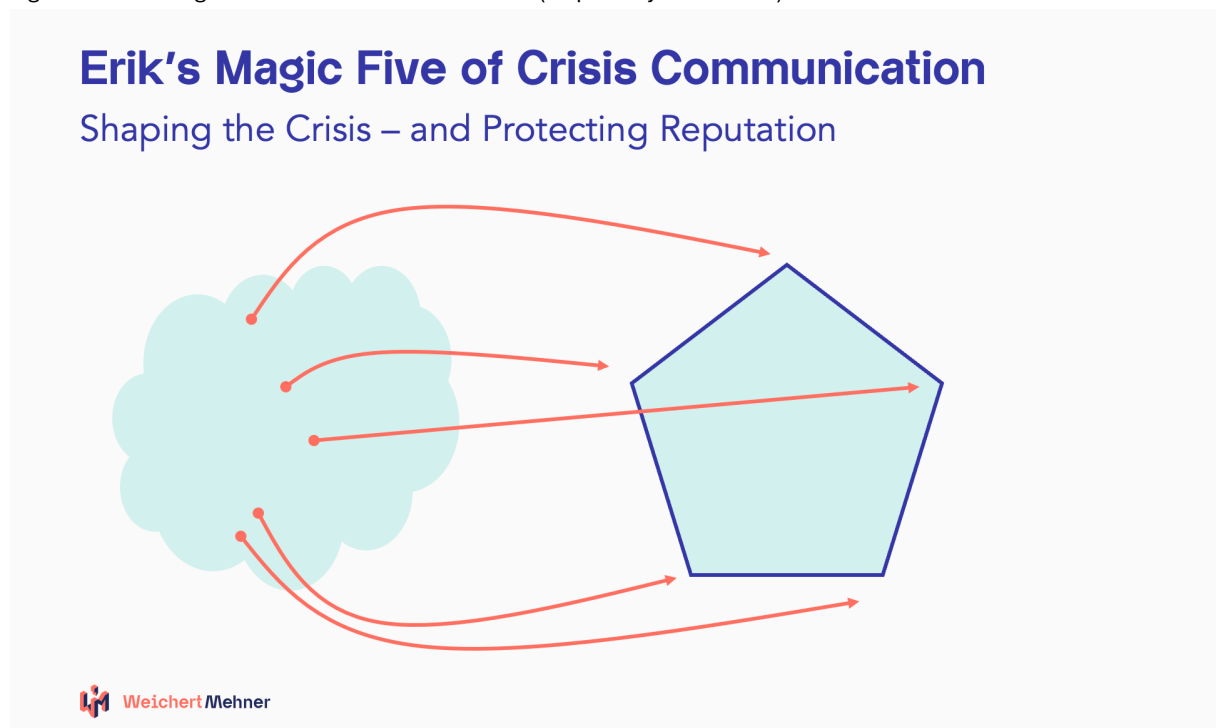**Erik Fritzsche's Checklist**

The Magic Five of Crisis Communication

In a crisis, every minute counts. Lack of preparation, rash decisions, and poor communication can have devastating consequences. That's why clear guidelines are essential. My "Magical Five" of crisis communication go beyond managing a crisis—they help shape its outcome: from swift root cause analysis to sustainable problem resolution and transparent communication. Mastering these core principles builds trust, secures reputation, and preserves the value of both individuals and organizations.

These principles of crisis communication are based on practical experience and scientific research, such as Matthias Kepplinger's work on the "Mechanisms of Scandalization." They demonstrate how to effectively analyze, manage, and communicate during crises to protect trust and reputation.

Managing crises means shaping crises!!

Figure 1: Erik's Magic Five of Crisis Communication (inspired by Alan Weiss)

Erik's Magic Five of Crisis Communication
Shaping the Crisis – and Protecting Reputation

Weichert Mehner

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1. Find Out What Happened!

- **Which reliable sources can be used to comprehensively gather the facts?**
  Identify internal documents, external reports, expert opinions, or direct accounts from those involved.

- **What internal and external factors contributed to the current situation?**
  Evaluate organizational processes, external pressures, and recent events that might have triggered the crisis.

- **Are there historical parallels or similar crisis cases that could provide additional insights?**
  Look into past incidents within the organization or in similar industries for lessons learned.

- **Who within the organization is responsible for the root cause analysis, and how is this role coordinated?**
  Define responsibilities clearly to ensure accountability and seamless collaboration during the analysis.

- **What potential blind spots could distort the root cause analysis?**
  Consider biases, overlooked factors, or gaps in information that could impact the accuracy of findings.

2. Address the Problem!

- **Which actions ensure a sustainable solution and eliminate the root cause of the crisis?**
  Identify immediate and long-term measures that tackle the issue comprehensively.

- **Are there existing processes or systems that contributed to the problem and need to be reviewed?**
  Analyze operational workflows, decision-making structures, and organizational culture for potential flaws.

- **How can it be ensured that all affected parties accept and implement the measures?**
  Develop a clear communication plan and involve stakeholders in the solution process to foster commitment.

- **What indicators show that the root cause of the problem has been successfully addressed?**
  Define measurable outcomes, such as performance metrics, compliance levels, or stakeholder feedback.

- **Are there preventive strategies to avoid similar issues in the future?**
  Implement policies, training programs, or system upgrades to mitigate risks and reinforce resilience.

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3. Act Quickly!

- **How is urgency communicated and prioritized within the organization?**
Establish clear channels and frameworks to emphasize the critical nature of the situation and its priority over routine tasks.

- **Which decision-making processes can be accelerated without compromising the quality of actions?**
Identify bottlenecks and implement streamlined approval procedures while maintaining accountability.

- **What steps must be taken immediately to prevent further damage?**
Focus on containment measures, damage control, and mitigating immediate risks.

- **Is there an established crisis team to ensure fast and coordinated responses?**
Ensure the team is well-trained, empowered, and equipped with clear roles and decision-making authority.

- **What communication channels are necessary to inform all stakeholders in real-time?**
Utilize multi-channel communication tools like emails, instant messaging, and emergency hotlines to maintain continuous updates.

4. Handle the Issue in Compliance with the Law!

- **What legal and regulatory requirements apply to addressing this specific crisis?**
Identify relevant laws, industry regulations, and organizational policies that must be followed.

- **How is it ensured that ethical standards are upheld during problem resolution?**
Develop a code of conduct for crisis management and align actions with corporate values and societal expectations.

- **Which external experts or consultants should be involved to minimize legal risks?**
Engage legal counsel, compliance officers, or industry specialists to navigate complex legalities.

- **How will it be documented that all actions are conducted in compliance with laws and values?**
Maintain detailed records, including meeting minutes, decision logs, and compliance checklists.

- **Are there control mechanisms to ensure no legal violations occur in the long term?**
Implement audits, monitoring systems, and regular reviews to prevent future infractions and maintain adherence.

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5. Reputation Management Through Communication in All Directions!

- **Which target groups need to be prioritized for information, and how?**
  Identify key audiences such as employees, customers, partners, and the public, and determine the urgency and frequency of communication for each group.

- **Which formats and channels are best suited to promote transparency and build trust?**
  Use a mix of press releases, social media updates, internal newsletters, video messages, or direct meetings tailored to each audience.

- **How are messages crafted to convey openness and address uncertainties appropriately?**
  Ensure clarity, empathy, and honesty while acknowledging challenges and outlining steps being taken.

- **How is communication regularly reviewed and adapted to new developments?**
  Establish a feedback loop with a crisis team to monitor effectiveness and refine messaging based on the evolving situation.

- **Are there mechanisms in place to collect feedback from stakeholders and respond flexibly?**
  Use surveys, comment sections, direct inquiries, or stakeholder meetings to gather input and demonstrate responsiveness.

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Avoid!

- **Giving up**
  In a crisis, it's not about winning but ensuring that no single narrative emerges in which you come out looking bad.
- **Lying**
  The worst-case scenario is being caught in a lie—no one will have sympathy for you! Share what you know, what you don't know, and when you might (possibly) have the answers.
- **Believing you can buy time**
  Pointing to a "thorough investigation that takes time," referencing "committees that need to review," or promising "comprehensive inquiries" is futile—it only makes crises harder to manage!
- **Relying solely on a few journalists**
  The more journalists and channels you engage, the less likely it is for a single negative narrative to dominate.
- **Staying in your comfort zone**
  In a crisis, friends and family will suffer—that's unavoidable.

And finally: Preparation is everything! Those surprised rarely handle it well.

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