

Crisis Communication:

Candor about Candor

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1. *Outright lying is comparatively rare.* Most organizations -- government and corporate alike -- try hard not to flat-out lie.
2. *Misleading half-truths are extremely common.* Carefully crafting what you say in order to mislead without lying is the norm (though not a good idea).
3. *Secrecy and cover-up are also extremely common.* Withholding or downplaying information you would prefer people not to know is also the norm.
4. *It doesn't feel like what it is.* You know your intentions are good, so your distortions and secrets don't feel misleading to you. They feel like leading.
5. *There are many "good reasons" to mislead.* The information hasn't been quality controlled; critics will take it out of context; the public might panic; your reputation and ability to manage the crisis would suffer. And so forth.
6. *There are many good reasons not to mislead.* Candor is at the core of credibility. The truth usually comes out in the end. People are at their best when collectively facing a difficult situation straight-on; things get much more unstable when we begin to feel "handled," not leveled with, misled.
7. *You probably mislead too often.* Excessive candor exists, but it is not a common problem. Insufficient candor is a very common problem.

An off-the-wall recommendation:

Keep a written list of every time you decide to be less than completely candid about a crisis. Write down why you thought it was important to do that. Keep being candid with yourself about how often you are not quite candid with the public. Periodically imagine your list on the local newspaper's front page; if your reasons won't look persuasive there, perhaps you should reconsider them now.

Try to view each item on your list as a crisis of conscience. An occasional crisis of conscience is to be expected. If you have them often, and without thinking of them as crises of conscience, you're headed for trouble.