

# **Crisis Management in an Uncertain World: Leading with Strategy, Acting with Humanity**

*In today's world, volatility is no longer the exception, it is the norm.*

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*Paris, May 2025*

From cybersecurity breaches to pandemics, economic collapses to climate disasters, and personal tragedies to organizational breakdowns, **crisis is part of our new normal**. No manager - formal or informal - is immune. And no strategic plan, no matter how well-constructed, remains intact when uncertainty strikes in its rawest form.

What defines successful leadership today is not the ability to prevent crisis, **but to navigate through it with clarity, decisiveness, and above all, humanity.**

## **We Are All Managers: With or Without a Title**

Before diving into frameworks, let's challenge the idea of who a "manager" is. Most people associate the term with an organizational role or corporate title. But we all **manage something**: our time, our responsibilities, our emotions, and the wellbeing of those around us.

From the moment we wake up, we are micro-managing dozens of variables: morning routines, school drop-offs, project deadlines, interpersonal tensions, emotional reactions. **Management is not a job description. It's a posture. A mindset.**

And when a crisis hits, whether a company-wide collapse or a personal emergency, we are all called to lead, whether we like it or not.

## **Crisis: The Uninvited Teacher**

Crisis doesn't knock. It crashes the door.

It scrambles priorities, unearths vulnerabilities, and strips away illusions of control. But it also reveals truths. It forces focus. It surfaces real leaders, even among the quietest team members.

What's critical to remember is this:

**You don't need to play the hero. You need to stay human.**

Too often, managers adopt a “superman” stance in the face of a crisis, feeling they must have the answers, rescue everyone, and solve everything alone. This mindset is unsustainable and, in many cases, dangerous.

**A true leader in a crisis is not the loudest or the fastest, but the most grounded, composed, and compassionate.**

## **Five Principles for Human-Centered Crisis Management**

### **1. Stay Grounded**

Anchor yourself before anchoring others. Breathe. Pause. Manage your internal panic before managing external chaos.

### **2. Avoid Judgment**

In a crisis, everyone processes differently. Some freeze, others overreact. Stay observant, not judgmental. Let people be human.

### **3. Postpone Blame**

If you do find the source of the crisis, remember **there is no time for blame**. The immediate priority is containment and care. Accountability can, and must, come later, after the dust settles.

### **4. Communicate with Clarity and Care**

Silence is a breeding ground for rumors and fear. Communicate clearly, regularly, and with empathy. Even if you don’t have the answers, say so.

### **5. Don’t Isolate**

Ask for help. Activate your network. Empower others to step in. Crisis is not a test of your individual heroism; it’s a collective human test.

## **The Crisis Timeline: Phases of Response and Leadership**

Crisis management is not a single moment; it’s a multi-phase journey. Here's a strategic yet human-centered timeline to guide your response.

### **Phase 1: Shock & Containment (First 0–48 hours)**

**Objective:** Stop the bleeding.

- **What happens:** Confusion, fear, emotional reaction, lack of information.
- **Best actions:**
  - Ensure physical and emotional safety.
  - Isolate and contain the damage (e.g., shut down compromised systems).

- Communicate immediately, even if only to say, “We are aware and we are acting.”
- Appoint a **Crisis Lead**, not necessarily the CEO, but the calmest person in the room.
- **Avoid:**
  - Spreading unverified information.
  - Over-promising.
  - Casting blame.

Example: When a fintech startup's servers were hacked overnight, the COO posted a company-wide message before 7 a.m., calmly explaining that systems were under lockdown, user data was being assessed, and next updates would come at 10 a.m. That 3-line message calmed 90% of the panic.

## Phase 2: Diagnosis & Strategy (Day 2 to Day 7)

**Objective:** Understand and act.

- **What happens:** Teams begin to stabilize; critical data becomes available.
- **Best actions:**
  - Conduct a rapid audit (what happened, what’s affected, who’s involved).
  - Prioritize issues using **urgency vs. impact**.
  - Set up cross-functional “war rooms” for coordinated response.
  - Start the **empathy circuit**: check in with employees, customers, partners.
- **Avoid:**
  - Analysis paralysis.
  - Reverting to “normal” prematurely.

Example: During the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak, companies like Airbnb pivoted by analyzing which markets would collapse and which could survive. They paused expansions and invested in remote-friendly features, fast, with clarity.

## Phase 3: Stabilization & Communication (Week 2 to Week 4)

**Objective:** Restore order. Rebuild confidence.

- **What happens:** Emotions begin to settle. Uncertainty still lingers.
- **Best actions:**
  - Share regular updates with full transparency.
  - Deploy short-term action plans (salaries, supply chains, delivery schedules).
  - Offer psychological support where possible (internal counseling, flexibility).
  - Reinforce your **organizational values**: “Here’s what we stand for especially now.”
- **Avoid:**

- Corporate tone-deafness.
- Pretending things are fully back to normal.

Example: A cosmetics brand hit by embargo in its export country didn't fire anyone. Instead, they redeployed teams to product R&D and local retail innovation. Their internal newsletter shared real stories, struggles, and gratitude, building long-term loyalty.

## Phase 4: Recovery & Reinvention (Month 2 onward)

**Objective:** Learn, evolve, prepare.

- **What happens:** Crisis impact fades, but scars remain.
- **Best actions:**
  - Conduct full crisis debriefs. Not just “what went wrong” but “what worked”.
  - Document decisions made and why they are your institutional memory.
  - Adjust your business model to build resilience: remote readiness, diversified supply, succession planning.
  - Celebrate wins, even small ones. People need emotional closure.
- **Avoid:**
  - Returning to business as usual without learning.
  - Suppressing post-crisis fatigue.

Example: After a major flood hit their logistics hub, an FMCG company created a second, inland backup facility, and trained regional teams to switch operations in less than 24 hours. The next crisis? They were ready.

## Example of Different Crises, Same Human Lessons

Crisis Type	Business Response	Human Response
Cybersecurity breach	Shut access, inform clients, call experts	Reassure, don't shame IT team
Natural disaster	Evacuate, contact emergency services, assess loss	Protect people first, offer emotional support
Bankruptcy threat	Freeze non-essential expenses, renegotiate liabilities	Be honest with team, offer career guidance
Political embargo	Pause exports, rethink go-to-market, localize supply	Stay calm, manage morale, support affected teams
Pandemic	Enable remote work, pivot services	Keep routines, address anxiety, celebrate resilience

## **In Conclusion: Management During Crisis Is Not About Being Perfect, It's About Being Present!**

There is no universal playbook for crisis. But there is a universal posture: **be human, stay composed, and act with intention.**

You don't need to know everything. You don't need to save everyone. But you do need to **stand in the storm with courage, care, and clarity.**

Because in the end, people don't remember if you had the best strategy. They remember how you made them feel: seen, safe, and supported.

**"In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers."**  
– Nigerian Proverb