

Three Tips for Crisis Communication

In any crisis, one of the greatest problems is uncertainty. What was familiar, known or expected is suddenly gone when a crisis begins to unfold. The unknown and uncertainty are what makes a crisis challenging—for leaders and team members alike.

It's also what invokes fear and anxiety—the unknown. In our culture, the fear of public speaking and the fear of death are our two greatest fears. While that may be so, the fear of the *unknown* actually grips people more frequently and powerfully; think of all the panic buying in recent days with the coronavirus outbreak.

And it's what fuels the underlying anxiety your team members may feel during a crisis as they wonder, “How will this affect me and my role? What changes might come for me, my job, my family and my world?” These crucial questions deserve an answer. But what does it look like to communicate well and lead differently by providing authentic answers and helpful direction forward?

Nehemiah provides a helpful model and offers three tips for Jesus-centered leadership and crisis communication for teams.

1. **Accurately Assess and Convey Your Current Reality**

In the opening paragraph of Nehemiah's autobiographical book, he records a report from Jerusalem. It's simple and straightforward—Jerusalem's wall is broken down and its gates are destroyed. As a result, the people are in trouble (Neh. 1:3). The crisis of war and defeat had overcome Jerusalem and her residents.

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he ventures out at night to survey the extent of damage to the city walls. He then gathers the Jews and the people of the city to provide a plain-spoken but accurate appraisal of the current situation: “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned” (Neh. 2:17).

Because a crisis ushers in uncertainty, change, volatility and the unknown, your team needs you to provide an accurate assessment of the situation coupled with clear information about your current reality and what you anticipate, especially in the near future.

As a leader, don't overstate nor minimize things. Simply share what you know to the best of your ability. And if you don't know something, it's ok to simply tell your team you don't know. But also let them know what steps you'll take to find out and when you'll get back with them to provide the information they need.

Providing a thoughtful, honest and accurate assessment of the current situation helps calm team members' concerns and gives a sense of assurance in uncertainty. It helps address anxiety and enables team members to engage instead of being distracted.

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2. Address Team Members' Concerns and Questions

After Nehemiah and the families of Jerusalem collectively labored on rebuilding the first portion of the wall, they encountered a new crisis—opposition from local leaders threatening violence against the city. The people in Jerusalem voiced their concerns, “Our strength . . . is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves, we will not be able to rebuild the wall” (Neh. 4:10). Nehemiah heard their concerns and addressed their fears by reallocating resources, adding people to the workforce and increased defenses so the work could continue.

During a crisis, people experience a variety of concerns and questions, but often the most pressing question people face is: “What will happen to me?” “How will this affect me and my role?”

Based on your accurate assessment, provide specific information about how the current challenges may affect your team today, in the near future and in the long term. Honestly address changes that may need to be implemented due to the crisis. Reassure your team members based on what you know making sure to avoid sweeping generalizations or promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Try to anticipate the questions your team members may be thinking and address those questions or concerns before they're voiced. This demonstrates your attentiveness and understanding of your team members, what they're experiencing and how the crisis may be affecting them.

3. Awaken Hope and Motivation

People need hope, especially in the most challenging of times. Nehemiah recognized this need and rallied the people, “Do not be afraid . . . Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Neh. 4:14).

The crisis you may be facing today will end. You may not know when or how, but the challenges, the difficulties, the fear, the anxiety, the unknown will eventually cease. While in crisis, it may be hard to see the “light at the end of the tunnel,” but as a leader, it's important to remind your team to be hopeful.

As Jesus-centered leaders, we ultimately find our hope in Jesus. Point your team members to Jesus—our Rock, Redeemer and Rescuer. You can also help your team find hope and motivation by sharing with them steps and plans to navigate the current crisis to carry them forward. Remind your team of the fact the current crisis will end!

The need for clear, cogent, helpful communication increases exponentially during a crisis. We hope you find these three steps for communicating with your team during times of challenge and crisis helpful. We welcome your feedback and please let us know ways we can help serve you!



About Dr. Rick Franklin: Rick is husband to Dana and father to four adult children. His passion to develop Christian leaders has been honed and cultivated during the course of 30 years of ministry in a variety of church, parachurch, teaching and consulting roles domestically and internationally.

Rick is an Arrow leader (Arrow Class 7) and prior to joining Arrow Leadership as Vice President, Rick served with his wife, Dana, in a variety of senior leadership positions with Cru in the US, Eastern Europe and Canada.



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