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[How should leaders respond in times of calamity?](#)

I believe when everything around is falling apart, it's up to the leader to gather and mend things by being empathetic, showing utmost care and giving out a comforting aura that we are in it together...this too shall pass

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Even with all the latest technology, data analysis; predicting disasters is still largely a daunting task and almost impossible in most cases. You never know when a flood, epidemic or even a cyber- attack can paralyze your organization's operations. Last year we saw 5 floods affecting our country and today entire world has almost come to a standstill with the coronavirus outbreak. In such volatile conditions, it's quite challenging for a leader to facilitate the conduct of 'business as usual', as everyone looks up to the leader to manage the situation well and come up with a solution, which is in favour of customers, employees, and distributors.

I have faced many such calamities in the past and learnt a lot from them. I feel, the solution lies in how you respond to the situation and prepare for the unplanned. It's important to be calm and not to be flustered when a storm comes your way (both literally and figuratively). It's mainly thinking about 'what ifs' and planning the best for the worst that can happen. This preparedness can help you tackle any calamity head on. Below are some learnings from my experience:

Customer first

The first thought under such situations is how to protect the interests of the customers. In such crucial times, it's important to be there with them and address their worries. It's only under such circumstances that the true value of your services is adjudged. Be accessible at all times across all platforms. Although there are customer service executives available round the clock, there have been many instances where I have personally addressed customer queries that I get on my social media handles. Show how much you care for them and they will trust you in return. With digitisation, always give customer the option to reach out to you through multiple means.

Employee safety is paramount

Safeguard your people, it's only when you take care of them that they will work towards your purpose with greater determination. Provide them with all necessary resources and assistance required to recover; like paying salary in advance, helping with emergency supplies if need be, medical help or even altering few policies to provide them convenience. I feel, that

although such environment demands your employees to work harder to serve your customers, it's equally important to take care of them which will enable them to take care of others. Above all this, their health and safety is of utmost importance.

Build an emergency response team

You can't just fix things with a snap of your finger. You need to plan for the worst, invest in preventive measures. It's always helpful to have Plan, B, C...till Z. Think out of the box as your conventional approach may not always work. Conduct drills and dry runs to gauge the preparedness of various functions if there is a calamity. Build an emergency response team that ensures sustenance of services both back-end and on-ground. Such drills have helped us settle innumerable claims instantly for our customers in times when they required the most assistance. Most important aspect of an emergency response team is to empower them with authority to take calls as per the situation. This should be a cross functional team that brings different skill sets to the table.

Communication is the key

It's vital to communicate clearly with all the stakeholders on what's at stake and how you intend to address the situation. Be empathetic and action-oriented when you engage with anyone, be it customers, employees or partners. It's how you communicate with them and the assurance you provide, that shows your preparedness. I have always been transparent in my approach, if it's a bad news I say it's a bad news rather than covering it up with some glossy picture which may not be possible. I feel if your intent is right and if you have an appropriate solution, communicating it will help you get all the support you need to come out of the calamity. Care has to be the backbone of your communication, if you genuinely do, it shows, and people respect that.

Document your learnings

While you are managing the disaster at hand, you also need to document your learnings and your responses to it simultaneously. I feel such crisis situation can be a best teacher. I always introspect on steps I took and what I could have done better. It helps me prepare for the next worse thing in a better manner.

Such trials by fire showcase the true spirits of a leader. I believe when everything around is falling apart, it's up to the leader to gather and mend things by being empathetic, showing utmost care and giving out a comforting aura that we are in it together...this too shall pass.