

Advice for Managing Internal Communications in the Midst of an Animal Challenge

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Summary

For organizations that become the target of animal welfare allegations or those facing long-term animal rights campaigns, internal communications can prove challenging.

This can be the case because:

- Responding to external audiences (news media, investors) becomes the organization's top priority.
- There are concerns about appearing overly defensive to employees.
- The organization is concerned that internal messages may leak out, creating new communications challenges.
- A belief that a full investigation of any animal welfare allegations must take place before any communications with staff can occur.
- An assumption that staff will universally reject the accusations being made about their employer, therefore internal communications are not necessary.

Overall Internal Communications Advice from Americans for Medical Progress

Americans for Medical Progress believes that internal communications are a top priority when an organization is facing animal welfare allegations. Whenever possible, information should be shared internally before or at the same time it is shared with the news media.

Specific Goals for Internal Communications During an Animal-Related Crisis

- To demonstrate to employees that they are one of the company's most important constituencies and that they have a right to be informed prior to or at the same time as the general public about important developments.
- To let employees know that the organization values them and their hard work.
- To show employees that the organization will stand by them in tough times.
- To maintain morale.
- To counter the common belief that research organizations are unwilling to communicate about the important role of animal studies in health advancements.

Internal Communications Best Practices for Organizations Facing Animal Welfare Allegations

A. Whenever possible, employees should learn of challenging news from their own organization.

Employees appreciate learning of developing challenges from their own employer vs. the news media or other outside sources. Even in the early stages of an event, when details are limited, a brief communication to staff to inform them of a developing challenge is preferred. Internal transparency can also help maintain trust and prevent false claims from circulating through the internal rumor mill.

B. Following the initial announcement, provide regular updates.

In the first communication to staff, pledge to follow up with additional updates and then follow through with that promise. If a crisis situation is expected to last weeks or even months, consider daily, weekly or twice monthly updates to staff depending on the need.

C. Take time to consider who the messenger should be.

Sometimes the person who delivers the message is almost as important as the message itself. Should employee communications come from a top company administrator? Should they come from the head veterinarian? Or should a variety of internal spokespeople be involved? Depending on the situation, it may be decided that certain messages need to come from the organization's leader. In other cases, it's helpful to have communications come from an employee with detailed, firsthand experience.

D. Use a variety of communications methods.

Recognize that not all employees check their email repeatedly throughout the day. In urgent situations, consider face-to-face meetings with staff, followed by an email. Another option would be to host a live video or share recently recorded comments from a company leader.

E: Make sure employees have a chance to respond and ask questions.

Two-way communications are often critical during a crisis. Employees often have questions or want to voice their own concerns. Provide them with an email address or contact point for questions if the communication is an email. If news is shared in a

meeting, make sure time is allotted so that employees have a chance to get their questions answered.

F. Recognize that employee communications can become external communications.

Even in non-crisis situations, employee emails are often shared outside of the company. Therefore, make sure messages do not contain confidential information and would not be challenging if published by the news media. Also make sure that internal communications and external communications are aligned. If employees or the public notice that the organization is providing conflicting details, trust may quickly diminish.

G. Recognize the role of employees as company ambassadors.

If your company is a large employer, recognize that your staff may have a significant impact when it comes to public perception. Let employees know what they can tell friends or family who ask about the current challenge. Of course, these details must also align with what is being said in internal and external communications.

H. Avoid attacking opponents. Instead, focus on solutions and the path forward.

It can be frustrating for members of an organization when they feel they are unfairly attacked. This is natural. However, avoid internal communications that appear to attack the individuals or organizations behind negative animal welfare claims or comments. Instead, focus on how the organization plans to respond. Consider what staff want to hear from their employer. What concerns might they have and what do they want to hear?

I. Listen to feedback and respond.

Make certain that communications leaders are collecting feedback from employees and looking for trends. Do certain questions repeatedly come up? If so, perhaps the organization should create a section of the website dedicated to the issue at hand and create FAQs, fact pages or other documents.