

The language of crisis management

We are all experiencing lots of anxiety at the moment, and are trying to work out how to ensure the best for our teams, colleagues, clients and partners. So, below, please find some key expressions, tips and techniques for communicating powerfully in a crisis.

6 ways to use Business English in a crisis

1) Exploring different scenarios

We are in a time of uncertainty, responding day by day to events. The first and second conditionals allow us to explore 'what ifs'. They help define our contingency plans in the event of an emergency. The first conditional highlights possibilities that feel more real. It is a more direct way of communicating. The second conditional allows us to explore hypothetical scenarios in a less direct and immediate way.

- If the coronavirus spreads, we will have to implement a homeworking policy. **(First conditional)**
- If the coronavirus spread, we would have to implement a homeworking policy. **(Second conditional)**

2) Mitigating risks

Developing point 1, risks needs to be well-defined and the mitigating

actions clearly outlined.

- To reduce the risk of the coronavirus spreading we have to...
- To ensure a core level of customer service we must ...
- To reassure all our staff, we need to...

3) Being directive

There are times when you need to say what has to happen now: The modal verbs 'need to', 'must' and 'have to' can give you that sense of urgency. They work well in defining protocols, giving directions and outlining next steps. 'Should' can also be used to give powerful advice.

- We must avoid shaking hands.
- We have to put on hold non-essential business travel.
- We need to review our meetings policy.
- We should establish an emergency hotline for all our employees.

4) Retaining an open dialogue

Decisive action can go hand in hand with empathy and openness. Certain issues need to be explored as a team, collaboratively. Some useful expressions are listed below.

- One option could be to...
- We could consider...
- We might want to review..?
- Have we considered..?
- A good next step could be to...
- What do you think about..?
- Would you be willing to..?

5) Defining meaningful and sharp actions

In a time of crisis, actions need to be clearly defined, with realistic timelines and clear accountabilities. The future passive is a great structure in getting straight to the point. A good convention is to state the activity, timeline, and then the action owner in brackets.

- All team meetings **will be conducted** online from Friday 13 March 2020 (All Team).
- All clients **to be contacted** by phone by Friday 13 March 2020 (TH).
- Online training content **to be reviewed** by Wednesday 18 March 2020 (TH).

6) Keeping it light!

Knowing when to keep it light. In a serious crisis, where the anxiety is evident, there is often a need for small moments of light relief. Remember that ellipsis - the art of deliberately leaving out words in sentences - can help lighten your language!

- Anyone for a cup of tea!
- Chocolate time!
- Coffee!
- Liverpool - What happened!
- Anything good on Netflix?