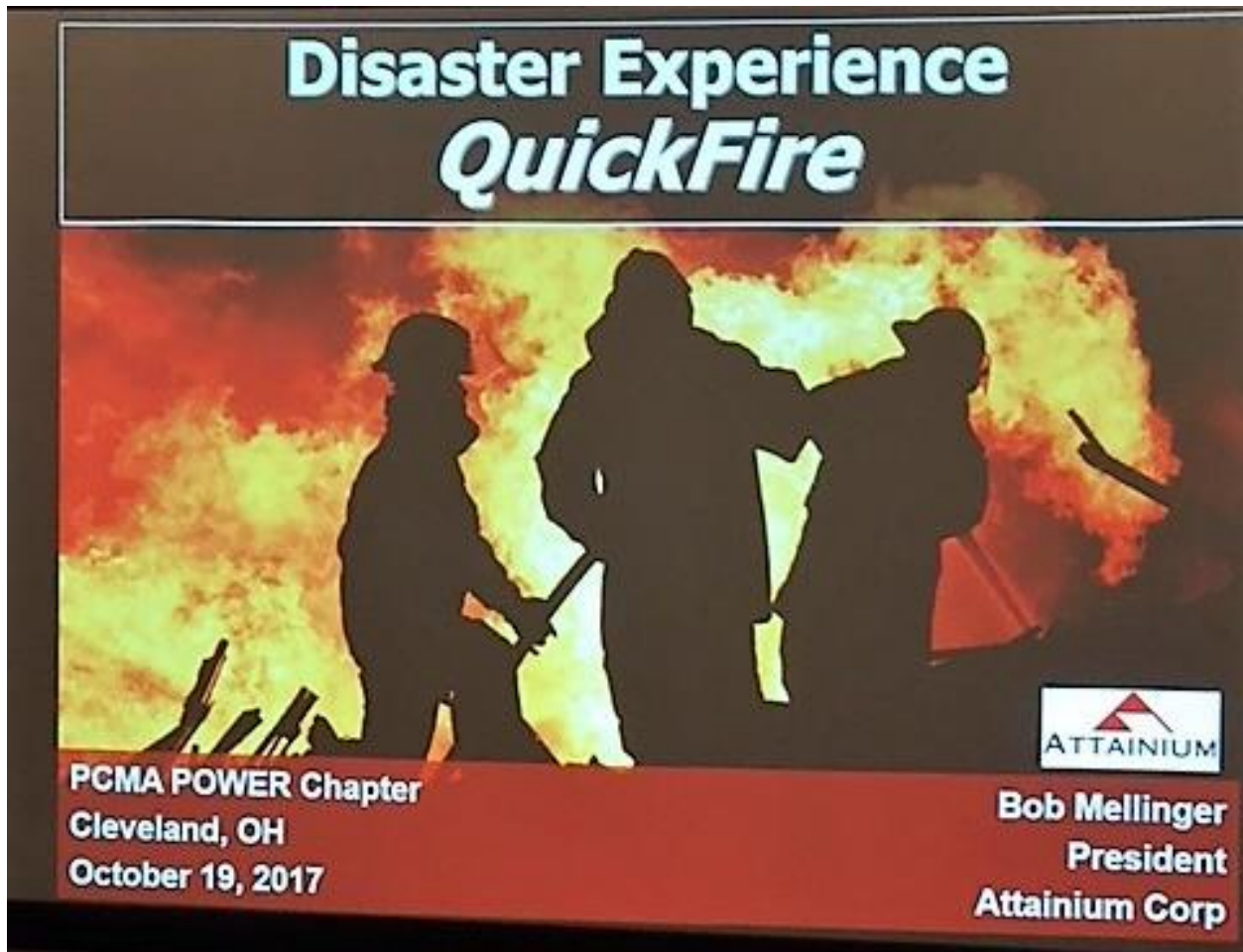


# Disaster Experience QuickFire



On Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 25 PCMA professionals gathered for lunch at [The Kimpton Schofield Hotel](#) in downtown Cleveland to hear Bob Mellinger, President of [Attainium](#). Bob is a PCMA Best-in-Class speaker and is making the rounds at many PCMA Chapter meetings to help event planners work through a crisis. He contends that every situation has its own unique set of circumstances, so you need a well thought out crisis plan that is well understood by your team.



## Meeting Objectives

- Improve your crisis communication and decision-making skills
- Identify gaps in your communication skills. Bob made a great point that there might be challenges because the individuals you are communicating with don't understand "your language" – acronyms, etc. Talk to the persons who understand your language and have them communicate to others.
- Recognize you can only make decisions based on the data you have in hand. You will never have all the data you need until the crisis is over.
- Discuss best practices and how to use the information at hand

## Event Logistics



Bob set up a scenario, we all worked among our tables as a team, we then debriefed and discussed with the entire room what we would do.

What was difficult for many of us was the speed of the crisis and the limited time one has to plan and respond. After the initial debrief, we had five cycles during which the storyline unfolded, followed by a debriefing period where we could alter our plan based on new information disclosed to the group.

## 5 Key Questions to Ask and Answer During a Crisis

1. **What can you and what can't you control?**  
Spend time on the things you can control and ignore the items you cannot.
2. **What do we know?**  
Deal with the facts that you know them at that moment.
3. **What don't we know?**

#### 4. What do we need?

#### 5. What are we planning to do next?

### Always Debrief after an Event Crisis

Bob reminded us that our number one concern in a crisis needs to be the safety and security of our meeting participants.

Based on the exercise we completed, everyone agreed that:

- **Miscommunication was a problem.**  
There were a lot of rumors going around about the crisis that had nothing to do with the facts. It is important to act on only what you know to be true.
- **The internal and external communication plan was adrift.**  
Staff and attendees all talked to the media which led to incorrect reporting and fueled fear among attendees.
- **The reputation of the venue and event were in question.**  
There still needed to be a plan to communicate about what happened at the event so a future event does not suffer loss of attendance due to lack of confidence in the association and its governing board.

### Bob's Final Thoughts

He reminded us that a crisis often moves too quickly *and* too slowly. There is a rush of new information and then a long period of waiting. His parting statement was, "Don't make a decision change based on no new information. Only change the path if you have new, factual information."