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Oct09

[Paul](#)

[‘Model’ behavior in the wake of tragedy](#)

My workday typically kicks off at 6 a.m., and it’s the responsibility of [National Public Radio](#) to coax me out of bed. But as my clock radio came to life on Feb. 13—placing me on the cusp of consciousness—it was difficult to comprehend what I was hearing. A plane crash...near Buffalo...50 people reported dead.

It’s hard to fathom something so tragic happening so close to home. And over the next several days, like so many of us, I would look to the media for continuing updates on its cause and the heart-wrenching aftermath.



Nearly eight months have passed since the crash of Continental Flight #3407, but it still offers opportunities for reflection, particularly as it relates to crisis management. Yesterday, a number of my [University News](#) colleagues and I had the opportunity to hear firsthand insights on the tragedy as part of the [Public Relations Society of America \(PRSA\)](#) Northeast District Conference, held at the RIT Inn & Conference Center.

The conference featured a variety of presenters charged with enlightening attendees on some aspect of our vocation. More than a few used the forum to extol the virtues of our profession or to showcase their niche area of competence. That’s fine, but as my colleagues can attest, I have a hard time hiding my impatience for that stuff. I feel it’s time better spent investigating our challenges and discussing how we can overcome them to better serve our various publics.

For that reason, it was compelling to hear from a panel of six communicators, all who played a major role in telling the story of Flight #3407. In addition to three Buffalo-area journalists, there were PR practitioners representing the Erie County Executive, the [American Red Cross](#) and the New York State Police.

Exploring the anatomy of such a tragedy appeals to my journalism background, particularly the details on efforts to accommodate a worldwide pool of reports. But what was most inspiring was a consensus from the panel on how professionals from both PR and journalism successfully worked in tandem to serve the needs of the community at large.

Brian Meyer, a reporter for the [Buffalo News](#), discussed the organized flow of information from authorities and their communication representatives, helping the media provide accurate and timely updates to the public. The media and PR—often at odds—worked in concert for the common good. “I hope it becomes a model that will be replicated in future disasters,” Meyer told the audience.

I hope to never experience a situation anywhere near the magnitude of Flight #3407, but University News and our other colleagues at RIT put much effort into preparing for the inevitability of a crisis on campus. We understand our various responsibilities, and that includes working effectively with the media to help protect our community. Knowledge is power, and it’s imperative for us to access a full complement of communication tools to make certain people have the information they need to protect themselves and others.

But no worries of that today. Instead, I woke up learning that President Obama had won the Nobel Peace Prize. Here’s hoping my clock radio continues to deliver ‘good news’ for many mornings to come.

Photo credit: Harry Skull Jr., Buffalo News

1. [Julie L.](#)
Oct09

Paul—very nice blog post ... I really enjoyed that panel presentation. It was an example of a worthwhile conference session...because we both

know many are not. :)

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