**Crisis Leadership and COVID-19**

**Principles and Tactics to Lead Through the Crisis, Not Just Manage It**

**About This Guide:**

This is produced as the result of a discussion and previous collaboration between me, Daryl Black, Tim Carwell of CommAlert, and Becky McCaffrey of Intrinsic Management Consulting.

As long-time partners in the areas of emergency response & management, crisis communications, and business continuity, we felt that it would be beneficial to work together to produce information and documentation to assist business owners and individuals to navigate through the COVID19 situation.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**“Issues don’t need management, they need leadership.”**

Leading during a crisis has many similarities to non-crisis circumstances but there are also many different elements and considerations. When it is business-as-usual, leadership is often keeping control on the straightaways with the occasional turn in the road.

Crisis, however, is characterized by fewer straightaways, more turns and ever-changing road conditions.

Crisis leadership is about leaning into the turns and not avoiding them.

Generally, you are operating in an environment where information is scarce, changing and frankly, inaccurate. The human emotions are more acute during crisis in that people have heightened stress and anxiety.

With all the challenges that crisis brings it can also be an opportunity to bring the team together in a common goal.

The following is general guidance for leaders. Note that there are no hard and fast rules and so a principles-based approach is best.

**Objectives for Leading During Crisis**

1. **Provide safety:**
   1. **Physical needs**
      1. Abundance of soap, hand sanitizer, social distancing practices, remote working, etc.
   2. **Psychological safety**
      1. Recognize that your team will be enveloped by stress, anxiety, and borderline panic.

Likely not all of the emotions will be attached to work. They have personal concerns around their kids, elderly parents, etc. You can have all of the protocols and safeties in place at the workplace, but your team will also be thinking about everything else as well. Support them outside the workplace as well if in a position to do so.

***NOTE: It is important that you DO NOT impose your own views or opinions on them. Your opinion is IRRELEVANT.***

1. **Create a ‘*NO Rumour or Speculation*’ Rule**
2. Deal in facts, STOP rumours and speculation in its tracks.
3. Establish branded sources of information (i.e. CDC, provincial/state health authorities, etc.).
4. Reinforce the ‘No Speculation/Rumour Rule’ at every meeting and in as many interactions as possible. People have a natural tendency to speculate, guess, and in many cases gossip.
5. Walk the walk yourself by NOT engaging or assisting in the spreading of (mis)information
6. Information is neither good nor bad. WE attach the meaning to it.
7. **No information is good or bad**
   1. You are responsible for treating information as neutral. Good, bad, terrible, great are meanings we attach.
   2. Information just ‘IS’. Overly emotional reactions are contrary to good crisis leadership and sound decision-making.
8. **Decide what you can/cannot control**
   1. Do not spend time and energy on circumstances that you simply can’t control.
9. **Look from the status of what IS in place and working**
   1. This is a much more productive place to start problem solving as we tend to focus on what is broken or not in place vs what is working and in place. What building blocks/systems/processes/procedures are currently in place? This turns our attention to what can be used immediately to at least minimize the impact. Note the 80/20 Rule below.
10. **Plan, make THE tough decisions, act decisively**
    1. Adopt the 80/20 rule. This rule acknowledges that we will never, in a crisis, achieve 100% information or accuracy in that information. Get to the 80% and execute. Monitor frequently, adjust as needed, but move forward. We create our own ‘good luck’ when we lean in and act. Momentum is very important during crisis.
    2. Practically decide who stays, who goes. What does this look like in the short term? What about the long term?
    3. Use trigger points. If ‘THIS' happens then we will do ‘THAT’.
    4. DON’T be married to one plan because you thought of it and you don’t want to seem weak or like you don’t know what’s going on.
    5. ALWAYS document your decisions for future reference and embrace the fact that you will make mistakes – learn from them.
11. **Communicate**
    1. Schedule a standing meeting so the team doesn’t have to guess when they’ll hear something, and it creates a rhythm for team members to get into.
    2. Be available to talk. Don’t be TOO busy!!

**Ways of BEING for “A Leader”**

Teammembers will remember how you made them ‘feel’, not as much as what you did.

* 1. **BE empathetic.** It means you put yourself in the team member’s shoes, see things from THEIR perspective. Hold space for them. You don’t have to agree or disagree. **Your opinion does NOT matter.**
  2. **BE compassionate.** Recognize the difficulty that people are going through. Act with kindness wherever possible. It may mean you or the organization ‘loses’ short-term but in the long-term gain.
  3. **BE vulnerable.** Contrary to popular belief vulnerability is not about opening up about your childhood trauma or revealing deep secrets. It IS engaging when you don’t know.
  4. **BE calm.** Nothing undermines sound decision-making like stress. As leaders our attitudes are contagious and during crisis the team is even more acutely aware of how you are conducting yourself, what you’re saying, and how you’re saying it. They are looking for a calm in the storm and it is your responsibility to deliver the steadfastness that is so important in crisis. Take TWO deep breaths before engaging in a conversation or making a decision. It works.