



# Leadership During a Time of Crisis

Making Sense of It All During the Chaos

University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education  
Doctoral Candidate, Jennifer Zuchowski [zucowsk@usc.edu](mailto:zucowsk@usc.edu)

# Organizational Culture



## **Exhibit 13.1. How Leaders Embed Their Beliefs, Values, and Assumptions.**

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### *Primary Embedding Mechanisms*

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis
- How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises
- How leaders allocate resources
- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching
- How leaders allocate rewards and status
- How leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

### *Secondary Articulation and Reinforcement Mechanisms*

- Organizational design and structure
  - Organizational systems and procedures
  - Rites and rituals of the organization
  - Design of physical space, facades, and buildings
  - Stories about important events and people
  - Formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters
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# Why Leadership Actions During Crises Matter

- Legitimacy of the organization is at stake
- Organizational effectiveness increases when leaders facilitate creative and collaborative problem solving.
- Organizational effectiveness increases when leaders behave with integrity.
- Organizational effectiveness increases when leaders encourage open lines of communication.
- Your reputation is at stake – Showcase competence and leadership – other’s perception of you may change depending on how you respond and react during a crisis!



# What YOU as a Leader MUST Do During a Crisis

- Stay calm
- Encourage employees to continue to do their best work
- LEAD, do not manage a crisis
  - Behavior and actions drive perceptions
  - Ownership, values, and authenticity count
- Know the organization's vulnerabilities in advance; have in place Incident Command Infrastructure with key players and strategies

# Challenges During a Crisis



## Key Leadership Challenges

- You are not totally in control
- Uncertainty of the future
- Vulnerability and threat of the unknown
- Pressure for Accountability
- Need to analyze in real-time and quickly
- Need to anticipate long-term ramifications of decisions
- Perception is reality – people want to know what happened, how you are responding, and how you will navigate in the future



## Common Failures

- Miscommunication
- Blame game
- No clear roles and responsibilities
- Lack of emergency management protocols
- Don't over-promise, don't over answer (the coverup is worse than the crime)



## Best Practices

- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!!!!**
- Lead through dignity and responsiveness
- Manage the confidence of the public and staff
- Make swift and decisive decisions
- Learn from mistakes
- Display genuine care, connection, and competence
- Maintain an open-door policy
- Consider avenues for employees to voice their concerns (e.g. town halls)
- Engage employees in problem-solving
- Acknowledge good work and the positives



# Critical Communication

*Focus on what needs to be said and how to say it*

- Actions and words should demonstrate care and commitment to doing the right thing
- Explain the circumstances
- Be honest
- Provide timely updates
- “Keep the main thing the main thing”
- Keep your communication short and concise
- Lead with a strong opening to compel your audience to continue listening or reading

Adapted from University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education  
Dr. Alexandra McDermott Wilcox, [amwilcox@usc.edu](mailto:amwilcox@usc.edu)



# Critical Communication

*How would I feel if this communication became front page news?*

- Consider carefully the tone of your message (who is your audience?)
- What are you trying to achieve through the communication? What is your goal? (main message)
- Anticipate reader reactions (review your word choice)
- Beware of making any criticisms or blame (honesty without tact is cruelty)
- Consider if you are using the right medium for the communication
- Edit it multiple times and seek second reader opinions
- Consider your internal communications to be as important as external communications (should you create a communications plan?)
- Treat every written communication as though it will be leaked (emails, memos, texts)

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**Your ability to lead will be judged by how quickly information is shared with key audiences such as your employees**







*“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’d do things differently.”*  
*-Warren Buffett*



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The Australia and New Zealand School of Government; Leadership in Times  
of Crisis: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLX9pT12Qlw>

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## Additional Materials

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