

Ryan's Family Steakhouse

CASE STUDY: CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO MANAGE THE UNEXPECTED

In the era following 9/11, many companies are examining what, if any, processes they have in place to handle critical situations. When implementing such a system, there are important factors to consider, such as who must be informed and how to minimize damage to people, property or the organization's reputation.

CHALLENGE

Ryan's Restaurant Group Inc. recognized their need for a centralized reporting system well before 9/11. With more than 23,000 team members in 338 locations, Ryan's wanted to ensure they were prepared for any emergency. Like any company with multiple locations, Ryan's faced issues beyond their control, like robberies or violent weather, which would force store managers to deal with situations outside of their normal operations.

"We needed to train upper management and store management on how to respond in a crisis," said Eddie Tallon, Vice President of Internal Audit and Loss Prevention. Ryan's wanted their managers to be able to handle situations in a certain way and to understand how to secure the safety of team members and customers.

SOLUTION

Ryan's worked with The Network to organize a system for reporting emergency situations to help them take control and respond with consistency.

Developing Employee Communications

The first step was to produce a manual to provide managers with detailed instructions on what to do in case of an emergency. Together, Ryan's and The Network developed a manual to address a variety of situations, from power outages and robbery to a death in the workplace. Whenever a manager encounters a critical situation, he or she consults the manual for guidance. This "go-to" document helps managers control an emergency and potentially prevent it from becoming a crisis.

Creating a Crisis Team

Ryan's also formed a Crisis Management Team, which consisted of upper level management from Operations, Audit and Loss Prevention, Maintenance, Construction, Risk Management, Human Resources and Food Safety. This team needed to be quickly involved during an unfolding crisis. In the past, managers reacted to unexpected events by calling their District Manager for instructions. This process wasted valuable time and resulted in inconsistent handling of situations. "We knew we would need a central hotline number," said Tallon.



Implementing a Crisis Hotline

Working with The Network, Ryan's launched a 24/7 Crisis Hotline, which facilitates the reporting of every incident through a single toll-free number. When a Ryan's store manager calls the Crisis Hotline, a professional interviewer asks questions to document incident details, including the nature of injuries and the names of involved parties. The information is organized into a concise report that helps senior management quickly assess the situation.

At the close of the call, the interviewer gives the store manager incident response instructions. These instructions are developed by the Crisis Management Team and vary according to the type of incident. This enables Ryan's to provide immediate guidance to restaurant managers around the clock.

Providing Immediate Notification

The next step was to set up an escalation process based on Ryan's pre-determined criteria. The Network now contacts crisis team personnel by telephone 24 hours a day. All reports, whether escalated or not, are sent to senior management at the home office, so corporate management can track incidents at all locations.

Tallon says the Crisis Hotline "has a calming effect, knowing someone is working on their behalf to help them solve the problem. They know The Network is going to find someone who will be able to give them direction."

RESULTS – NO MORE SURPRISES

From Tallon's perspective, the benefits are clear. "One of the greatest benefits for managers is a sense of security. Managers don't have to use valuable time trying to track someone down, because they only have to make one phone call. They can use their time to respond to the crisis and rely on the expertise of The Network to report the emergency in a timely manner. This makes the process run smoothly and efficiently."

"Those of us on this team who have the responsibility of responding know that we are going to wake up in the morning, and if something devastating happened, it was handled properly; the surprise factor is gone."