Demonstrating Positivity to Your Team During Crisis

*Being Positive in a Negative or Challenging Situation isn’t Naïve its called Leadership*

~ Anonymous

When the path ahead is uncertain, team members turn to leaders to help them gain clarity and a grounded hope for a better future. They want someone with a positive vision, who is confident about tackling the problems we all face, yet courageous enough to confront uncomfortable truths and admit what they do not know.

Leaders can underestimate how much their team members look to them for information. To address these needs, you should act with deliberate calm and bounded optimism. Those who can visibly demonstrate these qualities help their teams and the organization by giving them hope that they can face the challenges ahead.

But that is hard to do in a crisis, since humans are biologically wired to have a stress response (fight, flight, or freeze) when confronted with volatile environments, unpredictable events, and constant stress.

To stay calm and optimistic while under extreme pressure, you need to have and demonstrate a heightened awareness of the changing reality in the outside world and how you are responding emotionally and physically. This heightened awareness allows you to shift from viewing challenges as roadblocks to seeing them as problems to be solved, and even learned from.

**Leading and Learning Outside your Comfort Zone**

**Situational Awareness**: The conscious knowledge we have of the immediate environment and all of the events happening in it. The elements are perceived and comprehended.

**Self-Awareness**: How an individual consciously knows and understands their own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

In a crisis, leaders must continuously process large amounts of complex information, contradictory views, and strong emotions. This requires awareness of what happens in the outside world (facts on the ground) and in the inside world (body and mind). Effectively connecting *situational awareness* with *self-awareness*, our outer world with our inner world.

In a crisis of uncertainty, this process helps you avoid overreacting to challenges or jumping to conclusions just to stop feeling uncomfortable. Recognize these stress responses as opportunities to pause and reflect before acting, as noted above, to lead with deliberate calm and bounded optimism. When you do that, instinctive biological reactions will start working for you and not against you.
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Below are actions you can take to guide your teams through crisis and the challenges ahead:

**Deliberate Calm: How to Steer into the Storm**
In crisis situations, you must make a deliberate choice to practice a calm state of mind. Then you can step back from the situation and choose how to respond, rather than reacting instinctively. You will become comfortable with discomfort and can look at adversity through a new lens. A leader who is deliberately calm realizes that fear, channeled from uncomfortable facts or emotions, offers potentially valuable information and doesn’t get unhinged by it.

Reframing a threat as an opportunity for learning and innovation turns an uncertain situation into one of hope and possibility. Stress can be good if you harness and frame it constructively it keeps energy levels high and positive even in a crisis environment.

**Your emotions have a big impact on your teams:** When you are impatient, fearful, or frustrated, your team members begin to feel the same way. On the other hand, when you are hopeful and calm, the team can face challenges more creatively.

**Bounded Optimism: How to Mix Confidence and Hope with Realism**
In a crisis, your team members want you to fix things fast. However, in a crisis situation familiar answers might not work and could even be counterproductive. Early on, leaders can lose credibility by displaying excessive confidence or by providing simple answers to difficult problems in spite of obviously difficult conditions. It is essential to project confidence that the team and the organization will find its way through the crisis but also show that you recognize its severity. This is authentic confidence.

Optimism that springs from authentic values and trust in people’s capabilities can be the source of energy for your teams to move forward.
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Four steps to help you build your self-awareness during crisis:

1. **Set Your Intention**
   Take a few minutes at the start of the day to go through your agenda and set an intention for what you want to accomplish. What **challenges** might you have to face, and what possible **opportunities** can you expect? How do you intend to stay **focused**? How do you intend to react emotionally? Also, think about, how will your actions affect your team members and other people?

2. **Regulate Your Reactions**
   While in a stressful situation, **observe your emotions** so you can recognize the stress response, taking a pause to assess the situation before choosing how to respond.

3. **Practice Reflection**
   Reflection is a way to process what happened during the day and to create space to listen to your inner world. You can reflect daily about critical situations. What moments were **difficult** and **why**, how did you feel, and why did you respond the way you did? Reflection helps you with the big picture and your own reactive behavior and its drivers. People have many ways to reflect. Some use meditation, some reflect while running or walking the dog. The important thing is that you make it a regular planned practice.

4. **Reframe Your Perspective**
   When we’re tired from stress, we tend to see negative messages and threats more readily than opportunities and positive messages. Keeping a balance and staying realistic is not easy. Knowing this, is step one. Handling these situations effectively, is step two. When facing a difficult situation, try to redirect away from the negative explanation and toward an exploration of other possibilities that could be true. Viewing the issue through different possibilities and scenarios—from the most positive to the most negative—can help in planning responses later.

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When faced with a difficult situation, ask yourself:

- Am I jumping to conclusions too fast?
- What else can be true at this moment?
- What is important to me, my team and the organization right now?

With the information I have now, make a conscious decision about the best way to move ahead. **Build time to revisit your decisions regularly, with an open, curious, and learning mindset, building on fresh information coming in and at different stages in the crisis.**