

Leading in a Crisis

How to keep your people calm, focused and engaged

A crisis is a threat but it's also an opportunity to demonstrate effective leadership and make your company stronger.

Avoid this common leadership mistake

In times of crisis your people feel anxious, afraid and out of control. And they're looking at you, their leader, to be their lighthouse in the storm.

Ineffective leaders make a critical mistake: They don't know what to say, so they stop communicating. When you do this, you send a message to your people that you're just as lost as they are.

Your No. 1 goal

Neuroscience tells us that the brain is a "prediction engine." It craves certainty and routine. The chaos created by a crisis is an assault on the brain. People become unproductive precisely at a time when you need them to be agile and resourceful.

In such a situation, your number one goal when leading people is to **relieve the anxiety** that blocks them from facing challenges at 100% capacity.



The key to relieving anxiety... have a plan

Research shows that when teams face high-stress situations, there's potential for a breakdown of the "shared cognition" that prevails in normal circumstances. Stress can cause a group of highly competent people to "cognitively diverge from each other" and independently make a series of bad decisions that cascade into chaos. The solution is to provide the team with what the researchers called a "shared mental model" – a well-defined plan – that facilitates teamwork and decreases the level of stress that can result in mistakes.

***** The 5 elements of an effective crisis plan *****

1 Candidly define the present reality

Don't sugarcoat the problem. Start by saying that you're facing a serious threat and there's a rough road ahead.

2 Show your work

People respond badly to unexplained events. So emphasize that your plan is based on rigorous factual analysis. As in, "Our risk-analysis expert estimates revenue could drop by 25%. That's why we're taking aggressive action."

3 Provide accurate information

Accuracy gives people a sense of control. Bad news is more tolerable when it's predictable and people believe that what you're telling them is true. As in, "Based on our analysis, we expect to be hardest hit in the following three ways ..."

4 Keep it simple

Articulate the one overarching goal you want to achieve, then lay out a series of bullet points that will ensure the safest possible journey. As in, "We need to protect cash to get through this. Here are three action steps we will take immediately."

5 Over-communicate

Repeat the plan many times and in different venues: In person, by video, via email and on social media. If rumors spring up, assume they were triggered by a communications oversight. Address the rumors. Fill the gap immediately.

Advantage

Distributed by **Advantage Performance Group**
www.advantageperformance.com