

## Navigating a Crisis

### Lesson 6-5: Managing the Psychological Effects of a Crisis

#### Discussion Guide – Confidentiality Reminder

#### One Word Check-in

#### Update – Personal, Business, Leadership

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*“Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Matthew 6:27 (NIV)*

**Crisis is a state of feeling.** It is an internal experience of confusion and anxiety that falls outside of formerly successful coping mechanisms. A person in crisis may feel confused, vulnerable, anxious, afraid, angry, guilty, hopeless and helpless. This state of crisis can occur at work or at home in our personal lives.

#### **The health of an organization is dependent on the collective physical and mental health of its staff.**

Business leaders tend to only think about the financial impact a crisis has on their organization and how to survive in a challenging and changing business environment. Crises take a personal toll on us physically and psychologically, resulting in feelings of anxiousness, loss of sleep, depression and a sense of failure. When the emotional health of employees declines, productivity and revenue usually decrease in tandem.

#### **In a crisis, we all experience the loss of connection, structure, control and competence:**

- *Loss of connection* – God has wired us for relationships. During the pandemic, we had to severely restrict contact with those outside our household. Contact with friends and extended family was difficult, and working from home challenged our workplace relationships. During a financial crisis, there is a concern of being laid off, therefore not being able to support your family.
- *Loss of structure* – Nearly all normal routines were broken during the pandemic. Parents were unable to go to work; children could not go to childcare or school; and activities such as going to the gym, a restaurant or a sporting event were suddenly off limits.
- *Loss of control* – In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, air travel was suspended. Something as basic as freedom of movement can be taken away from us without warning.
- *Loss of competence* – During a crisis, work roles can change. If ‘all hands-on deck’ are needed to deal with a crisis, many will be forced to work outside of their area of expertise.

#### **Leadership can effectively navigate a crisis by acknowledging these losses and their psychological impacts on their team.** Below are some specific steps to alleviate the psychological effects of loss:

- Show empathy and compassion for lost connections by facilitating opportunities for your team to talk together about how they are handling the current situation mentally and physically.
- Provide new structure by identifying the new highest priorities, assigning responsibilities to meet those priorities and setting up a crisis response team to lead this effort.
- Acknowledge what cannot be controlled while spending time and effort on the things that still can be controlled. Let go of the uncontrollable and get to work on the controllable.
- Even if normal work responsibilities have been upset, take on new priority tasks that utilize your skill set. This can also be a time to work on strategic projects that have been put off.
- Provide hope and vision for how the organization will survive.

#### **Shared Experiences:**

- During the financial crisis or COVID-19 pandemic, were you personally impacted most by the loss of connection, structure, control or competence?
- How were family members and co-workers impacted differently than you?
- What actions did your organization take during these crises that were effective in dealing with the psychological toll of the crisis, and what further actions should have been taken?
- What have you learned about yourself during these crises – both good and bad?
- What are the behaviors and attitudes you can personally control, even in the middle of crisis?

**Bottom line:** Managing mental health in a crisis involves recognizing what has been lost, acknowledging what we cannot control, and spending our time and effort to replace what has been lost in the crisis.

#### One Word Check-out

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**Dig Deeper**

**Want to learn more?**

- *Video:* [The Psychology of Crisis](#) by Dr. Henry Cloud (this requires you to enter your email address, but it is worth it).
- *Article:* [Leading Well in Chaotic Circumstances](#) by Outreach Magazine
- *Podcast:* [Mayo Clinic Q&A podcast: Mental health and coping during COVID-19 crisis](#) by Jennifer O’Hara
- *Article:* [Psychology of a Crisis](#) by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- *Article:* [Planning For A Crisis: Tactics To Support Employee Mental Health During Emergencies](#) by Garen Staglin, Co-founder and Chairman of One Mind at Work writing in Forbes.com

**Spend time focusing on what you can control, not worrying about what you can’t.** In the midst of uncertainty, our personal and work lives are turned upside down by changes that were not anticipated. Our mental health suffers when we are overwhelmed by a sense that everything has changed, and we have lost control. The truth is that crises do bring about a number of things that we cannot control. An unhealthy response is to spend our time worrying about things that we simply can’t control. These thoughts can blind us to the fact that even in the middle of difficult circumstances, we can still take ownership of our actions and attitude.

Here is a simple but effective exercise you can do to help get you out of the habit of worrying about those things you cannot control.

- Create a list with two columns: 1) things you cannot control and 2) things you can control.
- After you have your lists completed, briefly acknowledge the first column and all of the things you cannot control (but probably spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about).
- Then, spend much more time on the list of things you can control. Use this list to determine what steps you can take to improve the current situation.
- You may find it helpful to print off your list and literally tear it down the middle and throw away the column of things you cannot control (and stop worrying about those things). Keep the column of things you can control – and get to work!

<u>Things You Cannot Control</u>	<u>Things You Can Control</u>

**Finding balance in a crisis prevents it from becoming all-consuming.** Part of the challenge of dealing with a crisis is finding a balance between staying informed on the latest developments without becoming paralyzed by a seemingly endless loop of bad news. In the workplace, this can mean focusing most meetings on actions in response to the crisis instead of dwelling on the crisis itself. In our personal lives, it can mean limiting our consumption of the 24-hour news cycle. In practical terms, it might mean checking in on the news headlines for 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening. After that, turn off the television and stop checking your newsfeeds.