

SPINNING STRAW

INTO **GOLD:**

TURNING OBSTACLES
INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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TODAY'S PRESENTATION

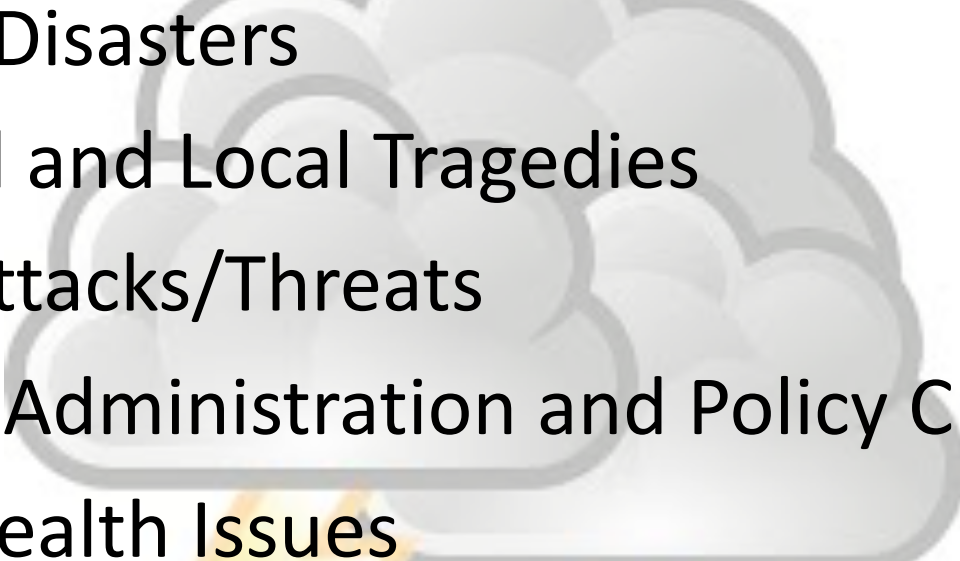
- 1. GROWING CONCERNS FACED BY LEADERS IN INDEPENDENT EDUCATION**
 - EXTERNAL EVENTS
 - INTERNAL EVENTS
- 2. CRISIS MANAGEMENT NON-NEGOTIABLES**
- 3. CASE STUDY PERSPECTIVES**

WEATHERING THE STORM

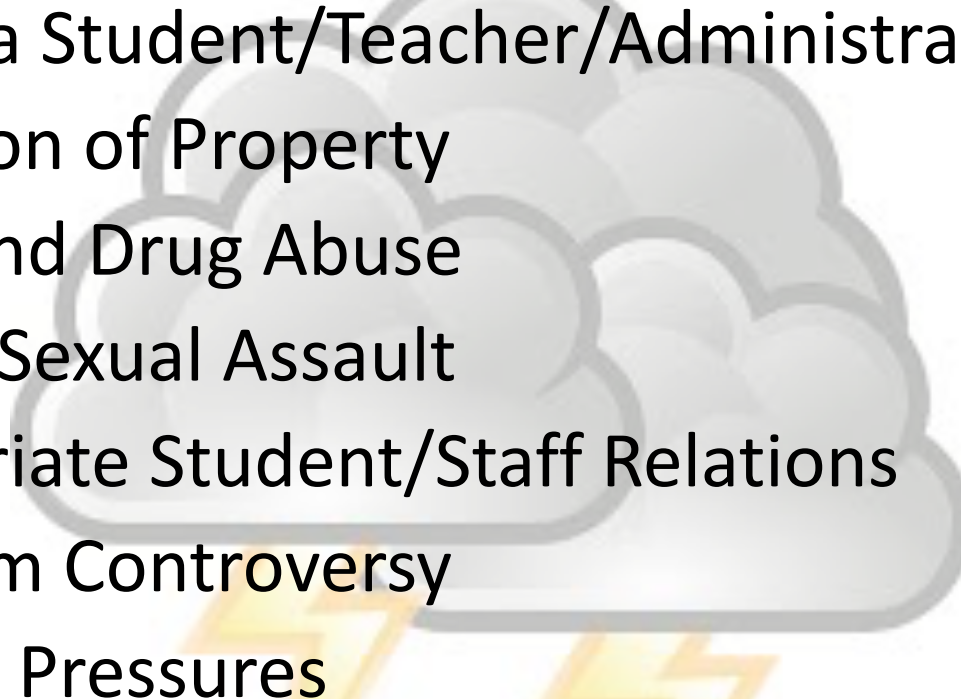


Leaders in independent education face a wider range of possible crises and disruptions than ever before, occurring both inside their institutions and within the broader world community.

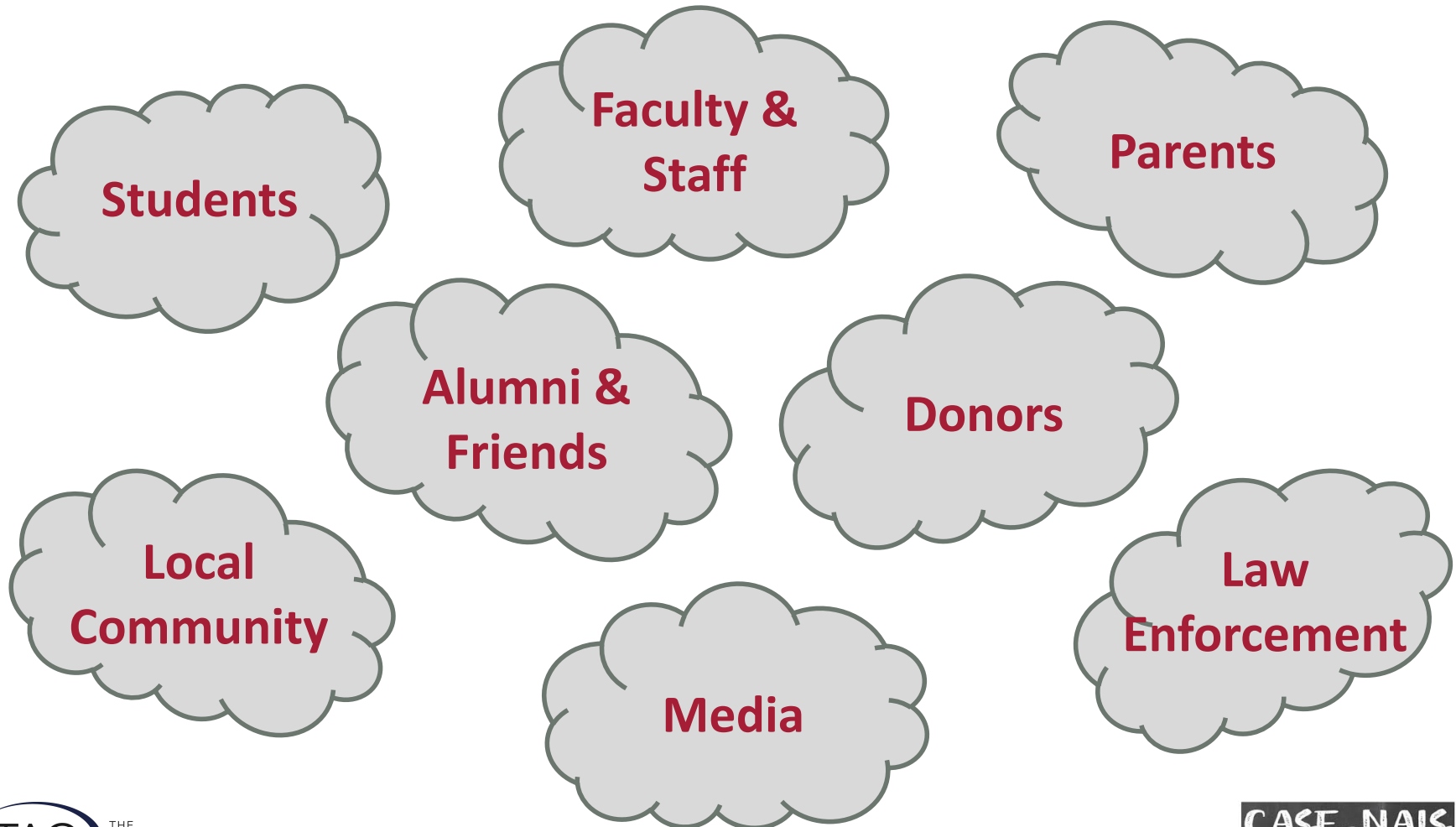
EXTERNAL CRISES

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- Natural Disasters
 - National and Local Tragedies
 - Terror Attacks/Threats
 - Political Administration and Policy Changes
 - Public Health Issues

INTERNAL CRISES

- Death of a Student/Teacher/Administrator
 - Destruction of Property
 - Alcohol and Drug Abuse
 - Violence/Sexual Assault
 - Inappropriate Student/Staff Relations
 - Curriculum Controversy
 - Economic Pressures
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ADDRESS KEY STAKEHOLDERS



CRISIS MANAGEMENT NON-NEGOTIABLES

“Start by doing what’s
necessary, then do what’s
possible, and pretty soon
you’re doing the *impossible*.”

- St. Francis of Assisi

1. PLAN AHEAD

While not possible for every situation, it is prudent to have a well-communicated and practiced crisis management plan in place at your institution.

- Recruit a crisis management “task force” of willing and reliable colleagues.
- Define and assign specific roles based on each person’s skillset.
- Arrange and participate in an annual “drill.”

2. CONVENE YOUR TEAM

Do not react impulsively. Convene other trusted colleagues to design a coordinated response.

- Convene your crisis management task force at central location to announce what has happened.
- Discuss an appropriate response and delegate tasks to each team member.
- **Own your role as leader** – do not pass off important tasks simply because they are unpleasant.

3. NAME THE ISSUE, PUBLICLY

“A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

- *Winston Churchill*

- As an independent school leader, **it is YOUR job to be the spokesperson.**
- Tell the truth and tell it fast – people are bewildered and seek information quickly in a crisis.
- If leadership fails to deliver a prompt, public response, they are often blamed (correctly OR incorrectly) for the issue.
- Transparency is key to maintaining trust.

4. RESPOND AUTHENTICALLY

Trust your intuition and respond authentically. Too much stoicism or too much emotion can both be perceived as forced.

- Leaders use all of themselves, *including* their emotions.
- Determine the parties affected most by the issue and maintain continuous communication. This may include individual meetings and/or phone calls with key players.
- Following a crisis, many people will want to speak with you personally. Within reason, make time for these people to be heard – they may become your advocates in the future.

5. PARTICIPATE IN A RESOLUTION

Work alongside key stakeholders to pick up the pieces and implement safeguards for the future.

- Ensure the availability of necessary resources for community support, such as counselors, group therapy, etc.
- Provide parents with guidance on how to address the issue at home.
- If applicable, implement appropriate disciplinary measures.
- If applicable, implement increased safety measures.
- If a crisis management plan for the issue was not previously in place, create one to prevent the issue from happening again.

6. BREATHE

A good leader must take care of themselves in order to be most helpful to others.

- Take time to process the events for yourself, in whatever way makes the most sense for *you*.
- Ask for help if you need it, and demonstrate the importance of self-care to others.

7. MAKE MEANING FOR THE FUTURE

Crises are devastating at the time of their occurrence, but their aftermath can present opportunities for improvement and increased community engagement.

- Own your story – and tell it! Stories create shared meaning and inspire hope.
- If applicable, create a meaningful memorial to bring people together.
- Encourage and accept contributions from those who want to help.
- Thank your community for their cooperation and response during the crisis.
- Overcoming a crisis together creates a deeper, more powerful bond between an institution and its stakeholders.

CASE STUDY PERSPECTIVES

**“Experience is a hard teacher because she gives
the test first, the lesson afterward.”**

- Vernon Sanders Law



CASE STUDY 1

An External Issue – Local School's Response to the Sandy Hook Tragedy

- New Headmaster – 5 months into the job
- K-8 day school located just 20 miles from Sandy Hook Elementary
- Word of the mass shooting came in during dismissal preceding the weekend
- Due to the age of students involved in the tragedy and close proximity to the incident, significant concern was shown by parents, teachers board, and student body

THE RESPONSE

Convene, Discuss, Own

- Convened pre-established safety committee along with administrative team
- Created a response plan, communicated it to leadership and faculty, and delegated next steps

Tell the Truth and Tell it Fast

- Headmaster took on role of sole communicator
- Wrote to parents immediately, explaining protocols already in place, and the plan moving forward
- Engaged school psychologist and other resources from NAIS and CAIS
- Maintained regular contact with parents through meetings and ongoing communications, including proactive safety measures

THE RESPONSE

Outcome

- Brought community tightly together, generated new connections
- Earned trust of faculty, staff, students and parents
- Created a safer environment in which to learn and work
- Created an opportunity for students to have an open dialogue and reduce anxiety
- Board members felt engaged, helpful and part of the conversation

Lessons – Resolutions & Safeguards

- Crises arise when you least expect
- Importance of making plans **before** something happens
- Who are our experts, and how do we support the community in different scenarios?
- **Constant** contact with a **clearly** outlined plan creates tremendous trust

CASE STUDY 2

An Internal Issue – Possible Sexual Assault Between Students

- K-12 day and boarding school with 150 students
- Headmaster abroad on a recruitment trip
- Received phone call reporting an inappropriate sexual encounter between a male and female student during unstructured time in an empty classroom

THE RESPONSE

Convene, Discuss, Own

- Returned home and brought together leadership team
- Gathered information and established basic facts about incident
- Took control of the situation by forming high-level plan for next steps

Tell the Truth and Tell it Fast

- Spoke to legal counsel ***before*** board chair, and sought advice from trusted and experienced colleagues
- Called law enforcement immediately
- Convened faculty and staff meeting
- Met with all of the students in age-appropriate groups
- Informed parents and held parent meetings

THE RESPONSE

Outcome

- Situation handled in a timely manner by appropriate professionals
- Students' legal rights and privacy protected
- Earned respect of local law enforcement
- Learning opportunity for students, affirmation of “safe” spaces
- Earned/reinforced trust with parent body
- There was “no story” to tell

Lessons – Resolutions & Safeguards

- Protocols for leadership when the head is off campus
- Open dialogue and safe spaces for reporting
- Need for established relationship with law enforcement
- Legal counsel – right team for right situation

CASE STUDY 3

Choate Rosemary Hall and the “Preppie Connection”: Well Meaning But Over Matched

- Choate Rosemary Hall – “elite” college preparatory school in Wallingford, CT
- 1984 – scholarship student and girlfriend detained by U.S. Customs agents at JFK International airport as they returned from Venezuela with as much as \$300,000 worth of cocaine, purchased with money from wealthier classmates
- The story was picked up by the media, and an in-depth special aired on *60 Minutes*, featuring an interview with the Headmaster

THE RESPONSE

- Headmaster, well meaning and forthright, saw an opportunity to talk about a national epidemic
- Ill prepared to go head to head with aggressive *60 Minutes* team
- School's lack of experience and coordination were exposed
- Perceived laissez-faire attitude alienated viewers



The scandal inspired an independent film in 2015

DISCUSSION:

How could this situation
have been handled better?

QUESTIONS?



THANK YOU

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