

Mexican dialect of Spanish, except for me. I assumed the role of orchestrating the conversations through briefings with company officials prior to family contacts and answering questions as they would arise during conversations. I learned quickly that it was not appropriate to gaze into the eyes of these family members during the initial greeting. Culturally, there is a belief or superstition that if one looks too long into their eyes, it is considered the “evil eye,” which can cause harm to that individual or family. In this case, a show of caring and concern through extended eye contact would have been inappropriate. A quick look in the eye and gazing down was much more appropriate. Also, I learned that it was not appropriate to bring in our Cuban-American consultants from Florida to South Texas. Even though they spoke Spanish, the cultural differences would have served as a hindrance to effective rapport.

A.3.1 The Role of Family Representatives

Family representatives:

- ▶ Serve as the primary point of contact between impacted families and the company.
- ▶ Assist with emergency travel and other arrangements for remote family members.
- ▶ Help with hospital liaison and funeral arrangements, if necessary.
- ▶ Respond to any type of reasonable assistance the family may need.

They also serve as a communication resource between the family and the company. Part of their job includes communicating needs and concerns to the crisis management team (CMT) or humanitarian response team (HRT). Authorization for special requests will also be conveyed through the representatives.

The representatives' ability to act in a sensitive, caring, and effective manner will not only help relatives cope, but will improve the relationship between the family and the company. It will also decrease the likelihood that disgruntled family members, their neighbors, employees, or others will go to the media with their complaints or negative connotations. Possibly, the caring response might even serve as a reputational enhancement as word spreads through various channels about the caring response of the company.

Services provided need not be complicated to be appreciated. Following an American Airlines crash in which everyone was killed, I was involved with a family that had droves of supportive people descending upon the home. There was a large extended family, a large constituent of social and community acquaintances, and membership in a large local church. Caring people collectively brought huge volumes of food. One, much appreciated, task the family

A.4 That Knock on the Door

Following initial death notification, it's likely that family representatives (not the same individuals who gave the notification) will meet relatives at the victims' homes. They should call in advance. If possible, do not park in or block the driveway. Upon arriving, they should identify themselves as representatives of the company, shake hands (or other culturally appropriate greeting), then ask to come in, speaking to each member of the family, including any children present. Get names ahead of time, if possible. If needed, write down names when first meeting family members and close friends to ensure you remember. It's OK to let them know you are doing this.

In such situations, it's generally a good idea to look for a dining room or kitchen chair and say that you prefer a hard chair. This keeps you from inadvertently sitting in the victim's favorite spot. It also permits you to place the chair where you want it, with access to everyone in the room.

A.4.1 Initial Conversation

Speak in a "matter of fact" yet compassionate manner. Do not try to feign empathy or display forced concern. Families don't want "fake." They want the family representative to maintain a state of calm assertiveness and listening in a controlled and caring manner. Achieve a comfort level of conversation. Although the situation is difficult, try to be at ease and natural.

The representative should express concern and intent with words like:

"I first want to express my shock and heartfelt sadness over what has happened. Again, my name is _____. I am an employee of _____ and I want to assist you and your family with any needs, concerns, or communications that would be helpful to you during this difficult time. I will serve as a source of information and communication between your family and the company."

The goal at this initial family meeting is to make "caring contact" and elicit conversation. Company representatives should talk less and listen more, using expressions like, "What are your concerns at this time?" "What needs to be done right away?" "Do I understand clearly that you would like...?" and "Tell me more about that." The role is to facilitate conversation that is focused on assessing needs and identifying areas of assistance by:

- ▶ Asking questions.
- ▶ Discussing and compiling considerations and issues to be addressed.
- ▶ Confirming the actions suggested would be helpful and desired by family members.

As family members speak, listen very carefully. Some family members may deluge the family representative with needs, problems, and complaints. Others may be reluctant to speak or ask for help and will need prompting with open-ended questions.

Focus *completely* on what each individual is saying as they speak. Write down pertinent items for potential assistance, repeat back what they have said, and come to agreement on what the family rep will do to assist, when appropriate. Tell family members approximately how long it will take to get an answer or action related to their needs. Be absolutely certain to follow up with family members on all promises and responsibilities on a timely basis.

A.4.2 Asking Appropriate Questions

The following questions are provided to help family assistance representatives establish and maintain a rapport with families and obtain actionable items for assistance:

Initial Assessment Questions:

- ▶ “What are your present needs and concerns?”
- ▶ “What needs to be addressed first/immediately?”
- ▶ “What are the priorities?”
- ▶ “How can we best help you?”
- ▶ “Are there any needs that aren't being adequately addressed?”
- ▶ “What needs to start that isn't in place? What needs to stop that is presently happening?”
- ▶ “What needs to be done to address the situation(s)?”
- ▶ “What would a preferred outcome look like?” (Identify near- and long-term expectations.)

New Information Questions:

- ▶ “I'd like to hear a little bit about _____.”
- ▶ “In your opinion, what do you think about _____?”
- ▶ “What is not happening that you would like to see started?”
- ▶ “How do you intend to approach the problem?”
- ▶ “Could you tell me more about the reasons for _____?”
- ▶ “When (How) do you envision this happening?”
- ▶ “In what areas do we lack information?”
- ▶ “How will the decision be made?”

clothes police officer), all meetings should be in safe public places, or face-to-face assistance should be discontinued. If significant blame is anticipated, the company may want to utilize an external health professional who is thoroughly trained and experienced to assist the family instead of a representative who works directly for the company.

If issues of getting an attorney come up, the family representative should take the neutral position that the family should do whatever they feel is appropriate with no hint that the family representative believes it's a bad or good idea. Some people have accused family representatives of carrying out their duties in an effort to avoid litigation. While there does tend to be less litigation when family representatives do their jobs well, it is certainly not the role of family representatives to try and influence any legal representation decisions by the families.

The family representative's role is to genuinely assist with family members' needs without any appearances of ulterior motives.

A.5.1 Senior Management Assistance

While we are on the topic of helpful support, let's remember that senior management is not immune from needing assistance during crisis incidents. Many times the blame is directed toward senior managers. The ultimate responsibility of crisis response and decision-making rests on their shoulders. So, there are two areas of potential assistance for senior managers, personal and professional.

On the personal assistance side, employees tend to avail themselves to the EAP or onsite crisis counseling services, but senior managers tend not to participate. For that reason, it is important to identify an external crisis consultant who is adept at personally assisting senior managers during critical times. The critical incident might be a personal issue for a senior manager, like the death or major illness of a family member, substance abuse issues, or significant stress reaction during a time of crisis. In my experience, senior managers won't typically ask for assistance from within the organization or go to the EAP. However, managers who know experienced resources for senior managers often make referrals to that senior manager or the executive committee as a suggested resource.

On the professional side, research at Syracuse University (Schoenberg, 2004) and my experience with executives in crisis has demonstrated the high value for leaders in seeking support from an external resource that is experienced in crisis leadership and crisis response. This external resource may be a trusted peer from another organization or experienced crisis leadership