

Crisis Communication:

Anchoring Frame Fundamentals

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1. *Remember that people are not blank slates.* People have pre-existing knowledge, opinions, values, and emotions that they bring to the crisis situation. They listen to your communications through the filter of all this pre-existing content -- their anchoring frames. You need to adjust your message to match.
2. *Study your publics.* Good crisis communication requires knowing the anchoring frames of your various publics. That may mean surveys and focus groups -- periodically in normal times and even nightly in mid-crisis. If you can't do formal research, you can still ask some people what they think. Even guessing is better than not even considering what people's anchoring frames might be.
3. *Hook your message to anchoring frames that support it.* Where possible, build your case on the foundation of our pre-existing supportive opinions, values, and feelings. Whatever predisposes your publics to respond the way you want us to respond, appeal to it often.
4. *Explicitly address anchoring frames that run counter to your message.* You cannot correct misimpressions by ignoring them. You need to address them explicitly, acknowledging that they are widespread and why they seem convincing. Only then is it useful to explain why they are, surprisingly, mistaken. Take us with you from X to Y. Don't ignore that we think X and just keep insisting Y-Y-Y-Y.
5. *Watch out for your own anchoring frames.* You too will see the crisis through the filter of your own preconceptions. Among the anchoring frames to watch out for: that people are prone to panic; that all fear is bad; that leaders can never admit doubt or error; that crisis communication is no different from ordinary public relations; that it's easier to manage the crisis if the public leaves you alone.