



Everence®

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS:

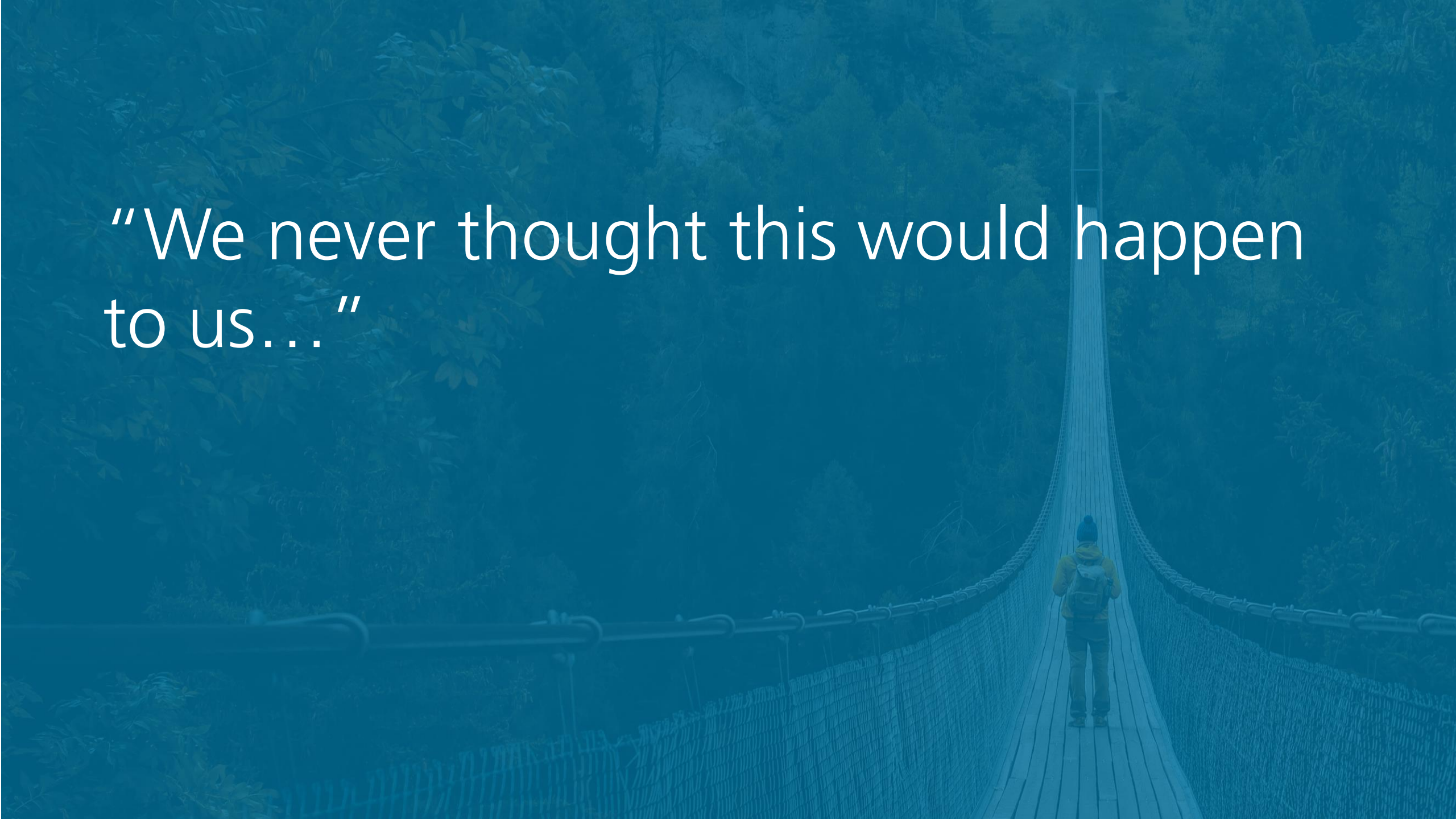
Marketing during times of adversity or scandal

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Everence®

“We never thought this would happen
to us...”



Defining crisis broadly

A crisis can be anything that disrupts your mission, credibility or relationships, including:



NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL

storms, fires, floods, pandemics, facility damage



OPERATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL

data breaches, embezzlement, sudden revenue loss, grant withdrawal



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

sudden resignation or misconduct by key leaders, board conflict



PROGRAM AND SERVICE DISRUPTIONS

harm to clients, service failures, safety incidents



REPUTATION AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

negative media coverage, controversial partnerships, social media backlash



COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL

racial injustice, community violence, political polarization affecting your mission



TECHNOLOGY AND EMERGING RISKS

misinformation campaigns, cybersecurity attacks

Why crisis communication matters



In a crisis, silence or confusion can do more harm than the crisis itself.

Crisis communication in contrast

HANDLED WELL

Children's Hospital of The
King's Daughters (RSV Surge,
2022–23)

- Proactive updates to families, staff, and media about capacity challenges.
- Transparent: acknowledged limits, explained what was known and unknown.
- Values-driven: child safety prioritized in every message.
- Built credibility by partnering with other hospitals and aligning messages.

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HANDLED POORLY

San Francisco Parks
Alliance (Financial
Collapse, 2025)

- Delayed disclosure of financial distress and misuse of restricted funds.
- Stakeholders learned details through leaks and investigations, not leadership.
- Mission-action misalignment: reputation as steward undermined by actions.
- Leadership and board resignations came only after damage was done.

Crisis communication core principles

CLARITY AND TRANSPARENCY



Say what you know, what you don't know, what you're doing next.

TIMELINESS AND CONSISTENCY



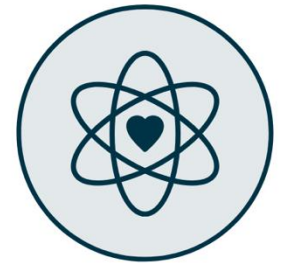
Be proactive, not reactive.

EMPATHY AND CARE



Focus on people, not optics.

VALUES FIRST



Let your mission and faith commitments guide tone and choices.

Crisis communication in contrast

BOTTOM LINE:

Effective crisis communication builds trust through transparency and values. Poor communication deepens the crisis and erodes credibility.



CASE STUDY 1:

The unexpected gift

Scenario:

- You receive an unsolicited \$2 million donation from a new donor.
- The donor is a business leader whose company faces lawsuits for unethical labor practices overseas.
- The gift has already been processed.
- The donor posts publicly about their “partnership” with your nonprofit.
- Community members and a reporter ask, “Will you keep this money?”

CASE STUDY 1:

The unexpected gift

Group discussion questions:

1. What risks do you see if you **keep** the gift? If you **return** it?
2. What **values** should guide your decision and messaging?
3. How do you communicate with your board, staff, donors, and community/public?
4. What language might you use **before** a decision is finalized?
5. How would you respond to the donor's public post?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

The unexpected gift

Not all crises =
disasters

- Ethical dilemmas can be equally destabilizing.

Lead with
values

- Faith-based missions face unique scrutiny.

Transparency
matters

- Communicate the process of discernment, not just the outcome.

Policies prevent
panic

- Gift acceptance and partnership guidelines are essential.

CASE STUDY 2:

The AI Impersonation

Scenario:

- A major donor says they already gave to your “emergency appeal.”
- They show you an email, social post, and even a video of your executive director –all branded with your logo and mission language.
- Problem: **You never launched this campaign.**
- It’s an AI-generated impersonation scam, diverting gifts to a fraudulent account.
- Staff are shaken, and social media users are questioning your credibility.

CASE STUDY 2:

The AI Impersonation

Group discussion questions:

1. What's your immediate response to donors who may have been scammed?
2. How do you communicate with the wider community to protect trust?
3. What internal steps do you take (staff briefing, legal, board)?
4. How can you be transparent without amplifying panic?
5. How do you prepare long-term safeguards against digital impersonation?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

The AI Impersonation

Digital risks are real

- Not all crises are physical or financial

Trust first

- Reassure and support affected donors quickly

Multi-channel clarity

- Post from official platforms to set the record straight

Transparency ≠ panic

- Acknowledge the issue, outline steps, reaffirm mission

Proactive safeguards

- Invest in donor education, verification, and cybersecurity readiness

Building a simple crisis plan



WHO

Spokesperson, back-up, approval process



WHAT

Core message template(s)



HOW

Communication channels



WHEN

Escalation timeline(s)

Core message template

Every crisis message should:



Acknowledge the issue



Share what action is being taken



Express values and care

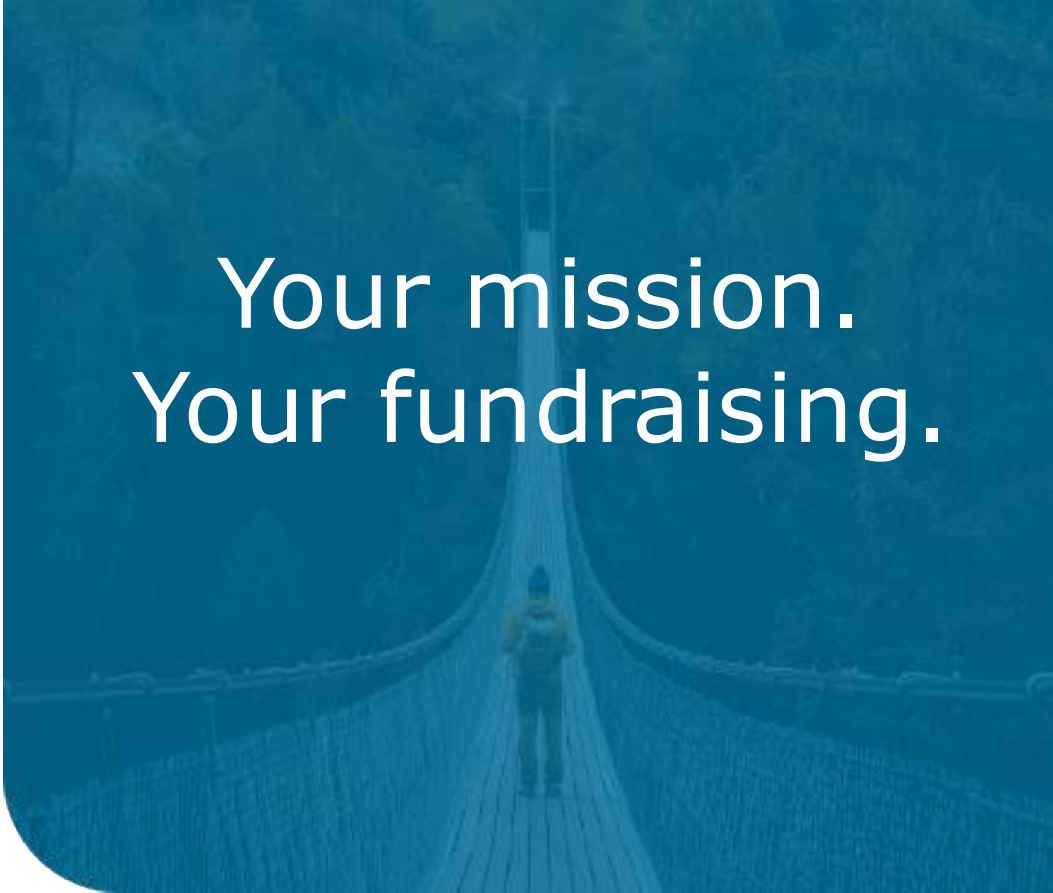


Invite dialogue / next steps

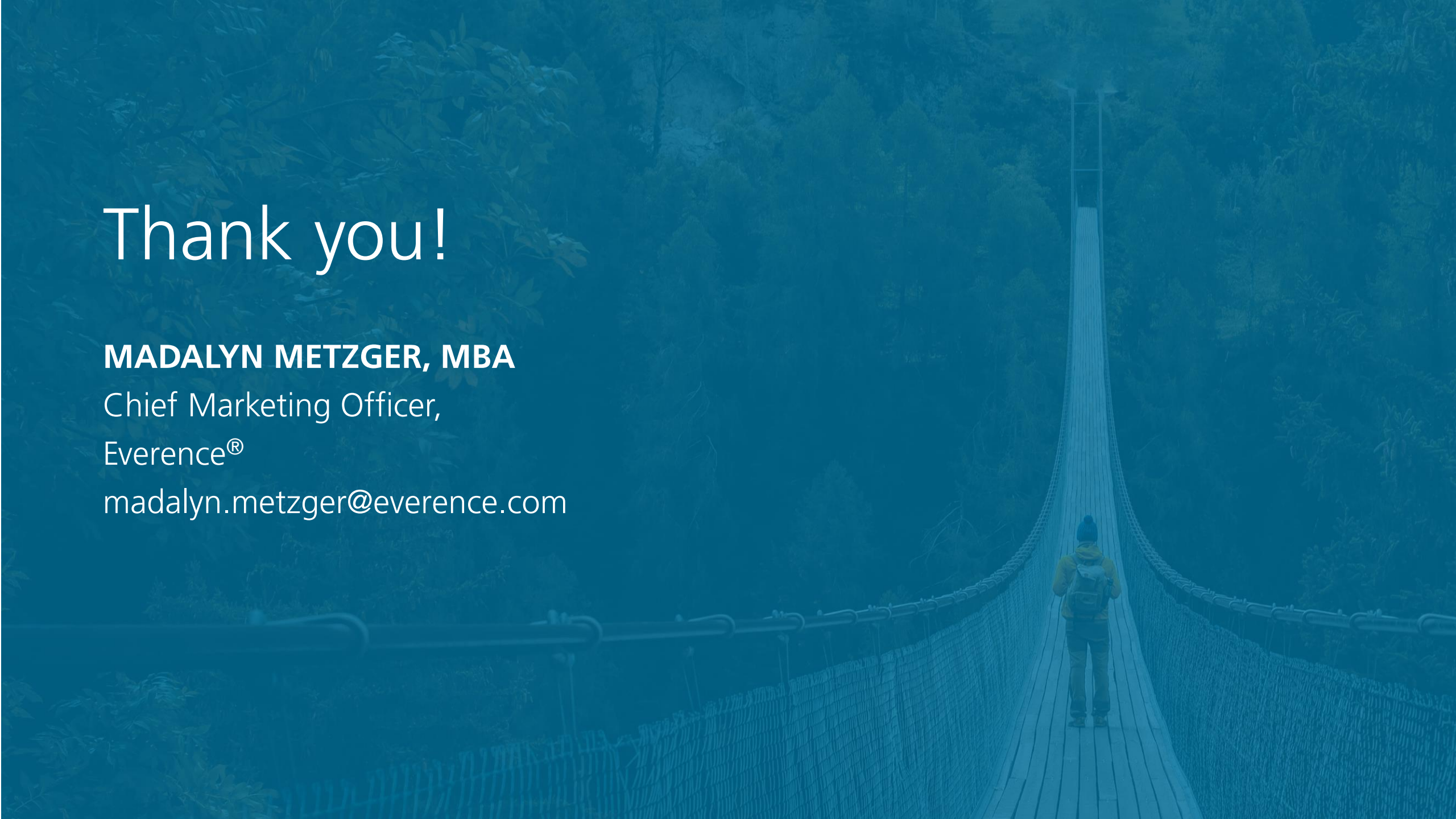
Action steps for your organization

What are two things you can do to right away to strengthen your organization's crisis readiness?

- **Example:** Identify a backup spokesperson.
- **Example:** Draft a holding statement template.



Your mission.
Your fundraising.

A person wearing a yellow jacket and a blue beanie is walking away from the camera on a wooden suspension bridge. The bridge is made of wooden planks and has a metal railing. It is surrounded by a dense forest of green trees. The entire image has a blue tint.

Thank you!

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