



Navigating a Crisis with your Humanity, Sanity, and Team Still Intact

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Question: In addition to the COVID 19 pandemic, there seems to be many crises that have impacted our business. We are unsure how to respond to these and balance the employee needs as well as our business requirements. Can you help guide us?

Answer: No one is “ready” for a crisis, and we all dread them. The crisis may be related to financial, workforce, or health issues (like a global pandemic?), or perhaps a natural disaster. No matter the cause, leadership is critical in helping your company and employees navigate, survive, and thrive through a crisis. Leaders must adopt a mindset that allows you to put one foot in front of the other, especially when it’s hard. Challenges can be viewed as stressful and overwhelming, or challenges can be viewed as opportunities. Your mindset will determine how you feel about the situation and will heavily influence your company’s success. Here are four key strategies for navigating a crisis with your humanity, your sanity, and your team still intact.

#1: Stay Connected and Communicate: Regardless of which end of the ‘busy’ spectrum your company is on right now, carving out time to touch base with your team is paramount. In the absence of information, people will fill in the gaps of understanding with their own conclusions. Rarely does this bode well. Your team needs to know that you care about them, that you are in this with them, and that you are working on plans to secure the viability of the business so that you can all navigate through the crisis. Connection can happen through face-to-face conversations, through daily or weekly update emails, phone calls, text messages, videos or Zoom meetings. The frequency is almost as important as the content. Be intentional with these touchpoints – especially when you are physically separated.

#2: Grant Grace: When a crisis occurs, teams may need to find new ways to perform job functions. Perhaps you no longer have an office and employees shift suddenly to remote work, or you lose a large segment of your customers. No matter the type of crisis, there will be disruptions and competing priorities. There will be frustration and non-productive time and technology challenges. Take a breath, let the little things go and allow others to do the same. Granting grace is granting permission for life to be messy sometimes and for each of us to be human. Provide flexibility where you can and tell your team to take a break when you can see that they need one. Give yourself that same permission. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

#3: Orient Towards the Positive: No matter the change, it is not without hope and light. We need to be reminded of the good to keep our energy up and our outlook positive. You could start each meeting with everyone sharing something they are grateful for or something positive that happened in their work recently. You could ask your team to participate in a volunteer effort to give back to your community. If

you have staff working remotely, you could include them in a virtual recipe exchange, a virtual happy hour, or a fun contest of some sort. Take time to fill your tank and gain perspective.

#4: Be Transparent: Don't let fear of making the wrong choice stop you from making any choice. Push forward with the information you have and let your team know the WHY behind decisions. Provide opportunities for questions and suggestions and be willing to reconsider your options if/when additional guidance and support becomes available. Prepare your teams for operating with a degree of unknown and provide them with regular updates to keep their focus on what you DO know vs. what you DON'T. Remember, communication is key, but it has to be honest, transparent, authentic communication if you want to keep everyone moving forward.

While you can't accurately predict what the days ahead will bring, you do have the ability to control your responses and to identify lifelines that will guide your team through uncharted waters. To use a sports cliché, 'It's game time'! Your employees are watching how you perform under this pressure. Your customers are watching how quickly you adapt to change and how deftly you respond to their needs. Your colleagues are watching. Your community is watching. Crisis reveals character and for those of you who have been putting in the work to finetune your leadership and communication skills over the years, it's about to pay off.