



## BOOK REVIEWS:

# Teaching Crisis with Clarity: How Effective Crisis Communication Bridges Theory and Practice

Reviewed by Cessna Winslow

Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2023). *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN: 0718-5239-2. Print: \$156; E-book: \$91; 264 pages.

In preparing to redesign an upcoming Crisis Communication course, I wanted a concise, current and student-friendly text that connects theory to real-world application. *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity* meets all those needs. The book presents a clear framework for how organizations can respond to crises ethically and effectively – encouraging communicators to see crises not simply as moments of loss or reputational risk but as opportunities for learning, moral reflection and rebuilding trust.

### Overview

*Effective Crisis Communication* is thoughtfully organized and easy to navigate, with 12 chapters divided into three well-defined sections that guide readers from theory to practice to renewal.

Part I, “**The Conceptual Foundation**,” introduces the principles of crisis communication, defines key terms and establishes the theoretical groundwork for the text.

Part II, “**The Lessons and Practical Application**,” bridges concept and execution, pairing lessons learned with companion chapters that show how those lessons play out in real-world contexts. These sections cover everything from managing uncertainty to developing ethical and effective crisis leadership –

skills directly relevant to today’s communicators.

Part III, “**The Opportunities**,” explores the growth that can emerge from crisis, emphasizing learning through failure, ethical decision-making, risk communication and the renewal process that helps organizations emerge stronger than before.

The logical structure and concise chapters make the text easy for students to follow. Each chapter concludes with learning objectives and discussion prompts – such as “You Make the Call” – that encourage conversation and critical thinking. In Parts I and II, the numbered “lessons” format helps students digest complex ideas step by step. Throughout the book, Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger skillfully weave theory and application together, drawing on examples from corporate, nonprofit and government settings to make the material both relatable and realistic.

### Key Features and Classroom Appeal

One of the book’s greatest strengths is how it integrates timely case studies and social media examples, keeping the content current without sacrificing academic depth. Early chapters establish essential lessons in uncertainty management, ethical leadership and strategic communication – concepts that underpin the case studies that follow. Ethics is not treated as an add-on but as a consistent throughline, remind-

ing readers that moral responsibility lies at the heart of effective crisis response.

The brief “*You Make the Call*” exercises are particularly engaging, placing readers in the decision-maker’s role to analyze real-world scenarios and consider how they might respond. These activities are tailor-made for classroom use, sparking lively discussion and helping students move beyond reading about crisis communication to actively practicing it. The result is a text that is both intellectually grounded and highly teachable – a rare combination for upper-level communication courses.

### Evaluation and Pedagogical Applications

From a teaching perspective, *Effective Crisis Communication* is clear, concise and immediately adaptable. The writing is approachable without being simplistic and the authors consistently connect abstract theory to familiar events – product recalls, political missteps and public health crises among them. This practical lens keeps students engaged and helps them recognize how communication choices can make or break an organization’s credibility.

While the text excels in clarity and substance, it is modest in visual design. Sparse black-and-white images add little to engagement and the absence of color graphics or infographics may feel dated to visually oriented or Gen Z learners. Likewise, the lack

of supplementary teaching materials – no test banks, PowerPoints, or instructor guides – may present a challenge for instructors who rely on such tools.

Even so, the book’s strengths far outweigh its shortcomings. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger provide a well-balanced, ethically grounded and accessible guide that helps students see crisis communication not merely as damage control but as an avenue for organizational renewal. The blend of theory, real-world examples, and interactive exercises ensures students will think critically, discuss deeply and connect principles to practice long after the course ends.

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