

# 6 Communication Tips From Emergency Managers

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Before, during and after an emergency it's absolutely critical to provide information and communicate. Why? Because in an emergency, and in life in general, the vacuum created when nothing is communicated is filled with information that can be, and often is, incorrect.

The principles outlined by organizational theorist Chris Argyris in his model, the [Ladder of Inference](#), hold especially true in the domain of emergency management. Argyris' proposition is that in the absence of information people make things up (assumptions) due to a need to make sense of something. Then people take action based on those assumptions. The danger, of course, is that often those [assumptions](#), are incorrect. So, while in everyday life the stakes may not be as high during an emergency event, making sure people have valid and timely information could be the difference between life and death. This said, in some circumstances there isn't time to validate information and yet communication must happen anyway.

Here are six lessons from leaders in emergency management about the importance of communication during an emergency event:

1. **Fill the vacuum, even if you have nothing specifically substantive to share.** It's OK to say "we have no further information right now." It's not okay to say nothing.

2. **If you know when you might have more information, say so.** And then even if you don't have more information at the point you said you might, communicate that it turns out you don't have the information you thought you would.
3. **Track social media** and, yes, correct wrong social media posts. Repost (like, retweet, etc.) those that are correct.
4. **At the risk of repeating yourself, do it anyway.** During times of crisis people's mental states are compromised and they may not hear everything they need to. So it's important to communicate, communicate, communicate. You may be tired of hearing yourself say the same things over and over; the person who is hearing you for the first time will be glad you repeated yourself.
5. **Give your social media a face**, yes, an actual picture of your social media/communications staff. Negative comments will slow down because people won't as readily attack a person as they will an email address, twitter handle, etc. Anonymity makes for an easy punching bag.
6. **Don't be scared to put info out there**, even if you don't have time to validate every detail. This is a tough one. Incomplete or unvalidated information could be the difference between life and death. If necessary, add more information or correct previously shared information when you know more. As with item number one, sharing some information is better than nothing. And sometimes providing information, even if it turns out that later you have to update it, is better than providing no information at all.

While these lessons come from emerging leaders in emergency management, the advice holds true for leaders regardless of their domain. We often hear leaders express frustration that they've already communicated information to their teams or organizations. Many seem to believe they should only have to say something once. Leaders must communicate the important stuff over and over and over and do it until people get the message. Until then, the leader hasn't done his or her job. If there is something you need to make sure people hear, act as if it is a matter of life and death and borrow a page from the emergency manager's playbook