

# Levels of Fear – Which Is the Goal?

(Page 1 of 2)

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- Panic** Panic is horrific when it happens. But it is rare. Although you should have a contingency plan for coping with it, don't neglect other priorities.
- Apathy** Apathy is the most common response to risk, and even to crisis. Most people's attention may be riveted, but some are sitting the crisis out, and therefore
- Denial** Denial is a much more common problem than panic. People in denial act apathetic – that is, they don't take precautions. But frightening them more would only push them more deeply into denial. Legitimize their fear instead, and help them bear it, so they can withstand the temptations of denial.
- Interest** Interest is too close to apathy to be appropriate for a genuine crisis. Interested people watch passively; you need people to act.
- Concern** Still too mild. People are concerned about inflation and crime rates and their children's grades. Crisis demands something more.
- Terror** Terror is the goal of terrorists. Terror is too close to panic; it is incapacitating.
- High Concern** High concern is what we settle into when the crisis has passed and we are adjusting to the New Normal. It is the highest level people may be able to sustain (though over the long haul we tend to retreat to mere concern). But for the crisis itself it's not quite high enough.
- Fear** Fear is the right response to crisis. It is high enough on the scale to ensure that people are putting aside their routine concerns. It is low enough on the scale to ensure that most people can cope. In a crisis, in short, proportionate fear isn't the problem. It is part of the solution.

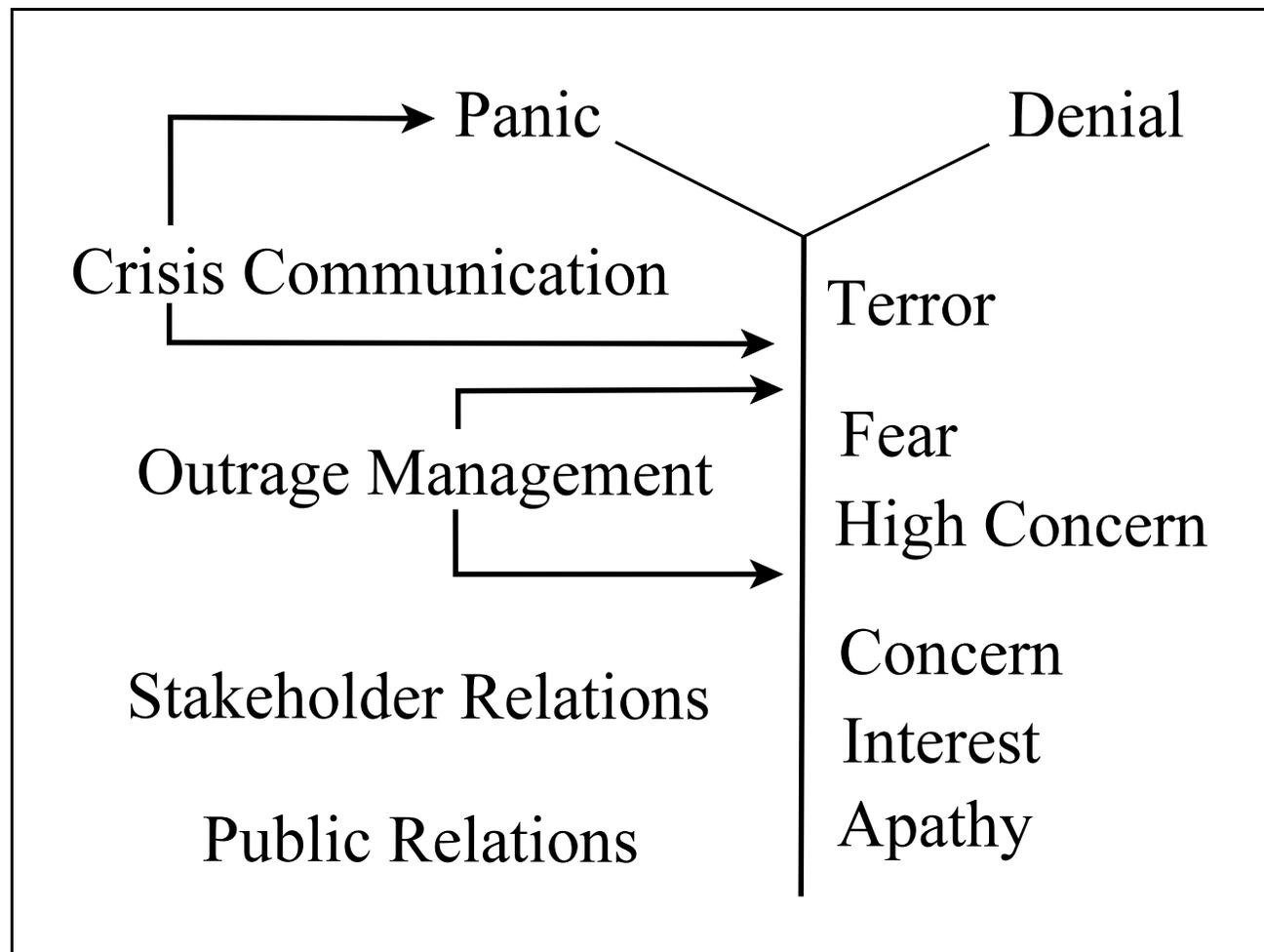
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Handout from: [Crisis Communication: Guidelines for Action](#)  
DVD produced by the American Industrial Hygiene Association (May 2004)

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(Page 2 of 2)

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