



71: LEADING THROUGH CRISIS

Thank you for joining the *Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast*!

Recorded on March 24, 2020, this episode walks us through how to lead through a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world during this season.

As a leader, you're not only thinking about your own job or your own family; you're thinking about the jobs and families of all the people in your organization, and you're thinking about the mission of your organization.

“This is not the first crisis the world has faced. We will get through this.”
—*Craig Groeschel*

The good news about crises: This is not the first crisis the world has faced, and it won't be the last. We will get through this. Life may look different on the other side of crisis—sometimes everything returns to normal, sometimes it doesn't—but we will get through this.

Every major crisis does two things.

1. A crisis creates **unexpected problems**.
2. A crisis creates **unprecedented opportunities**.

“Good leaders lead through hard times.” —*Craig Groeschel*

Opportunities

When a crisis creates opportunities, they usually come in these three categories: **practical, financial, and missional**.

A crisis has the rare side effect of bringing intense clarity to an organization. A crisis may mean you need to narrow your focus, redeploy team members to other areas, close a department, reallocate dollars, adjust expenses, approve certain projects, close others down, and eliminate fluff. These practical nuts-and-bolts opportunities help your company get laser-focused on what truly matters during a crisis.

A crisis can also create financial opportunities. You may see a need that your non-profit or company is uniquely equipped to fill. You may get an idea for a new business that will help solve the crisis. As a leader, look for financial opportunities and business needs and *respond quickly*. This doesn't mean you're taking advantage of crisis; it just means you're making financial decisions that put you in the best position to survive or solve the crisis.

A crisis can also create missional opportunities. There are people in need today who weren't in need a month ago—crisis creates opportunities to exercise your missional goals.

“Most people see problems. Leaders address the problems and seize the opportunities!” —*Craig Groeschel*

Solving Problems

It may seem obvious, but to solve problems a leader must identify problems.

The problem we're facing is COVID-19.

Some other problems are social panic, fear, and anxiety.

The potential for a negative economic impact is a problem.

And, public perception *may* be a problem. Be thinking about how your decisions will appear to the public and those you're leading—not out of vanity, but out of propriety. Even if what you do is right, but it's not understood by people, you can find yourself with a problem on your hands. If you're making a new, innovative, or risky decision, cast vision for why it's important and why it's the right thing to do.

Planning

Once you've identified the problem, create a plan. A simple, clear plan. It should become clear as a crisis unfolds what's important and what isn't. If not, sit down and chart out “What must happen?” vs. “What's off-mission?” Focus on mission-critical items only.

Here are some tips for creating a plan:

1. Expect to get it wrong at first.

During a crisis, there isn't a roadmap. There aren't directions or prescriptions for success. Pair that with the fact that reality is rapidly changing, and it's clear that you'll have to adjust course. Don't worry if you need to evaluate and reevaluate your plans.

2. Think long-term but plan short-term.

You always want to think of the future and where your organization ultimately ends up. But, during a crisis, it's just not practical to make solid plans when the situation is constantly changing. So, have long-term goals, long-term guidelines, but only put short-term, actionable plans into motion. Short-term plans, ranging from a few days to a few weeks, also help insulate you and your people from disappointment as things invariably change.

Communication

1. Communicate empathetically.

Almost always, no matter how devoted your staff is to your mission, their first thoughts in a crisis will veer toward themselves and their families and not the organization. In your communication, acknowledge their feelings and priorities.

Don't be afraid to say what people are thinking or answer what people are too afraid to ask. People won't follow you if they think you don't understand them or their circumstances.

“People won’t follow you if they think you don’t understand or care about them.” —*Craig Groeschel*

2. Communicate truthfully.

This is so important: tell the truth. Even if the truth is a little bleak or a little unknown, tell the truth. Your gut may be to be overly positive, but you need to be realistic. This isn’t the time for pure motivation. It’s time for leadership. Leaders take people through problems. They don’t ignore them or hide them.

People can handle bad news better than no news. If you don’t have an answer yet, say so. If you tried something and it didn’t work, and you have a new idea, it’s ok to be honest with the team.

Speak confidently, but not definitively. You and the team will make wise decisions as needed, but you can’t predict the future.

3. Communicate frequently.

You cannot overcommunicate. Every day, things are changing. Every day, people have new ideas, thoughts, and concerns. Send staff emails. Better yet, record of video yourself and send it out. People benefit from seeing confidence, truth, and leadership on your face.

Some final thoughts

- Cut unnecessary spending. As much as you can, conserve cash for the future.
- If you have to make sacrifices to conserve cash, leaders go first. Let the team know you’ve taken a pay cut, you’re donating money, or you’re going without a bonus—and then really do it.
- Take care of yourself! You’re tired, you’re taking risks, you’re making decisions. It’s exhausting. And it’s ok to be exhausted for a little while in the midst of a crisis. But, if you are injuring yourself, losing sleep, neglecting family, or feeling discouraged, take a break. It’s not an option, it’s a requirement.
- Remember, even if your business or ministry closes, *you are not a failure*.
- Prepare to hurt—on behalf of your team, your mission, your organization—because leaders hurt the most. It’s okay to show pain, sadness, and hurt. You care about the people and things you lead.

EXERCISES

If the current COVID-19 crisis is affecting your organization, chart out the most important, top-tier things that must be done to keep moving forward and survive. List them and focus on the most important.

If you haven't been regularly and frequently communicating with you team, sketch out three ways to connect with them.

Evaluate your own health, sleep, and family time. Are you neglecting one or all? Take a firm stand and decide to prioritize them—what change can you make today for bring health to yourself and your relationships?

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