



Slow **Burn**

Managing a Smoldering Communications Crisis

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Two Types of Public Crises

- ▶ Crises that go public generally fall into two basic types—sudden and smoldering.
 - ▶ **Sudden Crisis** – A disruption in the organization’s normal routine and occurs with little or no warning, generating extensive news coverage and public scrutiny. Accidents and storms are two kinds of sudden crises.
 - ▶ **Smoldering Crisis** – A condition that is potentially damaging and of which someone in the organization has knowledge, or should, but does nothing.



Chattanooga Fire Dept. / MGN



Sudden or Smoldering

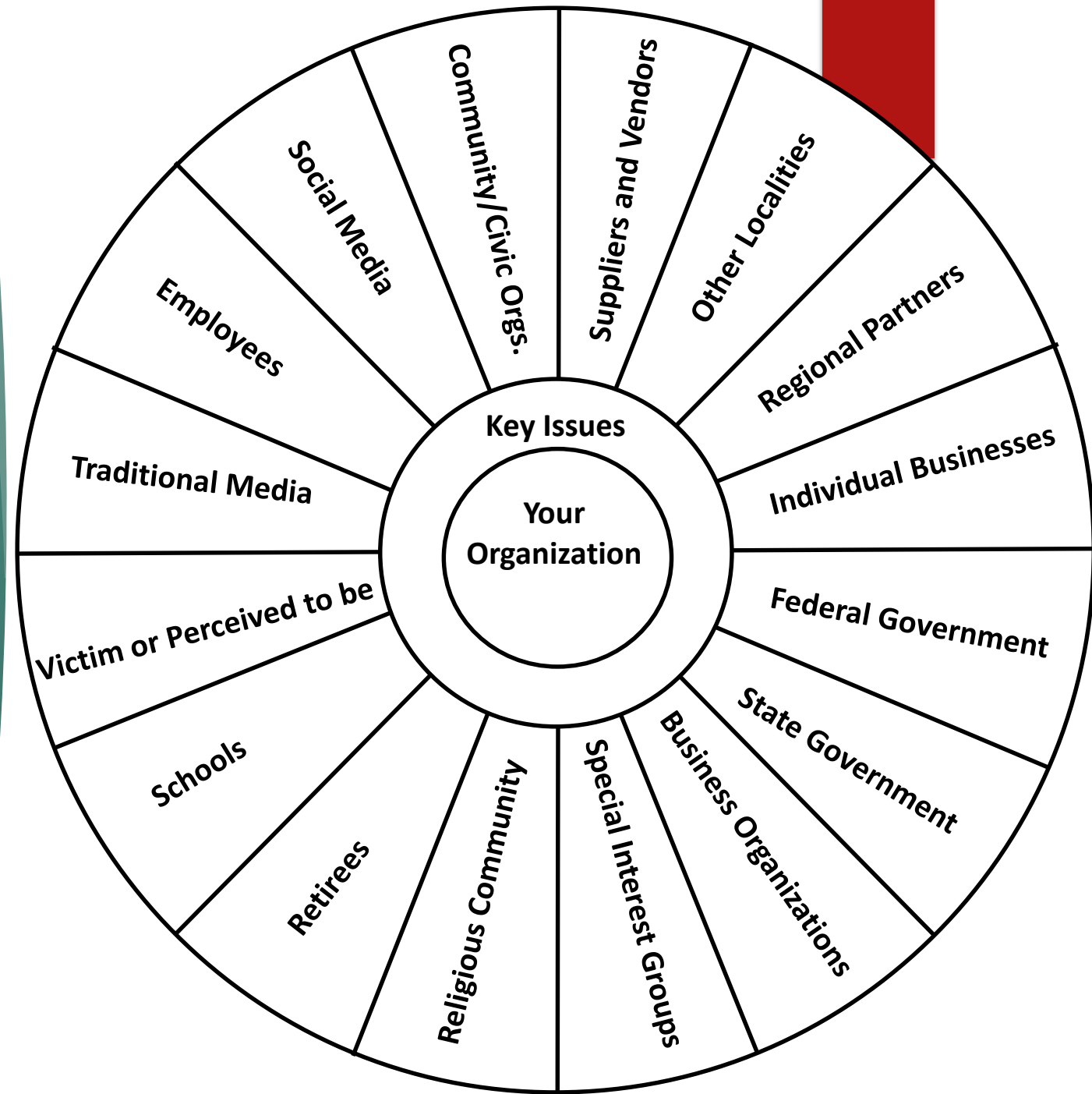
| Sudden or Smoldering | | |
|--|--|--|
| Adverse government actions | Computer Virus or hacking of network | Anonymous allegations |
| Damaging rumors | Competitive misinformation | Accusations of discrimination |
| Disclosure of confidential information | Equipment or service sabotage | Threats by disgruntled employees |
| Investigative reporter activity | Serious injury or death of an employee | Judicial action against the organization |
| A scandal involving an employee | Deep-seated labor problems | A highly-publicized lawsuit |
| A security leak or security problem | False accusations | Severe weather |
| Sexual harassment allegation | Indictment against the company | Activist demonstration |
| Illegal actions by an employee | Terrorist threat or act | Indictment of an employee |
| Unethical behavior of an employee | Major equipment malfunction | Whistle-blowing |

Video Sample

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh1gzJFVFLc>

Keys to Managing a Smoldering Crisis

1. Identifies Issue
2. Assesses disclosure
3. Develops a strategy



Step 1: Identify Problem

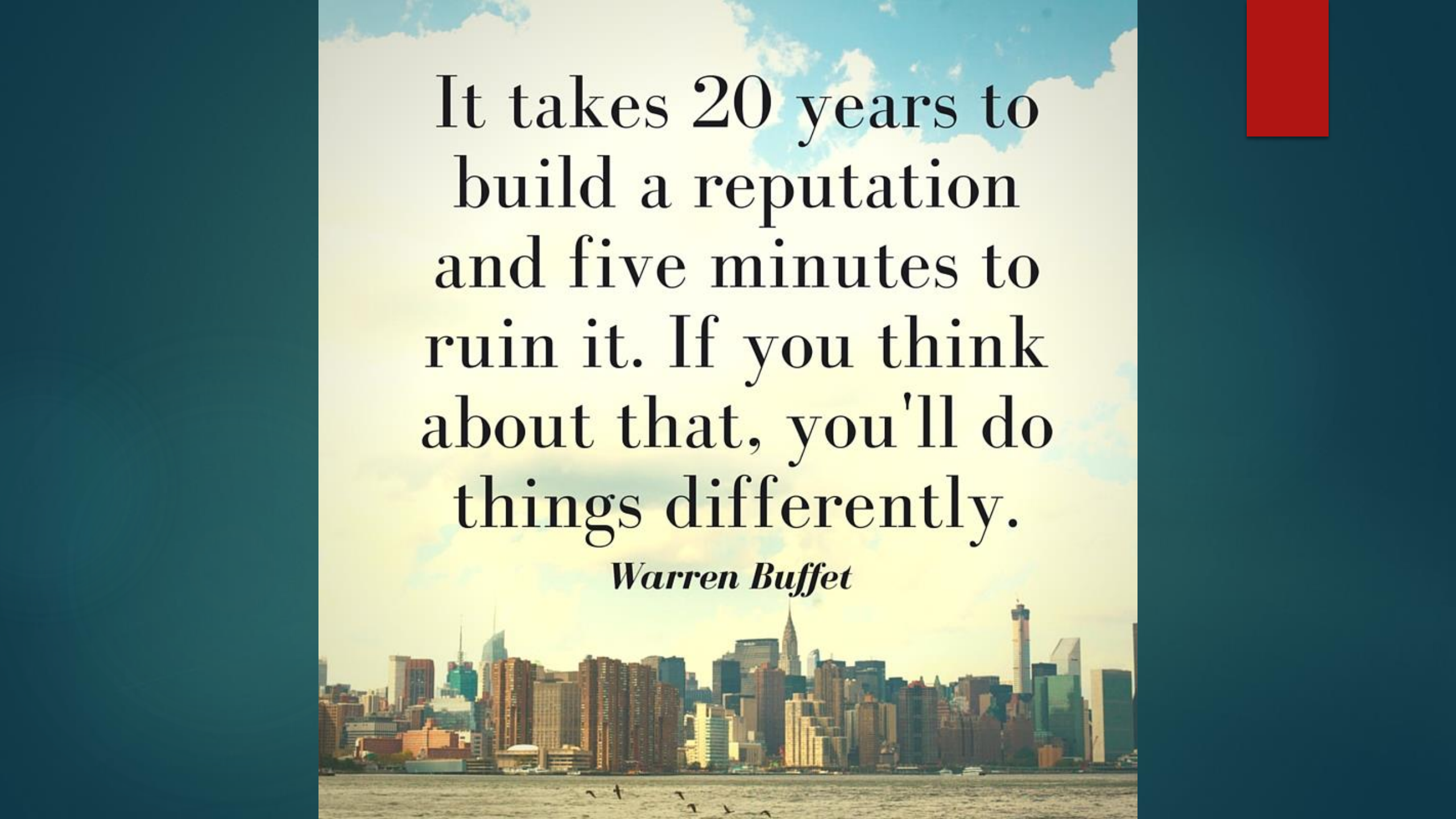
- ▶ What is known and can be confirmed at the present time?
- ▶ How long has it been going on?
- ▶ Who is involved?
- ▶ What are the sources of information?
- ▶ What is not known? What is being done to find out?

Step 2: Assessment of Public Disclosure and Media Coverage

1. Who is being harmed by not knowing?
2. Who needs to know? Why? When?
3. How is this problem likely to escape the organization?
4. How soon might it escape?
5. How will the media cover the story?

Step 3: Develop a TIMELY strategy

- ▶ Determine messages for audiences
- ▶ Determine communications tools to reach audience
- ▶ Establish spokespersons
- ▶ Tell what you knew, when you knew it and what you are doing about it

A photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, viewed from across a body of water. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The quote is centered in the upper half of the image. A solid red rectangle is in the top right corner.

It takes 20 years to
build a reputation
and five minutes to
ruin it. If you think
about that, you'll do
things differently.

Warren Buffet