

## Learning From Cats, Kids and Cold Cuts

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By Christina Stefanski

On March 12 close to 60 CPRS Ottawa/Gatineau members, future members, and students gathered to hear Dr. Terry Flynn speak about the value of crisis communications and the steps that were taken by Maple Leaf Foods during the Listeria outbreak in August 2008.

Dr. Flynn shared his findings from a six-month study on the response of Canadians to Maple Leaf Foods' communications activities led by CEO Michael McCain. According to Flynn, McCain acted like a leader, was strategic and was not afraid of making decisions.

"Organizations need to be in the field as soon as the crisis hits, be communicative, and do the right things," said Dr. Flynn. He noted that the keys to successful crisis communications are measuring, monitoring and managing the crisis. He also acknowledged that Maple Leaf Foods did an excellent job in regaining trust among customers, spending more than \$10 million on communications activities after the Listeria outbreak.

According to Flynn, "The biggest challenge in crisis communications is getting the organization to align their values and response. There can be no time lost in communications."

McCain's leadership demonstrated his commitment to Maple Leaf Foods' values and the safety of customers, says Flynn. By taking responsibility for the organization's failures in policy, management and ability to foresee the Listeria outbreak, McCain was able to regain the trust and credibility of Maple Leaf Foods.

"Trust, credibility and an effective spokesperson make the golden standard for what other companies have to follow," said Dr. Flynn.