

Costa Concordia: can Carnival Cruises rescue its reputation and boost its employer brand?

</hro/features/1020747/costa-concordia-carnival-cruises-rescue-reputation-boost-employer-brand>

24 Jan 2012, Allyson Stewart-Allen, HRO



As a corporate diplomacy expert and advisor, this has similar parallels to the BP disaster of 2010 when it similarly didn't deploy (or have?) a back-up plan smoothly deployed.

So what is it in this case that Carnival should have done but didn't which could have minimised the loss of trust in its global brands, insulated its share price, lowered the chances that people like me would write comment pieces like this?

- the "how" - immediate communication by a clear face (read: human) representing the company with details on its search and rescue efforts. As in any corporate crisis, it's about having a rehearsed plan should the unlikely event of disaster strike. Such plans are safety nets to ensure the company keeps its many stakeholders engaged, updated and feeling part of the solution to minimise their chances of dumping the shares or writing case studies in future years
- the "who" - fielding top executives from Costa's parent company, Carnival Cruises, is a must as they have the measurable credibility to reassure concerned relatives, friends, customers, employees, investors, the media and other stakeholders. This is a much more effective way to retain (and rebuild) trust in the organisation and its leaders rather than leaving it to trade bodies to speculate on the accident's details, as happened after Costa Concordia hit the rocks;
- the "what" - detailing to all stakeholders the actions being taken and contingency plans being operationalised is another classic "to do" for companies in crisis, as it's these actions - not simply the words - against which the company and its leaders are measured. Having emergency plans therefore which are rehearsed regularly means these rescue activities and the communication about them can be done quickly and ultimately will save lives. The ultimate goal is to minimise the shock to the system by deploying agreed-upon measures;
- the "where" - appropriate rescue operations need to be communicated and demonstrated in online and offline media by parent company Carnival Cruises to ensure each of its partners and channels are informed and aligned with the company's rescue activities. This will include travel agents, system partners (airlines, hotels, car rental companies) and others in its ecosystem to gain their support, cooperation in spreading the word to customers and most importantly demonstrate consistency to stakeholders. After all, what is brand equity if not built on consistency?

Such a simple checklist would have saved Carnival Cruises much of the unfavourable coverage it has had over the past couple of weeks. While many brands hit the rocks in one form or another, not all are stopped in their tracks. Hopefully the leaders are now studying the lessons from other brands, which have had similar experiences and will apply them in future.

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