

Leadership in Times of Crisis

(adapted from a collection of sources: McKinsey, Dan Sullivan, the Bible)

6 Steps for Leadership in Times of Crisis

1. **Leadership:** Leaders Set the Tone. People follow. The value of ‘deliberate calm’ and ‘bounded optimism’. Wisdom and Humility.
2. **People Connection:** Demonstrating empathy: Deal with the human tragedy as a priority.
3. **Focus:** Leaders are able to balance both the challenges and opportunities as well as the moment and the future.
4. **Plan and Decide:** Making decisions amid uncertainty: Pause to assess and anticipate, then act.
5. **Teams and Work:** Organizing to respond to crises to build a network of teams. Delegate, trust, leverage, and empower.
6. **Process:** Communicate effectively and clearly. Maintain transparency and provide frequent updates.

1. Leadership: Leaders Set the Tone. People follow. The value of ‘deliberate calm’ and ‘bounded optimism’. Wisdom and Humility.

Crises can put extraordinary demands on leaders in business and beyond. The hallmarks of a “landscape scale” crisis: an unexpected event or sequence of events of enormous scale and overwhelming speed, resulting in a high degree of uncertainty that gives rise to disorientation, a feeling of lost control, and strong emotional disturbance. Recognizing that a company faces a crisis is the first thing leaders must do. Once leaders recognize a crisis as such, they can begin to mount a response. During a crisis, which is ruled by unfamiliarity and uncertainty, effective responses are largely improvised. What leaders need during a crisis is not a predefined response plan but behaviors and mindsets that will prevent them from overreacting to yesterday’s developments and help them look ahead.

But large crises, **character is of the utmost importance.** Crisis-response leaders must be able to unify teams behind a single purpose and frame questions for them to investigate. The best will display several qualities. One is “**deliberate calm**,” the ability to detach from a fraught situation and think clearly about how one will navigate it. Deliberate calm is found in well-grounded individuals who possess humility but not helplessness.

Another important quality is “**bounded optimism**,” or confidence combined with realism. Early in a crisis, if leaders display excessive confidence in spite of obviously difficult conditions, they can lose credibility. It is more effective for leaders to project confidence that the organization will find a way through its tough situation but also show that they recognize the crisis’s uncertainty and have begun to grapple with it by collecting more information. When the crisis has passed, then optimism will be more beneficial. This “bounded” quality is being realistic. Confront the brutal facts and be honest with self and others about the current situation.

This calm and character as well as the optimism and realism can only come from being grounded in Christ. This involves both having an intimacy and a surrender that allows God to work in and through us. In crisis leaders need to pray fervently to hear from the Lord.

Luke 5:10,11, “And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

John 15:5, “I am the vine and you are the branches, he who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit, apart from Me you can do nothing.”

James 1:5-6, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

1 Peter 5:5, “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble

In a moment of crisis, reactions set the leaders apart from the followers. Peter Stark

In times of crisis, people reach for meaning. Meaning is strength. Our survival may depend on our seeking and finding it. Viktor E. Frankl

2. People Connection: Demonstrate empathy: Deal with the human tragedy as a priority. Care for people and they will look after you.

In a landscape-scale crisis, people’s minds turn first to their own survival and other basic needs. Will I be sickened or hurt? Will my family? What happens then? Who will care for us? Leaders shouldn’t assign communications or legal staff to address these questions. A crisis is when it is most important for leaders to uphold a vital aspect of their role: making a positive difference in people’s lives. Doing this requires leaders to acknowledge the personal and professional challenges that employees and loved ones have during a crisis.

Lastly, it is vital that leaders not only demonstrate empathy but open themselves to empathy from others and remain attentive to their own well-being. As stress, fatigue, and uncertainty build up during a crisis, leaders might find that their abilities to process information, to remain levelheaded, and to exercise good judgment diminish. They will stand a better chance of countering functional declines if they encourage colleagues to express concern—and heed the warnings they are given. Investing time in their well-being will enable leaders to sustain their effectiveness over the weeks and months that a crisis can entail.

1 Corinthians 12:25, “so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

When someone is in crisis, don't start by teaching, leveraging, or explaining. Just be with. **John Ortberg**

3. Focus: Leaders are able to balance both the challenges and opportunities as well as the moment and the future.

Leaders maintain a right focus and know what is most important in the moment of a crisis. They also know what can be set aside. Focus includes having a sense of visions and priorities. Vision helps motivate and set the priorities. Focus is the intersection of what is most important and what I can control. Forget is similar in that it is all the things and I can't control or what is not the most important. Here are ten sets of things to both forget and what to focus on.

Forget about yourself;	focus on others.
Forget about your commodity;	focus on your relationships.
Forget about the sale;	focus on creating value.
Forget about your losses;	focus on your opportunities.
Forget about your difficulties;	focus on your progress.
Forget about the “future”;	focus on today.
Forget about who you were;	focus on who you can be.
Forget about events;	focus on your responses.
Forget about what's missing;	focus on what's available.
Forget about your complaints;	focus on your gratitude.

Philippians 3:12-14, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation. **Viktor E. Frankl**

In times of crisis, it is of utmost importance to keep one's head.

4. Plan and Decide: Making decisions amid uncertainty: Pause to assess and anticipate, then act.

Waiting for a full set of facts to emerge before determining what to do is a common mistake made during crises. Because a crisis involves many unknowns and surprises, facts may not become clear within the necessary decision-making time frame. But leaders should not resort to using their intuition alone. Leaders can better cope with uncertainty and unsettled emotions by continually collecting information as the crisis unfolds and observing how well their responses work.

In practice, this means pausing from crisis management, assessing the situation from multiple vantage points, anticipating what may happen next, and then acting. The **pause-assess-anticipate-act cycle** should be ongoing, for it helps leaders maintain a state of deliberate calm and avoid overreacting to new information as it comes in. While some moments during the crisis will call for immediate action, with no time to assess or anticipate, leaders will eventually find occasions to stop, reflect, and think ahead before making moves.

Two **cognitive behaviors** can aid leaders as they **assess and anticipate**. One, called updating, involves revising ideas based on new information teams collect and knowledge they develop. The second, doubting, helps leaders consider ongoing and potential actions critically and decide whether they need to be modified, adopted, or discarded. Once leaders decide what to do, they must act with resolve. Visible decisiveness not only builds the organization's confidence in leaders; it also motivates the network of teams to sustain its search for solutions to the challenges that the organization faces.

Proverbs 16:1,3,9 ¹The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord...
Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established...
The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

A time of crisis is not just a time of anxiety and worry. It gives a chance, an opportunity, to choose well or to choose badly.
Desmond Tutu

5. Teams: Organizing to respond to crises, build a network of teams. Delegate, trust, leverage, and empower. One person can't do it all.

During a crisis, leaders must relinquish the belief that a top-down response will engender stability. Leaders can mobilize their organizations by setting clear priorities for the response and empowering others to discover and implement solutions that serve those priorities. To promote rapid problem solving and execution under high-stress, chaotic conditions, **leaders can organize a network of teams**. A network of teams consists of a highly adaptable assembly of groups, which are united by a common purpose and work together in much the same way that the individuals on a single team collaborate.

Break up the teams to focus on actions outside regular business operations, identify implications for routine business activities and make adjustments. The network of teams will include four domains: **workforce protection, supply-chain stabilization, customer engagement, and financial stress testing**. Regardless of their functional scope, effective networks of teams display certain qualities. They are multidisciplinary: experience shows that crises present a degree of complexity that makes it necessary to engage experts from different fields. They are designed to act. Merely soliciting experts' ideas is not enough; experts must gather information, devise solutions, put them into practice, and refine them. And they are adaptable, reorganizing, expanding, or contracting as teams learn more about the crisis and as conditions change.

Leaders should foster collaboration and transparency across the network of teams. One way they do this is by distributing authority and sharing information: in other words, demonstrating how the teams themselves should operate. Leaders need to promote psychological safety so people can openly discuss ideas, questions, and concerns without fear of repercussions. This allows the network of teams to make sense of the situation, and how to handle it, through healthy debate.

Ecclesiastes 4:9,12: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor... And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

1 Corinthians 12:12 "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."

Just as an organization's senior executives must be prepared to temporarily shift some responsibilities from their command-and-control hierarchy to a network of teams, they must also empower others to direct many aspects of the organization's crisis response. This involves granting them the authority to make and implement decisions. Establish an architecture for decision making, so that accountability is clear. Senior leaders must also make sure that they empower the right people to make crisis-response decisions. In routine emergencies, experience is perhaps the most valuable quality that leaders bring.

James 1:5-6, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."

1 Peter 5:5, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

A boss has the title, a leader has the people. Simon Sinek

6. Process: Communicating effectively and clearly. Maintain transparency and provide frequent updates

Crisis communications from leaders often hit the wrong notes. Time and again, we see leaders taking an overconfident, upbeat tone in the early stages of a crisis—and raising stakeholders' suspicions about what leaders know and how well they are handling the crisis. Authority figures are also prone to suspend announcements for long stretches while they wait for more facts to emerge and decisions to be made.

Neither approach is reassuring. *"Transparency is 'job one' for leaders in a crisis. Be clear what you know, what you don't know, and what you are doing to learn more."* Thoughtful, frequent communication shows that leaders are following the situation and adjusting their responses as they learn more. This helps them reassure stakeholders that they are confronting the crisis. Leaders should take special care to see that each audience's concerns, questions, and interests are addressed. Having members of the crisis-response team speak firsthand about what they are doing can be particularly effective.

Communications shouldn't stop once the crisis has passed. Offering an optimistic, realistic outlook can have a powerful effect on employees and other stakeholders, inspiring them to support the company's recovery.

Matthew 5:37, "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained..."

I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts. Abraham Lincoln