



White Paper

## **Message Mapping: How to Communicate During the Six Stages of a Crisis**

# Message Mapping: How to Communicate During the Six Stages of a Crisis

## Do You *Know* What You Will Say?

*What you will say in the critical first minutes after receiving reports of an active shooter on campus?*

*How about six hours into the incident?*

*What will you tell people when your county issues a floodwatch?*

*Or when the power in your building goes out at 10:00 a.m. on a Monday?*

A crisis is like a living organism: it grows, it changes, it evolves over time. Each crisis has a beginning, middle, and end. Just as a crisis isn't static, what we say, who we tell, and how we reach them varies during every stage of the crisis lifecycle.

High-profile communication blunders have proven beyond question that ineffective communication hampers efforts and often contributes to cascading failures, creating a quagmire. When stress levels are high and time is short, crafting the right message is a Herculean feat.

## Learn How to Map Your Communication Strategy

This white paper dissects the various stages of a crisis and examines the intersection of communication with the crisis lifecycle. Using crisis communication expert Dr. Robert Chandler's Six Stages of a Crisis™, we apply message mapping communication best practices to every stage of the crisis lifecycle: warning, risk assessment, response, management, resolution, and post-crisis recovery. Created prior to emergency situations, message maps are clear, concise messages that simplify complex concepts and speed communication during chaos. This paper will give you the tools to define communication needs during a crisis and create messages that work.

## Evolution of a Crisis

Some organizations take a blanket approach to crisis communications. However, to be effective, it's critical to consider every stage of the crisis separately as each stage dictates your audience's information requirements and your response.

According to Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D., internationally renowned crisis communication expert, a crisis has six stages: 1) warning, 2) risk assessment, 3) response, 4) management, 5) resolution, and 6) recovery.

**What, how, and to whom you communicate varies during each of the six stages of a crisis:**

1. **Warning**
2. **Risk Assessment**
3. **Response**
4. **Management**
5. **Resolution**
6. **Recovery**

### Chandler's Six Stages of a Crisis™



1. **Warning.** Certain incident types, such as hurricanes, have very distinct warning phases. Communication during this stage is often precautionary and intended to heighten awareness. Other incidents, such as workplace violence and power outages, have no warning periods or very subtle warning signs that often go unnoticed. In these situations, many organizations bypass communication completely during the Warning Stage.
2. **Risk Assessment.** In the moments after an incident occurs and/or is reported, a core team of crisis management decision-makers assembles to determine how to handle the situation. This team activates the organization's emergency response plan. Communications are primarily geared toward assembling team members, apprising executives and

officials of the incident, and advising local law enforcement and other similar organizations of the situation.

3. **Response.** Once the emergency response plan is activated, crisis team members begin to notify the “masses” about the incident.  
Communication during the Response Stage focuses on making constituents aware of the incident, providing instructions, and calling first-responders into action.
4. **Management.** After the initial response to the incident, the crisis moves into the Management Stage. During this phase, the crisis gets better and moves toward resolution or gets worse with deepening layers of complexity. Organizations must respond differently according to the progression of the crisis. A significant percentage of communication occurs during this phase as organizations provide regular status updates to their various audiences, change or add to previous instructions, control rumors, conference with leadership and responder teams, and course-correct as needed to respond to changes in the situation.
5. **Resolution.** Once the crisis has been resolved and is drawing to conclusion, crisis team members communicate that resolution to all audiences in the form of all-clear alerts and messages of reassurance.
6. **Recovery.** During the Recovery Stage, the focus is on healing and getting back to normal. Communication often revolves around post-crisis counseling, a return to pre-crisis policies and operations, and rebuilding accomplishments.

Chandler's Six Stages of a Crisis provides the compass for understanding underlying information needs to drive effective communications.

## A Crisis Complicates Conventional Communication

Communication during a crisis is hampered by a number of unpleasant realities business continuity professionals must account for in a comprehensive emergency communication plan.

### **Truth #1: Stress negatively affects the cognitive process**

Thinking of what to say and how to say it in the middle of a crisis leads to the possibility of mixed or erroneous messages. Messages may be too long, too short, or not address relevant issues. The wrong message can contribute to existing panic and confusion. For example, during 9/11, the head of a financial company promised employees that insurance benefits would continue uninterrupted. Several months later, the company was out of business and former employees never received the promised benefits.

**Communication during a crisis is much more complex than routine communication due to stress and related factors caused by an emergency.**

### **Truth #2: Stress negatively affects comprehension**

During a crisis, average reading levels decrease four grade levels. Negative dominance also occurs; during times of stress, it takes four positive statements to balance one negative statement.

### **Truth #3: You can't forget varied demographics**

A workforce may vary in geographic location, languages, and economic resources. A message's effectiveness will be hampered if it is written in a language or manner unfamiliar to employees.

### **Truth #4: Key personnel may be unavailable**

Key personnel may be unavailable due to scheduled absences or illness. Who makes decisions if the CEO is unavailable? What happens to payroll if half of the accounting team falls ill during a pandemic outbreak?

### **Truth #5: Business reputations may suffer**

You will be under a microscope. Poorly articulated or worded answers to questions can affect an organization's survival post-disaster. The perception that an organization behaved in a competent and responsible manner during a disaster is key to recovery.

# Communication Challenges Resolved: Message Maps

Message maps are clear, concise messages created in advance of a disaster that simplify complex concepts and improve communication during chaos. Message maps are appropriate before, during, and after an incident.

Planned message maps deliver clear, consistent communication throughout a crisis. Creating message maps prior to an incident ensures messages will be specific and appropriate. Planning ahead also allows consideration of how the message will affect and motivate all audiences.

**Planned message maps:**

- Eliminate the potential for dissemination of incorrect information
- Reduce rumors
- Meet elevated information demands
- Ensure the right message reaches the public
- Reassure those affected of an organization's ability to handle a disaster

**Message maps are clear, concise messages created prior to a crisis that simplify complex concepts and speed communication during chaos. Message maps are appropriate before, during, and after a crisis.**

<b>Message maps ARE:</b>	<b>Message maps are NOT:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy to understand</li><li>• Created prior to a crisis</li><li>• A simple way to organize complex information</li><li>• Distillations of complicated concepts written at a sixth-grade reading level</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficult to understand</li><li>• Created during a crisis</li><li>• Long, convoluted dissertations on what to do in a crisis</li><li>• Written with lots of technical jargon and high-level reading words</li></ul>

**Message maps are created prior to disasters.**

In creating message maps ahead of time, organizations have the time and resources to explore all possible disaster scenarios and map out all messaging needs by audience and stage of a crisis.

**Message maps are written at or below a sixth-grade reading level**

Reading ability and comprehension drops approximately four grade levels during times of stress. Planned communication ensures messages are understood by the widest possible audience. Message maps are created by distilling information down to easily understood messages written at or below a sixth-grade reading level.

**Message maps adhere to the 3-3-30 Rule.**

Message maps consist of three short sentences that convey three key messages in 30 words or less. The best chance of getting an audience's attention occurs within the first 9 seconds of a visual or audio broadcast or during the first 30 words of written material.

**Message maps are specific to one organization.**

Message maps convey information specific to an organization, e.g. work resumption, post-disaster insurance availability, and bereavement policies.

**Message maps consider the needs of varied demographic groups.**

Organizations may need multiple messages for various demographic groups. Creating message maps ahead of time allows organizations to take into account knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that suggest how target audiences will react to messages. Messages can also be translated into multiple languages.

**The best chance of getting an audience's attention occurs within the first 9 seconds of a visual or audio broadcast or during the first 30 words of written material.**

## **Creating Effective Message Maps**

If message maps are essential to emergency preparedness, why don't more organizations have them in place? Creating a message mapping strategy takes time, energy, and resources. The process involves input from many members of an organization. Although time-intensive, disaster planning can save lives, company assets, and organizational reputations. In the long run, it is economically more effective to take the time and resources to ensure excellent preparation. To create a message mapping strategy:

**Determine your core constituent audiences.**

Who is involved in or affected by your organization? List all possible audiences, e.g. employees, customers, vendors, suppliers, government regulators,

investors. Employees can also be divided into subcategories such as managers, field workers, clerical staff, and more.

**Walk through every possible disaster scenario.**

List all the likely scenarios that may affect your organization, such as power outages and weather-related closures. Then brainstorm the what-if scenarios: active shooters, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, pandemics, salmonella scares, and more. What do you need to communicate to employees, students, nurses, or others? How do their information needs change during the various stages of a crisis?

**Consider legal, financial, and other ramifications.**

In determining types of messages, consider:

- Legal implications
- Public relations implications
- Financial implications
- Business operations

**Determine channels of communication.**

How will these messages be communicated? Email, phone, text message, fax, other? How will your organization know the message was sent? Is there a confirmation process? Is there an automated system in place or will your organization need to set up a phone bank to contact others?

**Hone and refine message maps.**

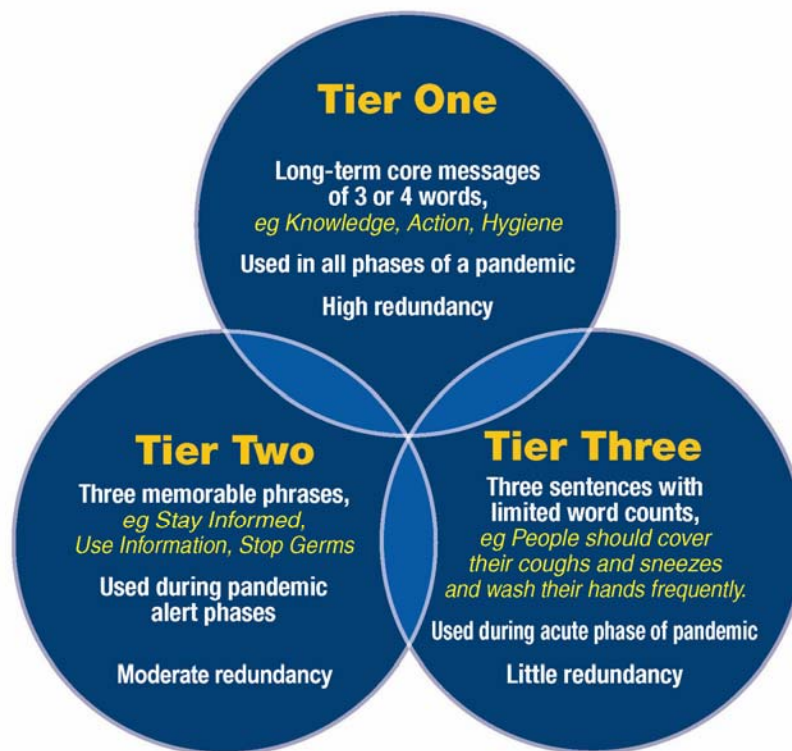
Traditional message maps reduce important, emergency-relevant concepts to no more than three short sentences that convey three key messages in 30 words or less at a sixth-grade reading level. Test messages for comprehension and revise as necessary.



## The Chandler Message Mapping Model

The Chandler Message Mapping Model™ (Chandler Methodology)—named for its originator, organizational communication expert Dr. Robert Chandler—is a more sophisticated version of traditional message mapping. This model of emergency communication makes use of three different levels of mapping, capitalizing on the idea that information needs are quite different throughout the various stages of a crisis, requiring a slightly different approach. In the Warning Stage of a crisis, audiences may not find traditional messages relevant or compelling. Those audiences are unlikely to remember even distilled messages, while mid-crisis audiences have needs for more specific information. Messages created using this system are intended to develop and hold audience attention over time.

The Chandler Methodology uses three types of messages that work together before, during, and following a crisis. These three types of messages are best represented as three tiers:



**The Chandler Message Mapping Model of emergency communication makes use of three different levels of message mapping, capitalizing on the idea that information needs are quite different during the various stages of a crisis.**

### Tier 1 - Long-term basic core messages

Core messages intended for long-term use should be reduced to phrases of no more than three or four words, e.g. "Duck and Cover" and "Click It or Ticket."

Core messages can be used in all phases of a crisis and as such must be extremely simple and redundant. For example, a first-tier pandemic message might be "Knowledge, Action, Hygiene."

### Tier 2 - Three easy-to-remember phrases

Second-tier messages are only moderately repetitive and are used to convey information during warning phases. Rhythm and rhyming are important in tier-two messages. For example, law enforcement uses "Click It or Ticket" as a tier-one long-term core message. A tier-two message would be "Stay Alert, Stay Awake, Stay Alive."

### Tier 3 - Three sentences with limited word counts

Third-tier messaging is appropriate for the acute phases of a crisis and is very similar to traditional message mapping. Third-tier messaging uses three sentences with limited word counts to provide detailed instructions or information. Third-tier messages are more personally relevant to specific audiences, e.g. those in danger due to a natural disaster or active shooter. These messages have the lowest amount of redundancy and contain the greatest amount of specific information.

**“ High-profile communication gaffes are caused by lack of preparation, confusing or inaccurate communication, or inability to get a message out quickly to the right people. ”**

-Dr. Robert Chandler

### Redundancy

Each phase of the Chandler Methodology makes use of different levels of redundancy. High redundancy is only appropriate at tier-one messaging; moderate redundancy is appropriate at tier-two. Third-level messaging needs to have the lowest amount of redundancy.

### The Chandler Message Mapping Model:

- Is a more sophisticated version of traditional message mapping
- Makes use of three different levels of message mapping
- Develops and holds audience attention over time
- Recognizes that *pre-incident* information needs are quite different from *mid-incident* and *post-incident* needs

## Creating Message Maps: Working Backwards

The creation of Chandler Message Maps is very similar to that of traditional maps. However, the reductive nature of Chandler Message Maps means that messages are created from most complicated to least complicated.

- Begin with the overall goal in mind.
- Determine the three sub-points that relate to the goal.
- Create three sentences for each message goal (Tier 3).
- Reduce sentences to three short phrases (Tier 2).
- Reduce phrases to three or four words (Tier 1).

## Sample Message

Incident	Stage	Topic	Audience	Spokes-person	Tier 3: Key Messages	Tier 2: Key Phrases	Tier 1: Key Words
Bomb Threat	Management	Police are searching buildings to contain the threat.	Parents	President, Dean of Students	Student safety is our number-one priority. The campus is in lockdown while the police search the buildings. We will continue to give you updates as we have more news.	N/A	N/A

## Message Mapping Worksheet

Incident	Stage	Topic	Audience	Spokes-person	Tier 3: Key Messages	Tier 2: Key Phrases	Tier 1: Key Words
			Employees				
			Customers				
			Suppliers				
			Investors				
			Regulators, government				
			Media				
			General public				

## The Everbridge Solution: Rapid Dissemination of Message Maps

Strategy and execution are equally important in an emergency and just as challenging to get right. You can't have effective communication without a strategy. Message mapping provides that strategy: what you will say, to whom, and when. But message maps don't work if you don't have a way to deliver them.

Automated incident notification systems are the optimal communication platform for delivering your messages. An incident notification system can deliver voice and text messages to tens, hundreds, or thousands of people within minutes. **Everbridge** is a proven provider of incident notification services that are effective in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

## Top 10 Reasons Organizations Select Everbridge

1. **Everbridge understands incident communication challenges better than any other provider.** Incidents are complex and multi-dimensional. Our solutions account for this complexity to ensure you can communicate effectively in any situation. Other providers take an ineffective, one-size-fits-all approach to incident notification.
2. **Everbridge brings technology and expertise together at every level for a complete solution.** Everbridge provides solutions that match incident needs, from safety and survival during a crisis to cutting costs and achieving efficiencies in your everyday incident response. Our understanding of incident communication challenges is leveraged in everything we do, from how we built our technology from the ground up to the expertise of the people we hire and learning opportunities we make available to the incident management community.
3. **Everbridge has the experience you need perfected through years of use during real disasters.** Everbridge has been battle-tested in the trenches of the toughest emergencies, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav, the Southeast Asian Tsunami, London Bombings, and the Southern California Wildfires, and has been used heavily to keep operations running during

“Living on the coast, hurricane evacuations are a matter of life and death. As the severity of Hurricane Ike became clear, the Everbridge Aware system allowed us to notify all of the affected residents and business owners about the storm's projected path and deliver vital information within minutes.”

- Alicia Cahill  
Public Information Officer  
City of Galveston

power outages, snow storms, and other routine incidents.

4. **The world's leading organizations rely on Everbridge.** Organizations in more than 100 countries—including Salesforce.com, AirTran Airways, the American Red Cross, and Virginia Tech—rely on Everbridge for quick, reliable, and cost-effective incident communication anytime, anywhere. Everbridge's diverse customer base and extensive experience ensures we have met the incident notification needs of organizations like yours.
5. **Everbridge is the easiest-to-use incident notification system available.** When seconds count, an incident notification solution designed for non-technical users can make the difference between a happy ending and a tragic outcome. Everbridge conducts regular usability studies to maintain its leadership position as the easiest-to-use notification system available.
6. **Everbridge provides the capabilities you need to manage any incident successfully.** Everbridge provides the most robust functionality for communicating during all types of incidents, from the routine to the catastrophic. Whether you need flexible, freeform messaging to respond to the unexpected or guided, matrix-based messaging to accommodate incident type, severity, complexity, who is sending the message and to whom, Everbridge gives you the tools you need to be successful. Advanced, optional features enable you to further configure the system to meet your notification needs.
7. **We're always there when you need us.** Everbridge owns and operates our infrastructure from end-to-end, ensuring unparalleled performance, reliability, and security. Some providers outsource their telephony to third parties, creating multiple dependencies and numerous points of failure outside their control. The Everbridge incident notification platform is built on Oracle technology using an active-active architecture—the only notification solution on the market that leverages this powerful combination. Active-active provides constant data replication across Everbridge's multiple globally dispersed data centers, ensuring that a large disaster will not disrupt the Everbridge service unlike other solutions that experience failover delays.

“Everbridge has a superior infrastructure unmatched by the numerous other products we researched. Many companies claimed to provide the most reliable service, but only Everbridge could back it up.”

- Jim Tabor,  
VP of Operations,  
AirTran Airways

8. **Everbridge mirrors the way you work.** No need to overhaul your existing systems or processes just to accommodate an incident notification solution. The highly configurable Everbridge incident notification system maps to your processes and integrates easily with your existing systems through a comprehensive integration toolset that enables the Everbridge incident notification system to work with almost any application containing contact information or business continuity plans.
9. **Everbridge helps you make better decisions.** When managing through an incident, you need to allocate resources, deploy response teams, provide instructions, and get information back in minutes, not hours or days. The right people get the right message faster with Everbridge's superior targeting capabilities and intelligent sequential message delivery. Results are updated in real-time, providing you with an up-to-the-second dashboard for informed decision-making, unlike more limited systems that cannot report results until after a broadcast has ended.
10. **Everbridge delivers a proven ROI.** Whether your objective is ensuring the survival of your organization and constituents or rescuing your bottom line from daily incidents that affect productivity and efficiency, Everbridge provides a quantifiable ROI (Return on Investment) for your routine and emergency notification needs.

## Everbridge Message Map Library<sup>SM</sup>

The Everbridge Message Map Library is a library of customizable messages available exclusively from Everbridge for fast, accurate response to a wide range of emergency situations ranging from natural disasters and workplace or campus violence to more routine business interruptions, such as power outages and building closures. In response to high-profile events such as the Virginia Tech tragedy, message maps—incident-based, pre-written messages that outline who to contact and what to say—have become a major focus point of emergency response and business continuity planners worldwide.

The Everbridge Message Map Library lays out a roadmap of what to say, to whom and when, helping organizations avoid common communication pitfalls so they can more effectively manage a crisis.

The Everbridge Message Map Library was created based on crisis communication best practices developed by Dr. Chandler according to Chandler's Six Stages of a Crisis: warning, risk assessment, response, management, resolution and post-crisis recovery. Each message map, or scenario, sets out detailed guidelines for message criteria at every stage of the crisis lifecycle. Concise messages are written at a sixth-grade level and include no more than three key concepts for maximum comprehension. Messages in the Everbridge Message Map Library can be customized for use by any organization and integrated into a comprehensive emergency response plan.

## Everbridge for Pandemics™

Everbridge for Pandemics, which leverages decades of research by internationally recognized crisis communication expert, Dr. Robert Chandler, includes all of the following:

**Pandemic readiness self-audit worksheet** to assess your organization's pandemic readiness and pinpoint gaps in your plan

**Chandler Methodology™ pandemic message maps**, licensed *exclusively* to Everbridge, that tell you what to say to employees, customers, suppliers, investors, partners, and the media before, during, and after a pandemic

**Pandemic preparedness presentations** to help you justify the importance of pandemic planning when talking to senior management

**Two-hour executive audio briefing** featuring Dr. Chandler talking about the key business issues executives need to be aware of during a pandemic

**Pandemic communication plan testing and validation tool** for your key 100 contacts to ensure that your pandemic communication response will work when it's needed most

## About Robert C. Chandler, Ph.D.



Dr. Robert Chandler is a recognized expert on organizational behavior and communication with research expertise focusing on issues such as pandemic communications, crisis leadership, crisis teams, crisis decision-making and behavior, human factors during organizational crises, and organizational communication assessment in a wide variety of business and corporate contexts. He has written more than 75 papers and articles and has authored six books, including "Disaster Recovery in the News Media" and his most recent work, "Media Relations – Concepts and Principles for Effective Public Relations Practice". Dr. Chandler is the Director of the Nicholson School

of Communication at the University of Central Florida.

He is also a member of the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, the International Communication Association, the American Forensic Association, and the National Communication Association.



## About Everbridge

Everbridge, the world's recognized leader in incident notification systems, merges technology with industry expertise to help millions of people communicate in a crisis and connect on a daily basis. The company's notification platform and incident lifecycle communications model make communicating to many as simple and effective as communicating to one. Organizations in more than 100 countries—including Salesforce.com, AirTran Airways, the American Red Cross, and Virginia Tech—rely on Everbridge for their emergency notification and day-to-day incident communication needs. For more information about Everbridge, visit [www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com).

## Contact Us

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