



**FORGE**  
COMMUNICATIONS

## **All Kinds of Fun: Crisis Communications in 2020**

October 13, 2020

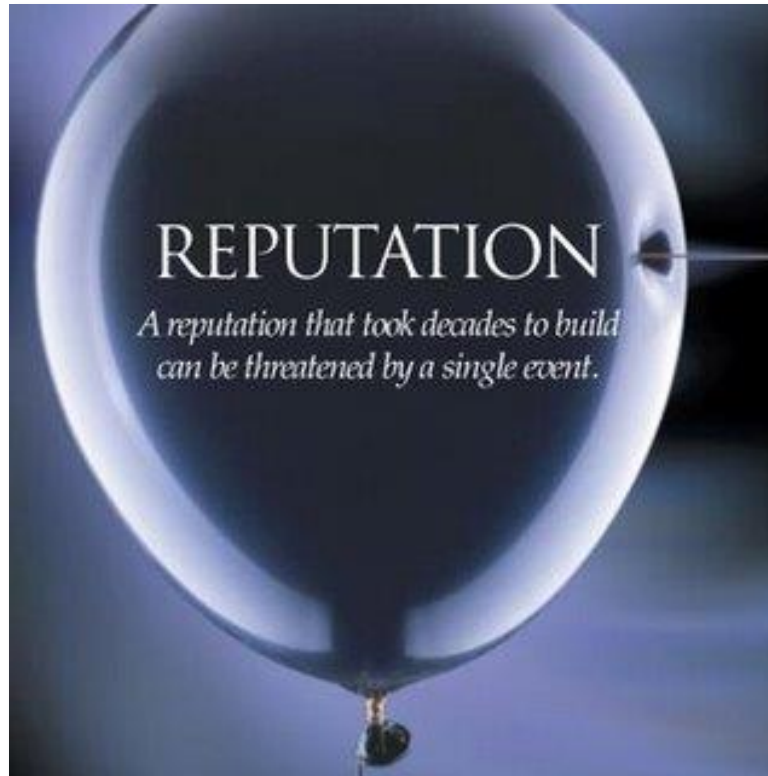
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**N.C. Biotechnology Center**

# Why is crisis communication planning and management important?





“If you lose money for the firm by a bad decision,  
I will be understanding.  
If you lose reputation for the firm,  
I will be ruthless.”

Warren Buffet

**53%**

of consumers expect brands  
to respond to a crisis within  
one hour

**59%**

of consumers want brand  
responses to to a crisis to  
come from the CEO

**90%**

of consumers say they are likely to shop with a  
brand that responds well to crises

2019 Survey, Crisp Thinking



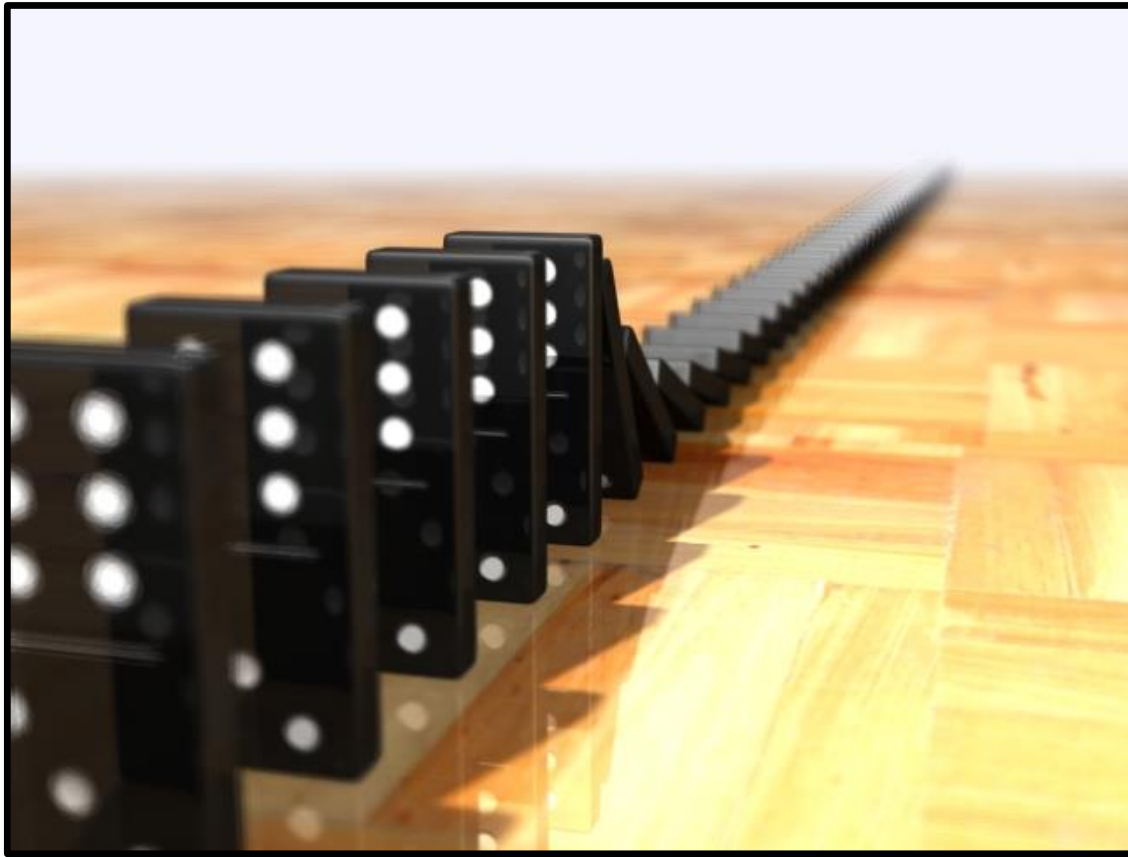


What is a “crisis”?

# Attributes

- Unexpected
- Out of the ordinary
- Unpredictable, disruptive
- Potential to undermine confidence and damage reputation
- Affects or involves multiple audiences
- Draws attention of internal and external stakeholders

And once it starts . . .





# Types of crises

- Natural disasters
- Accidents (mechanical, scientific, human error)
- Legal or financial issues
- Government actions
- Criminal activities
- Employee incidents
- Environmental, health issues
- High-profile events
- Rumors
- Cyber attacks
- Social media attacks/fake news

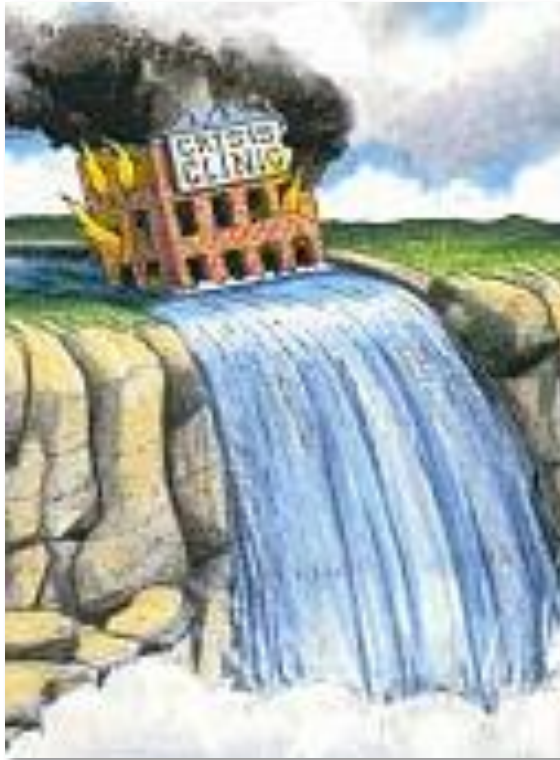


But it can happen, and it will happen.



It's not a question of if, it's a matter of when.

# Not every crisis is like this



(though it may feel like it)





Novozymes | Feb 2006







## Colonial Pipeline | June 2010



# Planning helps avert disaster at tank farm



Firefighters watch as flames shoot up from a tank of burning gasoline at the Colonial Pipeline Co. tank farm at Gallimore Dairy Road and Interstate 40. A lightning strike ignited the blaze shortly before 1 a.m. Sunday. Firefighters from Greensboro, High Point, Charlotte and Raleigh were at the scene.

PHOTOS BY BOB BROWN/News & Record

## Workers, firefighters knew what to do when lightning hit gasoline storage tank

By RYAN SEALS, RICHARD M. FERGUSON AND BOB KULMAN  
Staff Writers

**GREENSBORO** — Colonial Pipeline Co. will investigate why an electrical grounding system failed to prevent a fire at one of its gasoline storage tanks after it was struck by lightning early Sunday, a company spokesman said.

Colonial protects its tanks with systems designed to deflect electrical charges into the ground so routine thunderstorms don't cause fires. But the massive fire in one of its 72

### MORE ONLINE

View video and more photos from the fire at [news-record.com](http://news-record.com)

tanks off Gallimore Dairy Road was an exception, said spokesman Sam Whitehead.

"It's extremely rare," Whitehead said. "I've been with Colonial for 40 years, and this is only the third one

See Fire, Page A6



About 20 law enforcement officials from the Greensboro Police Department, Guilford County Sheriff's Office and the Highway Patrol closed down roads around the site, including parts of Interstate 40. All the roads in the area were reopened by 1:45 p.m.

## OUR OPINIONS

# Lightning strikes ...

■ But seamless collaboration between the city's fire department, peer public safety agencies and a local tank farm operator prevents a major catastrophe.

A bolt of lightning struck a local gasoline storage tank early Sunday, erupting into a wall of flames that leapt as high as 100 feet and belched a plume of smoke that billowed like an arch across eight lanes of interstate highway.

That so many people safely awakened hours later, not knowing the event had even happened, bears testament to the speed and effectiveness of the response.

A team of 150 firefighters from Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh and Charlotte arrived on the scene, tamed the fire in less than six hours and, more importantly, prevented its spread to 71 other gasoline tanks at the Colonial Pipeline tank farm off I-40.

Though speed is a hallmark of good firefighting, the swift success of Sunday morning's response actually began four years ago, when the Greensboro Fire Department established a partnership with local pipeline companies and fuel terminals for emergency planning and training.

Using federal funds, the fire department also purchased specialized equipment to battle potential tank farm blazes. In turn, Colonial had invested in fire hoses that measured more than a half-foot in diameter and that carried higher-than-normal volumes of water.

Greensboro Fire Chief Gregory Grayson added that his department and Colonial had trained on the site for a tank fire only two weeks ago "for this very type of event." (What is it they say about luck resulting when preparation meets opportunity?)

There was other good fortune. The timing of the incident, at just before 1 a.m. on a weekend, allowed firefighters, police and EMS crews to arrive through a minimum of traffic. Those same conditions also enabled the approximately 20 Greensboro Police Department, Guilford Sheriff's Office and State Highway Patrol officers to quickly close part of I-40 and other roads until the fire could be extinguished.

Further, the tanks nearest the fire happened to be almost empty, containing only 3,000 of their total capacity of 52,000 barrels.

And although four firefighters had to be treated for exhaustion after battling heat that exceeded 100 degrees, the temperatures during a daytime fire would have been even worse.

Thus far, it appears that the environmental impact of the fire is minimal. Colonial also had installed emergency dikes to contain any spilled gasoline and fire-suppressing foam to the tank farm site.

The one critical factor that did not operate according to plan was an electrical grounding system that was supposed to draw lightning away from the gasoline tanks. But the waves of storms and lightning that ripped through the Triad Sunday morning were especially nasty.

Acts of God will come when they will come. But careful planning prevented what surely could have been a major catastrophe.

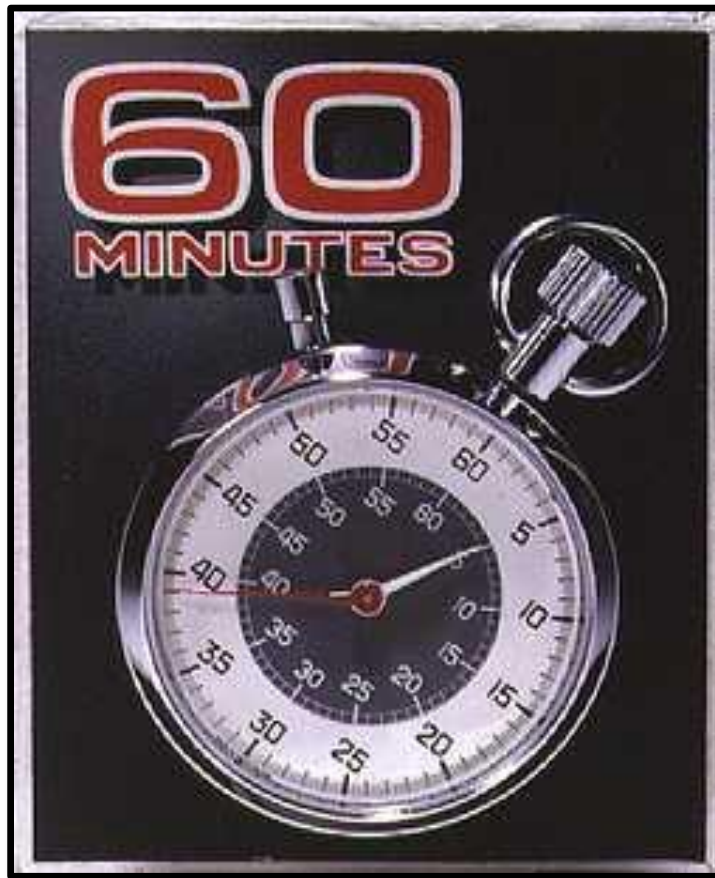
In the end, teamwork, communication and preparation saved the day, and we can only guess how many lives.

Colonial Pipeline | June 2010



“YOUR **FUTURE** IS CREATED BY WHAT  
YOU DO { **TODAY** }  
NOT ~~TOMORROW~~”

**Start in the future and work back**







Quite simply, this changed –  
and is still changing – everything.



>50% of people get breaking news from  
social media before traditional media.

# 2020 *This Is What Happens In An Internet Minute*



Created By:  
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**“By failing  
to prepare,  
you are  
preparing  
to fail.”**

Benjamin Franklin

# The first rule



You can't manage a crisis,  
but you can – and you must –  
manage your reaction.



# Before a crisis

- Think about it
- Think about it some more
- Predict the worst (fun brainstorming!)
- Create crisis team, assign responsibilities, collect all contact information (crises aren't just 9-5)
- Build consistent, compelling foundation with stakeholders through media, social media and more
- Think about it some more

# Before a crisis

- Build a crisis communication plan
  - Choose monitoring and content systems
    - Social media + news media
    - Emails, texts, phone calls
    - Consider AI-powered sentiment analysis tools
  - Agree on the strategy, tactics and general approach
  - Update employee handbook, on-boarding, social media policy, internal procedures, etc.
  - Develop key contact lists and distribute

# Before a crisis

- Build a crisis communication plan
  - Create messaging matrix by stakeholder groups
    - Employees and their families
    - Regulatory officials
    - Investors, shareholders, analysts, influencers
    - Patients, patient advocacy groups, customers, partners, vendors
    - Etc., etc., ad infinitum

# Before a crisis

- Build a crisis communication plan
  - Choose monitoring and content systems
    - Social media + news media
    - Relevant hashtags and followers
    - Skilled staff
    - Emails, texts, phone calls
    - Consider AI-powered sentiment analysis tools
  - Determine social media guidelines for interaction

# Before a crisis

- Build a crisis communication plan
  - Develop templates for statements, social posts, news releases, emails, Q&As, videos, web page, etc.
  - Identify spokespersons (consider training)
  - Assign access for social/news media accounts
  - Assess multilingual needs
  - Identify business and marketing PR metrics to monitor
  - Assess SEO status (e.g., domain authority)
  - Solidify approval process (with back-ups)

# Before a crisis

- Conduct crisis simulations
  - Stress-test the plan and people
  - Stress-test the process and platforms
  - Identify gaps

# When it hits

- Stop. Think. Go.
- Get the facts
- Assess the severity and potential
- Get help, if needed (legal, communication, regulatory, etc.)
- Adapt and implement crisis plan
- Listen – carefully
- Anticipate what else could happen (good and bad)
- Don't wait. Be proactive.



# When it hits

- Stay ahead of it
- Prepare strategies, tactics, messages, emails, posts, etc.
- Speak with one voice
- Tell the truth – if you mess up, ‘fess up
- Update internal + external stakeholders
- Act quickly (and wisely)
- Monitor and pivot, as needed





# Social media pros/cons in crises

## Advantages

- Tool to build trust in advance
- Reinforces public alerts
- Early-warning system
- Finger on the pulse
- Additional tracking tool
- Assessment tool for recovery
- Wide array of platforms

## Disadvantages

- Inept/unauthorized use can make things worse
- Not everyone uses it
- Not everyone will see posts
- Inaccuracies, hoaxes, etc.
- Resource-intensive
- Need to correct errors, misunderstandings
- Can fan negative opinions
- Can be overwhelming

# Afterward

- Breathe 😊
- Assess short- and long-term impact
- Assess your process
- Adjust crisis plan
- Adjust strategy, process, tactics
- Adjust messaging and communication
  - Story archetypes can help
  - Pioneer vs. rebirth
- Think some more

# Keep your eye on the horizon



- Reduce/eliminate negative impacts
- Preserve/improve reputation
- Return to normal ops ASAP
- Limit competition's ability to take advantage of the event
- Realize your goals

# Recipe for failure

- Lack of focus from leadership
- Lack of planning and preparation
- Failure to establish a detailed strategy
- Lack of agreement on roles and responsibilities
- Lack of follow through on commitments
- Lack of good data for decisions
- Lack of employee and stakeholder involvement
- Poor execution of plan
- Lack of urgency



# Recipe for success

- Leadership sees it as a priority
- Clarity of accountability, authority, responsibility
- Risks have been identified and assessed
- Strategies and tactics in place and practiced
- Key partners are part of crisis team
- Crisis plan is comprehensive and ready
- Media plan in place
- Spokespersons identified/trained, messaging
- Process exists to train, assess, revise

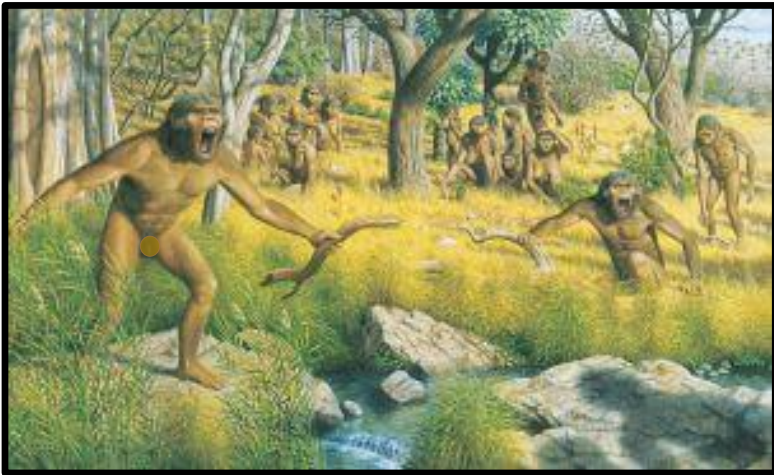


# When is a crisis good?

- Heroes are born
- Change is accelerated
- Latent problems are faced and solved
- New strategies and ideas evolve
- Early warning systems develop
- Lessons are learned and put to use

When it comes to communication,  
some things have changed,  
but most things haven't

# Humans haven't changed





# What persuades us?



# What persuades us?



Logos

Ethos

Pathos



Trustworthiness  
+  
Expertise  
+  
Dynamism

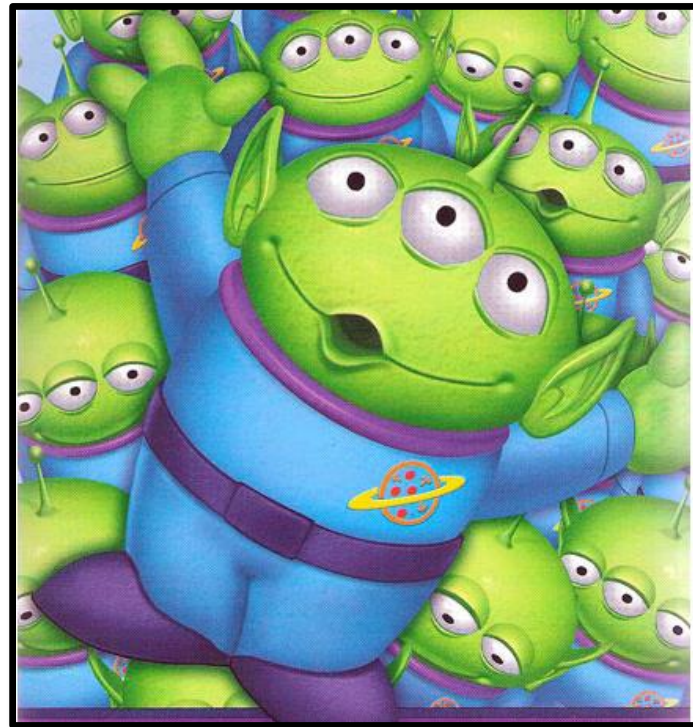
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Credibility

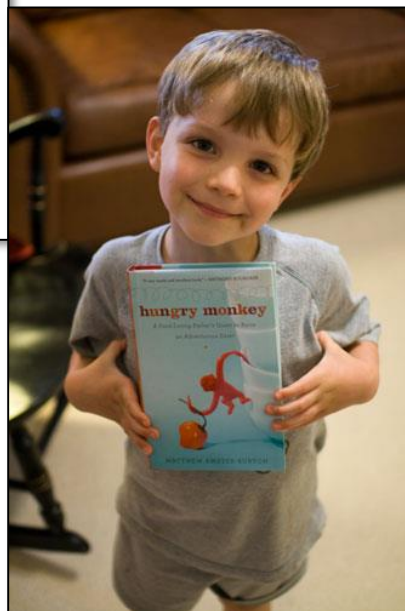


# What motivates us?

- Pain
- Pleasure
- Fear
- Hope



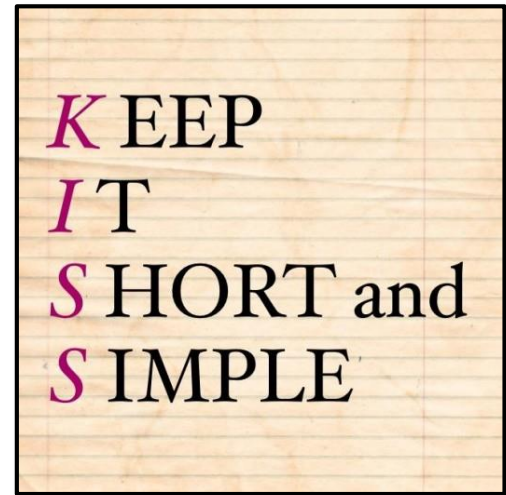
And it happens one person at a time . . .



Tell me a story, pleeeeeeeeeze

# Message guidelines

- Concise
  - The KISS Rule
- Consistent
  - No forked tongues allowed
- Compelling
  - Logos: Language the stakeholder can understand that is supported by facts
  - Ethos: From a source the stakeholder considers credible
  - Pathos: Trigger emotions that are pertinent, meaningful and authentic







Don't tell me how the watch was made,  
just tell me what time it is

# Appeal to basic human instincts



- What happened?
- Are my family and I safe?
- Is this bad for me and my family?  
My friends?
- Is this bad for the environment?
- Who is responsible?
- Who will be punished?
- How and when are things going to be fixed?
- What is the right thing to do?
- How can this be prevented from happening again?





Communication during and after a crisis is not about pulling strings behind the scenes to “spin” the public and media

It’s about responding effectively to preserve and strengthen your credibility, reputation and ability to operate successfully





**DO** THE RIGHT THING  
IT THE RIGHT WAY  
IT FOR THE RIGHT REASON

# Top 10 ways to trash a reputation

10. Wait till the last minute: Why prepare now if it might never happen?
9. Ignore your employees or members: It'll just distract 'em.
8. Ignore the media: Heck, they'll just twist the truth anyway.
7. Play by your rules and timetable: Why give a hoot about what anyone else wants?
6. Never accept responsibility or apologize: My lawyer knows best!
- 6b. Don't engage in social media: It's just too risky.

# Top 10 ways to trash a reputation

5. Ignore any and all emotions: Feelings are for wimps – facts rule!
4. Cooperate only when you have to: Keep your head down and your mouth shut.
3. Provide only the bare minimum of information: Why confuse ‘em with the details?
2. Dazzle ‘em with jargon: If a little is good, then a lot is even better!
1. Ignore it, and it will go away...



# Thank you

(and may the Forge be with you!)

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