

## **Prompt**

Students will conduct a thorough analysis of an individual or incident/event in which effective communications strategies were successfully implemented in managing a crisis. This is the opposite outcome from what is expected in case studies – you will identify what someone did correctly. Examinations must discuss the situational analysis, identify challenges to success, and analyze the use of strategies among stakeholders, in the media (traditional and social), and online as appropriate. Students will be expected to conduct research and provide evidence of their subject's successful implementation, as well as their own analysis of the strategies used and how they were effective.

### JetBlue Valentine's Day Crisis

#### Situation Analysis

On February 14, 2007, JetBlue planes at John F. Kennedy International Airport faced an operational delay due to an ice storm. This delay allowed flights to land, but prevented flights from taking off, stranding millions of people and thus creating a ripple effect that lasted for six days.

Out of 156 scheduled departures, only 17 JetBlue flights left John F. Kennedy International Airport on February 14, with some passengers waiting on the runway for more than six hours. Throughout the six days of JetBlue being down, up to 2,000 flights were cancelled, costing JetBlue millions of dollars. On February 20, 2007, normal JetBlue operations resumed, but the damage to their reputation was already done.

#### Challenges to Success

- News coverage  
Multiple television, radio, and print companies releasing stories immediately and without complete facts.
- Protests  
Protests put on by customers and/or employees who feel they have been wronged by JetBlue.
- Social media  
Passengers and/or employees posting to social media during and after the incident with potentially false information.
- Competing airlines  
Competing airlines using JetBlue's error to swoop in and make deals with JetBlue customers in order to gain customers and business.
- Employee retention  
Employees becoming fed up with the solution to the incident, thus deciding to quit.

#### Stakeholders

- Board of Directors
- Customers
- Crewmembers
- Investors
- Airport employees

- Federal Aviation Administration
- Travel Agents
- Tourism Organizations

### Communication Tools

- Public statement  
A public statement was given immediately following the incident.
- Bill of Customer Rights  
The Bill of Customer Rights was created within the month of the incident.
- Television appearances including:  
*American Morning*  
*Today*  
*Fox and Friends*  
*Squawk Box*
- Radio  
Multiple radio interviews were given by David throughout the months after the incident to increase transparency and create a dialogue.
- YouTube  
David made a video within the week following the incident
- Internet blogs  
Multiple blog interviews were given by David throughout the months after the incident to increase transparency and create a dialogue.
- Newspaper interviews  
Multiple radio interviews were given by David throughout the months after the incident to increase transparency and create a dialogue.

### My Analysis

Looking at this crisis from the outside, the Valentine's Day crisis should have been a major setback for JetBlue. JetBlue had no contingency plan for this type or size of catastrophe. Over the six days, they lost 20 million dollars in revenue and an additional 24 million dollars in flight vouchers given to customers impacted by the disruption. In the face of this crisis, the easiest solution would have been for founder and now former CEO David Neeleman to lay low, and collaborate with his constituents. Instead, David went full force towards the crisis.

Immediately following the incident, David made a public apology, taking full responsibility and blame for JetBlue's actions. Five days after the crisis, David released a YouTube video detailing his promises to JetBlue's customers. In this video, he also outlined the steps the company was taking to ensure the incident never happened again. In addition to David's public apology and video, he also voluntarily interviewed on radio and television programs to discuss the issues and how JetBlue planned on fixing them. JetBlue went above and beyond with not only refunding all customers impacted, but also including a voucher with their refund as well.

However, one of the most notable steps JetBlue took, was their implementation of their Customer Bill of Rights. Inspired by the crisis, this document lays out the foundation and results for issues that arise, including compensation for delays and cancellations. The document also

includes JetBlue's promise to provide free movies and food to those onboard during ground delays, with the additional promise that ground delays will be no longer than four hours.

In the end, I chose this crisis case because the scope of the crisis was tremendous and the damage was plenty, yet the handling of the crisis was above and beyond what one would expect from anyone, let alone an airline company. Immediately following the crisis, David Neeleman apologized, made promises on how JetBlue would improve, and created a future contingency plan for customers. This communication strategy following the crisis was successful because all of the actions together allowed for transparency within the company and for the customers creating a sense of trust and respect.

Knowing that JetBlue valued their customers, made those impacted feel humanized. Their feelings were validated, and they were compensated in multiple ways for the inconvenience of the incident. With David choosing to do the majority of the talking for JetBlue, customers perceived themselves as being on the same level as him. While David's solution was unable to make everyone happy, his openness towards the crisis and his ability to take full responsibility, saved JetBlue from slipping into oblivion. To this day, JetBlue is still a favorite among budget travelers.