

When to Speak and What to Say: Effective Crisis Communications

Matt Gerien, Senior Executive Vice President
RW Jones Agency

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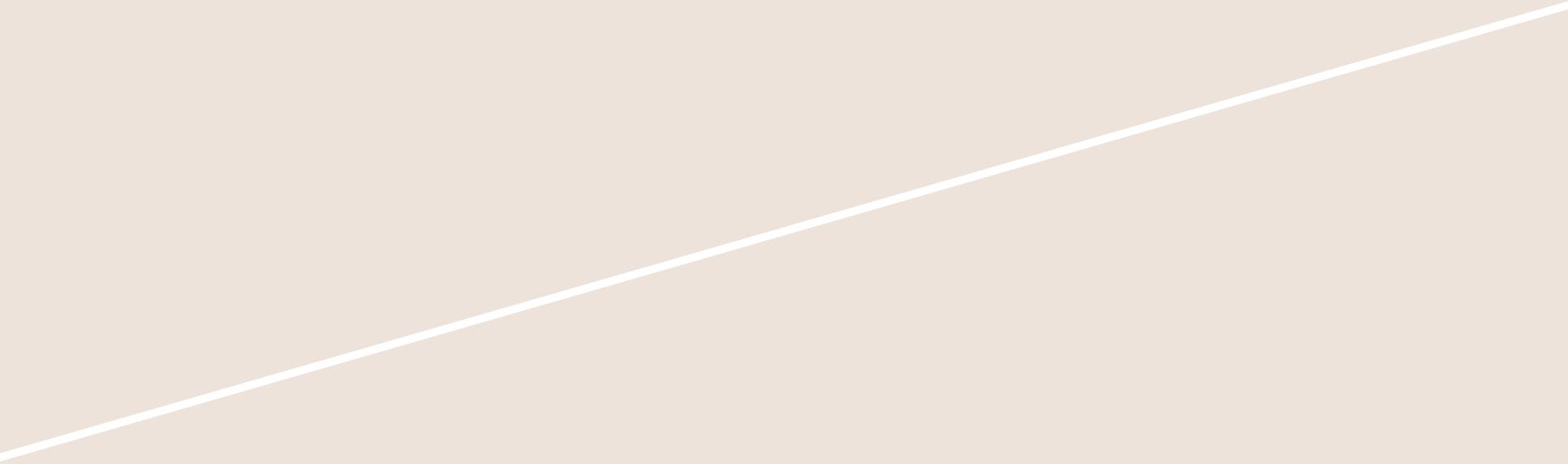
Workshop Agenda

- The Current Landscape
- Shifting Public Opinion
- Leading with Institutional Values
- A Framework for When to Speak
- Identifying Audience and Method
- Crisis Communications Principles
- Exercise

External Events of Significance

Internal Issues and Crises

The Current Landscape



OPINION

With War Raging, Colleges Confront a Crisis of Their Own Making

Oct. 26, 2023

U.S. | U.S. EDUCATION NEWS

Speak Out on Israel-Hamas War or Stay Quiet? Both Are Risky, Colleges Find

Leaders at Stanford, Williams and elsewhere limit their statements, but neutrality proves a challenge

Warning of 'Grave' Errors, Powerful Donors Push Universities on Hamas

Wall Street financiers are pressing elite schools to condemn criticism of Israel. On Sunday, the University of Pennsylvania issued a statement calling Hamas's attack terrorism.

The Israel-Hamas war has roiled US campuses. Students on each side say colleges aren't doing enough

America's colleges aspire to be places where ideas meet and common ground emerges

Did you say something?
How did your campus respond?

Has your president or campus shifted their position on public statements over the last year?

Public Opinion is Shifting



41%

Of Americans say businesses should take a public stance on current events.

Source: Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Report, 2023

-7%

Year-over-year

Source: Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Report, 2023

53%

Americans aged 18-29 are much more likely to want a business to take a public stance.

Source: Bentley-Gallup Business in Society Report, 2023

Leading with Institutional Values



Authentic and meaningful responses to issues and crises align clearly with a shared set of institutional values.

Our first question in preparing for or responding should be:

What are our institutional values and beliefs on this topic?

The answer should then serve as a bright guiding light for all responses.

When we develop shared values and respond in line with those values, we build trust with our community and are true to ourselves.

A Framework for When to Speak



Key Question:

**What is the best
response for our
campus
community?**

INSIDE HIGHER ED

Statement or No Statement?

A test for whether to issue an institutional statement on national issues and crises.

By [Melissa Richards](#)

Public relations officers and college presidents have spent so much time over the last two years focused on empathetic and compassionate communications that our initial reaction to every national crisis seems to be, "We need a statement."

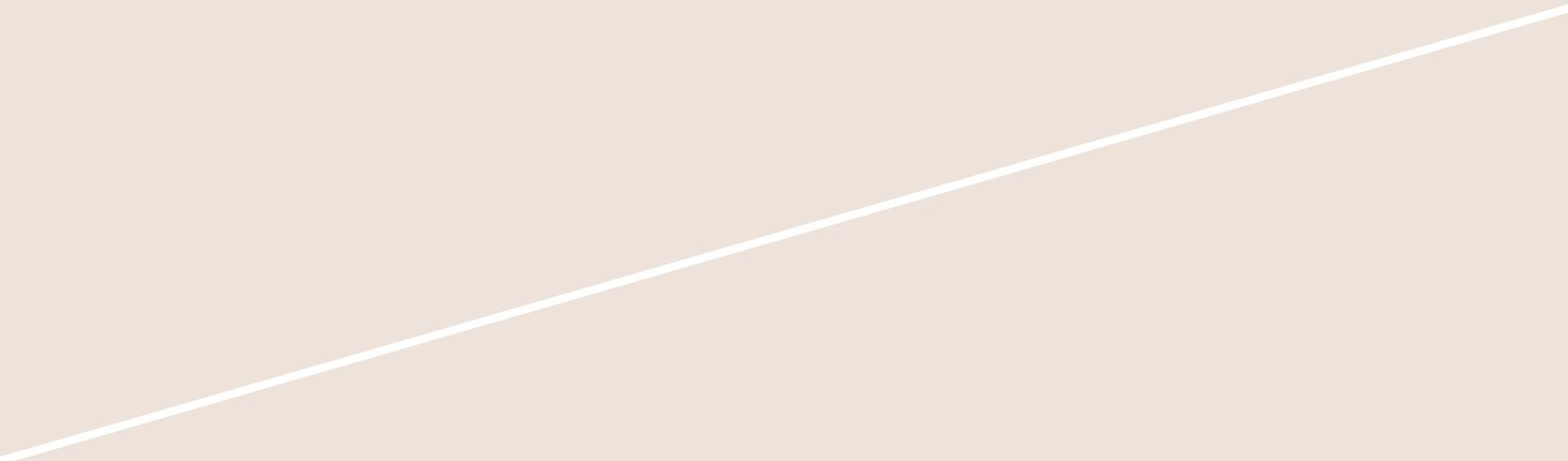
But while holding is an important leadership principle, it must not always take the form of a community email. Sometimes our people need space, sometimes they need one another and sometimes they need to hear from their president or dean. When deciding whether to issue a statement, consider the following test, which was compiled over a period of years throughout my career. While the language is my own, this topic has been referenced by other professionals in a number of formats. I do not claim copyright but instead share my experiences and how I've adapted and expanded industry conversations over the years.

- Is the critical event relevant to higher education?
- What is the circle of influence: Is it a local, regional, national or international issue?
- Why would we want to communicate about the event?
 - Moral?
 - Value-driven?
 - Sympathy?
 - Political?
- What are our peers doing?
- Do the words reflect the tone and personality of the leader and the college?
- Would a statement by the college add to the conversation?
- Is the college positioned to affect change?
- Does the event directly affect our community, students, employees?
- Is the college taking any action to support the affected the community?
- Will the statement be perceived as discriminating against another group?

Additional Questions

- Does intensity, centrality or geography dictate our campus react differently than peers?
- Will any statement impinge on normal public discourse?
- Will a statement contribute to the health, wellbeing and/or safety of our campus community?

Determining Audience



Higher Education Audiences

Internal

Students
Faculty
Staff
Parents/Families
Alumni
Donors

External

General Public
Journalists/Media
Prospective Students
Policy Makers
Higher Ed Peers

**Making your
students the
primary audience
is usually the best
option.**

Determining Communications Method



Communications Methods

- Email
- Website
- Social Media
- Text
- Newsletter
- Video
- Webinar
- In-person meeting/public appearance
- News Media

Crisis Communications Principles



Communications Methods

- **Be prepared.** Develop a crisis communications plan that outlines how you will respond. This plan should include a list of spokespersons, communication channels, and messaging. Review it regularly.
- **Be transparent.** Communicate openly and honestly. This means sharing information as soon as possible, even if it is bad news.
- **Be responsive.** Respond to all inquiries promptly and professionally. Be prepared to answer questions about the crisis and your organization's response. Listen to your community.
- **Be empathetic.** Show compassion and understanding for your stakeholders during a crisis. Acknowledge the impact that the crisis is having on them.
- **Be consistent.** Maintain a consistent message.

**Anticipate the
implications of your
leadership decisions
and responses to your
communications.**

Thank you
for attending
this session!



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