



WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH:

*Our **Top 10 Lessons Learned** from Helping Senior Care Organizations Tell Their Story in Key Moments of Challenge and Change*

Whether it's an affiliation, strategic partnership, merger, sale, or even closure – every organization serving seniors has to consider how it will evolve and adapt in the coming years.

From our work across the country with senior care organizations navigating this uncharted territory, our team at Denny Civic Solutions shares our Top 10 lessons learned when it comes to communicating with your organization's audiences at key moments:

- 1 Before beginning, define what a win looks like.**
Change is hard, and good organizations prioritize helping residents, families, and staff navigate what can be a frightening experience. Generally, a win does not mean avoiding any negativity whatsoever, but rather (a) Telling your story from a position of strength, (b) Ensuring your key stakeholders feel informed AND heard and (c) Protecting your brand.
- 2 Be prepared to face a worst case scenario head-on.**
Having a leak strategy in place early is essential. If outside factors force your hand before you intend to announce a significant organizational change, preparing your key messages in advance helps you communicate authentically, even in “crisis mode.”
- 3 Expect the unexpected – and plan for a crisis.**
Monitoring media (print, broadcast, and social) in real time helps you adapt your messaging before and after your news goes public. On a practical level, this means creating a shared “rapid response” document where your whole team can share intel and post updates.
- 4 Define your audiences with care.**
Unique audiences call for unique communications strategies. Residents need a personal touch. Families shouldn't first hear about your announcement on the evening news. And a social media post shouldn't read the same as a letter to your employees.

- 5 Keep your board informed – and prepare them.**
Your board is just as critical an audience as residents, families, staff, and the general public. Get their buy-in early, and give them tools (such as a Board Protocol Document) that helps them manage community conversations while preserving confidentiality.

- 6 Project manage the day (and the week...and the month).**
Who delivers letters to residents? When? Which staff members do you need to meet with early? Who buys the donuts? A minute-by-minute day-of plan is essential to keep things humming smoothly.

- 7 Tap outside influencers.**
Key community partners can help carry your message. Sometimes it's having an influencer quoted in a press release about the challenges leading to the news at hand. Other times it's having trusted social workers on hand the day of your announcement to help worried families navigate. Lean on your network.

- 8 Be authentic and keep it real.**
People know Covid has hit the industry hard. They understand that it's hard to retain good employees. Whatever your challenges are, be real with your audiences. But also...

- 9 Share problems - but bring solutions**
If you're announcing tough news, part of understanding the why is knowing how it positions the organization for the future. Meanwhile, have your operations in place to support the announcement – where are people going to go? Who's going to help them?

- 10 Practice makes perfect – get your spokesperson to REHEARSE!**
You don't talk to a reporter the same way you talk to a friend. Media training your spokesperson(s) pays dividends. It helps prepare them to stay on message while fielding tough questions – and ultimately results in a better story.

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