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## Crisis gurus applaud Letterman move

By DONNA GOODISON

Local crisis management experts gave high marks to David Letterman's frank on-air revelation Thursday of a \$2 million extortion attempt that threatened to reveal the late-night talk show host's sexual liaisons with female staff.

Letterman took control of the story by releasing the information on his own terms and portraying himself as a victim - key elements to a successful crisis communications strategy, experts said.

"He controlled the delivery of the message, and he got the information out at the time and in the way that he wanted to do it," said Justine Griffin, senior vice president of crisis communications for Rasky Baerlein Strategic Communications. "He did it very much in his own brand of humor, and it was very true to his personality."

Letterman's statement that he didn't plan to address the issue publicly much more also scored points with Griffin.

"The crises that really start to kill someone's reputation are the ones that drip, drip, drip - a piece of information comes out, and three days later there's another story with another angle," she said.

CBS News employee Robert Halderman, a producer for the real-life crime show "48 Hours," pleaded not guilty to a charge of first-degree attempted grand larceny in a Manhattan court Friday and is out on bail.

His blackmail attempt prompted the 62-year-old Letterman to acknowledge the sexual affairs to his studio audience and viewers during Thursday's "Late Show" on CBS, without specifying when they took place. In March, Letterman married Regina Lasko, his longtime girlfriend, and the couple has a 5-year-old son.

"I was worried for myself. I was worried for my family," Letterman said on air. "I felt menaced by this, and I had to tell them all of the creepy things that I had done."

"The creepy stuff was that I have had sex with women who work for me on this show," Letterman said. "My response to that is yes, I have."

Letterman did an "amazing" job given the circumstances - the level of stress that he likely was under and having to worry not only about himself, but his family, crew, audience and guests, said Nancy Sterling, senior vice president of ML Strategies in Boston.

"His management is really significant not only for him as a performer, but for him as a human being - meaning that the way he that he managed it could impact people's lives," Sterling said.

**Letterman's public airing of the matter on one of late-night's top-rated shows resulted in the best possible outcome for him, said Ann Murphy, a vice president at O'Neill and Associates.**

"It made it very believable because it was David Letterman speaking for himself rather than through a third party or just a compact statement without any other comments from him," she said.

Helene Solomon, CEO of Solomon McCown & Co., gave Letterman plaudits for "marching through the story in a very transparent and personal way" that she believed was both bold and quite powerful. But she drew the line at his humor. At one point, Letterman joked, "I know what you're saying: 'Oh, Dave had sex!'"

"Levity around sexual misconduct in the workplace for anyone is not a smart thing," she said.