



Saskatchewan Soccer Association
The Governing Body of Soccer in Saskatchewan

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Crisis Communication Guideline

Bad things happen, even to good people and organizations. They can happen anytime or anywhere, and while it's okay to be surprised when they occur, it's not okay to be unprepared.

When unexpected events occur that have the potential to damage reputations, organizations can be ready to respond clearly and in a way that addresses fears or concerns. As such, this document is meant to serve as a guideline on crisis communications for members of Saskatchewan Soccer.

First Steps

1. **Develop the Critical Incident Response Team:** This should comprise of the Executive Director, Director of Soccer, Coordinator of Communications, Board President (as required) and any other staff/ Member Organization representative deemed appropriate based on constraints of confidentiality and required expertise.

At this time, determine constraints of confidentiality and consider the lines of communications that may be required and the precedence to communicate with those individuals. (See Stakeholders/audience consideration) (Responsibility Executive Director)

2. **Understand the Crisis:** *Ask these questions and jot down your responses. This will help you formulate a plan and an initial response. Each person in the critical incident response team should write their responses to the questions down separately, and then compare together, in order to make sure that the thought processes are complete and there is no "group think" happening.*
 - What or who is involved? (Trigger points for activation of a plan)
 - When did you first learn about the issue or how long has it been going on? (Timeline)
 - Who first learned of the problem? Who is involved? (Name and Contact information collected)
 - Where is the event unfolding? Local, provincial, national, international (Location)
 - Why are you being contacted? (Relevance to Association)
3. If communication with the media is expected, you should have a complete media list, which is updated regularly with all fax numbers, emails and phone numbers for principal print media, wire services, radio and TV Stations (Responsibility Communications Coordinator)

Internal Communications – Critical Incidents

The importance for any organization to master public media communications in the wake of a “newsworthy” critical incident cannot be overstated. This is especially true when the organization, by nature of its high profile and mandate is viewed as a community agency – subject to public scrutiny.

Of equal importance is the mastery of communications within the organization directed from and to its stakeholders. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION does not exist within a vacuum since the flow of information within the organization often influences the content of EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS, and specifically communication with the media.

In an organization with multiple locations (like the SSA Provincial Office), managing internal information flow is even more challenging, and often requires the writing and enforcing of respective policies and procedures.

Flowing Information about Critical Incidents to the Provincial Office

Since most news worthy happenings occur outside of the Provincial Office and/or the direct involvement of the leadership team, information about the incident must flow to the Provincial Office as quickly as possible and into the hands of the designated spokespeople. From there information is managed and can flow back to the respective stakeholders/members and the media outlets as determined prudent or necessary.

Flowing Information about Critical Incidents from the Provincial Office

The organization’s leadership acts as the steward of information (critical incident and otherwise) and is discretionary in the dissemination of this information. In addition to providing information to the public media through interviews, news releases and news conferences, the individuals or group managing communications may determine the value in cascading the information directly to the internal stakeholders (including Board Members) within the organization’s network. There are a number of reasons why flowing information about critical incidents has value:

- As a courtesy to the network members so they don’t learn about the important happenings through the media or other sources
- To inform the network members that the Provincial Office knows about and is handling the situation/critical incident
- To remind the network members about the policy and procedure regarding media communications so they redirect any media enquiries as per the policy/protocol.
- To reduce the number of enquiries about the incident coming into the Provincial Office.

Internal Communication Channels

Depending on the complexity of the organization and the nature and urgency of the information, various means can be employed to disseminate information through the organization’s network and membership. Direct communication via telephone is effective, but labour intensive. Email blasts are economical and expedient, but may not be read in a timely fashion. Less urgent communication may be posted on the organization’s website and social media. Digital and print newsletters are also a good communication forum for non-urgent but important communications. Regardless of the method employed, a contact person should be enlisted at each remote location and it would be this person’s responsibility to make sure

the important communications is distributed at each site.

Summary

The Provincial Office's responsibility of properly managing information about critical incidents can be greatly exacerbated when an unprepared, ill-equipped and non-designated person become the self-appointed spokesperson of the organization, even when the incident occurs within the person's purview. Media relations are challenging and should not have to include the correction, retraction and associated apologies caused by the dissemination of inappropriate or incorrect information.

Stakeholders/audiences consideration

In a crisis, the first thing for an organization to consider is which audiences need to hear a key message and the order in which they should hear it.

The media are an important platform to reach key audiences, but that doesn't mean a reporter is the first person an organization should speak with about a damaging incident, even if they are the first to reach out seeking a comment.

Most organizations have a list of priority audiences they want to address in the case of a crisis. Some might be regulatory requirements, others are driven by business needs or common sense. For example, employees should not hear about an incident at their workplace from Facebook or on the radio. Rather, they should hear about it directly from their organization.

Here's a sample list of priority audiences for a typical publicly-traded corporation:

1. Board of directors/executives
2. Owners/shareholders - Member Organizations, program partners – Sask Sport & Canada Soccer
3. Government/regulators/law enforcement
4. Employees
5. Current customers
6. Media

Most organizations have this list formalized in advance of a crisis so they know their priorities when flagging a problem and responding to it. Generally, it's important to get the internal organization aligned before responding to external stakeholders. For a soccer club or association, a list might look something like:

1. Board members
2. Parents of current players/players
3. Provincial association/regulatory authority
4. Media

For a provincial body, such as Saskatchewan Soccer Association, the list might look something like this:

1. Board members
2. Employees
3. Sport governing bodies (Canada Soccer Association and Sask Sport Inc., as required)
4. Member Organizations
5. Major sponsors or funders
6. Media

Every organization should have this list drafted ahead of time and committed to paper so there's a clear list of audiences to engage when a crisis hits.

Platforms, news cycles and deadlines

In the past, there were only four different media platforms, all with distinct deadlines: radio, newspapers, televisions and magazines. Radio was updated every 30 minutes in the morning. Newspapers had morning and afternoon editions. Local television outlets had newscasts at noon, supper and after the national news. National television had the news during the morning shows, supper-hour, and late-night. Magazines were either weekly or monthly.

Today, media's news cycles run 24/7/365, thanks to platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Journalists often post stories or video to their outlets' Twitter accounts and Facebook pages as well as on their website. This means responses must be developed more quickly to address a story.

If an organization isn't communicating with its audiences, someone else will shape the story, often with a narrative that doesn't align with organizational values or intentions.

Designating a spokesperson

When responding to a crisis, care must be taken with the messenger as much as the message. A coach of a team would be the go-to spokesperson for a story about a team winning a tournament. But if there's a serious allegation involving misconduct on that same team, the president or board president should speak on behalf of the organization.

The seniority of the spokesperson must reflect the seriousness of the crisis. This is why the Prime Minister or President hold a press conference to address some events and in other situations, they send a cabinet minister or press secretary to deal with the media. The same principle applies when dealing with incidents that affect the reputation of an organization.

At the same time, organizations should also have a process for reviewing public statements. It may not be necessary for the entire board of directors to review a statement, but it's wise to have at least one person review do so to ensure the facts are accurate and conveys the appropriate tone.

When assigning a spokesperson for SSA Critical Incidents, first consider the magnitude of the incident and consider the below list:

1. Executive Director
2. Director of Soccer
3. President
4. Coordinator of Communications
5. Other SSA Coordinators, with specific expertise or knowledge

For an SSA Member Organization managing a critical incident, the list may be:

1. Member Organization President/Chair
2. Member Organization Board Member/ appointed spokesperson
3. Technical Director

Holding statements /Initial Public Release of Information

Holding Statements

Holding statements are the initial communication used when an unexpected event takes place and reporters begin to call. Holding statements are typically an acknowledgment that something has happened and an organization is working to get details to share at a later time.

In keeping with the importance of addressing audiences, holding statements should also be emailed directly to the board members, parents, employees, sponsors/funders and other stakeholders. It is important this communication is sent directly from the organization, rather than audiences reading about a situation online or hearing it on the news.

See appendix A for more information and examples of holding statements

For long-running crises, it may be necessary to issue several holding statements, but the principles remain the same:

1. Confirm the facts before drafting a statement
2. Respond to key audiences based on priority
3. Respond only to media and social media
4. Statement should convey sympathy for injuries/victim involved (**Our thoughts are with that player and his family. We wish him a quick recovery.**)
5. Statement should contain a key message ("**Our club/association is committed to fair play and good sportsmanship**" "**We take the issue of player safety seriously**")

Key Principles of "First Response" Efforts and Interviews

1. **Uniformity of Response Principle:** *In a crisis situation, everyone should be reading off the "same sheet of music". Whenever possible, forward this information to all newsrooms by email or fax. Prior to any interview, provide the reporter with a basic fact sheet that contains "bullet" information. Also, if you want the reporter to ask you a certain questions, simply say, "You know, the question I'm most asked is... (and complete the question). You are most guaranteed to here that question asked sometime during your interview. If you have practiced your response and have some good facts you can deliver in 12-15 seconds, the chances of that statement making airtime are very good. See Appendix A for a template of the "Your First Response" document*
2. **Prepare for the Blitz:** *Be prepared after the initial release to receive a number of phone calls from the media. It is important for the spokesperson to be readily available to make additional statements or clarify information in the first media release to dispel any rumours.*
3. **Protocol for verbal comments:** *Always use the approved first media release as the basis for your verbal comments to the media. Even though you may have clearly written a first release, your sound bite comments for radio, TV or online media over the telephone or on-camera have more impact than the written word. Practice and rehearse your comments with staff members. Have at least two "themes" that tell the rest of the story, and use them for every response when answering media questions.*
4. **Temperament and Story:** *It is not up to the media to tell the "rest of the story". That is your job. Never be defensive and always appear to be the most cooperative, even though you may get hostile questions from the media. Remember that there is no such thing as an embarrassing question, only the possibility of an embarrassing answer! Organizations want the*

media to cover good activities throughout the year, so try to give them all the information they need in a crisis, and watch what happens to organizational credibility at the end of the year. It will soar!

5. **Record your own interviews:** *Remember to also record your own interviews. Simply place a tape recorder/cell phone on the table prior to starting an interview. Simply say, "I record all of my interviews, like you do. I like to share what I've said to my staff and keep a permanent record of it." This action alone will often eliminate sloppy reporting, or stop the reporter who tends to take someone out of context.*
6. **This is YOUR interview:** *Remember that you control the interview. It is your interview and not the reporters, and 100% of the time you will know more about the story than the reporter. If not, your staff is not providing you with the most current, complete, concise and conversational information possible about the incident.*

News releases

News releases follow similar rules to holding statements, but are more formal. Releases would only be used in a serious crisis when a formal statement is needed to address rumours. Because releases are generally written, the included information immediately becomes part of the public domain. As a result, they should be reserved for crises with high media attention when an organization's reputation would be damaged by not saying anything.

Similar steps apply for news releases:

1. Prioritize key audiences
2. Designate a spokesperson
3. Confirm the facts before drafting a statement
4. The statement should contain respect of the legal process and/or convey sympathy for victims
5. The statement should contain a key message about organizational values (if appropriate)
6. Include the contact information of whoever will handle follow-up calls
7. The statement should be distributed to audiences based on priority

See a draft news release in Appendix B.

Some organizations choose to consult with a communications professional when an incident is serious enough, especially when the consequences of a misstep could be severe.

Press conferences/stakeholder town halls

Press conferences are reserved for issues with grave reputational consequences and interest from multiple media outlets. As such, it is advisable to bring in a professional communicator when an association doesn't have the in-house expertise to organize and oversee this kind of event.

If an event is serious enough to warrant a press conference, organizations should also hold a town-hall public meeting with affected stakeholders: parents, players, employees, sponsors and volunteers. These groups will have similar questions to the media and should hear answers directly from the association. Do NOT hold the press conference and the town hall at the same time, but as close together as possible.

In both instances, an organization needs to take the following steps

1. Find an appropriate location to hold the event - considerations should be given to:
 - audio-visual needs – presentations often require a screen and microphone
 - background visuals – consider what will appear in the background when being filmed (at an endorsement for Donald Trump by a preacher, there was a framed copy of a Playboy magazine in the background and caught in frame for the television cameras, which defeated the whole point of the press conference)
 - audience comfort – does the venue have enough chairs to accommodate the audience, is it too big or too small
2. Prepare the designated spokesperson
 - Draft opening statement – the same rules apply as for the holding statement and news releases
 - Anticipate the questions and draft responses
 - Practice with mock interviews
 - Ensure the spokesperson is wearing solid colours EXCEPT white if television cameras are going to be filming
3. Send out the media advisory/notice to stakeholders with date, times (both start and finish) and location

Interview preparation

Interviews are not like regular conversations. An organization's spokesperson must have a strategy and key messages to guide the dialogue to ensure the discussion doesn't wind up somewhere unintended.

Key messages (see next section) should be in place prior to the interview and the spokesperson will want to practice these prior to the event. Experienced communicators never go to a formal interview without having a mock interview with a colleague beforehand. Practice helps ensure a smoother and more convincing response.

Tips for interview preparation

- Anticipate the questions
- Show confidence
- Stick to the facts – never speculate (“Avoid, “I think”, or “We think” statements)
- Nothing is off the record, even if the reporter says, “this is off the record.” Comments in casual conversation can be used by the reporter
- Follow up with the reporter or stakeholder if you don't have the answer and have promised one
- Don't say “no comment” – (see bridging in the next section)
- Don't repeat the negative (Q: “When did you stop beating your wife” A: “I don't beat my wife”)
- Avoid “over answering” the question
- Don't guess or speculate

- Don't venture out of your realm of expertise (leave law to the lawyers, science to the scientists)
- You may ask to see the story or hear an interview before it is published, but this is not a right and insisting can create negative rapport with the reporter
- Understand your rights as the spokesperson (the types of questions should be on point – questions about an unrelated topic in a forum about another issue, you should have a reasonable time frame to respond if you don't have the answer)
 - Your Media Rights
 - Decline to give an interview
 - Be comfortable and not under glaring lights
 - Choose the interview location
 - Set the time of the interview
 - Set the “ground rules” for the reporter
 - Tell “your story” the way you wish it to appear
 - Challenge incorrect information advanced by the reporter
 - Provide background information – a fact sheet – on the subject
 - End the interview at a time of your choosing
 - Stick to the topic that the reporter came to talk about
 - Express yourself without the fear of rapid-fire questions or constant interruptions
 - Withhold your “opinion”
 - Politely refuse to answer certain questions when deemed inappropriate

Key Messages

Key messages are an important tool used by communications professionals in dealing with the media or stakeholders. Essentially, these messages are what an association wants its audience – whether media or stakeholders – to take away from a conversation. Ideally, this is what an organization wants to see attributed to it when quoted in the media.

View key message samples in Appendix C

View specific key message samples in Appendix D

Tips for key messages

1. These are not scripts, so use familiar language to convey the sentiment (Example: “We want our players to play with a smile on their face” versus “Kids having fun is important to us” – they convey the same message)
2. Use facts and figures as proof points to emphasize key messages – “We believe strongly in player development - **we had xx number of players on SSA provincial teams this summer**” (boldface is the proof point)
3. Colour the message with personal details (“**Our club/association celebrates Canada’s multicultural diversity because it’s reflected by our membership – we have more than xx nationalities from five different continents among our players, coaches, employees and volunteers**”) (key message with personal flavour and a proof point)

Bridging

Bridging is a common technique employed by professional communicators to answer tough questions and/or hostile questioners. It involves acknowledging or “touching” the question before moving to a response.

When dealing with hostile or angry questioners, it’s important to acknowledge the emotion before touching the question. Once this has been done, employ a bridging phrase (IE. What I can tell you, what’s important here, what I do know) to go to a key message.

The importance of bridging should not be understated. Never do an interview without at least two themes that you want to have aired. And, being able to “bridge” to those two themes tells the “rest of the story”.

It is imperative that you practice bridging by answering the question posed by the reporter honestly in four seconds, then bridge to your two themes and be able to tell them in eight seconds. Remember, your total response can be no longer than 12 seconds as a rule.

View examples of bridging in Appendix E

No matter what format and channels used, be sure to analyze your responses using the checklist in Appendix F.

Resources

Will Gibson, President of Fort McMurray Soccer, Alberta Soccer Association

Media Communications: Critical Incident Response Workshop, Morris Interactive Inc.

Appendix A

Your “First Response” Template

Tell your Critical Incident Response Team they are authorized to give out only the following information if contacted by phone or in-person.

First step, confirm and document the requestor’s name, title, company and reason for calling.

Say: “THIS IS WHAT WE CAN CONFIRM AT THIS TIME...”

“At approximately (time) _____, we learned that (give a brief, concise and complete statement)

“This is all the information we can provide at this time (about the extent of the damage; possible injuries) other than to say that it has involved (specific facility and location, if known)

And (number) _____ people. We are currently assessing our next course of action, notifying the appropriate stakeholders and determining, if any, contact with law enforcement or emergency services are required.”

“As soon as we have additional information, we will: (call you personally, send an email, or ask that you attend a news conference).”

If a reporter asks any additional questions:

“That is all I can confirm at this time. I am sure you understand that our first concern is for those involved in this incident, and we are all very busy dealing with this situation. We know you have deadlines, and will try to accommodate you in every way possible. Please be patient. Thank you very much.”

Holding Statements

It is best to consider the development of a holding statement through the lens of an example.

Example:

An opposition player was badly injured in a tackle in a u-14 boys match and is taken to hospital with a suspected broken leg. The player from your club/association received a red card. A sports reporter from the local newspaper calls for comment on rumours that the police have been called by the opposing club to investigate the incident for a possible assault charge.

Given the fact that parents and players could start talking about this on Twitter and Facebook, putting together a holding statement is critical.

The following would serve as a holding statement for this type of incident:

“We understand there was an incident a match involving one of our teams and are still gathering details about the event. Our thoughts are with the player who was taken to hospital and we hope the injury isn’t serious and we wish him well. What we can tell you at this time is our association expects our players, coaches and parents to exhibit good sportsmanship and fair play on and off the field.” – quote from your designated spokesperson (which should be the board chair, president or club director).

This is the response that will satisfy reporters for the initial news cycles even though it is light on specifics. This statement can also be used to respond to posts on social media platforms if an association or club has a Facebook page or Twitter account and people are posting questions about it.

Additional holding statements may be issued as details about the incident are confirmed. It is VITAL to have solid information before speaking to anything in public. In the case of the example incident, this would mean getting a written confirmation from the police either confirming or denying an investigation into the incident is taking place. Once this information is received, then issue another holding statement. If the rumours are true and the police confirm they have opened an investigation, it will certainly limit what a spokesperson should say, as it is irresponsible to comment on the details of any incident where law enforcement becomes formally involved. Thus, an updated holding statement on this would be along the lines of:

“We can confirm an incident took place in a match involving our club where a player was seriously injured. Our thoughts are with that player and his family. We wish him a quick recovery. As this incident is now under police investigation, it would be inappropriate to comment on what happened at this time. Our club/association will cooperate with the authorities. Our club is committed to fair play and good sportsmanship and we take the issue of player safety seriously.”

Following the association’s priority audience list, this statement would be sent out to board members, parents of the team in question, coaches of travel teams, the provincial association/regulatory authority, and used to respond to media inquiries. If the media have not asked about it, never proactively send something out. This also applies to posting on social media if no one has specifically asked a question.

If confirmation that the police are not formally involved is received, the next step depends on how an association or club typically handles this type of incident. A holding statement along the following lines could be issued:

“We can confirm there was an incident took place in a match involving our club where a player was seriously injured. Our thoughts are with that player and his family. We wish him a quick recovery. This incident has been referred to a disciplinary panel for formal review so we will not be commenting on the specifics of what happened at this time. Our club/association is committed to fair play and good sportsmanship and we take the issue of player safety seriously.”

Appendix B

News Release

Example:

A board member of your organization has been formally charged by police with embezzling money from her day job at a school district. This has set tongues wagging among the parents whose children attend schools in that district and are involved as volunteers at your association. The media pick up on this when she makes her first court appearance and are calling to ask for comment. You issue a holding statement and promise to come back with something more formal.

ORGANIZATION'S LETTERHEAD

Date

Our (club/association) would like to make the following statement:

We can confirm one of our current board members is involved in legal proceedings. These charges do not involve her role with our (club/association). There is no evidence of any irregularities at our (club/association). As this case (name of the board member) is currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

The board member has been placed on leave from her duties with the (club/association) during this time. (THIS IS DEPENDENT ON YOUR CLUB'S PROTOCOLS/PROCEDURES FOR HOW TO HANDLE THIS TYPE OF SITUATION AND WOULD NEED TO BE CONFIRMED WITH THE BOARD MEMBER IN QUESTION)

Name and position of designated spokesperson (president/board chair would be appropriate in this case) along with contact information (e-mail and phone).

In this example, the club purposely avoided using a key message about the its commitment to transparency and financial accountability to avoid being seen as being prejudicial. However, making such a statement when responding to follow-up questions from parents or journalists would be acceptable. The statement was not committed to paper and distributed it in the public domain in a document that directly addresses the case.

Appendix C

Key Messages

Here's a key message from an earlier example:

*"We understand there was an incident a match involving one of our teams and are still gathering details about the event. Our thoughts are with the player who was taken to hospital and we hope the injury isn't serious and we wish him well. **What we can tell you at this time is our association expects our players, coaches and parents to exhibit good sportsmanship and fair play on and off the field.**"*

The bolded portion of the holding statement is the key message. It's what an organization wants quoted. Key messages should reflect the values of an organization. Examples of SSA key messages would be:

- "We understand there was a reported incident of (violence, misconduct, abuse, etc.) involving _____ (an SSA-registered team, player, Member organization). Our focus at this moment is to fully understand the facts of the situation before providing any further comment. **What we can tell you is that SSA and its Member Organizations uphold their collective mandate to provide a safe and healthy environment for its participants through the adherence to industry-standard practices.**"
- "Saskatchewan Soccer Association was notified of a critical incident within one of its Member Organizations. Our thoughts are with the individuals impacted. **What I can say is that Saskatchewan Soccer Association and its Member Organizations work diligently to foster an inclusive, open, and safe environment for our participants.**"
- "Saskatchewan Soccer Association values the safety and wellness of our participants with the highest regard. As an association, we work with our members to foster a playing environment that enables individuals to participate in the sport they love without worry of discrimination, abuse, or threat of safety or endangerment."

Appendix D

Key Messages for Specific Situations

Reports of Abuse (Sexual in nature)

Saskatchewan Soccer Association's response

When dealing with allegations of misconduct toward children the safety of the child/children involved are paramount. Every person who has reasonable suspicion to believe that a child may be in need of protection has a duty to report.

When a report has been made, the Head of Organization shall ensure that the individual in question no longer has access to children and a formal investigation is initiated. While a report has been made and an individual has been removed from previous activity there is no assumption of guilt.

The accused also has rights which including a fair hearing and the right to confidentiality. Anyone who willfully breaches the confidentiality of the process may be guilty of violating that person's right and may themselves become subject to discipline.

When a matter is before the police local complaints process shall be on hold until the conclusion of the police investigation. All decisions related to that matter have been made with these principles in mind.

What has happened?

A complaint has been received. The accused has been notified that all involvement with (Member Organization) _____ is on hold until such time as this matter comes to a conclusion.

The matter is now before the police and when that process comes to a conclusion a local discipline process may be undertaken.

A Member Organization's response

When dealing with allegations of misconduct toward children, the safety of the child and/or children involved is paramount. Every person who has reasonable suspicion that a child may be in need of protection has a duty to report.

A report has been received of this serious nature and as (Position and Organization) _____, I immediately took action to ensure the safety of the children by directing that the individual in question to no longer be engaged with our team and further to that, have removed them from all activity and all contact with our participants. We are initiating an internal investigation and this matter is also under consideration by the RCMP. We have taken steps to ensure the safety of the children and our local complaints process will be on hold until the conclusion of the police investigation.

I must remind everyone that, while a report has been made and an individual has been removed from their current duties and responsibilities with the Club, there is no assumption of guilt until such time that a charge has been laid, or a decision made through a hearing.

The accused has rights which include a fair hearing and the right to confidentiality. We recognize the damning nature of the allegation and also hold the responsibility to ensure due process is provided before any permanent and lasting statements or actions are made. Anyone who willfully breaches the confidentiality of the process may be guilty of undermining the formal processes we are preparing for and may result in them being subject to discipline.

All decisions related to that matter have been made with the principle of safety and fairness in mind. We are also aware that this matter is being considered by the RCMP.

Until further information is provided, we stress that this is a confidential matter. Should anyone have additional information that may be relevant we ask that you contact me directly at (provide contact information).

Appendix E

Bridging

In the first example (a u-14 boy suffering a broken leg), a reporter may make the following hostile remark:

“Parents of the other team are angry because they say your club has a reputation for promoting dirty play.”

Using the bridging technique, here’s the response:

*“I understand why parents are upset (**acknowledge the emotion**) because there was a serious injury and our thoughts are with the player and we’re hoping he recovers quickly (**show empathy**). What I think your question is trying to get at (**this is the bridge**) is how our club intends to handle this and let me be clear: Our club takes player safety seriously (**key message**). We are committed to fair play and good sportsmanship. (**key message**) We expect that from our players and will be reviewing this incident to see if further action is required.”*

In the second example (the board member charged with financial improprieties), a parent posted a question on the organization’s Facebook page:

“Can you guarantee there’s no issues with the club’s finances?”

This would be an appropriate response (using bridges):

*“I can understand why people are concerned (**acknowledge the underlying emotion of the question**). Here’s what I can guarantee (**bridge**) This club is committed to transparency and financial accountability. We have reviewed our accounts and found no evidence of any missing funds. We are committed to ensure the fees paid by parents are directed towards the players. (**key messages**)*

Other bridging phrases:

- “As I said before (name of the reporter)...”
- “(Name of the reporter), what’s really important here...”
- “But (Name of reporter), we don’t want to overlook the fact that...”
- “(Name of reporter), let me point out again...”
- “And (Name of reporter), remember ...”
- “And (Name of reporter), looking at the big picture...”
- “(Name of reporter), I cannot emphasize enough...”
- “And (Name of reporter), when you put it all together...”
- “What makes sense to us (Name of reporter) is...”
- “(Name of reporter), I think we’d be more complete if we said...”
- “I’d be more correct (Name of reporter), if I added...”
- “But (Name of reporter), when you look at the whole story...”
- “That’s certainly part of the issue (Name of reporter), but rounding it out is...”
- “And again (Name of reporter), here are two key points...”
- “And (Name of reporter), I would be remiss if I didn’t emphasize that...”

Appendix F

Public Perception Test

All of your statements should pass the following public perception tests:

1. Are they both honest in content and compassionate by response?
2. Do they communicate a thoughtful, intelligent content?
3. Do they show your genuine concern?
4. Are they solution-based?
5. Are they presenting the “image” of your organization in a good light?
6. Are you going to be viewed as not only a reliable organization, but also a responsible one?
7. Will they show your organization as one with good “core values”
8. After watching and hearing you, will your various stakeholders view you as being in control?
9. Have you “communicated from the heart” and not just from the “head”?
10. Will your audience remember having “liked” you and your organization?