

12 Elements of Great Crisis Management Playbooks

1. Provide a graphics-friendly “How To Use This Playbook” with step-by-step guidance on plan sections and tools, replacing a more static Table of Contents.
2. Keep playbook “introductions” and “definitions” to a minimum -- these become superfluous and debilitating pages when managing a crisis.
3. Assign a few core roles to a handful of crisis management leaders. Beyond that, don’t weigh down support staff with clunky crisis management titles or roles.
4. Direct action through brief, directive language in the active tense. (This list may serve as a template.)
5. Adopt a modular approach with resources that scale up and down, based on the unique characteristics of each crisis.
6. Provide broad, top-line strategic and tactical considerations, rather than bogging a playbook down with granular “completism.”
7. Provide strong key messages and a list of “tough Q’s” in the content section of the playbook. This should render long Q&A documents unnecessary.
8. Provide only 25-50 percent of the content needed for press releases, fact sheets, timelines and related tools. Avoid more specific Swiss-cheese templates, which rarely get used in an actual crisis.
9. Provide contact lists in an appendix, made available electronically. Even better -- consider integrating your contact list into a notification system (e.g., www.sendword.now, www.missionmode.com) and schedule regular updates.
10. Digitize the playbook and provide secure access whenever and wherever the tools are needed. Consider making playbooks available through mobile devices. Avoid relying only on binders.
11. Assign a Playbook Master and Playbook Administrator to shepherd content updates and process updates, respectively. Make sure updates happen at least quarterly.
12. Socialize, orient, train and test the playbook *at least annually* with your crisis management team. And constantly solicit feedback for playbook improvements.

Excerpted and re-organized from blog posts titled “The Disabling Dozen: Common Crisis Plan Impediments” [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).