**Crisis Communication Case Study**

**Instructions:** Read the case study and share responses to the discussion questions.

**The Demonstration—A Girl, Her Steer, & An Animal Rights Organization**

She just sat there, starring into space. She was in a state of disbelief. It was only her second year showing steers and her steer had been named Grand Champion. It was an honor she’d been prepared for her whole life. Kim already knew that she could expect $5.oo a pound tonight during the auction. Last year her steer had only brought in 73 cents, and this was sure to be an improvement.

She wasn’t just happy about the money, although it would start a nice college fund. Next year, she would be on the cover of the sale brochure, with her steer. She would show that brochure to prospective buyers, and they would know that she raised good steers. Maybe that would get more buyers to come out next year. That would help the whole program. Kim lived close to the fair and the large brunt of responsibility for bringing out buyers fell on her shoulders. For exhibitors who traveled five or more hours, it was easier to bring the steer home and sell it there than to bring buyers to the sale.

She couldn’t wait to tell everyone. For three months, while others were sleeping in and spending lazy afternoons at the beach, she’d been working. Up at 6 a.m. seven days a week to feed, then wash, brush and dry for four hours. Now it was all paying off.

She jumped up to get her steer ready for the sale.

"Come on girl. You’ve got to get up to the ring. NOW." It was the voice of her father, and he sounded tense.

"But, I’m only half ready. Besides, I’ve got another half-hour. What’s your problem?"

"You’ve got to go around. You’re not going through the barn."

This was said with "the look," which meant that he would not be explaining *why* she would have to go all the way around the barn.

Mumbling under her breath about fairs that spend all their money to build nice wide exhibitor-friendly hallways and then make them walk all the way around the complex, Kim backed her steer out of the chute and headed for the door.

After several minutes, girl and steer, with father trailing behind, arrived at the door to the sale pen. With a final brushing of the steer, the girl took a deep breath and walked into the ring.

But the crowd wasn’t looking at her yet. Across the way, blocking the aisle she should have used to arrive at the ring, a group of demonstrators marched. Signs proclaiming "Meat Is Murder" were waving in the air.

The girl turned to try to catch her father’s eye. Obviously, he had known that the demonstrators were there and had wanted her to avoid them. No such luck. They soon caught sight of her in the ring and, realizing that she had gone a different route from stall to ring, began to move closer to the ring. Soon they were blocking the view of the bidders and chanting louder and louder.

Officials from the fair finally arrived to handle the situation, and the girl was asked to lead her now very jumpy animal out of the ring until the auction could proceed.

Inside, demonstrators were continuing to block the aisle, while more steers were led up for the auction. Exhibitors from all around the barn came to the arena to voice their objections to the demonstration. Each group began to yell at the other, but no one was truly heard. The fair officials were working to keep the two groups separate, to keep the demonstration from becoming violent. Mr. Lee, the newly appointed vice president in charge of the agriculture programs stepped up to take the microphone from the auctioneer. He had to find a way to quiet the two groups quickly.

Meanwhile, the girl walked behind the barn and tied her steer to the wash rack. Her father, angry at such demonstrations, went inside to add his word to the ensuing disagreement. She wished he wouldn’t. In a sense, she agreed with the demonstrators. She was going to miss her steer, and she would certainly never eat that particular steer.

Before her father came back, reporters began arriving. Nothing like this had ever happened at the fair before. With so many members of the media already on the grounds, many reporters came running to the unexpected demonstration. A few television reporters pulled the lead demonstrators out of the barn to interview.

"The children involved in this action have no idea what they are involved in," one of the demonstrators said. "Most of them don’t know where the cattle go after today. Cattle are slaughtered in the cruelest manner, and these children are forced to support it." As the demonstrator spoke, he caught sight of the girl and her steer.

"Why this young lady, right there, is a perfect example. Her father sends cattle to their death regularly. Their cattle are kept outdoors throughout the winter. This girl is taught only to hate animals."

The reporter quickly ended the interview, excited to have a new voice for his story. He was heading for Kim, ready to ask her questions.

**Discussion Questions:**

* How would you respond to the demonstration if you were the youth? If you were the reporter? A fair official? Another exhibitor?
* How can the fair official effectively control the demonstration? What actions should be taken to before continuing the auction?
* Also present at the fair are members of the public, uninvolved with the demonstration or the auction. What actions, if any, should be made by the fair officials to insure their enjoyment of the fair? What should be done by exhibitors to counteract the perception of exhibiting cattle put forth by the demonstrators?
* Should children involved agriculture programs that place them in the public eye be prepared to work with media? The public? How can this be accomplished?
* Some fairs have developed an area outside the livestock arena for demonstrators. Is this an appropriate solution to the incident described in this case study?