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# Management by Walking Around Gets You Ready for a Crisis

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“You are only as good as your contacts,” a veteran law enforcement official once said. That adage proves true every day in the public and private sectors. A chief security officer has to nurture, cultivate and respect relationships with internal and external partners who are essential to resolving a critical incident. One way to do so is to simply walk around.

“Management by walking around,” a classic business concept, involves executives meeting with employees and external partners face-to-face, listening to their concerns and collecting information on operational developments. A security executive should understand the dynamics and procedures of these entities before a disaster strikes.

When I was a security executive at a Fortune 50 company, I noticed a lack of dialogue and partnership with key organizations. The company rarely interacted with outside agencies, even though investigative and fire protection responsibilities warranted cooperation. My staff and I initiated meetings with department associates and external agencies to gain an understanding of their concerns and requirements.

To enhance the organization's emergency preparedness, we established a crisis management team, comprising senior executives, the company president and me, and then collaborated to develop a contingency plan. Members became comfortable addressing situations that may occur outside the scope of conventional business activities, including explosions, kidnappings and workplace violence incidents. Police and fire officials also participated in several exercises.

A large-scale functional crisis exercise involved the county Office of Emergency Management. The exercise, which involved a simulated collision between a company plane and a commercial airliner, took six months to plan and strengthened the organization's partnership with community responders. The exercise stipulated that the company plane contained sensitive proprietary information that was discovered at the crash site. The business agonized over the protection of the product and demanded its return, but the incident commander hesitated. The crisis management team, in partnership with local government officials, reached an agreement about how to best protect the data while maintaining the integrity of the crash scene. The media also participated in the exercise, and joint press statements were released.

Several months following the exercise, a commercial airliner crashed at the city's international airport. In interviews with the press, the county emergency manager acknowledged that the exercise had aided in an expeditious response and helped the responders understand the needs of local businesses impacted by the accident. Our corporate air terminal was in the affected area, but relationships established with public agencies enabled us to recover our operations in a short time.

Relationships with internal and external partners pay enormous dividends during incident response. Disasters occur in any organization, and the security executives must form advance partnerships for emergency planning and crisis management. Time spent with external partners will reduce the confusion and misunderstandings that confound response to a critical incident.

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