



Leading through a crisis

Despite countless considerations given to planning for unforeseen events, they will occur. How you respond to them will make a significant impact on those you lead.

I am developing a strong dislike for water. Houston was recently hit again by a water-related event, this time due to surprising cold weather. When winter approaches, my fellow Houstonians are happy to receive a break from what feels like 150 degree Fahrenheit weather and the ongoing threats of tropical storms and hurricanes.

Typical winters average a couple of days with slightly below freezing temperatures — usually not consecutively. That changed in early February. As the entire state dropped significantly in temperature while it was also raining, the electricity grid (Texas has its own) literally came minutes away from catastrophic failure, forcing 4.3 million residents into a blackout lasting several days.

As Houston is almost at sea level, we have few basements and none in the average home. Our plumbing is outside or in our attics, insulated to keep the warm weather

from penetrating the house, not to keep warmth from escaping. Pipes failed everywhere, in homes, businesses and affected water municipalities, across over 60 percent of the counties in the state. Risk-modeling firm Karen Clark and Company estimated damages at \$18 billion. My home will be included in the final numbers.

This is my third flood-related event. On the July 4th weekend of 2016, my lake house experienced a broken pipe in the downstairs bathroom, flooding the bottom level. I took that experience, extrapolated the learnings and rebuilt. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey flooded the first floor of my primary residence. More lessons learned, but we rebuilt.

In February, I had to be out of the country and took my wife along for the Valentine's Day weekend that followed, as well as her birthday. With negative COVID-19 tests in hand, we planned on returning to Houston on the 15th. With the airports shut down and most major roads closed for several days, we were unable to return for many days past what we had originally planned. On the 16th, with a weird feeling, I asked

a good friend of mine who lives nearby to check on my house. As he knew I would be in the middle of video calls with some leaders I'm coaching, he texted me pictures of water pouring over the slab of my home. I connected with him and talked him through how to break into my house, where he found water pouring out of the kitchen ceiling and a river running through the main part of the house. With below-freezing temperatures and no power, and thus no heat within the home, our pipes burst.

Events, both personal and business-related, will happen outside of our control or influence. How we respond to them will either create trust and strengthen relationships with family members and those we lead or erode it. In my experience, there are four key behaviors to lead through a crisis: 1. Keep calm. People look to the leader's (or parent's) behavior to see how to respond. If they show stress or fear, they will create the same feelings in others. 2. Don't react too quickly. Slow down. Develop a plan with multiple contingencies, prioritizing and focusing first on the immediate needs

of health and safety. 3. Don't run too thin on emergency resources. Maintain a financial cushion. Have a readily available list of important contacts in both print and digital formats. 4. Think, "This too shall pass." Promote, "It will be OK, we will get through it."

Resulting from my own experiences with these chaotic events, I offer a fifth behavior: 5. Consider a more minimalist life. You never fully appreciate how much unnecessary "stuff" you have until you have to pack or discard much of your belongings, over and over again.

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