

MAKE IT **COUNT**

A 10-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine

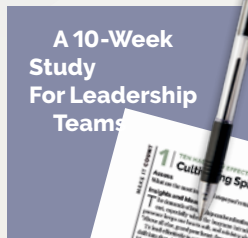
How to Lead in a Crisis

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**



DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAKE IT COUNT



What Is Make It Count?

Make It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

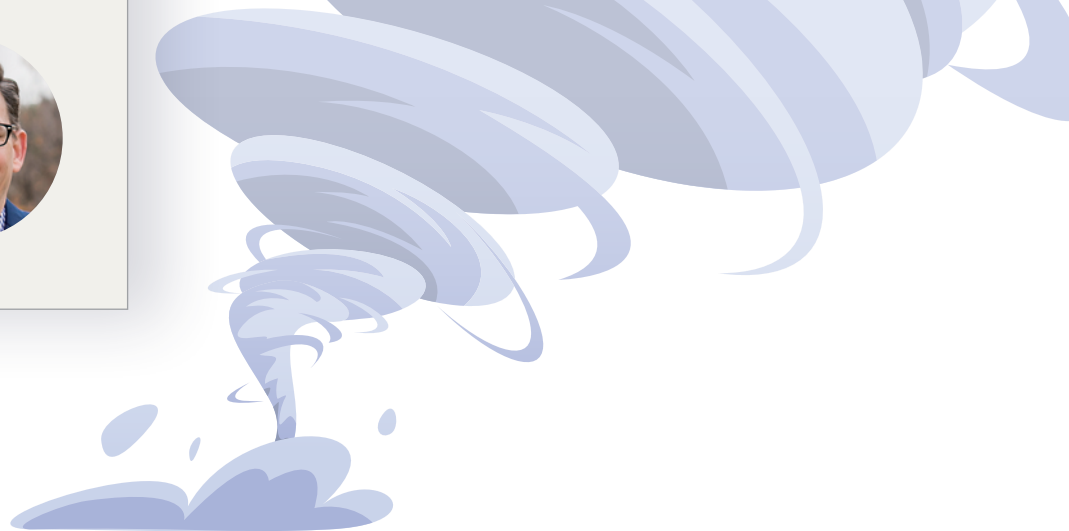
Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at influencemagazine.com/Downloads.

These lessons are written by **STEPHEN BLANDINO**, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



How to Lead in a Crisis

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**



Years ago, my wife heard someone say, “You can count on a major crisis hitting your life every 10 years.”

At the time, she thought that sounded a bit hyperbolic. Yet over the past 10 years, we’ve experienced *multiple* crises.

First, we dealt with a major health scare just 18 months after planting our church. My heart’s mitral valve unexpectedly ruptured, requiring emergency cardiac surgery followed by six weeks of recovery.

Then we navigated the disruption of COVID. During the pandemic, more than 40% of our congregation left and never returned. We finally started growing again only recently.

We can't always control circumstances, but we can maintain a healthy attitude amid difficulties.

Along the way, we’ve also experienced several smaller crises that required bursts of attention.

Painful events and seasons test our leadership and stretch personal and church resources. Nevertheless, when a crisis happens, responding to it isn’t optional.

The long-term impact on us and our ministries has a lot to do with how we manage crises.

This installment of *Make It Count* offers 10 lessons on leading through crises. Before exploring those, consider four elements of crisis management.

Attitude

We can’t always control circumstances, but we can maintain a healthy attitude amid difficulties.

During a crisis, it’s crucial that pastors keep emotions in check; balance optimism and realism; and lead with prayer, empathy, and deeply rooted values.

Failing in any of these areas will only make the crisis worse.

Assessment

Crisis assessment happens in stages.

At first, events tend to move quickly. This is the time to evaluate and address the immediate threat.

As the crisis continues to unfold, further analysis yields deeper insights. These discoveries help leaders create a strategy for moving forward.

Assembly

Crisis are too big for one person to manage. Leaders must assemble a wise and diverse team to address the issues thoroughly and effectively.

Team members help the lead pastor carry the load. They also provide wisdom, perspective, and counsel during plan formulation and recovery implementation.

A crisis management team includes not only internal staff, board members, and key leaders, but also outside voices, such as other pastors, legal advisors, and experts in various fields.

Action

Crisis require an active response.

When a crisis emerges, leaders take immediate steps to ensure everyone is safe.

However, a long-term response must include clear planning, congregational care, regular communication, and financial preparation.

These are the broad categories of crisis management. The following 10 lessons unpack the overall response in greater detail.

While discussing these lessons with your team, keep in mind that the insights are not in sequential order.

Rather, this study identifies principles that apply to the entire crisis-response process. Each principle plays a critical role in helping you lead well through whatever crises may arise in your ministry.

1 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Manage the Basics

Assess

What's the most important key to leading successfully during a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

No one looks forward to crises, but everyone walks through them. For leaders in particular, these painful seasons test our mettle each step of the way.

Although most crises are unexpected, you must be ready to respond to them. How you navigate these critical moments plays a large role in determining the ultimate outcome.

This is why getting the basics right is so important. You may not be able to control the circumstances, but you can manage your responses and leadership.

Whatever the crisis, the following basics are essential.

1. *Control your **emotions**.* The old adage from British World War II posters remains good advice for crises of all kinds: "Keep calm and carry on."

People take their emotional cues from leaders during a crisis. If you let your emotions get the best of you, you'll make the crisis worse and drain confidence from your team and congregation.

Philippians 4:6–7 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. *Lead with your **values**.* Author Steve Moore once said, "Almost all leaders would affirm the importance of values as the central component of a philosophy of leadership and ministry. Few leaders have explicitly identified their values and developed an understanding of how they impact every judgment call."

Because it's easy to compromise under pressure, defining values before a crisis shows up is vital. Only then will you have a true north to guide you through the storm.

3. *Exercise a posture of **prayer**.* James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

Nothing highlights the need for wisdom quite like a crisis. Therefore, prayer must be your ongoing posture before, after, and during these times. Seeking God's guidance is paramount.

4. *Balance **realism** and **optimism**.* Leaders must face the brutal facts while maintaining an optimistic outlook on the future.

Without realism, you won't address the critical issues in the crisis. And without optimism, your team will lose hope. Effective leaders strike the right balance to create a path forward.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the four basics above have been hardest for you to practice during times of crises? Why?
2. Can you think of a time when one of these basics was missing during a crisis? How did it make the situation worse?
3. What other basics for leading through a crisis would you add to the list?

Apply

Work together as a team to identify your values. Put them in writing, and discuss how you would lead according to these principles during a crisis.

1 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Manage the Basics

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Getting the basics right:

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“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

4. *Balance* _____ *and* _____.

Apply

Work together as a team to identify your values. Put them in writing, and discuss how you would lead according to these principles during a crisis.

2 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Assess the Situation

Team Review

What progress have you made toward identifying your team values?

Assess

What has been your gut response when you've experienced a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

Crisis has a way of being big, fast, and unpredictable.

By definition, crises are significant and serious. They often blindside people and leave them feeling disoriented.

In these unsettling situations, leaders have a responsibility to assess the situation and take steps to address it.

Proverbs 18:15 says, "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out."

Assessing a crisis starts with asking key questions. The answers will help inform decisions in the immediate aftermath of the situation.

Consider six questions when facing a crisis.

1. **Safety:** *Is everyone safe?* When it's an emergency situation involving an imminent threat, safety is the first priority.

If the building is on fire, you don't call a meeting to discuss the problem. You pull the alarm and help people exit as quickly as possible.

2. **Reality:** *What happened?* Leaders need to understand the nature of the crisis. The discovery process involves investigating, gathering facts, taking notes, and creating a timeline.

Knowing what has taken place allows you to make informed decisions about what to do next.

3. **Impact:** *Which individuals does this affect?* Crises create ripple effects, so leaders must evaluate the extent of the damage. Carefully consider how the situation is affecting people both inside and outside the congregation.

4. **Forecast:** *What might happen next?* Crises usually unfold in stages. Wise leaders don't assume the initial event is all that will happen. They consider what additional threats might surface and how to respond now to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone.

5. **Contact:** *Which helpers should I call first?* Most crises are too big for anyone to handle alone. They require the help of staff members, board members, and other key leaders. Formulating solutions in isolation is rarely a good idea.

6. **Action:** *What should we do next?* Crises call for action, and effective leaders are always planning the appropriate next step.

While there will be other questions to ask, this list is a good starting place. The questions above provide a basic framework for helping you and your team assess the situation and respond wisely.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When a crisis first hits, which questions above are you most likely to ask?
2. Which question would be easiest to forget during the initial hours of a crisis?
3. What additional questions would you ask?

Apply

Have team members write down questions they would ask at the beginning of a crisis. Give everyone an opportunity to share their ideas. Then work together as a group to create a top 10 list.

2 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Assess the Situation

“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out” (Proverbs 18:15).

Consider six questions when facing a crisis.

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Apply

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3 HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS Assemble Your Team

Team Review

What questions did you settle on to help assess a crisis at the outset?

Assess

Who should be part of a crisis management team?

Insights and Ideas

Proverbs 11:14 says, “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”

This principle of seeking input is certainly applicable to crisis management. You need a team of wise people who will help navigate a crisis.

Without a wise team, you’ll make every decision from one limited vantage point — your own. One’s perspective is valuable, but it’s not complete.

As biblical leadership expert J. Robert Clinton observed, “The difference between leaders and followers is perspective. The difference between leaders and effective leaders is better perspective.”

Build a strong crisis management team made up of staff members, board members, and other leaders. A team provides access to the “better perspective” needed to navigate difficult terrain.

A good team helps provide three crucial perspectives.

1. *Spiritual perspective.* The church is a spiritual body committed to a spiritual mission. It’s not simply a business with big goals and bottom-line objectives.

Therefore, it’s important to approach every decision with a biblical, Spirit-guided perspective. Without this mindset, you’ll invariably overlook eternal implications and Kingdom priorities.

2. *Relational perspective.* A crisis impacts people in different ways. Depending on how close they are to the epicenter, some will feel the effects more than others.

For example, the pandemic was stressful for everyone. But it was especially difficult for those who lost family members or experienced long-term health problems.

A diverse team will help with viewing the situation from a variety of vantage points so you can respond with wisdom and empathy.

3. *Organizational perspective.* The church’s mission is spiritual, but there are still bylaws, financial responsibilities, and legal requirements to consider.

The right team will help you navigate these realities with wisdom and integrity.

Author and Christian psychologist John Townsend said, “One thing I have observed is that no matter how great your product, service, strategy, and systems, the right people can accelerate everything, and the wrong people can take you down.”

The last thing you need during a crisis is for your team to make things worse. Carefully assemble a team that will contribute spiritual, relational, and organizational insights for the journey ahead.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Can you share an example of how the right team — or the wrong one — affected the response to a crisis?
2. Why are spiritual, relational, and organizational perspectives essential during crisis management?
3. What other valuable perspectives might a team offer during crises?

Apply

Identify three types of crises that have affected churches in your area. Then discuss what qualities your team will need if those situations arise within your church.

3

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Assemble Your Team

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers” (Proverbs 11:14).

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“The difference between leaders and followers is perspective. The difference between leaders and effective leaders is better perspective” — J. Robert Clinton

Three perspectives of a good team:

1. _____ *perspective.*

It’s important to approach every decision with a biblical, Spirit-guided perspective. Without this mindset, you’ll invariably overlook eternal implications and Kingdom priorities.

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Apply

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4 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Seek Outside Counsel

Team Review

What qualities will help your team navigate crises?

Assess

What kinds of outside advisors could assist during a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

Assembling a wise team is essential during crisis moments. However, your team also needs the perspective of outside counsel.

There have been many times when I've faced a difficult decision and sought the expertise of people outside our local church.

Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice."

Sometimes people who are less emotionally involved in a crisis can see solutions more clearly.

Consider seeking input from individuals in each of the following five categories.

1. **Legal advisors.** Crises sometimes raise difficult legal questions. Find an attorney who can help you manage these complex issues legally and ethically.
2. **Wise pastors.** There are few crisis situations in ministry that another pastor hasn't already experienced.

Lean on the wisdom of pastors who have already been there and come out the other side. Ask for their prayers, and discuss with them the spiritual and practical aspects of leading through the crisis.

These pastors can be a great source of support and encouragement not only during the crisis, but also afterward as you recover, rebuild, and move forward.

3. **Experienced leaders.** In addition to wise pastors, seek the counsel of other experienced leaders.

These might include board members, denominational leaders, and other individuals with relevant expertise.

4. **Licensed counselors.** Pastors are responsible for shepherding people through crisis moments. This is where the wisdom of licensed professional counselors can be especially helpful.

Talk with a counselor about how to address the mental and emotional needs of people in crisis. You might even invite a Christian mental health professional to speak to the congregation or lead a regular support group.

5. **Financial advisors.** Crises often affect church finances. If the impact is significant, seek the assistance of financial advisors in determining next steps.

Don't walk through crises alone. Some of the best advice can come from people outside of your local church. Seek them out, and listen to their counsel.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What advisors have you leaned on outside of the church during a time of crisis, and how did those individuals help?
2. Which of the five types of counsel are you most likely to consult during a crisis? Which are you least likely to seek out? Why?
3. What other kinds of advisors might you call on during a crisis?

Apply

Work together as a team to put together a list of advisors to seek out during a crisis. Keep this list in a place where you can easily access it should a crisis arise.

4 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Seek Outside Counsel

“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice” (Proverbs 12:15).

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Five kinds of outside advisors:

1. _____ *advisors.*

Crises sometimes raise difficult legal questions. Find an attorney who can help you manage these complex issues legally and ethically.

2. _____ *pastors.*

There are few crisis situations in ministry that another pastor hasn't already experienced.

3. _____ *leaders.*

These might include board members, denominational leaders, and other individuals with relevant expertise.

4. _____ *counselors.*

Talk with a counselor about how to address the mental and emotional needs of people in crisis.

5. _____ *advisors.*

Apply

Work together as a team to put together a list of advisors to seek out during a crisis. Keep this list in a place where you can easily access it should a crisis arise.

5 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Create a Plan

Team Review

Whom did you include in your advisor list for crisis moments?

Assess

What should a crisis management plan include?

Insights and Ideas

Crisis demand action. They also call for a plan.

When Nehemiah became aware of the crisis in Jerusalem, he didn't just show up and start swinging hammers to rebuild the city. He brought together four essential ingredients.

1. **Resources.** Nehemiah not only gained permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem, but he also secured the resources for rebuilding the wall.

Nehemiah asked the king, "May I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" (Nehemiah 2:8).

Because of God's favor, the king granted Nehemiah's request.

Plans to navigate crises always require resources. In some cases, you may need to dip into your financial reserves to move forward.

2. **Research.** When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he evaluated the magnitude of the crisis. During the night, Nehemiah began "examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire" (Nehemiah 2:13).

Crisis moments often call for quick decisions, but leaders must still take the time to examine the situation before determining what to do.

Research might involve a series of phone calls and meetings as you seek to diagnose the crisis and find a path forward.

3. **Road map.** Craft a detailed plan for addressing and resolving the crisis.

After researching the condition of the wall, Nehemiah developed a strategy for rebuilding. It involved working on each section, laying beams, and hanging doors.

Once the work was complete, Nehemiah reinstated religious practices in Jerusalem.

4. **Roles.** Identify who will complete each task in your crisis-response plan. Consider the roles of pastors, staff members, board members, volunteers, and outside helpers.

Nehemiah mobilized workers to construct different parts of the wall. Nehemiah 3 lists these teams and their tasks.

After construction ended, priests, Levites, and musicians assumed their roles in leading people through a time of fasting, repentance, worship, and obedience to the law.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How can a leader balance the tension between doing research and taking action when dealing with a crisis?
2. Why is it important to assign specific roles during a time of crisis?
3. What other crisis-management lessons can you glean from Nehemiah's story?

Apply

Work together as a team to do some crisis-scenario planning. Choose a hypothetical crisis, and then work through the four steps above to craft a strategy for dealing with it.

5 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Create a Plan

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Apply

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6 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Stay Visible

Team Review

What lessons did you learn from doing scenario planning for a crisis?

Assess

What role does the visibility of the leader play in a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

While contrasting the leadership of the Pharisees with that of servant leaders, Jesus told His disciples, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26–28).

The kind of leader Jesus describes is visible, available, and in touch with the people he or she serves — even during a crisis.

When a crisis hits, feelings of embarrassment, shock, or fear might make a person want to withdraw. However, this is the last thing a leader should do.

As coach Bear Bryant once said, “In a crisis, don’t hide behind anything or anybody. They’re going to find you anyway.”

Remain visible and available to the following groups.

1. **Your *team*.** Those who report to you need to *see* and *hear* from you — not once, but regularly.

When a crisis descends, uncertainties flood the minds of team members, whether paid staff or faithful volunteers. They may wonder, *Will the church survive? Will I still have a job? What will the fallout be?*

Be sure team members feel safe sharing their fears and concerns with you. Take time to check on, pray with, and encourage them.

2. **Your *congregation*.** Those attending your church need your presence. They need a pastor and staff who empathize, answer questions, and offer hope.

Leaders should provide a calming presence, praying with people, encouraging them, and modeling hope and faith.

3. **Your *family*.** Crisis moments consume time, resources, and emotional reserves. Those closest to us carry a heavy load while we attend meetings, take phone calls, and work long hours.

In these moments, we must work hard to remain visible and available to our loved ones.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When have you seen a leader duck and cover during a crisis? What impact did it have on the team and organization?
2. Why are visibility and availability particularly important during crises?
3. Of the three groups above, whose needs are hardest to meet during a crisis? Why?

Apply

Work as a team to name practical ways to stay visible and available during a crisis. Make and keep a list of guidelines to consult when that time arises.

6

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Stay Visible

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26–28).

“In a crisis, don’t hide behind anything or anybody. They’re going to find you anyway.”
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Remain visible and available to these groups:

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When a crisis descends, uncertainties flood the minds of team members, whether paid staff or faithful volunteers. They may wonder, *Will the church survive? Will I still have a job? What will the fallout be?*

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Those attending your church need your presence. They need a pastor and staff who empathize, answer questions, and offer hope.

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Apply

Work as a team to name practical ways to stay visible and available during a crisis. Make and keep a list of guidelines to consult when that time arises.

7 | HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Communicate Honestly

Team Review

What practical tips did your team come up with to be visible and available during times of crises?

Assess

What impact does communication — or lack thereof — have during a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

Communication is vital during times of crises. Yet church leaders often overlook the importance of providing information in a timely and appropriate manner.

Amid the chaos of a crisis situation, it's easy for pastors to become so busy and distracted that they fail to communicate — or say the wrong things.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Communication is an opportunity to build others up according to their needs, and crises have a way of multiplying needs.

We must communicate truth in the right tone to help people make sense of the crisis and find a path forward.

Consider the following four ways to manage this.

1. **Sequential communication.** There is an order to communication during a crisis. Leaders should generally communicate to board members, staff members, key leaders, volunteers, and the entire congregation in a sequential order that makes sense for the crisis at hand.

While it isn't always possible, in most cases, you'll communicate in concentric circles throughout the congregation.

2. **Clear communication.** A multitude of messengers speaking off the cuff can lead to unclear or even contradictory statements.

Official written communication — whether through online posts, newsletters, emails, or press releases — is one way to disseminate details thoughtfully, clearly, and with a united voice.

3. **Wise communication.** Leaders must choose their words carefully, taking into account timing, the audience, and appropriate discretion. This calls for wisdom and discernment.

4. **Frequent communication.** Crisis communication is never a one-time event. People need regular updates to help them understand what's happening, what to expect, and what they should or shouldn't do.

When communication lacks frequency, people start filling in the blanks with questions, assumptions, and accusations.

As author Jon Gordon noted, "Where there is a void in communication, negativity will fill it."

The four qualities above are essential in the communication process. Applying these principles will help you communicate effectively during any crisis.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When have you experienced inadequate communication during a crisis? How did this make you and others feel?
2. Which of the four communication qualities is easiest to overlook? Why?
3. What additional communication tips would you add to this list?

Apply

Work together as a team to put together a crisis communication plan. While the specifics may vary from one crisis to the next, having a communication plan ahead of time will provide a framework to follow when you need it most.

7

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Communicate Honestly

Communication is vital during times of crises. Yet church leaders often overlook the importance of providing information in a timely and appropriate manner.

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Four crisis communication essentials:

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Apply

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8

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Demonstrate Empathy

Team Review

What progress did you make on your communication plan?

Assess

What does empathetic leadership look like during a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

Crisis in the local church are high-pressure times, and the strain certainly wears on pastors. Emotions run high and energy low as church leaders navigate heavy demands and sleepless nights.

But in these moments, congregations desperately need shepherding care. Pastors and team members must lead with empathy.

Author Mark Miller observed, “Empathy is a skill powered by energy. No energy, no empathy.” Therein lies the paradox. Empathy requires energy, but crises are draining.

Nevertheless, empathy isn’t a quality Christians can jettison when the heat is on. Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

Scripture calls us to be sympathetic, loving and compassionate (1 Peter 3:8). The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

To lead with greater empathy, take steps to develop the following four qualities.

1. **Awareness: the eyes of empathy.** Empathy begins by noticing what’s happening around you.

Amid a crisis, leaders naturally focus on the fire burning in front of them. That’s important and necessary, but we must also pay attention to people.

When taking time to notice fear and uncertainty on the faces of people we lead, we will respond with increased empathy.
2. **Listening: the ears of empathy.** It’s also important for leaders to hear what people have to say.

This requires taking the time to stop, make eye contact, and really listen. It doesn’t have to be a long exchange, but pastors do need to learn about the concerns and struggles driving people’s emotions.
3. **Understanding: the heart of empathy.** Careful listening makes it easier to relate to what congregants are going through, both on an intellectual and emotional level.

Leaders come to understand *facts* and *feelings*. This combination informs the crisis response and creates an empathetic bridge to the hearts of those in crisis.
4. **Care: the hands of empathy.** When leaders see, hear, and connect with the hearts of hurting people, they can develop a more compassionate and caring response.

Feeling the pain of others equips pastors to address it with tangible and practical support.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What difference does empathetic leadership make during a crisis?
2. How has a leader’s empathy amid a difficult time helped you?
3. Which of the four qualities above is most difficult for you to practice during high-pressure moments? Why?

Apply

Empathy starts with awareness. Identify several ways leaders can become more attuned to what people are going through. Make an effort to notice hurting people and respond to them empathetically.

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HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Demonstrate Empathy

Crises in the local church are high-pressure times, and the strain certainly wears on pastors.

But in these moments, congregations desperately need shepherding care. Pastors and team members must lead with empathy.

“Empathy is a skill powered by energy. No energy, no empathy.” — Mark Miller

Therein lies the paradox. Empathy requires energy, but crises are draining.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15).

Scripture calls us to be sympathetic, loving and compassionate (1 Peter 3:8). The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

To lead with greater empathy, take steps to develop the following four qualities.

1. _____: *the _____ of empathy.*

When we take time to notice fear and uncertainty on the faces of people we lead, we will respond with increased empathy.

2. _____: *the _____ of empathy.*

This requires taking the time to stop, make eye contact, and really listen.

3. _____: *the _____ of empathy.*

Leaders come to understand *facts* and *feelings*.

4. _____: *the _____ of empathy.*

When leaders see, hear, and connect with the hearts of hurting people, they can develop a more compassionate and caring response.

Apply

Empathy starts with awareness. Identify several ways leaders can become more attuned to what people are going through. Make an effort to notice hurting people and respond to them empathetically.



Prepare Financially

Team Review

What did you learn about interacting with people empathetically?

Assess

What kind of financial strain do churches experience during times of crises?

Insights and Ideas

Crisis are stressful times for church leaders. There aren't enough hours in the day to address every concern. Demands rapidly mount. Meetings multiply. And finances become strained.

Crisis create financial problems in two ways. First, a crisis can quickly drain resources.

Second, if a crisis weakens trust within the congregation, it may lead to a decline in giving. This can happen immediately or slowly over time.

Be careful not to become careless with finances during a crisis. Proverbs 10:4 says, "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth."

Exercise wisdom while preparing financially for the unforeseen impact a crisis might have on church finances. Proverbs 21:20 says, "The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down."

Where do you start? What should a leader do financially when a crisis surfaces? Below are eight practical considerations.

1. **Do:** *What priorities should we focus on?* These financial priorities usually include addressing the crisis, covering essential expenses, and continuing critical programs.
2. **Delete:** *What easy cuts can we make?* Start with changes that are relatively painless.
3. **Discontinue:** *What services or purchases are nonessential?* Evaluate which expenditures can wait, and cancel or pause unnecessary subscriptions and services.
4. **Delay:** *What new initiatives should we temporarily suspend?* Launching programs and services requires funding. Consider putting these on hold during moments of crisis.
5. **Decrease:** *What budget lines should we reduce?* Some budgeted expenses are likely discretionary. Identify areas where you might be able to scale back.
6. **Delegate:** *What can we outsource at a lower cost or no cost?* Perhaps the church is paying for services volunteers would be willing to do, for example.
7. **Deal:** *What services or contracts can we renegotiate?* It might be time to revisit insurance coverage, contracts, and services with a monthly or annual fee.
8. **Distribute:** *What can we give those in need?* God calls us to generosity, and crisis moments are opportunities to demonstrate His love to hurting people.

When facing a crisis, these are just a few of the financial questions church leaders should ask. There will likely be many others that are more specific to the situation.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How have you seen a crisis ravage a church's or ministry's finances?
2. Which of the eight ideas above most challenges you?
3. How can leaders balance faith and wisdom as they manage finances during a crisis?

Apply

Do a scenario planning exercise. If the church faced a crisis that immediately reduced giving by 15%, what steps could you take to help your ministry area's financial health?

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HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Prepare Financially

Crises create financial problems in two ways. First, a crisis can quickly drain resources.

Second, if a crisis weakens trust within the congregation, it may lead to a decline in giving.

“Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Proverbs 10:4).

“The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down” (Proverbs 21:20).

Below are eight practical considerations for managing finances during a crisis.

1. _____: *What priorities should we focus on?* These financial priorities usually include addressing the crisis, covering essential expenses, and continuing critical programs.
2. _____: *What easy cuts can we make?* Start with changes that are relatively painless.
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Apply

Do a scenario planning exercise. If the church faced a crisis that immediately reduced giving by 15%, what steps could you take to help your ministry area’s financial health?

10

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Move Toward Recovery

Team Review

Even if the church is not in a financial crisis, what could you do now to better steward resources in your ministry area?

Assess

What do leaders need to think about during the long-term recovery from a crisis?

Insights and Ideas

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The Lord knew trouble and trauma would come our way. After all, we still live in a fallen world. But Jesus also gave us hope for overcoming. We must keep this hope in focus and maintain an eternal perspective throughout each stage of the recovery process.

After a destructive storm, the clouds roll away and the sun reappears. But that’s when the real work begins.

Similarly, crises often arise swiftly and calamitously. Afterward, it may take months or even years to recover.

Rebuilding following a crisis is no small task. During the recovery process, leaders need to keep four things in mind.

1. *Think **short** and **long**.* You have to deal with the immediate effects of the crisis while also planning for the future.

For example, if a tornado hits your building, you will be busy the next day cleaning up, helping congregants who are suffering, and finding a new place to meet for services.

At the same time, you must keep an eye on the future. What’s the long-term plan? How will you rebuild? What steps do you need to take now to put future hopes within reach?

2. *Be **focused** yet **flexible**.* Nothing goes exactly as planned amid a crisis. You will deal with a range of issues hour by hour and day to day.

This means making plans but holding them loosely. You’ll need to stay flexible while focusing on the big-picture steps toward recovery.

3. ***Learn** from the crisis.* Keep a journal of insights you discover along the way, especially those with transferrable application.

Capture these lessons in writing, and then leverage them to improve the present and protect the future. Share the insights with others so they can learn and grow in faith as well.

4. *Invest in your **mental** health.* Crises take an emotional toll. Church leaders need space to decompress.

You need someone who can help with processing emotions, gaining perspective, and navigating the days ahead. This is where mental health therapy is helpful. Find a counselor early in the journey and meet with him or her regularly.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What is the most difficult part of long-term recovery from a crisis?
2. How can leaders balance short- and long-term planning during a crisis?
3. What would you add to the four principles above?

Apply

Discuss lessons from previous crises the team has experienced. Then look for ways to apply those lessons now before another crisis hits.

10

HOW TO LEAD IN A CRISIS

Move Toward Recovery

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Rebuilding following a crisis is no small task. During the recovery process, leaders need to keep four things in mind.

1. *Think* _____ *and* _____.

You have to deal with the immediate effects of the crisis while also planning for the future.

2. *Be* _____ *yet* _____.

This means making plans but holding them loosely. You’ll need to stay flexible while focusing on the big-picture steps toward recovery.

3. _____ *from the crisis*.

Capture these lessons in writing, and then leverage them to improve the present and protect the future.

4. *Invest in your* _____ *health*.

Crises take an emotional toll. Church leaders need space to decompress.

Apply

Discuss lessons from previous crises the team has experienced. Then look for ways to apply those lessons now before another crisis hits.