recreation law and liability, technical knowledge, climbing skills, incident investigation, and communication skills including written, oral and on-camera.

Crisis communication can also be thought of as a business continuity strategy. The aim of crisis communication in this context is to assist organizations to achieve continuity of critical business processes and information flows under crisis, disaster, stress, or event-driven circumstances.

Effective crisis communication strategies will typically consider achieving most, if not all, of the following objectives:

- Prepare in advance: develop a crisis communications plan
- Determine key decision-makers and designate a spokesperson in advance
- Media train your spokesperson periodically
- Prepare messaging and key talking points in advance

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- Determine processes for fact-finding and incident investigation
- Understand the role of the authorities and integrate with them and their processes (law enforcement, coroner, DA)
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of legal counsel and insurers
- Maintain open communication
- Be accessible to the news media
- Show empathy for the people involved
- Prepare to use technological capacity and tools well
 - Understand your technology resources: web, phone, email, social media, etc.
 - Allow distributed access of factual information
 - Streamline communication processes
 - Maintain information security
 - Deliver high volume communications
 - Support multi-channel communications
- Keep staff informed and attend to their morale

Crisis communication planning and prior preparation can play a significant role by transforming the unexpected into the anticipated and responding accordingly.

Attend the upcoming 2022 CWA Summit for more content on risk management, legal and regulatory policy, and other pressing issues. [View a list of sessions here, and sign up today](#)

About The Author



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Robert Angel is an Ohio and Colorado licensed attorney concentrating in the areas of administrative law, recreation, amusement, and entertainment law, and business formation. He served on the CWA Board of Directors from 2006 to 2013 and was reappointed to the Board in 2019. Bob has been instrumental in regulatory initiatives on behalf of CWA members across the U.S. since 2005. His clients include many gyms in Ohio and other states.



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