

How to Publicize Your “Save” Story

—By Anne Devine

Your company exercised vision when it implemented an on-site automated external defibrillator (AED) program.

The program was well received by management and employees, and by the dedicated people who volunteered to be trained first responders. Now, when the unthinkable happened, a sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) in the workplace, your own employees were able to save the life of a coworker, administering a defibrillation shock and CPR before the ambulance arrived to provide advanced emergency medical care. What do you do now? How can your experience help others? By telling your story you may help save the life of your neighbor, relative or friend by encouraging other companies to establish AED programs in their workplaces.

Physio-Control, in Redmond, Washington, pioneered defibrillation technology more than 50 years ago. On July 18, 2006 we found out what the power of AEDs really means.

Our company revolutionized emergency medical services when it made the first portable defibrillator that enabled paramedics to carry defibrillation therapy to the patient’s side via ambulances. Over the years, Physio-Control’s dedication to saving more lives expanded defibrillation into communities with LIFEPAK® AEDs. Now anyone with minimal CPR and AED training, usually about three hours, can provide lifesaving treatment to someone whose heart has gone into a dangerous rhythm know as ventricular fibrillation (VF) and who most likely will die without immediate treatment.

During our quarterly company meetings we invite an SCA survivor and/or rescuer to speak to the employees. These events are deeply moving and keep the employees inspired and motivated. Yet, none of us quite understood what happens to a team when someone is saved with an AED by coworkers until July 18, 2006. On that day we found out, when one of our own employees collapsed in cardiac arrest.



Left to right: Steve Copeland, Dean Cowles, Oscar Rojas

For Dean Cowles, July 18 started out like any other day.

Dean came to work early as usual to avoid the congested commute to Redmond, Wash. He worked, along with his fellow engineers, in the North Building of the Physio-Control campus, to work on AEDs and other LIFEPAK defibrillators. In some cases, customers wanted special configurations, which Dean can figure out. Anyway, for Dean, it was just another day. Or so he thought.

It was a day Ed Fallon, Kim Arnold, Steve Copeland, Oscar Rojas and Steve Firman will never forget.

As Steve Copeland strolled through the cafeteria on a little “break,” Kim ran into the lobby screaming, “Where is the AED? It’s Dean!” Her fellow engineer Ed was already on the phone calling 9-1-1. Steve ran for the LIFEPAK 500 AED, which is prominently mounted on the cafeteria wall, and ran with Kim to Dean’s office. Oscar was already there, trying to administer to Dean. Steve and Oscar began CPR and Oscar applied the electrode pads. The AED immediately advised a shock. Steve Firman, Dean’s manager, came walking through

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the area, and Oscar, called, "Hey you, over here!" He was so shaken he could not remember Steve's name. Thinking Oscar was pulling a prank, Steve walked right over, and then saw the gravity of the situation. He also saw the team was doing a great job carrying out what they were taught in the CPR/AED training Physio-Control had started to require of all employees (not just the designated emergency response team) just two years before. He told them they were doing fine and to continue the therapy. When the device said, "Shock advised," the team looked at Steve and asked "Should we really do this?" He said, "Yes, we should." And they did.

It was Dean's lucky day. He received very effective CPR, thanks to Steve and Oscar, as well as Ed and Kim, who so quickly activated the chain of survival. Because Dean received almost immediate CPR and defibrillation (his first shock within two minutes or less of collapse) and quick response by the emergency medical services team, in addition to follow up care at nearby Evergreen Hospital Medical Center, he was back to work and doing well in just two weeks.

Now What?

How ironic can it be for a company that develops and manufactures lifesaving medical technology get to see the benefits of that technology in action right in its own workplace? Immediately, a company-wide e-mail was sent from Physio-Control's president informing all employees of the lifesaving event, being careful to respect Dean's privacy. We cautiously waited to hear more news, hoping for a positive outcome for our fellow employee.

Once Dean woke up later that week, he was "gung ho" about promoting the lifesaving benefits of AEDs. He wanted to tell everyone he could about AEDs and Heart Safe Workplaces. He wanted to express his gratitude to employees and to Physio-Control for implementing company-wide CPR/AED training and for having lifesaving AEDs available throughout the workplace.

The Perfect Opportunity for Us All to Celebrate Together

We had notified our local media of the event, and we received coverage the day of the company meeting from the Eastside Bureau of one of our local dailies. The August day was warm and sunny, and the time when we have the annual cookout... none of us was quite prepared for the emotions of that day, as we listened to our president talk with Dean about the event, and then to members of the team who rescued him. We realized the benefit of our lifesaving products, and that regular, everyday people can use this technology in a medical emergency to help save a life. Hearing Dean and our team speak reaffirmed that our jobs are important. What we do matters.

This event was captured on video, so we prepared Dean and the team for the taping of individual interviews and the actual company event. This three-plus minute DVD is a tribute to our work and can be used for many purposes, such as recruiting new employees, team building events, and marketing Heart Safe Workplaces.

Signifying the Event for Posterity

Our president wanted to ensure the memory of this event was kept in the forefront of our day-to-day business. He challenged the communications team to come up with creative ways to support that idea. "We had already begun writing a story of Dean's save, as we had done for so many others saved by LIFEPAK defibrillators. These stories are used for marketing purposes and are provided, with people's permission, to reporters and trade publications wanting to highlight the lifesaving benefits of AEDs.

Dean and the team's photo would be soon mounted on the walls of our "Survivor Gallery." Our writer was already completing a case study for the "Business Case for AEDs" for use in marketing heart safe workplaces to businesses and other organizations. We also commemorated the event with a plaque in the lobbies of our two buildings. This way, anyone who visits our company has the opportunity to learn about our save. Finally, our president declared July 18 as "Heart Safe Workplace Day" at Physio-Control.

More Visibility for AEDs and for Body Cooling (Induced Hypothermia)

We allocated PR resources to promote this story. Our PR agency contact was enthusiastic about the heartwarming effects of the story, especially around holiday time, noting the irony that an engineer who worked on defibrillators for about three decades is then saved by one of the devices he's touched so many times over the years.

Our agency began pitching Dean's story to various media outlets. The first opportunity came from a medical reporter with *USA Today* who is interested in sudden cardiac arrest and AEDs and wanted to interview our group for a story in the publication!

We scheduled a conference call with Dean and his rescue team, along with our PR team, for media training. They were already masters at providing "sound bytes" and felt ready to talk to *USA Today*.

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A Positive Media Outcome

The reporter took another angle to the story after talking with Dean, his rescue team, and later, Dean's physician. He learned that Dean had also benefited from a treatment known as induced hypothermia. Seattle, Wash. was the first to take early defibrillation to the victims of SCA and now we are one of the few cities nationwide to provide "body cooling" to help preserve brain function in people recovering from SCA. Dean's story was embedded in a larger story about the role of body cooling in improving outcomes for SCA victims. Dean's story illustrated the importance of every link in the chain of survival, early access to 9-1-1, early CPR, early defibrillation, and early access to advanced emergency medical services. Body cooling adds a new dimension to the continuum of care for SCA survivors.

We were very pleased the story ran on the December 11, 2006 cover page of *USA Today*: "To treat cardiac arrest, doctors cool the body" and the subhead "Brain-saving technique carries little risk, but most cities, hospitals aren't using it." On a subsequent page the story continued, with a synopsis of Dean's event, titled, "Training and quick action saved a life" and a great photo of Dean holding the LIFEPAK® 500 AED along with his lifesaving team.

We Received a Call from a Producer with CBS Evening News with Katie Couric

She read the article about body cooling in *USA Today* and, after researching the topic further, was interested in doing a segment for Katie's new nightly news program. She arranged for a visit to our plant with her crew on January 24, 2007.

The producer was well prepared and very good to work with, making our PR team and employees comfortable with her plans for the story and their interviews. We accompanied Dean and the crew to his cardiologist's office later that afternoon, where the producer interviewed Dean and his

doctor, and the crew got shots of them together. She rounded out the story by shooting additional hospital scenes. The piece aired, as part of a series on heart health, on February 27th. We were pleased at the professionalism with which the informative segment was produced. The opportunity to tell our story had come full circle, from our own employees and local media to national print coverage, to national television coverage.

What a Save in the Workplace Really Means

Months later, as we attended a company meeting there sat Dean. He grinned and gave a little wave. The reality of the situation hit home. As you promote your "save," you may find the publicity enhances your corporate reputation as a caring employer who does the right thing. It may also help you attract and retain quality employees, because you care about them. It may help you create marketing tools to support your sales team, and motivate your team for years to come as they view the clips and CDs of media coverage.

But what it really comes down to is: It is the small, daily interactions with people who touch our lives that mean the most. Dean's wave reminded us of that, and how grateful we are that Physio-Control was prepared to help save his life in the critical initial stages of The Chain of Survival. We're glad Dean's team was prepared to respond. We're all delighted Dean is here with us today.

Things to Remember When Promoting Your Save

- Be sure the individual(s) involved want to be recognized. Some people who survive SCA prefer privacy about their medical condition and do not want it to be widely known. Clarify what they feel comfortable with, and obtain written permission, with the help of your legal team.
- Also check in with rescuers to determine their interest in being involved in media and other events. Some may not wish to be singled out in this way. Others may agree to be photographed (also obtain written permission according to your company's policy) but not want to speak. Honor their wishes.
- Prepare your team before involving them in any media interviews. Let them know they do not have to respond to questions that make them uncomfortable. Provide media training, teaching them to speak in "sound bytes," which essentially means to get to the point quickly rather than wandering. Always be with your team during media interviews.
- Think of good visuals to provide the media. This may include ideas about photo locations, the opportunity to photograph the AED (or an AED trainer) with the rescuers, providing a training tape so the reporters can see the device "in action," and suggestions for locations that will provide visual interest for film crews.
- Reach out to your local media. You may want to pitch the story individually to reporters you already know, or schedule a media event, sending a media advisory in advance that provides details related to the event: who, what, when, where, why should I go?

- Remember your survivor may be dealing with ongoing health issues. Be sure to pace the events and requests on his or her time. You may need to help buffer him/her from multiple requests and offer to help prioritize. There may need to be a "time out" period to allow for rest and getting back to work.

PR Deliverables You Can Develop About Your Save Story

- With your human resources department, plan a special employee event to celebrate. This could be a one-time or annual event to commemorate the importance of your Heart Safe Workplace. You may wish to invite key media to this event.
- Photograph your team, survivor and rescuers, and frame the photo, with a brief synopsis of the lifesaving event, to remind employees and visitors about the importance of the Heart Safe Workplace.
- Write up the story for use in recruiting employees to your company.
- Write a case study that shows the importance of AEDs and how it made a difference for your company. You can provide this to reporters and trade publications interested in covering SCA, AEDs and Heart Safe Workplace stories.
- Be sure to keep clips of media coverage and order CDs of any electronic coverage for viewing by employees into the future.
- Consider engaging your company and employees in community events such as those sponsored by the American Heart Association and local survivor groups.

For more information, please contact your representative at 1.800.442.1142 or visit our Web site at www.physio-control.com.



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