

How to Establish Your Own Humanity in a Crisis

Copyright © 2004 by Peter M. Sandman and Jody Lanard. All Rights Reserved.

1. *Let your emotions show.* Don't fake them – just stop faking not having them. Whatever you are feeling in response to the crisis, unless there is a good reason not to do so, let it show. Mute it a bit if you think you should, but don't hide it altogether.
2. *Model bearing your emotions.* Leaders who seem to be cold and emotionless are useless as role models for a public trying to cope with its emotions. Show that your feelings don't keep you from doing your job.
3. *Don't just describe your emotions; emote.* You may need to modulate a little, but your language, demeanor, and nonverbal communication should match the situation. Too calm is as bad as too emotional, and a lot likelier.
4. *Focus on fear and misery.* These two are the most universal emotions in crisis situations. If that's not what you're feeling, just keep in mind that your response is unusual. If it is what you're feeling, let some of it show.
5. *Express wishes.* "I wish we knew more." "If only we had stockpiled more vaccine before the epidemic began."
6. *Talk about yourself.* You have a life, a family, a professional history. Tell us a little about them.
7. *Use personal pronouns.* "I," "me," and "my" are intrinsically personal. So are "we," "us," and "our" ... and "you" and "your." Compare "the department wishes to express its sympathy" with "my heart goes out to...."
8. *Look the way you feel.* If you're sleepless and a little haggard, let that show too.
9. Don't always stop to shave or put on makeup or change into fresh clothing before appearing on camera.
10. *Don't worry too much about looking professional.* Looking professional is important – but you won't forget to look professional. You are at risk of forgetting to look human.

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