Certified Tour Professional White Paper

Crisis Management for Tour Companies

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Introduction

A crisis situation can take on many forms and will not discriminate, striking a tour company of any size and/or business model. Due to the global reach of travel and tourism, there are many factors—both internal and external, as well as those controllable and beyond control—that can bring risk and crisis calling.

NTA tour company members are required to carry at least $1 million in comprehensive general public liability insurance. In order to obtain this coverage, they must attest to certain standards as it relates to crisis and risk management, including a crisis management plan. However, with the busy day-to-day operations to manage, does the tour company take the steps to ensure the plan is current and that personnel is indeed ready to put the plan into action at a moment's notice?

Also, does the company conduct risk assessments? Where does the potential loom for risk to turn to crisis and how can it be mitigated?

The following outline will help tour operators develop and personalize a step-by-step management plan to put into action at time of crisis.

Once a crisis plan is finalized, tour companies are encouraged to share and review the document with all employees and relevant contractors, as well as the suppliers they will use on tour to ensure there is coordination in a time crisis.

It's recommended that tour operators hold annual all-team crisis planning workshops where the company's management plan is reviewed and revised accordingly. The team also can role play one or two crisis scenarios to move the theoretical to the actual. This helps a company realize additional action items that must be added to a plan or what needs to be adjusted.

Plan Outline

Step 1

Establish objectives for your plan. These examples can be personalized for a tour company's business model and mission:

1. Accurately communicate in a timely manner the status of the situation/crisis.
2. Bring together personnel who are in the best position to accurately communicate the details.
3. Minimize the release of inaccurate information by providing access to factual information.
4. Address immediate needs generated by the crisis and maintain a team presence to address lingering needs.

5. Effectively communicate that (add company name) can deal in a positive, proactive manner with the aftermath of any crisis.
6. Position (add company name), if appropriate, as a key resource during and following the crisis.

Step 2

As you are creating your plan, establish several teams to oversee, advise and implement actions related to specific area of tour operations. Each team will have a leader and the appropriate number of team members (both on-site at the crisis and in the home office). As you develop the other parts of your crisis plan, you may need to adjust the types of teams, as well as the number of people on the team or the type of employee.

1. Coordination: has total crisis oversight responsibility; leaders from each group serve
2. Operations & Logistics: involves two teams—on-site and HQ crisis management
3. Communications: handles communications with all audiences; internal and external
4. Human Services: oversees medical and counseling needs
5. Legal: ensures legal implications are considered, for all audiences, during the crisis

Step 3

The purpose of a crisis management plan is to be as prepared as you can to work through and survive a crisis situation. Create a check list that the Coordination Team leader can use at the onset of a crisis to help achieve your objectives.

Crisis Situation Response Reminders and Check List:

- [ ] Remain calm. As leaders, it is our primary responsibility to set an example of strength and fortitude despite what is happening around us.
- [ ] Responses should be honest, timely and direct.
- [ ] Understand the impact of social media. It can be used to our advantage and it’s important to not allow it to be used against us. Monitor social media and respond appropriately.
- [ ] Understand the impact of time. If it is a national or international crisis, the media or our members are likely to know about it before us or at least as soon as we do. We have very few minutes to make an initial statement to our audiences.
- [ ] Understand that people react differently in a crisis. Be prepared to react differently yourself or to observe others reacting with difficulty to the situation. Be understanding of yourself and others in their response.
- [ ] It’s important to be working on tomorrow’s issues at the same time that you’re working in the moment of the crisis.

Step 4

Create an Immediate Actions Check List, which is used at the onset of any crisis situation scenario by the Coordination Team.

- [ ] Assess the situation; collect as many facts and details as possible; assign note taker

- ❑ Review the impact related to: Operations & Logistics, Communications, Human Services and Legal (adjust this related to the types of teams you have)
- ❑ Establish action list, set deadlines and give assignments to staff
- ❑ Develop holding statement based on what is immediately known
- ❑ Contact company headquarters or local office for support, as warranted
- ❑ Contact company executives and stakeholders, as relevant
- ❑ Establish communications channels (i.e. website, media, etc.)
- ❑ Determine if anyone needs to travel in the event of an off-site situation
- ❑ Employees should communicate any related information to the Coordination Team Leader
- ❑ Develop statements and update as possible (employees, travelers/customers, stakeholders, media, travel industry, associations)

Step 5

Create a list of all possible crisis situation scenarios with related actions. Situations to consider are transportation accident, weather disasters, terrorist attacks, a traveler dying while on tour, illness outbreak, theft, and traveler injury.

A tour company must look at the operations, services, travelers served, activities offered and places visited to fully develop this scenario planning. This section of your plan also will include the actions that should be taken by the various teams.

Your company's list of possible crisis situations will vary widely dependent on your business model, customers served and type of product offered. All of this must be taken into consideration, and as you adapt these aspects of your business, circle back to your crisis plan and make necessary adjustments.

Step 6

Create a list of all related personnel with 24/7 contact information. Include any person, company or organization you may need quick access to in a time of crisis. Examples would be company personnel, medical contacts, insurance contacts, legal support, media, suppliers, airlines, Centers for Disease Control, embassies, and more.

Additional considerations During Time of Crisis

<u>Coordination Team – Internal Leader/External Leader</u>

- Quickly assess situation and develop holding statement
- Contact team leaders (who makes up the Coordination Team)
- Meet with Coordination Team
- Determine current situation (Identify what is known, what must be verified); adapt holding statement as warranted
- Make key assignments to team leaders
- Determine if "on-site" team needs to go to location of crisis
- Prepare statements with legal/finance review (but legal does NOT have the final call on statement—company leader/ Coordination Team leader does)
- Alert all systems/staff (reservations, IT, etc.)

- Assign a scribe to record all events chronologically—right hand to internal team leader (Consider a report/time sheet for key individuals to regularly submit to the scribe)
- Internal communications: employee nurturing—critical to remember the care and feeding of the employees
- Develop succession plans for when key players are not available and/or shift controls on rotation (i.e., if internal team leader is not available, who takes that role, and then who fills his/her role, etc.)
- Always keep looking forward—ANTICIPATE (let the teams deal with the details and minutia so the whole process keeps moving forward)
- Ongoing evaluation of process for adjustments as needed and for future use
- Wrap up session as crisis ends (or key stages come to an end)

General Inquiries (Brings an anticipation of what general inquiries will be)

- Immediately tell employees and customer service personnel how to respond—develop a holding statement ("Yes there is a situation. We are aware of it and investigating it, and we'll find out the details and get back to you.")
  - Personalize the situation: take it from corporate to personal
- Dependent on the situation, share appropriate messages of condolence. Don't forget to reference travelers, employees, contractors, supplier partners, drivers, etc.
- After the Coordination Team meeting, develop official statements for customer inquiries
- Prepare written statements for email and social inquiries; all specific for the platform
- Coordinate with agency team because agents will be calling res center line first
- Coordinate with the guest relations and media teams for messages
- Run manifest of guests on tour for reference during inquiries
- Develop rotation system so everyone can be better prepared and rested for their shifts
- Consider special touch tone message or 800 line with prepared statements to public (depends on situation)

Communications Team (all audiences)

- Contact external PR assistance
- Establish media site (off-site of main management area, like a local hotel)—be sure there is meet-and-greet staff and phone reception for all media inquiries.
  - Related, establish a family site, if necessary; or someone to contact for family members.
- Establish official spokesperson. Should only be one to maintain control of the message
- Remind/inform all employees to refer all media calls to media team and make no comments outside of statements provided. Give them talking points to pass on to the media team, so that it's handled properly and positively)
- Identify who, if anyone, will work with media on-site, especially before on-site team arrives (local supplier, tour director/staff, officials)
  - Same to be handled for the family members
- Be sure that anyone in proximity who could be approached by media and/or family is briefed with statements (e.g. shared tenants)
- Review initial "holding statement" (or create specific to media as needed) and revise as possible with updates
- Recognize the power and immediacy of social media.

- Have email/phone number for key media people for quick access, including national media, depending on crisis

Ongoing communications needs:

- Monitor news and social media (online, TV, radio, etc.)
- Coordinate closely with all crisis teams to ensure messages are consistent
- Notify/update partners, suppliers, etc.
- Have hard copy, updated lists of contact information and keep current

Operations & Logistics On-Site Team (also involves elements of all other teams, handled at the scene)

- Locate "Crisis Go Bag" (prepared in advance and ready for travel to site; contains satellite phone, if necessary; cameras; crisis manual; employee contact lists for 24/7 coverage; cash access; corporate credit cards)
- Provide direction to on-site interim staff for actions prior to On-site Team arrival
- Complete logistics of getting to the site (flight arrangements, lodging, etc.)
- Coordinate with suppliers at the scene (coach company, DMO, hotels, etc.)
- Instigate roles with the on-site team and consultant team, if appropriate
- Establish location of all involved
- Establish On-site Command Center and distribute contact information to HQ, suppliers, etc.
- Coordinate with Communications Team for on-site spokesperson/media needs
- Provide counseling/comforting for those involved
- Consider relevant time differences for HQ communications

Operations & Logistics Team HQ Team (fact checkers, logistics, resources)

- Coordinate with On-site Team to develop interim on-site team by identifying who is in the immediate area (tour directors, drivers, supplier representatives)
- Identify other resources in the area (suppliers/ company contacts)
- Prepare the tour director (on-site staff) with "holding statement" and initial talking points
  - All media inquiries still referred to Communications Team at HQ
- Run manifest for who was involved
- Begin verifying facts—determine fatalities, injuries, causes of accident/situation, etc.
- Conduct ongoing analysis of the situation
- Key: Internal/External communication plan must be solid and consistent
- Prepare information for contacting families/next of kin as needed— turn over to customer service center.
- Coordinate logistics for anyone else who needs to get to the site—e.g., family members, suppliers, other staff, etc.
- Consider relevant time differences for on-site team communications

Legal/Contract/Finance

- Review supplier contracts
- Review insurance forms
- Review passenger manifest
- Check insurance coverage—what is financial exposure?
- Notify insurance broker and legal counsel
- Coordinate with Operations & Logistics Team on potential liabilities/exposure:
  - Review records of driver, equipment record, all suppliers and your company
- Hire accident investigator as needed
- Fund tour directors—wire money—have plan for weekends, holidays, etc. (may need to rely on local contacts/suppliers)
- What did the participants lose?
  - What will the company need to replace (passports, keys, clothing, valuables, etc.)
- Get police report, if applicable
- Begin looking at future impacts from incident (insurance increases, contract clauses, etc.)

Miscellaneous Points

- First, determine who "owns" the crisis—is it your company's, carriers', etc.?
- Anticipate appearance of cell-phone video of the incident. Social media is everywhere and coverage will be instantaneous of everything.
- Suppliers must have 24/7 emergency contact to reach company.
- Let suppliers and partners know what you expect of them in a crisis situation—suppliers need to have emergency kits with critical emergency information for reaching company
- In Europe, government is more involved with control of accidents than in the United States.
- What may happen in this specific location?
- Assist people who can't get their belongings—company must provide prescriptions, glasses, clothing, other needs.
- Short-term costs pay off in the long run.
- Be sure you document your due diligence (any resources used to determine safety and security of destination).
- Most overlooked or neglected component is staff: What if the trauma devastates the employees' work? Needs to be a major focus of your business continuity plan.
- Contact cascades—who contacts whom—especially in a catastrophic event at all levels have

Conclusion

Preparation is key when it comes to risk assessment and crisis management. Consider these steps:

1. Create your plan
2. Share your plan
3. Put your plan into action
4. Review and revise your plan

Resources related to crisis and risk management

- NTA Corporate Partner Aon Affinity Insurance
  - Sample plans
  - Lessons in risk management
  - Guidance on necessary insurance coverage
  - Website: http://www.aontravpro.com/Pages/Home.aspx

- NTA Owners Network
  - Group of NTA tour company owners to serve as resource
  - Contact NTA Headquarters (headquarters@ntastaff.com) for more details

- Dr. Peter Tarlow, president Tourism & More
  - Previous NTA speaker
  - Expert in tourism risk management and travel safety and security
  - *T&M's Tourism Tidbits*, monthly e-newsletter
  - Website: http://www.tourismandmore.com/
  - Email: ptarlow@tourismandmore.com