After examining the 10 lessons for effective crisis communication, it is time to work on building your effective crisis communication skills. The following cases are designed to help the reader identify and discuss each of the key lessons described and discussed in the previous chapter. Following each case, the reader is asked to make a determination about whether the crisis communicators were effective or ineffective. This chapter contains seven real-life cases that examine lessons on effective crisis communication. The first case provides a detailed account of BP and the United States Coast Guard’s communication following BP’s 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The second case examines Aaron Feuerstein’s crisis communication following a 1995 fire at his textile manufacturing plant in Methuen, Massachusetts. The third case, discusses a food-borne illness outbreak at Odwalla Inc., a beverage company known for its health conscious products. The fourth case describes the depiction of lean finely textured beef as “pink slime.” The fifth case examines the response of Greensburg, Kansas, after tornado destruction in 2007. The sixth case examines a crisis that played out on social media when Domino’s Pizza was blindsided by a hoax online by two of its employees. Good luck with working through these cases while developing your crisis communication skills and experience at the same time!

EXAMPLE 4.1. THE LARGEST ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN UNITED STATES HISTORY: BP AND THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD RESPOND

On April 20, 2010, at approximately 10:00 PM CDT there was an explosion on the mobile offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon located in the Gulf of Mexico. The semisubmersible oil rig was leased and operated by BP Exploration and Production. The explosion caused a fire on the oil rig. Shortly after the initial fire, a second explosion capsized the oil rig. The Deepwater Horizon settled 1500 feet northwest of the well site. The explosion resulted in the deaths of 11 crewmembers; 115 workers were safely rescued. The Deepwater Horizon was severely damaged from the explosions, fire, and resulting collapse into the Gulf of Mexico. Oil began to immediately gush into the gulf. Three weeks after the explosion, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimated 210,000 to 2,520,000 gallons of oil was being released into the gulf every day. Several weeks after the crisis began, CNN put a video camera at the bottom of the gulf to show the amount of oil entering the water and televised it 24 hours a day. Ultimately it would take 87 days to cap the oil rig.
The response to the environmental crisis was complex, because of the scope of the crisis, the coordination necessary among stakeholders and regulatory agencies, the difficulties and complexities associated in capping the oil rig, and the global attention that the environmental crisis attracted. The crisis communication was coordinated when the United States Coast Guard, the regulatory authority, and the Bureau of Energy Management formed a partnership with BP, the party responsible for responding to the crisis. The United States Coast Guard and BP were supported by 15 federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Interior, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to name a few. A Unified Area Command (UAC) managed the entire response. The UAC was comprised of four sectors. Each sector reported to the UAC. A critical part of the unified command structure is public information officers (PIOs). PIOs are charged with gathering and disseminating information to stakeholders during a crisis. They respond to media requests, craft messages for stakeholders, and coordinate communication among various agencies in the unified command structure. It is a complex communication job that is essential to an effective response and recovery operation during any type of crisis. Effective crisis communication skills are necessary for any public information officer.

Pyle (2011) interviewed several PIOs from the United States Coast Guard and BP involved in the response and recovery operations during the Deepwater Horizon crisis. The PIOs had keen insight into the communication that took place during the crisis. The PIOs reported that they wished they had developed a unified communication plan or approach before the crisis or very early on during the event. However, the PIOs reported many goals or objectives in their crisis communication. Some PIOs explained that their goal was to get information out quickly, others tried to correct misinformation, while others suggested their goal was transparency. Other PIOs considered staying out in front of the crisis their primary goal.

Although many of the PIOs were brought into the crisis from many parts of the country and the world to support the massive communication needs during the crisis, they reported establishing relationships with stakeholders as critical to their response. They explained that working on functioning and developing collaboration within the ICS was critical to the unified command (Pyle, 2011). PIOs explained that the media, local communities, elected officials, the seafood industry, and frontline responders were all critical stakeholders during the crisis. To engage these stakeholders, they held open houses, creating opportunities for stakeholders to come to the incident command center for tours and to meet with subject matter experts to discuss wide-ranging topics related to the crisis.

A primary stakeholder for the PIOs was the media. The global media attention for this crisis was intense. PIOs suggested that the media was important to their crisis communication, because they were the primary way to get messages out to their stakeholders. However, they also discussed challenges in meeting the constant onslaught of media requests and the often aggressive questioning and demands for access, along with the divergent types of information requests they needed to respond to. They reported doing their absolute best to meet the needs of the media during the crisis. Although not perfect, PIOs provided unprecedented access to the crisis site and to key...
decision makers in the crisis. They reported being as accessible as possible, transparent, and did their best to correct misinformation in the media. However, the waves of media requests, the dynamic nature of the crisis, and the considerable amount of media made perfection difficult.

The PIOs reported providing as much information as possible to media and stakeholders about the crisis. In cases when they did not know the answer, they explained that they did not know. Some went further by working to try to find out the answer at a later time. However, the amount of questions and requests and changing nature of the crisis complicated the communication process. Several PIOs expressed that they should have countered media accounts that they felt were incorrect or were sensational. A large portion felt that their listening skills were essential to the crisis communication process. They explained that, rather than speculating what information people needed, they tried to listen and respond to the actual informational needs of their stakeholders. At times, this meant providing the information they had on hand at the time rather than speculating in their response. This was particularly true when discussing with response and recovery workers about any concerns they had about their health and safety during the crisis. The PIOs reported doing their best to meet the needs of their stakeholders by having subject matter experts (SME) and health professionals answer questions for stakeholders in a clear and informative manner. This information was mostly conducted face-to-face. Other information about the crisis was most often provided in media releases, interviews,
and through the website, http://restorethegulf.gov. The PIOs explained that they wanted to be more proactive in their communication. By being proactive, they could have provided more information about the cleanup process and discussed in more depth the engineering feats that were ultimately developed to cap the oil rig.

**Summary**

The BP oil spill was the largest response and recovery operation to an environmental disaster in United States history. The United States Coast Guard and BP coordinated the crisis communication for the event. This unusual and unprecedented relationship created a unique response and recovery operation that necessitated effective communication and coordination throughout the crisis. The PIOs who responded to the crisis experienced high demands for information, an often hostile and demanding communication context, and answers that were highly scientific and uncertain. The PIOs reported high levels of exhaustion during the crisis and expressed that future PIOs should monitor their rest and stress levels when engaging in crisis communication over an extended period of time.

**You Make the Call**

After examining this case, it is time to determine how the PIOs involved in the BP oil spill communicated in the wake of the plant fire. First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established on effective crisis communication in Chapter 3. Second, note that these lessons serve as touchstones and discussion points for what we believe are key aspects of any crisis response. As you answer the questions that follow, consider whether the PIOs were effective or ineffective in their crisis communication. We have rephrased the lessons into questions so that you are better able to address the key issues in the case.

**LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

**Lesson 1:** Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- What were the reported primary goals for PIOs in their crisis communication?

**Lesson 2:** Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- Had the PIOs developed partnerships with stakeholders prior to or during the crisis?

**Lesson 3:** Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- Did the PIOs acknowledge stakeholders as partners in managing the crisis?
Lesson 4: Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
  • Did the PIOs work toward positive relationships with primary and secondary stakeholders during the oil spill?

Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
  • Did the PIOs listen to or understand the needs of their stakeholders?

Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.
  • Did the PIOs communicate regularly with stakeholders about the crisis?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.
  • Did the PIOs communicate certain or absolute answers about the crisis?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.
  • Did the PIOs overreassure stakeholders about the impact of the crisis?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.
  • Did the PIOs provide statements of self-efficacy following the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.
  • Did the PIOs acknowledge positive factors that resulted during the crisis?

EXAMPLE 4.2. A PLANT FIRE AT MALDEN MILLS

Malden Mills is a textile manufacturing plant located in Methuen, Massachusetts. The company has operated in the Merrimack Valley for over a century and is one of the few textile mills still located in New England—many of the other mills have left the area because of high wages and unions. However, Malden Mills has remained steadfast in its commitment to the community and pays some of the highest wages in the industry. It provides much of the economic base for the area, because it employs roughly 3,000 people. At the time of the fire, the company was privately owned by Aaron Feuerstein and had previously been owned by his father and his grandfather. The organization had been in the Feuerstein family for close to 100 years.
Crisis Preparation and Planning

The Feuerstein family had focused on developing strong relationships with their employees and customers. Feuerstein describes his leadership values as “sensitivity to the human equation” (Ulmer, 2001, p. 599). Paul Coorey, president of the local union, described Feuerstein as “fair and compassionate” and explained that he felt Feuerstein believed “that if you pay people a fair amount of money, and give them good benefits to take care of their families, they will produce for you” (Ulmer, 2001, p. 599).

Feuerstein illustrated his belief in treating workers fairly during the 1980s, when the company filed for bankruptcy. At the time, Malden Mills was selling fur and in the process of developing Polartec. Feuerstein went to the union to request layoffs until the company could return to profitability. In addition, Feuerstein promised that he would rehire those he laid off when the company returned to profitability. Many employees took that promise seriously and did not even look for other work. Feuerstein kept his promises and hired back all the workers whom he had laid off during the bankruptcy.

Beyond the workforce, Feuerstein also contributed to the community in which he operated. He sponsored job training programs, English-as-a-second-language programs, and generous lines of credit to local businesses. One owner of a local company explained Feuerstein’s character by saying, “That’s the kind of guy Aaron is... If he’s got half a loaf of bread, he is going to share it around” (Ulmer, 2001, p. 598). When a local synagogue caught fire, Feuerstein and his brother stepped forward and contributed $2 million to the rebuilding efforts. Over the years, Feuerstein consistently worked to establish strong relationships with his workers and the community.

Courageous Communication in the Wake of a Disaster

On December 11, 1995, the evening of Feuerstein’s 70th birthday, his plant erupted into flames, burning for several days. Feuerstein immediately notified workers that he was going to rebuild the plant and keep it in Methuen and that he would pay workers full salaries and health benefits for 30 days while the plant was being rebuilt. He extended this benefit in total for 60 days and extended health benefits for 90 days or until the plant was rebuilt.

Within a day, the Boston Globe announced that “with one of his buildings still burning behind him, the 69-year-old owner of Malden Mills... spoke the words...
everyone in the Merrimack Valley wanted to hear” (Milne & Aucoin, 1995, p. B1). Feuerstein declared that “we are going to continue to contribute in Lawrence. . . . We had the opportunity to run to the south many years ago. We didn’t do it then and we’re not going to do it now” (Milne & Aucoin, 1995, p. B1).

Three days after the fire, Feuerstein held a meeting at a local high school. At this time, he declared that “at least for the next 30 days—the time might be longer—all hourly employees will be paid their full salaries” (Milne, 1995, p. B50). One month after the crisis, Feuerstein met with workers again. At this time he announced,

I am happy to announce to you that we will once again—for at least 30 days more—pay all of our employees. And why am I doing it? I consider the employees standing in front of me here the most valuable asset that Malden Mills has. I don’t consider them as some companies do as an expense that can be cut. What I am doing today will come back tenfold and it will make Malden Mills the best company in the industry. (Calo, 1996)

Over the remainder of the crisis, Feuerstein consistently met with workers and paid salaries and benefits. Two months after the crisis, 70% of workers were back on the job. At that time, Feuerstein agreed to pay salaries and benefits for the remaining 800 workers for another 30 days. At the end of this time, he paid health insurance for an additional 90 days for those still not back at the company and promised jobs for those unemployed, similar to his actions in the 1980s.

Summary

Aaron Feuerstein was universally praised for his compassionate response to the 1995 plant fire at Malden Mills. President Clinton commended Mr. Feuerstein’s crisis communication in his State of the Union Address. In addition, Malden Mills received donations from around the world for several years after the fire. At the time of the crisis, Aaron Feuerstein appeared to be less concerned about the cause of the crisis or responsibility and more concerned with those most impacted by the crisis: his employees and the community. After the fire, Feuerstein communicated immediately and worked to move beyond the crisis. He gave his workers and the community hope and faith that the company would overcome this crisis. In addition, he was able to solidify and further develop the stakeholder relationships he had worked so hard to establish before the fire.

You Make the Call

After examining this case, it is time to determine how Aaron Feuerstein communicated in the wake of the plant fire. First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established on effective crisis communication in Chapter 3. Second, note that these lessons serve as touchstones and discussion points for what we believe are key aspects of any crisis response. As you answer the questions that follow, consider whether Aaron Feuerstein was effective or ineffective in his crisis communication. We have rephrased the lessons into questions so that you are better able to address the key issues in the case.
LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Lesson 1: Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- What were Aaron Feuerstein’s primary goals in his crisis communication?

Lesson 2: Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- How did Aaron Feuerstein develop partnerships with stakeholders prior to the crisis?

Lesson 3: Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- In what ways did Aaron Feuerstein acknowledge his stakeholders as partners in managing the crisis?

Lesson 4: Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
- In what ways did Aaron Feuerstein work toward positive relationships with primary and secondary stakeholders following the fire?

Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
- What evidence is there that Aaron Feuerstein listened to or understood the needs of his stakeholders?

Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.
- How and how often did Aaron Feuerstein communicate to stakeholders about the crisis?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.
- Did Aaron Feuerstein communicate certain or absolute answers about the cause of the crisis?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.
- Is there evidence that Aaron Feuerstein overreassured stakeholders about the impact of the crisis?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.
- How did Aaron Feuerstein provide statements of self-efficacy following the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.
- In what ways did Aaron Feuerstein acknowledge positive factors that could arise as a result of the plant fire?
EXAMPLE 4.3. LONG-TERM COMPLEXITIES IN THE TAINTED ODWALLA APPLE JUICE CRISIS

Odwalla, a producer of juice and other products intended for health-conscious consumers, began a long and complicated process of crisis recovery on October 30, 1996. On that date, the company was notified of a link between its unpasteurized apple juice and an outbreak of *E. coli*. Odwalla voluntarily began a recall immediately on learning of the problem and willingly expanded its recall to include 12 other juices. Sadly, despite these efforts, the outbreak eventually took the life of a 16-month-old girl and seriously sickened 60 other children. In response to the crisis, Odwalla made substantial changes, pledging to make consumer safety foremost in its production processes. Many observers lauded this immediate response. In fact, Odwalla retained 80% of its accounts in the wake of the crisis (“Odwalla, Inc.,” 1997).

Challenges for Multiple Stakeholders

Odwalla’s crisis response, which we detail below, had a profound impact on a variety of stakeholders (Reierson, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2009). Prior to the crisis, producers assumed that the acid in juice products would naturally destroy bacteria such as *E. coli* without pasteurization. The Odwalla outbreak inspired major changes in this way of thinking. New pasteurization techniques requiring additional equipment became the norm in the industry. Not all producers could afford such equipment. Odwalla’s investors also shared in the loss mightily during the company’s long and costly recovery. In addition, the recall and subsequent investigation led to layoffs—causing financial hardship for many employees. Keep these stakeholders in mind as you read the following description of Odwalla’s response to its *E. coli* crisis.

Odwalla’s Crisis Response

From the start, Odwalla displayed a clear and impressive commitment to its customers. In addition to voluntarily recalling products and shutting down operations, Odwalla opened new lines of communication with its customers. The company launched a website dedicated to the crisis within 24 hours and created two 1-800 telephone numbers for customers and suppliers to call. Odwalla’s message to consumers was clear, consistent, and compassionate. The company shared its regret for the incident and offered refunds to those who had recently purchased its products. Odwalla also offered to pay medical costs for illnesses resulting from their contaminated juice (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998). Odwalla’s chairperson at the time of the crisis, Greg Steltenpohl, visited family members of sickened children and publicly acknowledged the pain and suffering the crisis had caused (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998). When the lone death caused by the crisis occurred, the company issued a press release offering condolences to her family.

Within two months of the crisis, Odwalla announced a revolutionary change in the production of fresh juice products. The company introduced flash pasteurization as a technique it insisted would destroy *E. coli* bacteria while maintaining much of the flavor and nutritional value that was present in its unpasteurized products (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998). Odwalla has not experienced another major recall since adopting flash pasteurization in 1996.
The new pasteurization process at Odwalla

Source: Photo courtesy of The Creamery at Pineland Farms.

Impact on Stakeholders

As mentioned at the outset of this case study, Odwalla was able to maintain the majority of its accounts after the crisis. The Wall Street Journal quoted one public relations and crisis specialist who proclaimed that Odwalla’s “core principles have brought them back to probably one of the quickest recoveries in history” (Moore, 1998, para. 15). This recovery was not without cost for some of Odwalla’s stakeholders. Small operators in the juice industry, investors, and some Odwalla employees all suffered during and after Odwalla’s crisis response.

At the time of the crisis, Odwalla was a relatively large producer in the fresh juice industry. Consequently, the company had the financial wherewithal to retool its facility with flash pasteurization equipment. Not all producers could afford this advancement. Once Odwalla announced it was using flash pasteurization, some grocery store chains such as Safeway were no longer willing to accept juice from others unless they too adopted flash pasteurization (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998). Small operators who did undertake flash pasteurization were forced to raise their prices, thereby diminishing their competitiveness (De Lisser, 1998).

Odwalla’s investors were also hurt by the crisis. Odwalla spent money aggressively during its recovery despite plummeting profits. In addition, Odwalla was fined more than a million dollars for the crisis (“Odwalla pleads,” 1998). As Reierson et al. (2009) observe, “although Odwalla’s actions might have been good business practice in the long run, immediately following the crisis investors were left with little to show for their original investment” (p. 122).
Odwalla’s employees also suffered during the crisis. Sixty Odwalla employees were laid off in the aftermath. Although consumers were compensated as a result of the crisis, little was done to support Odwalla’s employees during the crisis recovery. Several members of Odwalla’s board of directors were also replaced after the crisis.

Odwalla’s crisis response was decisive and effective in returning the company to profitability in the long run. This response, however, was not without cost to at least three sets of stakeholders: small operators, investors, and employees.

Summary

Odwalla’s recovery from its E. coli crisis was celebrated as an exemplar of excellence in crisis communication. Indeed, Odwalla communicated early and often with its consumers, showing remorse for the crisis and offering financial compensation. A closer look at the crisis, however, reveals lingering harm to small producers in the industry. Investors unable to stay with Odwalla for the long term also suffered significant financial losses. Similarly, some employees lost their jobs, at least temporarily, causing financial stress. This case provides clear evidence of the need for organizations to consider all stakeholders for the long term when developing a crisis response.

You Make the Call

After examining this case, it is time to determine whether Odwalla communicated effectively with the stakeholders involved in the crisis. First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established in Chapter 3 for communicating effectively and ineffectively during crises. These lessons should guide you in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Odwalla’s crisis response. As you contemplate the questions that follow, consider whether Odwalla was effective or ineffective in coping with the long-term complexities of the crisis.

LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Lesson 1: Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- Did Odwalla exemplify clear goals in its crisis communication?

Lesson 2: Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- In what ways did Odwalla develop partnerships with stakeholders?

Lesson 3: Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- How did Odwalla acknowledge its stakeholders following the crisis?

(Continued)
Lean finely textured beef (LFTB) has been blended into some ground hamburger by food processors and grocery stores in the United States for two decades. Despite no documented health risks and no ethical missteps by the product’s manufacturer, LFTB was, in 2012, suddenly and seriously discredited in the eyes of many consumers. The result was a full-blown crisis for Beef Products Incorporated (BPI), a primary manufacturer of LFTB. How could a crisis develop for a company that creates a safe product about which consumers generally knew nothing? The answer is a single news broadcast on ABC nightly news labeled LFTB pink slime and questioned the safety and ethics of its use.

The ABC nightly news program began with the anchor of the primetime ABC News broadcast introducing the story as a “startling ABC News investigation.” LFTB was described as a filler used to pad the content of ground hamburger with a dangerous product contaminated with ammonia. Use of the product was further described in the story as an act of “economic fraud.” Most damaging of all, the ABC News reporter

**EXAMPLE 4.4. WHAT’S IN A NAME? BEEF PRODUCTS INCORPORATED FACE “PINK SLIME”**

Lesson 4: Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
- Is there evidence that Odwalla established relationships with its stakeholders?

Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
- Is there evidence that Odwalla listened to its stakeholders?

Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.
- In what ways did Odwalla maintain contact with the public?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.
- Did Odwalla provide certain or absolute answers about the cause of the crisis?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.
- Did Odwalla overreassure about the impact of the crisis?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.
- In what way did Odwalla provide statements of self-efficacy following the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.
- Was there evidence that positive factors could arise from this crisis?

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introduced the term pink slime as an alternate name for LFTB. The use of this phrase creates feelings of disgust and queasiness in hearers. The phrase pink slime is also vivid and memorable. Thus, ABC News created a negative exemplar by using the phrase pink slime in its newscast. We discussed the seriousness of exemplars in Chapter Two. Use of the revolting phrase continued in subsequent ABC News stories, was picked up by reporters from other news organizations, and became a social media meme. The phrase pink slime implied that otherwise pure ground beef was being diluted by a grotesque and unsafe product to enhance the profits of restaurants and grocery stores.

A Third Party Crisis Response

The fallout from the pink slime characterization was severe. The phrase created consumer repugnance and outrage toward LFTB that led to the United States Department of Agriculture allowing participants in the National School Lunch Program to specify the purchase of beef products without LFTB, and grocery store chains such as Safeway, SuperValu, Food Lion, and Kroger pledged to stop selling ground beef that included LFTB. Ultimately, the dwindling demand for LFTB caused BPI to suspend production at three of its four processing plants, laying off 650 employees (Green, 2012).

BPI responded to the accusations with press releases and a website clarifying the nature and use of LFTB. Because the company supplied an ingredient instead of an end product purchased by consumers, however, BPI had a limited public relations network. As the crisis wore on, BPI benefited from the actions of other stakeholders in the beef industry. One of these benefits was receiving endorsements from organizations such as the North American Meat Institute (known as the American Meat Institute during the crisis). The mission of the North American Meat Institute (NAMI) is, “To be a catalyst for continuous innovation and improvement; a strong advocate for the meat and poultry community before consumers, policymakers and media; and a vehicle for members of all sizes to develop positive, constructive and long lasting relationships” (NAMI, n.d., para. 5). For BPI, NAMI provided the benefits of a credible third party, countering the claims introduced by ABC News. For example, NAMI created a video, similar in format to the ABC News story, presenting a series of facts about LFTB that contrasted with ABC News’s claims. The facts in the NAMI video included the following:

- LFTB is 100% beef. The pink color and the gelatin consistency of the product occur because the meat, extracted close to the bone after choice cuts are already taken, is heated and spun to remove all fat.
- Because all fat is removed, adding LFTB reduces the fat content and raises the protein level of ground beef.
- The levels of ammonia used in the creation of LFTB are similar to those naturally occurring in many commonly eaten foods.

At the peak of the pink slime crisis, sales of LFTB were down 80%. The response of third party stakeholders such as NAMI and the rising cost of hamburger, however, have led to a partial recovery for the product. Sales are still not to their former levels, but food processors of such products as canned lasagna and spaghetti sauce are making regular
use of LFTB. Sales in this area continue to rise. Many supermarkets that stopped selling ground hamburger with LFTB, however, still do not sell the product (Russell, 2014).

**Summary**

The lean finely textured beef case offers a poignant answer to the question, “What’s in a name?” Labeling LFTB as pink slime set in motion a series of events that put people out of work, lowered the protein level in many beef products, and diverted attention from greater food safety risks. The case also emphasizes the added challenge organizations face when they have little interaction with the public. As the manufacturer of an ingredient rather than an end product, BPI was basically a hidden or invisible organization to consumers. This case emphasizes the need for similar organizations who spend little or no time in the public eye to consider how they would communicate during a crisis.

**You Make the Call**

After examining this case, it is time for you to determine if BPI and NAMI communicated effectively with the many stakeholders involved in the crisis. Did their communication provide a sense of false certainty? Was clear, honest, and open communication practiced? First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established in Chapter 3. These lessons should guide you in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of communication within the LFTB crisis. As you contemplate the questions that follow, consider whether BPI and NAMI were effective or ineffective in coping with the added constraints they faced during the crisis response.

### LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

**Lesson 1:** Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- What were the primary goals BPI and NAMI pursued in their crisis communication?

**Lesson 2:** Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- How was the opportunity for BPI and NAMI to partner with the media limited by the fact that ABC News created the crisis?

**Lesson 3:** Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- How was the opportunity for BPI and NAMI to partner with the media limited by the fact that ABC News created the crisis?

**Lesson 4:** Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
- Who were the primary and secondary stakeholders that were addressed by BPI and NAMI?
Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
- Did BPI and NAMI listen to their stakeholders effectively?

Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.
- What did BPI and NAMI do to acknowledge uncertainty about LFTB during the crisis?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.
- Was sufficient information available when NAMI responded to the crisis on behalf of BPI?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.
- Did BPI and NAMI overreassure consumers about LFTB?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.
- What kind of advice did BPI and NAMI give to consumers during the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.
- What kinds of positive outcomes came out of the LFTB crisis, and how could these be used to prepare for future crises?

Plant Tour
Source: AP Photo/Nati Harnik
EXAMPLE 4.5. RURAL RENEWAL AFTER A TORNADO IN GREENSBURG, KANSAS

On May 4, 2007, the roughly 1,500 residents of Greensburg, Kansas, were struck by an EF5 tornado, which killed 11 people and demolished 95% of the buildings in the city. Greensburg is located roughly 100 miles south of Wichita in South Central Kansas. The tornado was one of the largest and most violent ever recorded. Estimates suggest the tornado was 1.7 miles wide and produced winds of over 200 miles per hour. Survivors were left without housing, running water, or electricity. The tornado literally swept away the homes, schools, and churches in Greensburg. Before the tornado, the city was known for its strong sense of community and for housing the largest hand-dug well, which served as a tourist attraction for those passing through the town. However, like many rural towns, Greensburg was slowly losing population, because locals left for larger cities and children went to college never to come back. After the devastating tornado, residents of Greensburg were beginning to consider a new identity for their resilient Midwestern town.

Initial Framing of the Crisis

Following the devastating tornado, there was a real sense of loss. Citizens were stunned by the impact of the tornado and were uncertain about what would happen to their community. However, almost immediately, key leaders in the community saw the potential to frame the disaster positively for its citizens. For instance, Greensburg City Administrator Steve Hewitt lost his home and everything he owned. However, he also felt the “the tornado had a silver lining, for it made this town and some 1,400 people regroup and reinvent itself” (Nguyen & Morris, 2009, para. 2). He explained further that “it forced people to make a change. It forced people to say, You know what—we have an opportunity unlike any other community gets” (Nguyen & Morris, 2009, para. 3). In this case, Steve Hewitt began to see a tabula rasa from which to recreate and reinvent the town of Greensburg.

Less than two days after the tornado, as the wreckage was being excavated from local buildings, School Superintendent Darren Hedrick provided a similar description to Steve Hewitt’s of how Greensburg could capitalize on the effect of the disaster. He explained, “Towns are about people, they are not about buildings. And it’s a huge opportunity to rebuild—not just rebuild it the way it was but maybe rebuild it a little bit better than it was” (Morris, 2007, para. 4).

These initial thoughts and communication by leaders began to instigate conversations by citizens through community forums held periodically to discuss the recovery process, including any problems or frustrations that people were experiencing. Because most people were living in FEMA trailers and were anxious to move into more permanent housing, developing a plan for moving forward was very important. However, through community forums, people began to talk about the disaster as a way to reinvigorate the town and solve the problem of its declining population. These people hoped to “reverse the trend. To not lose the kids, but to bring our kids back. To invest back in the community so that after they graduate they can have new jobs and new
opportunities” (Nguyen & Morris, 2009, para. 4). In doing so, “the tornado was something that bonded people, which . . . is a natural element of shared adversity, and the community was able to tap into that in a big way” (Phelps, 2009, para. 21).

The Greensburg City Council met regularly to discuss what businesses would continue to do business in Greensburg and when they would be reopening. This group also led many of the community forums and listened to the concerns and frustrations about the uncertain future that current residents faced. However, through city council meetings and community forums, a vision of creating a green city that could be a model for the entire world of energy conservation began to emerge. Danny Wallach, who headed a nonprofit group leading the push for environmental sustainability in Greensburg, began rallying residents to consider making Greensburg an example of what an energy- and environmentally sound community could be. He explained, “I mean, it literally struck me, green—Greensburg—and at the time, I wasn’t aware of just how perfect the timing in the national green movement was” (Morris, 2007, para. 14). Steve Hewitt said that Greensburg could come back stronger than ever. “Before the tornado, Greensburg was shedding 2% of its population every year. Those who left for college rarely returned to stay. It was a death by a thousand cuts” (Morris, 2007, para. 22). The leadership of the community began to see the potential and opportunity that the crisis created. Ultimately, these early visions and discussions led to the Greensburg City Council resolving that all new city buildings should meet the very highest environmental standard—LEED platinum” (Morris, 2007, para. 23).

Consequences of a Bold Environmental Vision Following the Tornado

Steve Hewitt was thinking big after the disaster. He focused on creating “office space for new businesses, a high school and an art center designed to be LEED platinum” (Morris, 2007, para. 23). He explained that building a green community would not be easy. “Maybe it’s a little bit crazy. There are only 14 platinum buildings in the country. When it’s all said and done, I’d like 4 or 5 here in Greensburg” (Morris, 2007, para. 25). When word got out about the vision Greensburg had created, several unintended outcomes developed. The Discovery Channel began filming a television series called Greensburg Eco-Town and ultimately created a television series called Greensburg: A Story of Community Rebuilding, which chronicled the entire renewal process.

By 2009, Greensburg was well on its way to becoming “a green community of the future . . . making Greensburg a national model for environmentally conscious living” (Nguyen & Morris, 2009, para. 5).

- Greensburg developed a series of eco-homes to educate people about energy-efficient construction. The eco-homes feature ground source heating and cooling, solar hot water, and even vegetable gardens on the roofs. They are about 70% more energy efficient than the average house and have been tested for safety in the event of future tornadoes (Nguyen & Morris, 2009).

- Greensburg developed buildings with solid concrete, using more natural light, and with better insulation and state-of-the-art windows.
• The community developed solar and wind technologies to harness power and geothermal heat.

• The town’s John Deere dealership created a state-of-the-art, energy efficient facility, by employing oil and heat to cool its floors and wind turbines to power the building. The owner believes he will save $25,000 a year with these improvements (Nguyen & Morris, 2009).

Community Response

It appears that Greensburg’s approach to interpret the crisis as an opportunity to reinvigorate the town has been effective. School superintendent Hedrick explains, “A lot of towns are dying a slow death. We had a fork put in us pretty hard. We have to find a way to resurrect and we hope we’re making good decisions to do that” (Morris, 2007). Fifteen-year-old Levi Schmidt described the recovery this way: “Before the tornado, I was not going to come back. I was going to go to college, and who knows where. This community was dying. Now I’m definitely coming back, and I know a good majority of my friends are” (Morris, 2007, para. 34). This certainly does not mean that everyone stayed following the tornado but does suggest that Greensburg is able, for the time being, to stem the tide of its decline in population. For more information on this case, take a look at the Greensburg, Kansas, website: www.greensburgks.org. The new slogan on the home page of the town’s website reads Greensburg: Better, Stronger, Greener! (Nguyen & Morris, 2009).

A view of the devastation in Greensburg, Kansas, following the tornado
Source: Greg Henshall/FEMA/Wikimedia.
Summary

The 2007 tornado in Greensburg, Kansas, caught everyone by surprise. The leadership in Greensburg quickly considered the potential opportunities associated with the disaster and framed it this way for citizens. This new prospective vision focused on making Greensburg a model of environmentally sensitive building and housing and set a plan for moving Greensburg forward. Greensburg engaged environmentally savvy stakeholders to help it create its vision and support its relief efforts. Through effective communication, Greensburg, Kansas, was able to effectively respond to a dramatic and tragic crisis.

You Make the Call

After examining this case, it is time to determine whether the leadership of Greensburg, Kansas, communicated effectively with the many stakeholders involved in the crisis. First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established in Chapter 3 on communicating effectively and ineffectively during crises. These lessons should guide you in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Greensburg’s crisis response. As you contemplate the questions that follow, consider whether the leadership of Greensburg was effective or ineffective in coping with the added constraints it faced during its crisis response.

LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Lesson 1: Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- In what ways did Greensburg leaders illustrate clear goals in their crisis communication?

Lesson 2: Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- Did relationships established before the tornado aid in Greensburg’s response?

Lesson 3: Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- In what ways did Greensburg leaders include stakeholders in their renewal efforts?

Lesson 4: Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
- In what ways did Greensburg leaders establish new stakeholder relationships that helped them create the new vision for their town?

Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
- Did the leadership of Greensburg include residents in decision making about the new vision for the town?

(Continued)
Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.

- How and how often did Greensburg leadership communicate with the public about the crisis?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.

- Did Greensburg leaders communicate with excessive certainty about the crisis?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.

- Did Greensburg leaders overreassure about the potential for renewal following the crisis?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.

- Did Greensburg leaders communicate statements of self-efficacy following the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.

- In what ways did leaders in the Greensburg community acknowledge that positive factors could arise as a result of the crisis?

EXAMPLE 4.6. A COSTLY YOUTUBE HOAX FOR DOMINO’S PIZZA

The simple combination of a video camera, two unsupervised restaurant employees with vulgar senses of humor, and access to the video sharing website YouTube created a cascade of problems for Domino’s Pizza, Inc. In April of 2009, two Domino’s employees, Kristy Hammonds and Michael Setzer, both in their 30s, posted a grotesque video to YouTube. The two created the video in the kitchen of a Domino’s franchise located in Conover, North Carolina. In the video, Hammonds narrates as Setzer is seen violating standard health codes by intentionally contacting food with several of his orifices. Although the video was truly disgusting and juvenile, it piqued the interest of the online community. The video, seen by nearly a million viewers before it was taken down, created a public relations and financial crisis for Domino’s (Clifford, 2009).

Unusual Challenges for Domino’s

The Domino’s YouTube crisis created two unusual challenges. First, the crisis was created by a hoax. Second, the perpetrators used a social media outlet to publicize their mischief. We will discuss each of these challenges individually.
Hoaxes, by their nature, create contradicting demands for organizations. Hoaxes begin with an accusation against an organization. In this case, the hoaxers, Setzer and Hammonds, falsely claimed to have served the food that had been contaminated by Setzer. Even if an organization suspects that the claims are false, as was the case with the Domino’s hoax, the organization must take every precaution against the threat at hand and display a capacity for dealing with similar threats that may occur in the future. Thus, organizations must simultaneously

- argue they have a plan in place, either pre-established or spontaneously generated, that can mitigate or manage any crisis emerging from the threat; and
- scrutinize available evidence in order to recognize and refute false claims at the earliest point possible (Sellnow, Littlefield, Vidoloff, & Webb, 2010, p. 142).

For Domino’s, the primary objectives were to emphasize its commitment to food safety and hiring reputable staff, while discrediting the claims brought against the organization in the YouTube video.

Domino’s second challenge was caused by the popularity and accessibility of YouTube. Awareness of the hoax video spread in a virtually exponential manner. Within hours, thousands saw the video. Within two days, that number climbed to a million. Even after YouTube agreed to remove the video from its site, the video was posted and made accessible by bloggers at a variety of alternative sites. For Domino’s, the challenge was to gain control of a story that proliferated extensively overnight and did so completely independent of the standard media sources, such as television and newspapers.

Patrick Doyle

Source: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo
Domino’s Crisis Response

This case accentuates the need for organizations to monitor social media to detect potential crisis situations. Domino’s was ineffective in such monitoring. In fact, Domino’s did not detect the video on its own. Rather, a blogger alerted the company to the condemning video. Domino’s initially failed to grasp the urgency of the situation. The company first responded with standard press releases denying that the company had served contaminated food. Unfortunately, this routine response failed to account for the fact that the crisis emerged on a social media site. Consequently, many who viewed the hoax video never saw Domino’s initial response. The company did not provide a formal statement from Domino’s USA President Patrick Doyle until 48 hours after realizing the video was on YouTube. During this lapse of time, bloggers speculated openly about Domino’s credibility and capacity for managing the crisis (Levinsohn & Gibson, 2009).

Domino’s spokesperson Tim McIntyre expressed his dismay as the crisis unfolded in a conversation with the New York Times. “We got blindsided by two idiots with a video camera and an awful idea,” McIntyre said (Clifford, 2009, p. 1B). “Even people who’ve been with us as loyal customers for 10, 15, 20 years, people are second-guessing their relationship with Domino’s, and that’s not fair,” he lamented (Clifford, 2009, p. 1B).

With their reputation reeling, Domino’s did what it had never done before—address a crisis situation via a social media site. Dressed in a shirt with an open collar, Doyle read a two-minute crisis response seated in front of a single camera. The statement was straightforward and apologetic. Doyle began by saying, “We sincerely apologize for this incident. We thank members of the online community who quickly alerted us and allowed us to take immediate action. Although the individuals in question claim it’s a hoax, we are taking this incredibly seriously.” Doyle also indicated that the facility in Conover had been temporarily closed and thoroughly disinfected. After claiming that customer trust is “sacred” to Domino’s, Doyle vowed to reexamine the company’s hiring practices to “make sure people like this don’t make it into our stores.” Doyle ended the video by saying he was “sickened” by the damage this incident had done to the Domino’s brand and the harm it had done to the reputation of the company’s 125,000 employees worldwide (Domino’s president, n.d.).

News of Doyle’s YouTube response spread quickly. His message was viewed extensively, and many of the websites that had criticized Domino’s for its slow and routine response offered critiques of the video—some favorable, some unfavorable. Unlike Domino’s initial effort, the YouTube apology garnered the much-needed attention that had been missing. Business Week heralded the Domino’s response as a lesson for all major companies, saying, “If there’s a lesson here, experts say, it’s that companies must have an active presence on the web—to monitor their brands continuously, perhaps enlisting loyal customers to help deal immediately with any damage” (Levinsohn & Gibson, 2009, p. 15). Another lesson from this case concerns the communication approach that organizations select for their crisis communication. Clearly, using standard press releases through traditional media venues did not reach the audience of the hoax video. Not until Doyle communicated through the same medium selected by the hoaxers was he able to reach his relevant audience.
Summary

The Domino’s case offers valuable lessons for responding to hoaxes. First, hoaxes can cause notable damage to an organization’s financial well-being. The YouTube incident caused extensive damage to Domino’s brand and to consumer confidence. Second, responding to hoaxes is complex. Organizations must, at once, discredit the hoaxers while establishing that the company takes all such threats seriously. At times, this type of crisis places an organization in a seemingly contradictory position. Third, the Domino’s case clearly exemplifies the increasing importance of alternative media such as YouTube in preventing and managing crises. Organizations would be wise to study the Domino’s case and consider their own levels of preparedness for such an attack.

You Make the Call

After examining this case, it is time to determine whether Domino’s communicated effectively with the stakeholders involved in the crisis. First, take a moment to refresh in your mind the lessons established in Chapter 3 for communicating effectively and ineffectively during crises. These lessons should guide you in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Domino’s crisis response. As you contemplate the questions that follow, consider whether Domino’s was effective or ineffective in coping with the added constraints of the hoax and the use of social media it faced during its crisis response.

LESSONS ON PRODUCING EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Lesson 1: Determine your goals for crisis communication.
- Did Domino’s exemplify clear goals in its crisis communication?

Lesson 2: Before a crisis, develop true equal partnerships with organizations and groups that are important to the organization.
- In what ways did Domino’s develop partnerships with stakeholders?

Lesson 3: Acknowledge your stakeholders, including the media, as partners when managing a crisis.
- How did Domino’s acknowledge its stakeholders following the crisis?

Lesson 4: Organizations need to develop strong, positive primary and secondary stakeholder relationships.
- Is there evidence that Domino’s established relationships with its stakeholders?

(Continued)
Lesson 5: Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders.
  • Is there evidence that Domino’s listened to its stakeholders?

Lesson 6: Communicate early about the crisis, acknowledge uncertainty, and assure the public that you will maintain contact with them about current and future risk.
  • In what ways did Domino’s maintain contact with the public?

Lesson 7: Avoid certain or absolute answers to the public and media until sufficient information is available.
  • Did Domino’s provide certain or absolute answers about the cause of the crisis?

Lesson 8: Do not overreassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them.
  • Did Domino’s overreassure about the impact of the crisis?

Lesson 9: The public needs useful and practical statements of self-efficacy during a crisis.
  • In what way did Domino’s provide statements of self-efficacy following the crisis?

Lesson 10: Effective crisis communicators acknowledge that positive factors can arise from organizational crises.
  • Was there evidence that positive factors could arise from this crisis?