



Bench strength

Four steps to building a deep bench for crisis management

Crises inevitably last longer than anyone anticipates.

Managing an organization in crisis is a team sport. And in sports, championship teams usually have one thing in common: bench strength. Yes, every team has its star players. But in addition to having a winning game plan, champions separate themselves from the field by having a deep bench of very talented individuals who can be subbed in—whether for strategic purposes or to address injury or fatigue.

Fatigue can be a factor in crisis management as well, as the most common miscalculation

in the midst of a crisis is duration of the event. Crises inevitably last longer than anyone anticipates. When a crisis hits, the initial response is all-hands-on-deck, taking immediate steps to mitigate the problem.

Managing the physical toll

Almost everyone can make it through the first 24 hours of a crisis without any real need to address physiological issues. But as individuals approach 36 or more hours of effort, the keen edge of mental acuity and effective decision making begins to wane.

Addressing potential physiological impacts requires preplanning—from coaching individuals who are expected to hold reserve positions of responsibility (the players coming off the bench) to logistical

support to provide food and necessities to those managing the crisis. To continue the sports analogy, it's having all players and supporting personnel in place to execute a no-huddle offense when needed.

Setting a tempo

Every crisis plan must set an operational tempo before the crisis team is deployed. The most common tempo divides the team into two groups, each working 12-hour shifts.

That, of course, means that the crisis management team must have competent backup, identified before a crisis strikes, to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. This can help prevent inevitable physiological impacts from becoming a distraction.

Building bench strength

Here are four steps that can help your organization build bench strength and address physiological needs:

1. In the crisis plan, identify both crisis management Team 1 and Team 2.
2. When exercising the crisis plan, deploy Team 2 while Team 1 shadows its respective counterparts as observers and mentors.
3. Determine what food and other supplies will be needed by team members and locate contractors that can handle those requirements.
4. Identify medical requirements of crisis team members and/or their families and account for them. Team members may be reluctant to identify their own needs until it becomes a crisis for them personally, which can further impact the team's effectiveness.

Taking the human toll on your crisis team into account is effective crisis management. It's also a reflection of the quality of leadership of the executive group.

Building bench strength is a championship trait.

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