

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE POST-CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Safety, Predictability and Control

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During disasters and extremely stressful situations people experience fear, uncertainty and a lack of control. By definition, disasters or crises are a “big deal”. Particularly when dealing with natural disasters, acts of violence (including terrorism) or industrial accidents people are suddenly thrust into an unexpected and sometimes unfamiliar situation. While the situation itself may only a few minutes (although it could certainly be longer), the effects of the situation are often longer lasting.

The three principles used in intervention after crisis and disaster reflect people’s need to restore order to their lives and the importance of doing so at all levels.

Safety: After disasters people feel vulnerable. They fear for their own welfare and for their families, friends, pets and community. People don’t feel safe. They might experience being “jumpy”, an inability to calm down, an increased irritability, but most of all a sense of being vulnerable.

In working with organizations and communities it is important for leaders to emphasize and demonstrate an atmosphere of **safety**. From ensuring people’s physical safety to planning for their emotional safety, emphasizing what THEY can do to feel safe will create a working atmosphere where people feel comfortable, as though they had a “safe haven”.

Predictability: Crises and disasters are often unpredictable. Even when they are predicted their course is unknown and often startling. After a disaster or a crisis people are shaken up and do not have a clear sense of what happens next. There is often a feeling of being “lost”. We all have our routines, when those routines get disrupted, we tend to feel disoriented.

Helping people return to feeling a sense of order in their lives requires **predictability**. The goal is to minimize any further surprises and provide people with ample warning about any changes about to occur. These changes could be to their work environment, living situation, or anything else.

Control: During a crisis or disaster people are “out-of-control” in the sense that they are powerless to change the course of events – no one can stop a natural disaster or the spread of a pandemic. As a result, the experience of helplessness is quite intense.

Encouraging people to assume **control** over decisions affecting their lives (as much as possible) is crucial to the recovery process – both on an individual and a community level. Requesting input and suggestions from people, allowing people latitude in determining the best course of action for them, are all examples of facilitating a sense of control after a disaster.