

do not call communicators to fish for generalities: they have a specific purpose, and communicators have a right to know that purpose if they are contacted. Clarity is important on both sides, and clarity of the media's purpose will establish the foundation for a positive long-term relationship. It will also mean greater credibility for communicators, as they are able to specifically respond to the points reporters are raising.

The best ways to maintain media contact in a crisis depend on the conditions of the crisis and the communicator involved. Communicators tend to adopt an approach fitted to each reporter they deal with. Some reporters are approachable; others tend to maintain as much distance as possible. Yet others ask generalized questions, allowing the communicator to take the lead in the way the topic is approached. This can work especially well for communicators, because it allows them to easily deliver the information they want to get into the public domain.

"You have to give media a road map; you have to give them a sense of where you are going to go; if you're going to say 'I can't speak to you right now,' you have to let them know *when* you're going to speak with them and you better damn well be able to do that. Media are just doing their job, and they can be relatively understanding and quite fair, but if you give them a stock response that doesn't show any sign of humanity, they're going to eat you alive."⁸

— John Larsen, communications consultant and principal of Corpen Group.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA DURING A CRISIS

Following are guidelines communicators should keep in mind when seeking publicity or responding to media queries.

Be mindful of the past relationship with the reporter. What did the reporter say about the company in the past? What kind of relationship does the communicator have with this media contact? Although some communicators may question the idea of friendship with media, a positive business relationship can nevertheless be created, nurtured and maintained — and their communications can certainly reflect the general tone of that relationship. If they know the reporters by name, if they've met them personally and

if they have had an oppo-
paper or radio or televisi
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