

# How to Keep Calm in a Crisis

## Staying in Control When Times Get Tough



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### **Stay calm, strong and resolute to weather any storm.**

How do you react in an emergency? Do you freeze, or find that your mind goes blank? Neither of those responses will help you or your team, but they can be minimized or prevented altogether with preparation and planning.

The word "crisis" conjures up images of floods, storms and wildfires, or maybe a banking crash or terrorist outrage. In business terms, though, it can be used for any number of situations, from an urgent product recall or claims of fraud, to a market collapse.

At a local level, a crisis could be triggered by having key members of your team on sick leave at the same time, or by rumors of lay offs or major change. These may be mundane issues in global terms but they can critically impact your team or organization.

You need to be organized and swift in response to a crisis. But, above all, you need to stay calm. It's not easy to keep cool when things go wrong, but this article will help you to meet disaster head-on and to think clearly as you do so. We look at crises in two stages: before they erupt and while they are happening.

## **Before a Crisis Erupts – Be Prepared**

The better prepared you are for a crisis, the more effective your response will be if it happens. If you put in the groundwork and have a tried-and-tested plan in place, you and your people will more likely be able to stay calm and levelheaded if you are "blindsided" by a disaster, as there is comfort in knowing there are procedures to follow to deal with it.

These six steps can help you to prepare for a sudden and unexpected threat to your organization.

## 1. Get the Right People and Systems in Place

If your everyday operations run like clockwork, you'll straightaway be less vulnerable in a crisis. An organized, efficient and coordinated team will likely be disciplined and able to function effectively in difficult circumstances.

Team members who work well together and know their processes inside out will be more aware of any "creaks and groans" in the system. Don't ignore these, as they may be warning signs of more serious problems ahead.

Recruit, train and support a sufficient number of skilled and motivated people to run your department or business effectively. This will give you a solid base for dealing with anything out of the ordinary.

## 2. Embrace Uncertainty

The business landscape changes constantly, and sometimes change is sudden and unpredictable. Such an unstable environment has been called **VUCA**, standing for conditions that are Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. Managing in such times can be daunting and frightening, and you may be tempted to simply ignore or resist difficult change. But if you embrace that challenge, you'll likely be better able to identify and manage any potential crisis.

They say that you can fight fire with fire, so fight VUCA with VUCA! You can counter the four negative elements by looking at four positive responses:

- Values, and how you stick to them when times get tough.
- Understanding the situation that you're in.
- Clarity of communication with your colleagues.
- Agility in the way that you react and adapt.

### 3. Plan for a Crisis

You need to understand what crises could affect your organization, and draw up strategies for dealing with them. Also, you need to plan how you will recover from them.

There are four stages to planning for a crisis:

1. **Establishing a crisis team.** This needs to be in place before any crisis happens.
2. **Identifying the key risks.** As well as potential major catastrophes, think about what everyday situations could develop into a crisis and the likelihood of those threats happening.
3. **Developing your crisis plan.** Consider how you will respond to each key crisis.
4. **Planning for full recovery.** Determine how to bring critical operations back online after an emergency, and get back to "business as usual" as quickly as possible.

#### Tip:

The stages listed above are a basic outline of what needs to be a robust and effective strategy for dealing with disaster. For an in-depth look at identifying and responding to potential crises, see our article, [Planning for a Crisis](#).

### 4. Plan Effective Communication

It can be difficult to think about communication when you are in the midst of a disaster. But [Communicating in a Crisis](#) is not a troublesome distraction, it's an important part of crisis planning.

A bad situation can worsen if rumors and speculation fill the void that is created when official communication is absent, unclear or inconsistent. Effective, swift and concise communication can calm and reassure team members, customers and other stakeholders.

You need to think about the key message that you want to communicate. For example, you may want to reassure customers that you are able to meet their existing orders.

Other steps that you can take to make your communication as effective as possible include anticipating people's questions and preparing your answers to them, appointing an informed and credible spokesperson, and being honest and open about the situation.

If you can be clear, coherent and sensitive, you will make the business of delivering and receiving bad news easier and less stressful for everyone involved.

## 5. Look After Yourself

A crisis strikes at one of our most **basic needs** – the need for security. A sense of insecurity, whether physical or psychological, can trigger strong emotions, such as fear and panic. You can protect yourself by **developing resilience** and learning how to manage **pressure** before it causes **stress**.

Finding a **work-life balance** and putting aside time for activities such as meditation, exercise and **journaling** can help you to develop inner strength for when times are tough.

## 6. Build Trust and Team Loyalty

A team that pulls together in a crisis is far more likely to come through it successfully than one that's made up of isolated or self-interested people. You can boost your people's confidence in themselves and in one another with the help of our article, **Building Confidence in Other People**.

It's natural that your team members will look to you for guidance when a crisis strikes. Our article, **Leadership in Hard Times**, explores strategies that you can use to rise to the challenge.

How you and your team members respond to a crisis will also depend on how much you trust one another. As we say in our article, **Building Trust Inside Your Team**, "A team without trust isn't really a team... However, when trust is in place, each individual in the team becomes stronger [and] the group can achieve truly meaningful goals." You can earn the trust and loyalty of your team members by demonstrating high-quality behaviors such as honesty, integrity, respect, and loyalty to them.

Having explored what you can do to prepare yourself, your team and your organization for a potential crisis, let's look at how you can stay calm and cope should the worst happen.

## Coping During a Crisis

Laying the foundations for a theoretical crisis is one thing, but dealing with the reality of one is quite another. You need a range of solid personal skills and techniques to see you through. Here are four:

# 1. Manage Your Feelings

When a crisis strikes, you may experience a rush of adrenaline as you try to take stock of what has happened. So, before you leap into action or make any knee-jerk decisions, give yourself time to gather your thoughts and to take an objective look at your situation. Take a deep breath – and another!

Calm your mind and body with **physical relaxation techniques** such as deep breathing, relaxing your muscles, and **centering**, and by harnessing positive thinking with **affirmations**.

Then, follow **The TDODAR Decision Model** to cut through the panic, so that you can make good decisions under pressure. Visualize a point beyond the crisis at which you will achieve success. And don't be afraid to **ask for help**.

# 2. Put Your Plans Into Practice

If you've got a crisis plan in place, now's the time to put it to the test in a real situation. It may be panic stations all around you, but this is the time for you (and your crisis team) to move your systems into "controlled emergency" mode. Focus on managing the things that you can control; don't waste energy and effort trying to change things that you can't control.

# 3. Support Others

You'll likely be dealing with worried and emotional people, so do your best to stay positive and confident. Your team members will welcome and take heart from the calming presence of someone who's organized, prepared and decisive.

Remember, while you may need to be assertive and strong, and to demand immediate actions from your team members to resolve a crisis as swiftly as possible, try to remain empathic and aware of their fears and concerns.

People who think that they have to cope with a crisis on their own are less likely to do so effectively as those who know they are supported, so show that you'll **stand up for your team**.

# 4. Guard Against Negative Behaviors

When the waters get rough, some people tend to seek refuge in self-serving behaviors that can make the situation worse. Guard against these behaviors, both on your team and in your own actions. These include:

- Abandoning the team to "cover yourself."
- "Clamming up" and forgetting the principles of effective communication.
- Blaming others.
- Forgetting procedures or processes in a state of panic.

Instead, be available and contribute wholeheartedly to meeting your team's or organization's immediate needs. And be flexible – be prepared to go beyond what you might normally offer.

## **Key Points**

Crises can blow up suddenly. They can happen because of mistakes that you or your organization have made, or they can be caused by events entirely beyond your control, whether economic, political or natural.

Whatever the situation, staying calm and in control is essential to your survival and success, whether you're a leader, manager or team member.

You can prepare in advance of a crisis by getting the right people and systems in place, embracing uncertainty, planning for risk, communicating, looking after yourself, and building trust and loyalty within your team.

You can cope better in the moment of crisis if you manage your feelings, put your plans into practice, support others, and guard against negative behaviors.

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/calm-in-crisis.htm>