

- ▶ crisis communication strategies
- ▶ analogies and alliteration
- ▶ roleplay: interview in a crisis situation

### 6.4 Management skills Communicating in a crisis

#### Discussion

**1** You organized a New Year's party and several guests have been injured by fireworks and taken to hospital. How do you deal with the press?

Mark this advice ✓ = I agree, ✗ = I disagree or ? = it depends.

- 1 When journalists phone you, say you are too busy to speak to them.
- 2 Smile for the cameras as you walk to your car; after all, nobody has died.
- 3 At the press conference, emphasize how successful the party was in raising money for charity.
- 4 When a journalist says local fire regulations were ignored, tell her she is mistaken.
- 5 When journalists claim guests threw fireworks from table to table, ask them who told them that.
- 6 When asked how much compensation the injured guests will receive, give an optimistic figure.

Work in small groups and compare your answers.

#### Reading


**2** Read the article and choose *Do* or *Don't*. Which pieces of advice apply to the situation in Exercise 1?

## 'It will never happen to me'

**T**he first myth to strangle at birth is that crises only happen to other people. Like so many other business skills, the essence of communicating in a crisis is preparation; if you're convinced it's not going to happen, you're unlikely to have prepared for the worst. Admittedly, you may never find yourself being questioned on prime time TV about why your government is doing nothing to stop refugees starving to death, or why your company allowed toxic chemicals to leak into the water supply. But sooner or later, you almost certainly *will* find yourself facing questions about why your project is behind schedule, or why you can't deliver your customer's order. In every case, following a few simple dos and don'ts can make life a lot easier.

- 1 Do/Don't prepare – for the questions you want to answer, those you can't answer, and especially for the ones you really *don't* want to answer. Find out what your opponents are saying, and prepare an answer for that too. Have an answer ready for everything.
- 2 Do/Don't be led where you don't want to go: as long as you provide relevant information, there is no need to answer leading or trick questions.
- 3 Do/Don't build bridges from questions you don't want to answer so that you can give the answers you want to.
- 4 Do/Don't use sound bite techniques: indicate that you are going to summarize the essentials, leave a brief pause to focus attention, then deliver your key message in 20 seconds or less.
- 5 Do/Don't be drawn into speculating about outcomes for which there is no evidence.
- 6 Do/Don't formulate your ideas in negative terms; always use positives.
- 7 Do/Don't use alliteration and groups of two or three words to reinforce your key messages.
- 8 Do/Don't use analogies or stories to explain difficult or technical concepts.

#### Listening

**3**  2:14–2:21 Listen to extracts from eight interviews in crisis situations. What situations are being discussed, and which of the tips in Exercise 2 are, or are not, being applied?

**4**  2:14–2:21 Listen again and complete the key phrases.

- 1 Running a business without risk management \_\_\_\_\_ walking a tightrope.
- 2 It's a \_\_\_\_\_ question, but I think the bigger \_\_\_\_\_ here is really ...
- 3 Even more \_\_\_\_\_, the new machines will improve precision, productivity and profitability.
- 4 Let's \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_, shall we?
- 5 The really \_\_\_\_\_ thing to \_\_\_\_\_ is that talks are underway.
- 6 Let's not \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ there is no evidence of patients suffering any ill effects.
- 7 Let me \_\_\_\_\_ the current position.
- 8 We are \_\_\_\_\_ that the commission will report that there was no wrongdoing.