Q&A with Cal Mathis

This issue of the journal was born in March 2020 as the pandemic globally forced museums – and with them their most public face, exhibitions – to close. While one year later a vaccine brings hope, the pandemic continues to rage, its impact will likely be felt for years, and scientists warn of the rising risk of future outbreaks.

As professionals who create museum exhibitions for the public, often on lengthy timetables, what should we be thinking about as we plan our current responses and consider the future? In this issue, editor Ellen Snyder-Grenier interviews Cal Mathis, Vice President & Chief Security Officer at S&P Global, to learn how his expertise in crisis planning and management might inform our strategies.

Cal Mathis is Vice President & Chief Security Officer for S&P Global. In this role, he is responsible for leading, designing, and driving all worldwide protective programs for the enterprise, including global security initiatives, crisis management, incident response, protective services, travel safety, and security technology and projects. He is also the coordinator of the Corporate Crisis Management Team. Previously, Cal served as Deputy Commissioner and Sheriff for the City of New York. He is a member of the International Security Management Association, Overseas Security Advisory Council, and the American Society of Industrial Security.

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Q Ellen In a recent podcast, you said that while your job description is many pages long, when you boil it down, your work is about protecting what is most important – S&P Global employees. Part of that work, as you noted, is understanding the demands and impact the COVID-19 crisis is having on their physical and mental health. What kinds of questions should leaders be asking of staff members to ensure their well-being?

A Cal Yes, it's my job to protect that which is most important – our employees around the world. My primary focus is the safety and security of our people. During the pandemic, this duty of care has evolved to also consider the mental and physical well-being of colleagues who are managing the crisis and experiencing an unprecedented event. Employee support programs – including flexible working arrangements, remote work, and other structures – can greatly influence and improve our people's mental and physical well-being. We've also used other tools and mechanisms to help identify solutions, including employee engagement and sentiment surveys that provide a channel for candid personal feedback. The results of these surveys can guide organizations in developing targeted programs that support employee well-being by providing insights into the challenges that staff members are currently experiencing. Survey questions can include inquiries about virtual home schooling required during work hours, care needs for elderly family members, individual health concerns, and even pandemic-related uncertainty. Leaders can then use the results of these surveys to design employee support programs that promote a healthier work-life balance and a more effective workforce.

Q For those in your field, what are considered some of the forces whose uncertain outcomes might shape the years to come?

A The COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, and the impacts to routines and restrictions on movement will likely continue for some time. There are two concerns that drive my longer-term response planning: the effectiveness of vaccines on variant COVID-19 strains including the UK, South Africa and Brazilian strains – and the next epidemic or pandemic, which some health experts have forecasted may be worse than COVID-19. In addition, the effects of global warming, with rising ocean levels and more frequent major weather emergencies, will challenge many governments and organizations to develop robust response planning.

Q While S&P Global is a different kind of organization than a museum, what general, high-level crisis planning and management principles do you consider essential for any type of institution?

A Crisis management is a process that can be applied broadly. I recommend the following:

- Establish a crisis management team.
  - In many organizations, existing teams can be refocused to address crisis management needs. For example, a leadership team can also serve as the crisis management team, or an organization might establish a crisis management team with representatives of major departments. At S&P Global, this could include Human Resources, Information Technology (IT), Finance, Risk, Facilities, Legal, Security, Strategy and other key stakeholders. Whatever approach is decided, the crisis management team must be empowered to make decisions related to employees; the people and communities it serves; finances; and other critical areas.

- Convene the crisis management team at regular intervals, but at least quarterly, to plan future activities and to review lessons learned from past events that can be applied to future crises.

- Develop a five-step crisis management process:
  - Establish the crisis management plan – then build upon the plan over time as crises are managed.
  - Scan for or anticipate potential impactful events – these include targeted protests, weather emergencies, employee actions, power outages, threats to staff, health concerns, theft of property, etc.
  - Convene the crisis management team to develop the organization's response strategy.
  - Communicate information about the event and the response strategy to appropriate stakeholders. These include employees, customers (i.e., for museums, members and visitors), boards of directors, and the community.
  - Conduct post-event reviews to identify and document the lessons learned, build team "muscle memory," and enhance readiness for the next event.

Q One way that museums have responded to the pandemic-related shutdowns is to expand their digital programing, including putting exhibitions online. As we swing digital, are there potential risks we should consider?

A Cybercrime is one of the top threats facing public and private-sector organizations, as well as individuals. The greater an organization's digital footprint, the greater the potential threat. IT professionals and senior leaders are acutely aware of the risks posed by cyber criminals. Using tools such as password protection, encryption, two-factor access authentication, and employee-awareness training are all effective countermeasures to minimize breaches of online information and computer systems. I collaborate frequently with colleagues from Information Security, and they consistently promote the importance of employee-awareness training because human error often leads to unauthorized systems access. For example, an unsuspecting employee opening an email – often from an unfamiliar sender – could unintentionally expose the organization's network to ransomware, malicious software used to prevent access to information until a ransom is paid. Another area of concern is the use of social media and the potential vulnerabilities that can be exploited by posting or sharing inappropriate or unnecessary information. Organizations should develop cyber security and social media policies that minimize reputational, employee safety, and asset protection risks.

Q A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can challenge us in significant and unexpected ways. Amidst challenges, how might crisis also provide an opportunity for renewal?

A The pandemic has challenged all of us to pivot. For example, many organizations have experienced a shift to a fully remote posture, capable of delivering for their customers from a place other than the office. Challenges related to network connectivity have been mostly overcome, virtual meetings have been normalized, and travel largely eliminated. This was unimaginable before the pandemic. This experience has driven many organizations to rethink operations and reimagine the future of work. Agility and openness to different ways of doing things can help us all move more confidently into the new normal. ▪