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In Times of Crisis: Lead Yourself, Lead Others



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This article is adapted from *Crisis Leadership: Using Military Lessons, Organizational Experiences, and the Power of Influence to Lessen the Impact of Chaos on the People You Lead* by Gene Klann, Center for Creative Leadership, 2003.

About Gene Klann



Gene Klann came to CCL to serve as a senior program associate after a distinguished 25-year career in the military. He currently trains the Leadership Development Program, The Looking Glass Experience, Foundations of Leadership and Coaching for Development. In addition, he co-authored *Crisis Leadership: Using Military Lessons, Organizational Experiences, and the Power of Influence to Lessen the Impact of Chaos on the People You Lead* and has been a frequent contributor to CCL's bi-monthly magazine, *Leadership in Action*. Gene holds a Ph.D. in systems leadership from the Free University of Brussels.



Nothing tests a leader like a crisis. How a leader handles the emotions, behaviors and attitudes of the people involved in or facing a crisis reveals something of his or her deepest character. Of course, leaders must also lead themselves through crisis. They must deal with their own emotions and needs. For some leaders, this is the biggest challenge of all.

"Managing a crisis and providing leadership in a crisis are not the same thing," says CCL's Gene Klann. "Crisis management relates mainly to operational issues, while crisis leadership principally deals with how leaders handle human reactions, including their own."

During a crisis, leaders are often focused on the emotional turmoil of their direct reports and others in the organization, but it's equally important for leaders to take care of themselves during a crisis. "A crisis can exert a high impact on human needs, emotions and behaviors. We may not be conscious of this, but our behaviors send messages to others about our own underlying needs and emotions," Klann explains.

As a leader, you need to be aware of your own emotional turmoil, its effect on your behavior and its influence on your leadership abilities. Here are some ways to help you keep the perspective you need to bring your people and your organization through a crisis:

Think "today." Take the crisis one day at a time.

Talk and write. Talk to people you trust about how you are feeling. Write letters, cards and notes to people to express your thoughts about the situation. Keep a journal: write down what you are thinking, your impressions and your reactions.

Focus on the positive

Avoid negative people, negative thoughts and negative talk. Constantly think positive thoughts and tell yourself that you can do it.

Practice healthy habits

Exercise, even if it is just walking. Get more sleep, including naps. Eat healthier foods both at meals and for snacks. Reduce intake of coffee, caffeine and alcohol.

Get grounded

Take five-minute private breaks. Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation and deep breathing. Don't neglect spiritual exercises and activities as they fit your individual beliefs.

Shift gears

Laugh, tell jokes, watch a comedy. Read a favorite book or story. Spend time doing a favorite activity or hobby. Write a short story or a poem. Draw a picture. Listen to soft music. Listen to loud music. Dance and sing to both.

Prioritize and focus

Keep meetings short or "on the hoof," where everyone stands. Be more assertive. Say "no" more often. Be more conscious about managing your time and priorities. Concentrate on only major issues. Skip secondary tasks.

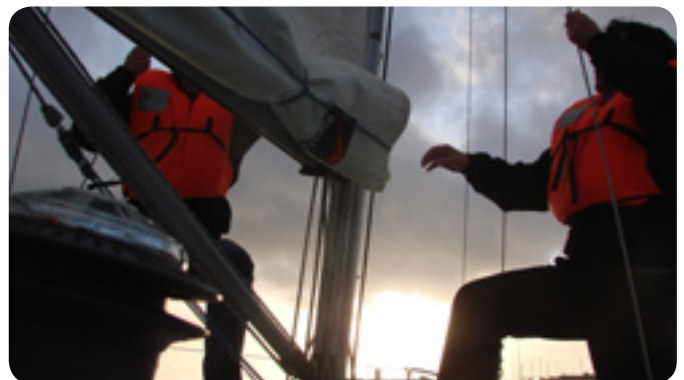
Keep in check

Now more than ever, do all things in moderation.

Remember the big picture

Concentrate on the greater vision you have of yourself, both personally and professionally. Think about where you will be and what you will be doing a year from now. Stop and realize that you are alive and that much good will come out of the crisis.

By paying attention to your own emotions, needs and behaviors, you will be better prepared to handle the human dimensions of the crisis. As a result, you will be more capable of containing the crisis, regaining control, minimizing damage, and effectively preventing, defusing and reducing the duration of an extremely difficult leadership situation.



WE'RE ONLY HUMAN

In times of crisis, heartfelt leadership means a lot. Leadership actions that connect to the human side of an organization include:

Make an appeal. Draw on a sense of loyalty, courage, morality or other principles that tie the organization's crisis strategy to what is important to people.

Pay attention. Listen and respond to what your direct reports are telling you.

Treat others with dignity, trust and respect. Treat people with sincere consideration and genuine concern. Show it by spending time with them, asking them about the things they are interested in, and considering their hopes and dreams as important as your own.

Tell a tale. Use stories that have a positive application to the situation at hand. Incorporate appropriate humor to reduce tension. Accept difference. Understand and accept others for what they are and how they react, without judging.

Be sincere. Communicate truthfully and honestly, follow through with what you say and avoid deception. Keep a high standard. Remain as professionally competent as possible in your area of expertise and in handling job responsibilities.