

Crisis Communications: The CISO, the CMO and the General Counsel

Accenture Cybersecurity Forum
Global Executive Leadership Network

October 2023
Session Summary



From the Accenture Leadership

In the heat of a ransomware attack or other cyber crises, the enterprise needs a team of complementary capabilities to lead a successful recovery. The CISO, CMO and General Counsel, in particular, are core members of that team.

Three executives with deep cyber, marketing and legal experience joined ACF members for a practical discussion about how to handle communications in a crisis. The importance of collaboration came through loud and clear. As one ACF member said: "A crisis is not the time for finger-pointing."

Thanks to everyone who participated in the call. We trust you will find the best practices our subject matter experts and ACF colleagues shared useful as you inevitably face future cybersecurity challenges.

Cheers,



Paolo Dal Cin

Global Head of Accenture Security
ACF Executive Sponsor

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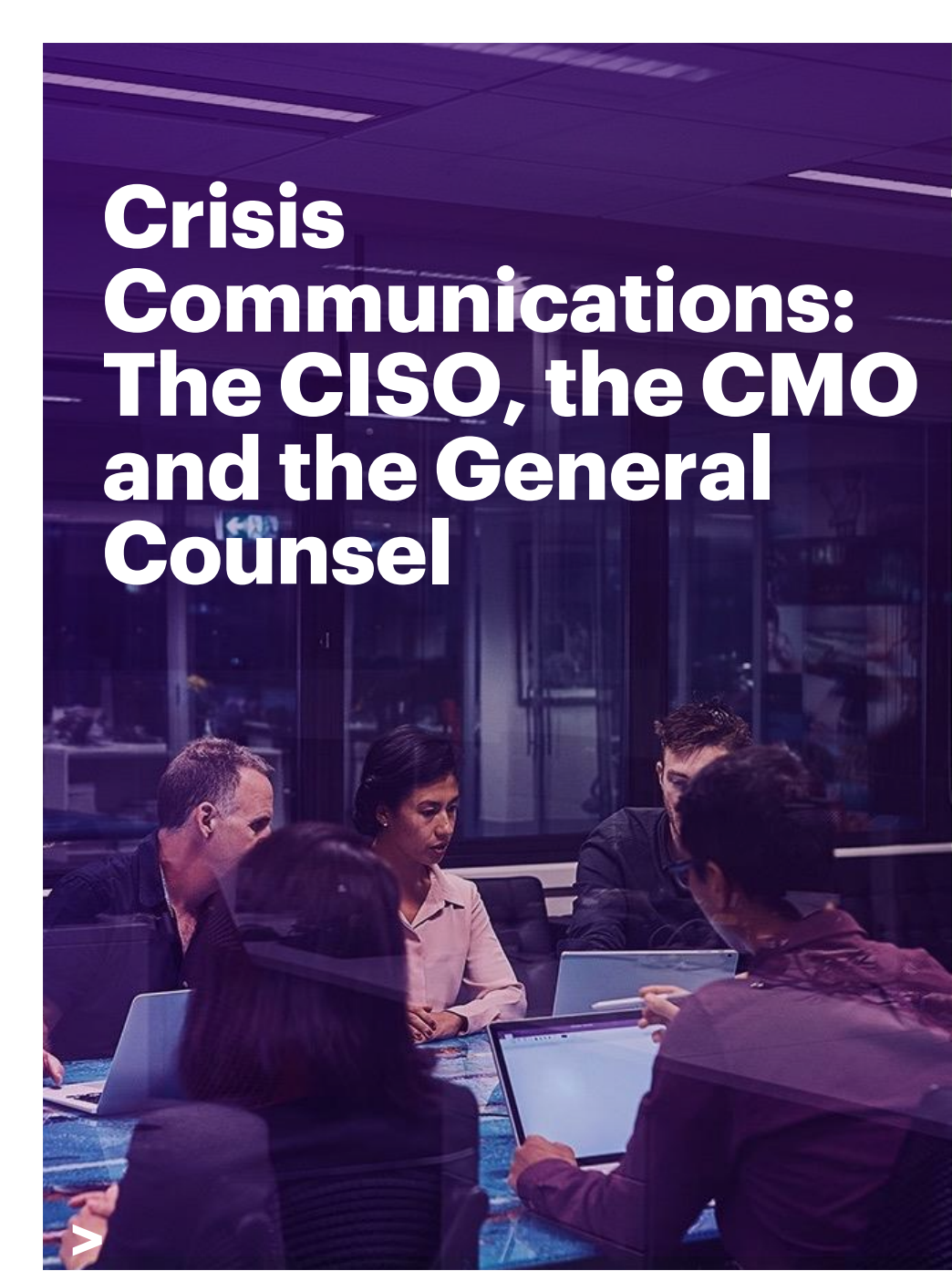


Kris Burkhardt

Accenture CISO
ACF Chair

[LinkedIn](#)





Crisis Communications: The CISO, the CMO and the General Counsel

The Accenture Cybersecurity Forum (ACF) convened a virtual roundtable titled “Crisis Communications: The CISO, the CMO and the General Counsel” on October 25, 2023.

ACF members discussed how CISOs can best collaborate with their C-suite peers before, during and after an incident, particularly considering new SEC disclosure requirements. Setting the stage for the discussion were a CISO, CMO and Chief Legal Counsel who shared their personal experiences in working together before, during and after a variety of cyber incidents.

This roundtable was conducted under the Chatham House Rule: ACF members are free to use the information shared, provided that neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, nor participants, is revealed.

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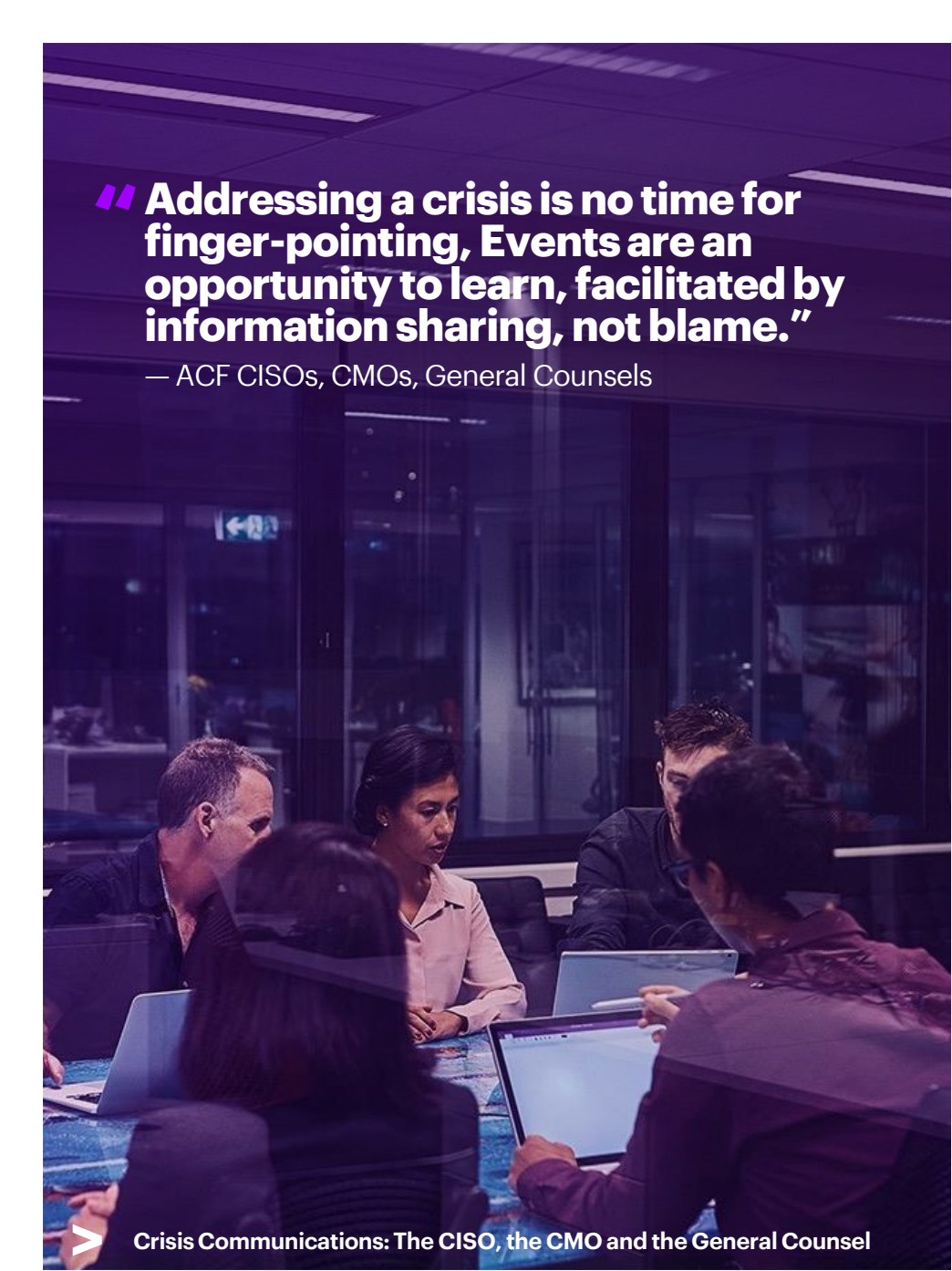
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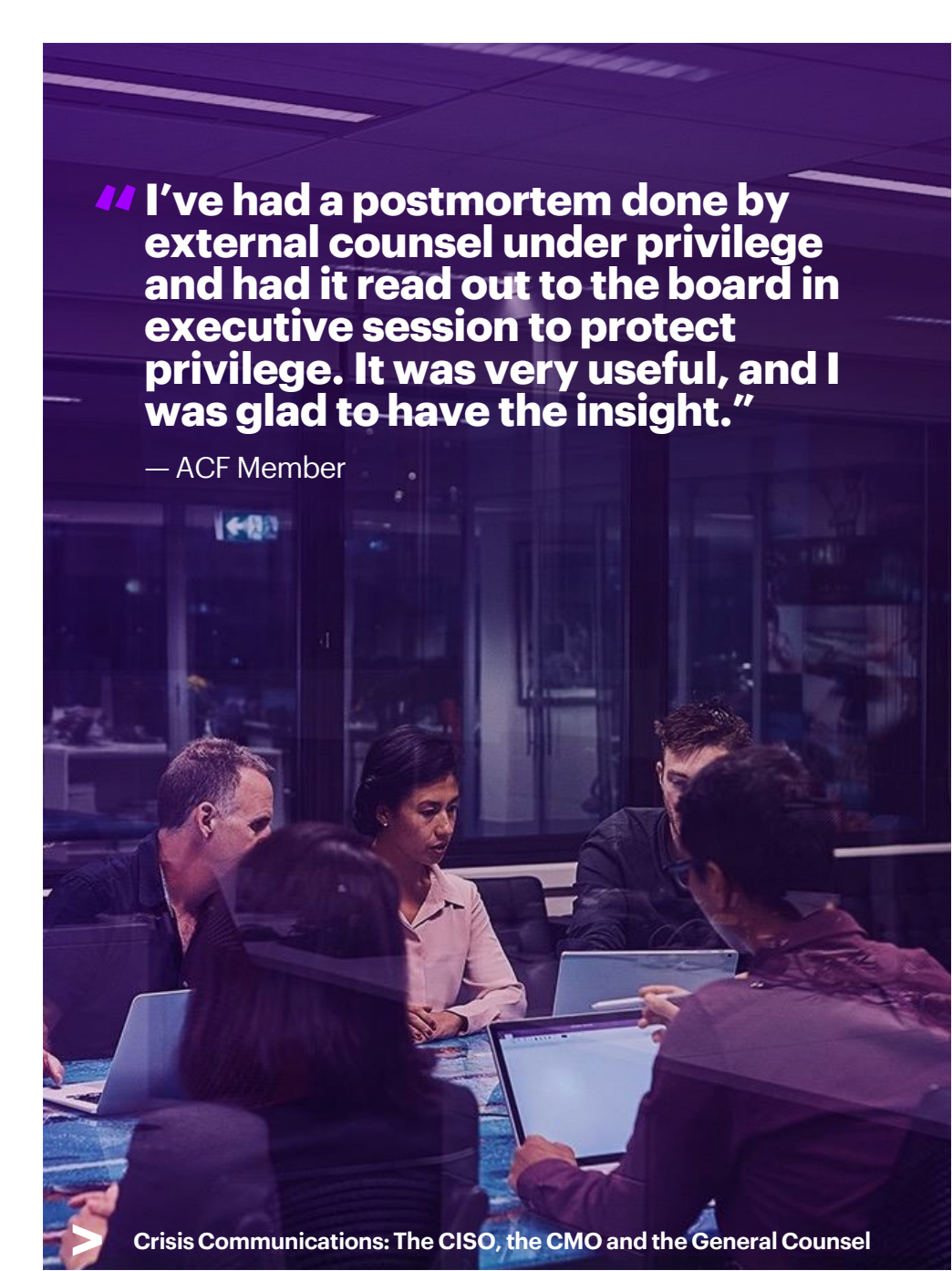
“ Addressing a crisis is no time for finger-pointing, Events are an opportunity to learn, facilitated by information sharing, not blame.”

— ACF CISOs, CMOs, General Counsels

Collaboration is key during a crisis

Subject matter experts and ACF members emphasized the importance of constructive, collaborative engagement. “Trust among the team is foundational,” said the CMO. The CISO said: “Having the CMO at the table makes all the difference.” The attorney added: “I speak with the CISO every week.”

Addressing a crisis is no time for finger-pointing, they added. Events are an opportunity to learn, facilitated by information sharing, not blame.



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— ACF Member

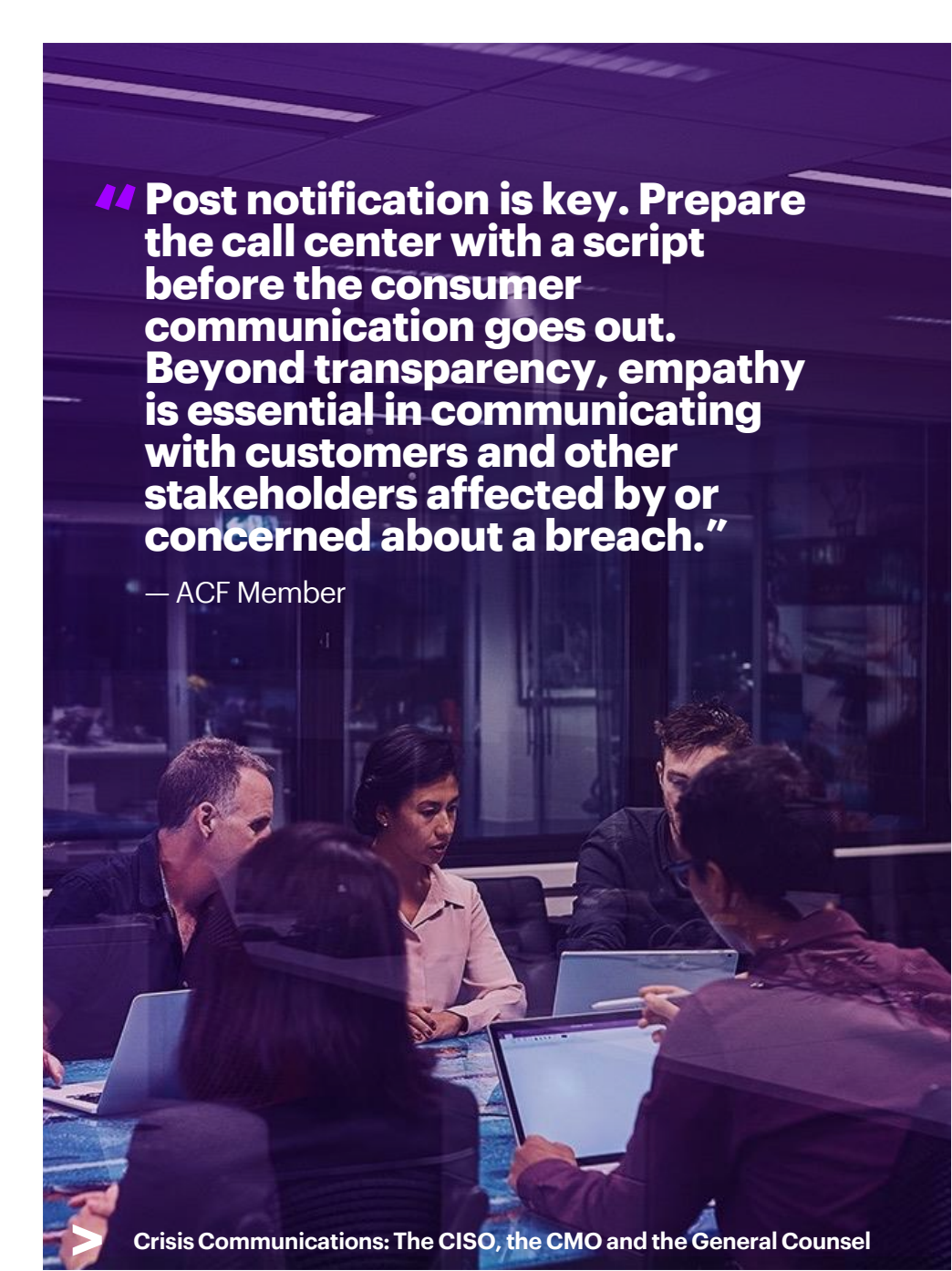
The role of the board in a crisis

An ACF member who serves on several boards said: “Communication with the board starts and ends with ‘risk.’ Determine what a crisis means in terms of risk specific to your organization whether it is financial, operational, and/or reputational risk.”

Another ACF member said: “You have to make the conversations real for them. We’ve brought in an actual FBI agent to talk about threats and risks.”

An ACF member shared in the chat how their perspective on board engagement has evolved. “The board exercise is a really interesting question. Our board does not make decisions in an incident. The decisions are CEO-level or General Counsel decisions. For this reason, I have not supported doing a tabletop exercise with the board. However, my position has changed because I think it’s valuable to have them understand what management is doing in an incident.”

Another ACF member added: “I’ve had a postmortem done by external counsel under privilege and had it read out to the board in executive session to protect privilege. It was very useful, and I was glad to have the insight.”



“ Post notification is key. Prepare the call center with a script before the consumer communication goes out. Beyond transparency, empathy is essential in communicating with customers and other stakeholders affected by or concerned about a breach.”

— ACF Member

Considering the reputational impact

“The enterprise needs to own the message to its customers, not the press or social media,” said an ACF member. “Disclosing is about complying with regulations but also about customer trust.”

Identifying the reputational impact of a crisis requires a clear view on all potentially affected stakeholder groups (consumers, customers, suppliers, communities, employees etc.). A key question: How will each one of these groups perceive the company following the incident?

The CMO subject matter expert said that it is useful to understand the attributes that give your brand strength and then assess the impact of a crisis on each of those attributes.

An ACF member encouraged others to consider longer term recovery implications of their communications. “Post notification is key. Prepare the call center with a script before the consumer communication goes out. Beyond transparency, empathy is essential in communicating with customers and other stakeholders affected by or concerned about a breach.”



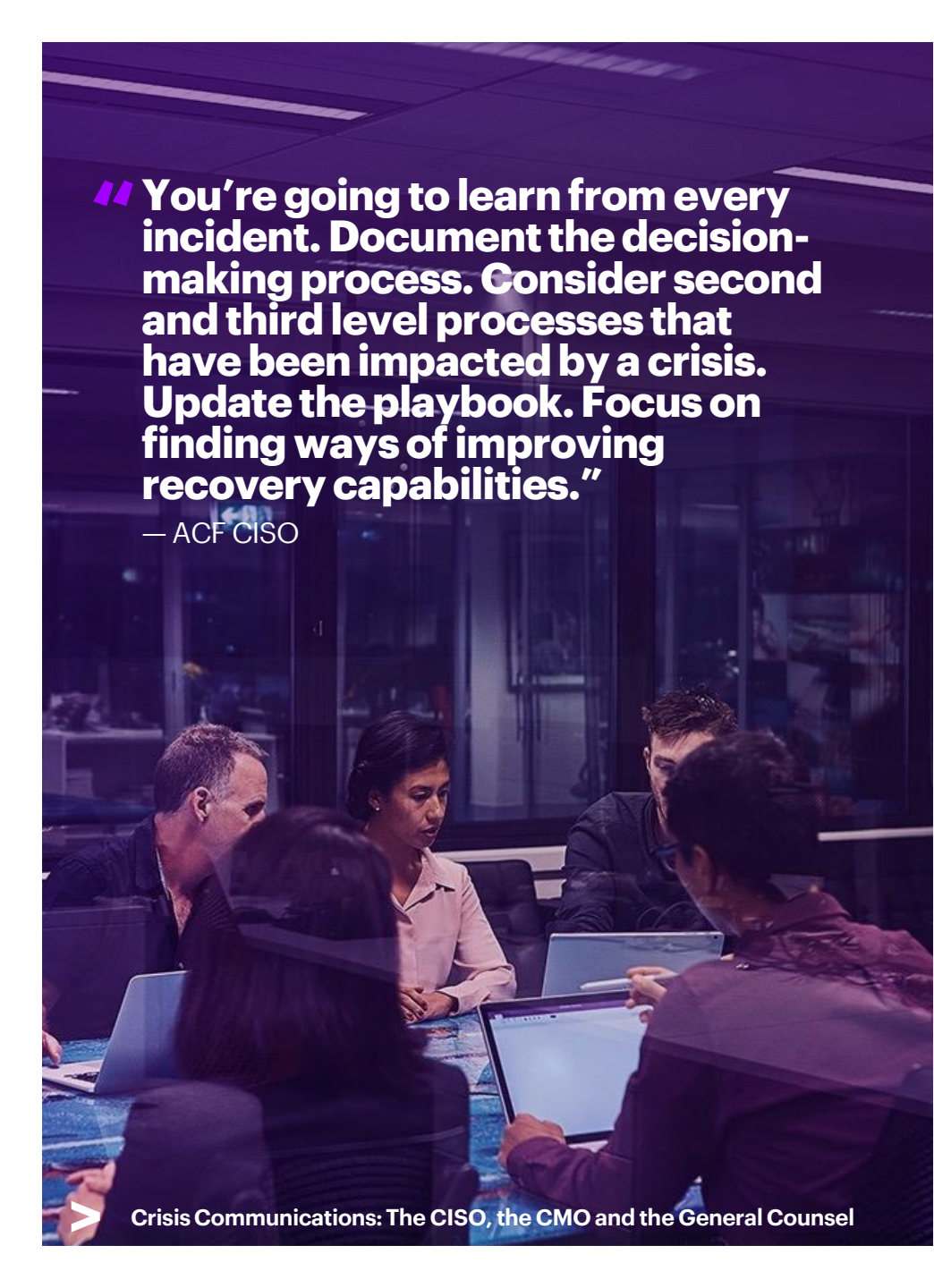
“Someone has to be dedicated full-time to keep track of regulatory requirements at regional, national, state and industry levels.”

— ACF CISO

Best practices (part 1/2)

Forum members identified the following best practices:

- **Relationships matter.** Before an incident, the CISO needs a tight, fluid relationship with the CXO team. Know who to pull into a situation and clarify roles and decision rights. The CISO of a global enterprise said that it seems that someone has to be dedicated full-time to keep track of regulatory requirements at regional, national, state and industry levels.
- **Have "what's best for the customer" guide decisions.** But keep in mind that not all audiences are equal and that decision rights should be aligned with audience definitions.
- **Capture learnings along the way.** “You’re going to learn from every incident,” said a CISO. Document the decision-making process. Consider second and third level processes that have been impacted by a crisis. Update the playbook. Focus on finding ways of improving recovery capabilities.
- **Consider media training to improve crisis communication skills.** Practicing in front of a camera can help prepare spokespeople for high-visibility communications assignments. An ACF member said: “We need to build muscle memory on external communications. For C-level executives what to say and how to say it externally requires practicing.”



“ You’re going to learn from every incident. Document the decision-making process. Consider second and third level processes that have been impacted by a crisis. Update the playbook. Focus on finding ways of improving recovery capabilities.”

— ACF CISO

Best practices (part 2/2)

Forum members identified the following best practices:

- **Craft concise messages.** The CMO recommended that spokespeople be prepared with no more than two or three main messages that need to be communicated consistently. “When you’re in an interview situation, start by level-setting the conversation with your three messages so they get communicated before taking questions.” In addition, the playbook should have draft communications in place that can be revised given the circumstances. Starting with a blank computer screen is difficult during a crisis.
- **Build muscle memory by routinely engaging in tabletop crisis situations exercises.** Team members come and go. New threats emerge. Regulations change. The enterprise response to crises needs to evolve accordingly, and the team needs to prepare accordingly. Tabletop simulations should incorporate engagement with the media, customers, regulators, among others.
- **Test your tools.** For example, a CISO said they regularly test their capability to deploy SharePoint and build audience lists so they are prepared to issue communications in high-stress situations.
- **Get the timing right.** In a fluid crisis, where you may not have all the answers, the enterprise may still be called on to share information. “Timing is one of the hardest questions, but we’ve found that when it comes to communication, the sooner the better,” said the CMO. It’s OK to say, ‘Here’s what we know today’ with an understanding that more information will come in time.”



**“Let’s share what we know
to secure what we must.”**

— **Kris Burkhardt** Accenture CISO, ACF Chair

Work the network

Contact [our team directly](#)
for questions and member introductions.

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