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by Corro

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Problem or Urgent Situation? **Assume Control**



Confronting Workplace Problems or Emergencies

Are you the designated fire-fighter? When anything affects your work and poses a problem, when decisions must be made, how prepared are you to assume control of the situation and take action?

Confronting Workplace Emergencies

In a Quandary – Take Command

Have a Problem or Urgent Situation – Assume Control

A crisis automatically tells people something is out of control. The last thing they need to witness is their boss losing emotional control and taking a frenzied approach to the problem.

A workplace emergency is an event that disrupts your workplace operations, causes damage, or endangers the welfare of you employees, clients, or the public. When you are confronted with an urgent situation or emergency, the most important thing you can do is assume control. You can use the same tactic so that minor problems or exigencies do not disrupt your whole day. True, it can be much easier to say than to do when an urgent situation is perplexing or nagging problems simply won't go away. The trick is to keep your wits about you and remain objective about the problem or predicament that confronts you.



Problems can range from relatively simple quandaries such as how to soothe an unhappy customer to more pressing events such as vital equipment failure or key people sick or hurt. Even the best laid plans and training cannot prevent some unanticipated critical situations from interrupting business. Covid 19 is but one example of an outside circumstance that had to be approached as urgent. Ongoing challenges with personnel and projects that are always late or over budget must be handled. Valuable resources and profits are drained from your organization when issues are left unaddressed or unsolved.

Steps to Assume Control when a Situation is Urgent

Are you the designated fire-fighter? When anything affects your work and it poses a problem and decisions must be made how prepared are you to assume control of the situation and take action?

► Action #1 – Decide to take control:

Most fire-fighters will tell you, you need to remain calm and keep your wits about you. You can do neither of those things if you are not in control. Always assume control. That is your number one priority. Try thinking of any crisis or a problem as one that belongs to someone else and that you have been called in as the designated problem solver, trouble-shooter, or fire-fighter. Your matter-of-fact acceptance of the responsibility along with your controlled approach helps keep other people calm and tells them you have the situation handled.

► Action #2 – Prepare to make the decisions, easy and tough:

There is an art to handling urgent situations or the difficult, tricky challenges that are unexpected and unplanned. Problem-solving and decision-making are critically important skill areas for professionals in emergency management. Using those two skills you can be the fire-fighter that is capable of handling any kind of quandary with professional ease.

Problem solving is a set of actions designed to systematically analyze a situation to generate and implement the best solutions. Decision-making is the instrument you use to make choices at each step of the problem-solving process. The two skills of problem solving and decision-making work in sync.

► Action #3 – What do you need to do first? How quickly do you need to act?

Your first decision is always to make a quick assessment to decide what you should do first. Is it a medical emergency that requires immediate attention? Apart from medical emergencies there are other truly urgent situations in business and life that must be handled immediately. These can be easy obvious decisions such as pushing aside planned activities and rearranging schedules to take care of a crisis. Deciding to apply a quick fix until you can delve into the problem may be necessary. Even if it is not a true emergency or high priority problem it will still require some kind of positive response from you.

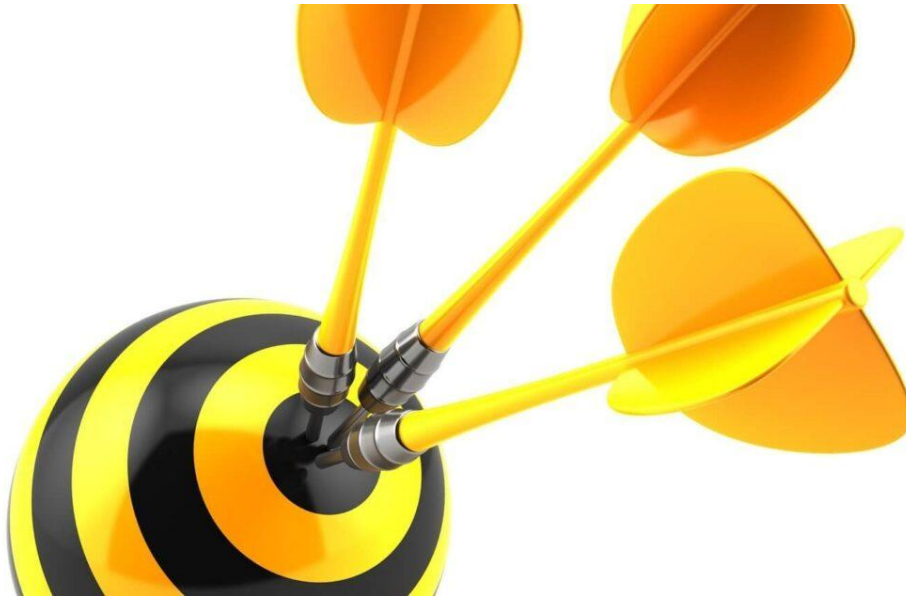
Deal with the situation promptly, but do not make your first or final decision prematurely. When a situation is less urgent you can take a few moments to evaluate your first steps. Maybe you do not need to act immediately. When other people are involved, taking control of a situation may require that you call a time-out for everyone involved to allow their emotions to calm down.

What you need to do first, may not be so obvious. It may be necessary to wait a few hours or even a day or too, to determine the root of the problem before coming to a decision.

Your first decision may just be to tread lightly as you look at the entire set of circumstances and take the time to think things through rationally.

- Determine if it really is a crisis or simply a situation where someone overreacted.
- When business priorities are at odds or key people are involved, you may face some very tough decisions. In business, an urgent crisis usually ends up in a loss of some sort. It could be money, time, materials, or customers. One of your first decisions might be to decide what loss can be tolerated and what loss must be avoided.
- Sometimes the most obvious problem is not always the most serious dilemma. If you find yourself dealing with similar situations over and over, you may have an underlying issue that has not been identified and dealt with. Have you taken the time to figure out what is the true cause of recurring problems? So often a manager spends so much time fixing an unexpected problem with a temporary solution rather than dealing with the real issue.

It maybe a multi-faceted and fluid situation and acting too quickly can add fuel to the fire or result in additional loss.



► **Action #4 – Determine your main concerns and your objectives:**

Try to look at the situation as a whole as you determine your priorities. When a crisis occurs a business owner has several pressing concerns. However, these objectives will usually be on your list:

- Of course, one of your goals should be to ascertain the root of the problem so that you can decide how to solve it. But, that may not be the highest priority.
- Your objective is to regain control without critical loss.
- It should be a priority to get things back to normal as soon as possible, including having your staff settling their emotions and thinking clearly.

► **Action #5 – Solve the problem:**

Some problems are easy to solve. However, solving the problem is never simply one decision or action. Very often it can be a multi-pronged course of action involving several steps and the best of your problem-solving and decision-making skills.

- When other people are involved, do not take sides and above all do not jump to conclusions, or rely only on one person's perspective.
- Gather information. Ask questions? What do you need to know before you can make a decision? What is relevant? What will help you make the right decisions? What different interpretations of your data might be possible?
- Be a good listener. Emotionally charged situations often result in participants having different views or interpretations. You will hear incoherent, fractured, unclear, and disjointed descriptions; other bad news may be revealed; people will share their versions of why it happened or who was to blame. Be patient to hear people out and save your questions for the end of the report.
- You may be able to have individuals write out a summary of a situation.
- Ask the individuals involved for suggestions about solving the problem.
- Isolate the root problem so you can respond responsibly to the real issue.
- Carefully examine and brainstorm your options. Ask “what if” questions to determine which alternative will best achieve your objectives. In judging alternatives, consider what might be adverse consequences? What other problems might a solution create? What are the risks of making this decision?
- Evaluate solutions on their merits. The workability of a solution is far more important than the status of the person that may have suggested the solution.
- Execute the decision. Commit to making the decision work. Put a plan in place. Allocate resources as necessary. One way to get things back to normal, is to take action, give instructions, offer help, and step away, trusting that the person who is normally in charge to carry through.

► **Action #6 – Follow-up to make sure the situation is resolved:**

It is one thing to have expectations that a problem is solved. You also want to test those expectations against actual events. Always follow-up to ensure that your instructions were followed and that action plans that were put in place are being acted upon. You want to know that the issue was resolved or that progress is being made. Listen to what people want to share. Be prepared to answer questions, or address issues that might have arisen. You may learn you have to monitor the situation. Use the follow-up to gain clarity to determine if the solution remains in place or needs to be updated to respond to future changes.

► Action #7 – Evaluate your experience and the results:

Reflect on the event so that you can do something to eliminate future difficulties or do better next time. When other people are involved solicit feedback. Every situation is an opportunity to learn something. When the urgency has passed and things have returned to normal, hold a debriefing session – not a blaming session – to discuss what worked well, what needs improvement to be more effective next time, and determine how a similar emergency can be avoided in the future. Make this an opportunity for training or planning so your organization and your people will be proactive in the future when similar situations arise. If necessary, and especially for complex problems, you may have another follow-up and de-briefing session.

Prevention and Preplanning is Key

Be proactive to prevent future crisis situations, especially if they pose risk. Who wants to let a situation turn into something with dire consequences?



Since emergencies will occur, preplanning is necessary. Regardless of the type of emergency your workplace experiences, it's important to be prepared so that the damage to your employees, your customers, and your business is minimized as much as possible. Making decisions during a crisis can be tough even for the calmest level-headed among us, so having a well-thought-out emergency plan that clearly outlines the steps and actions to be taken is crucial, and also may be legally required.

Identify Potential Problems Areas

Identify potential problems areas before an emergency happens. Do this for various aspects of your business. Brainstorm the worst-case scenarios that could happen in your workplace. You should also account for unforeseen risks that could develop into an emergency situation. Do not ignore those areas of your business that may seem less essential. Even a non-functioning bathroom, overhanging tree nearby, or excess clutter near a doorway can result in an unforeseen mishap that disrupts business and cause injury.

Use the following examples as a guideline in identifying potential problems. Internally your business may have unique situations. It might be a good idea to go through the day to day routine with vendors, clients and staff to determine where a potential problem might arise.

Payment processing failure Equipment malfunction Key staff absent Inventory not delivered Power outage Flooding Gas leaks Fire	Break-in Vandalism Rowdy disruptive clients Fraud Competitor espionage Quality control failure Hazardous spills Protests, strikes	Local catastrophe Medical emergencies Severe weather Environmental issues Life-threatening issues Workplace violence/harassment
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Create Response and Contingency plans

Once you identify the risks create plans on how to handle possible problems as they might occur:

- Put safety measures in place. Develop a system for checking to ensure regular maintenance is done or procedures are followed.
- Define your emergency response plan for major emergencies.
- Develop a contingency plan for how to deal with any type of problem or emergency that might arise in your business, your building, your locale. It will make it easier for you handle urgent situations quickly and effectively and make it easier for others to handle problems in your absence.
- Use what you have learned from past emergency situations to decide how you can best prevent a future crises from affecting your business.
 - Make a list of the various urgent situations you have dealt with in the last two months.
 - List the causes, actions you took, and the results for each crisis handled, including feedback from others, customers or staff.

- What did you learn from each crisis? The handling of each urgent situation should make a direct contribution to future prevention.
- Highlight any situations in which you applied a band-aid rather than fix the problem. Did you follow-up to gather facts and explore options to prevent a recurrence? Could a simple lack of resources or misplaced priorities be the cause?
- Compare the circumstances of each situation to find any pattern that exists.
- Decide how you can best prevent a future crisis from affecting your business. What would help prevent some issues from occurring? Additional training? Delegating responsibility? Setting up different procedures or controls? More frequent maintenance? New equipment?

Even the best planning and training cannot prevent an occasional unanticipated situation from occurring, but proactive prevention strategies can reduce the risks.

► **Tailor your Plans to your Business**

Your preventive plans, responses and contingency plans should be tailored to your specific workplace. Each work environment will have different risks and different logistical considerations. Therefore it is not wise to simply copy another person's preventative plan. Use it as a guideline, but be diligent in making it specific to your business.

► **Handling Emergencies with Professional Ease**

A crisis automatically tells people something is out of control. The last thing they need to witness is their boss losing emotional control and taking a frenzied approach to the problem. Under pressure, no emotionally over-wrought fire-fighter can make rational decisions. Are there any skills you can improve upon, so that you will look and act the part of the trouble-shooter with the right answers?

The more all team members learn about crisis management and taking control, the more competently they will act to handle future emergencies and the less you will be required to become involved. Is there training that can be incorporated into your business practices.

Do not procrastinate. Extreme emergencies or high-priority problems do happen and must be dealt with quickly. However, once you have fixed the immediate problem do not ignore it. Gather the facts, explore the options, and take preventative action.

Be proactive by instituting preventative plans to eliminate those urgent situations that steal your time and energy. Unanticipated situations will occur; have contingency plans in place to minimize disruption, loss, and stress.

Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success