



Mark Riley, Louisiana's deputy director of disaster recovery, on building a foundation of trust

[Transcript](#)

Mike Kearney:

Hurricane Katrina. Who will ever forget the magnitude of the hurricane and the impact that it had on the people in the South and, in particular, the folks in the state of Louisiana? You know, I remember vividly the images of the people housed in the Superdome and more so the folks that were outside of the Superdome because they could not deal with the stench and the spookiness of the structure.

Did you know that Hurricane Katrina is the most costly natural disaster in US history? Property damage alone was over \$100 billion, 108 to be exact, but over \$100 billion. That's a lot of money. And I remember the levy breaches that contributed to the extreme flooding in New Orleans and the surrounding parishes. Did you know that over 80 percent of the city was under water?

You know and I recently read that the breaches were the result of using shorter steel pilings in the levies to save money. Federal disaster declarations covered 90,000 square miles. You know, let me put that into context for you. The UK is about 95,000 square miles. And what that means is that the declaration zone was almost the size of the UK. That is incredible. And what's most important, none of this takes into consideration the lives lost and the people displaced.

There was over 1,800 people that died. And over 1 million people that were displaced; displaced out of their homes who had to move to other states and other locations. In fact, I live in Northern California. I told you that in the past and we had a family from the state of Louisiana in my home town. And what's remarkable is that it's been almost ten years. It's actually been more than ten years since Katrina and what's crazy is the recovery efforts are still going on today.

Mark Riley:

One of the things that struck me and I've seen it in other places; it's not just Louisiana, but how really resilient the American people are. You know, you're hit by something that is genuinely catastrophic yet you're still willing to go back and fight and build it back and all. And those places that were hit hard with Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, you go back to them today and you can see the resilience that has been built back not only in the physical infrastructure but in the people. Those people are resilient; they're hard. They come back and they don't give up.

Mike Kearney:

Welcome to [Resilient](#) where we hear stories from leaders on risk, crisis and disruption. And we get those stories by jumping on a plane and meeting our guests on their home turf. My name is Mike Kearney, the leader of Deloitte Strategic Risk Practice. And today I'm sitting down with Mark Riley, the Deputy Director for Disaster Recovery for the state of Louisiana, the man who manages an \$18 billion dollar budget and is responsible for Katrina recovery efforts as well as several other natural disasters that have happened over the last several years.

And we're meeting in Baton Rouge at the FEMA Joint Field office. This is basically the place where people work around the clock to clean up from past natural disasters and are getting ready for the next one. And I have to tell you I am really excited to talk to Mark. We do pre-calls in advance of these podcasts and I learned quickly that Mark is the real deal, a former Marine, a natural leader, a man of unquestioned great character and you may even hear his dry sense of humor during our conversation.

Mike Kearney:

Hey, Mark welcome to our *Resilient* podcast and thank you for joining us. You know, we're sitting in your FEMA Joint Field office. Love to just give everybody a sense of what is done here.

Mark Riley:

Well, first of all let me say the word 'resilience' is interesting in my environment because when I started in 2007, it wasn't part of the vocabulary, but over the last three or four years it's really become part of the vocabulary and it has a significant meaning.

But this office – and I have about 300 state employees here and FEMA probably has another 200 FEMA employees that are permanently here – but this is the focal point for the FEMA Stafford Act grant programs that come into play after there's been a presidential declaration. Then occasionally when there is an act of presidential declaration, this is also the facility that FEMA uses to stand up their joint field office that's active in the response end of a disaster declaration. So that's what happens here.

This is actually a FEMA building, a federal facility, as you saw when we came through the gates.

Mike Kearney: A very interesting place.

Mark Riley: Right.

Mike Kearney: So you just made a comment about resilience has become much more important over the last several years and kind of just jumping off the first question I was going to have, but when you think of resilience what does it mean to you and how has it become or why has it become much more important over the last several years?

Mark Riley: When I first started in this business we were stove-piped in recovery which is the name of my division is the Recovery Division. And recovery was really a stove-pipe process that simply managed grants that came into place because of a disaster. But then as we started to explore and experience – I mean Louisiana, Kiplinger's Newsletters designated Louisiana as the most disaster-prone state in the union, right? So we've had a number of very significant disasters even since Katrina.

And as we go through these disasters we learn each time – and one of the things that we've discovered is that recovery is a much broader effort than simply managing these little grant programs. It's really about reinstituting the community that's been affected. And the resilience part of that is if you take a plain reading of the Stafford Act it says in the public assistance program for example, it says, "We will build back that building that was damaged like it was before the event". Well, like it was before the event caused it to be damaged by the event.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: So resilience says I'm going to build it back better so that the next time there's an event like this, it will survive. But that applies to the whole of the community, not just that physical structure, but the whole of the community. We want that community to come back so that it's better able to survive the next event that comes down the pike.

Mike Kearney: Mark, you were brought in in 2007, which was obviously after Katrina, but it was also after a series of other major hurricanes. What was it like when you came in? How bad was it?

Mark Riley: Bad is kind of a relative concept and it kind of depends on how you measure it. Certainly for that individual family that lost their home and all their furniture, all their belongings—it was real bad. For many of the communities that were affected it was real bad. I'll use St. Bernard Parish as an example. I came in July of 2007.

I made a trip down there because that was the most, one of the most significantly impacted Parishes. It was still a war zone. The Parish had lost 60 percent of its population. Street lights still didn't work. You have entire strip shopping malls that were vacant with broken

windows and trash in the parking lots. And they were just – two years later they were just beginning to recover.

If you want to measure it again in my world which is this Stafford Act world, which includes the public assistance program and the individual assistance program, Katrina in dollars, Katrina is the largest disaster in US history. It is the number one of the top ten disasters. If you take the next nine disasters and add up the dollar amounts, Katrina is still greater.

Mike Kearney: Wow.

Mark Riley: Two months later the state got hit by Rita, again a significant hurricane event. If you put Rita and Katrina together for the state, they are four times larger than the next eight disasters in the United States. And that includes 911 and that includes Sandy.

You know, people talked a lot about Sandy and I say the difference between Sandy and Katrina is that New York has a better public relations machine than we do. And they had a super storm. We just had a hurricane. But there's a significant difference.

So bad is kind of relative. It was bad financially, bad for the economy, bad for the individual families, bad for the communities that were impacted.

Mike Kearney: Where did most of those people – so the St. Bernard's Parish you said 60 percent had left the area?

Mark Riley: Yes.

Mike Kearney: Where did they go?

Mark Riley: They literally went all over the country. Most of them, in fact if you go to an area that we call the North Shore, that's on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain across from New Orleans, many of them migrated over there because they still had family ties. They had work and everything.

One of the stories I like to tell is that in 2009 – so this is five years after the disaster, I go to San Antonio, Texas and I check into an Embassy Suites and the manager says – and as you know Embassy Suites has the breakfast in the morning. He says if you want breakfast you need to come down early. And I said, well why? And he didn't know I was from Louisiana.

He said we have a couple of families here still from Katrina from Louisiana and they come down every morning and they scoop up all the breakfast and bring it back to the room. That's how they live. So literally, Houston, Texas – great pictures of the Astrodome just full of evacuees from Louisiana and many of them stayed. So Parishes like

St. Bernard lost 60 percent. They're probably back up to about 80 percent of the population they had post Katrina. New Orleans has come back strong. So many of them left. Many of them stayed out of state. Many of them returned.

Mike Kearney: One of the things that I'm finding interesting about having these conversations is what compels leaders like yourself to take a job like this. So it was obviously a couple of years after Katrina hit. What was the reason you took it? Was there a deeper reason that connected you to this crisis that you wanted to get involved?

Mark Riley: Well, I want to be very frank. The reason that made me take this job was my wife. At the time that Katrina hit it really wasn't much of a blip on my radar. I was with the department of defense assigned to this place called the Joint War Fighting Center and was doing good things. And but we just had a set of twins and she wanted to come back home.

So I'd had some background right after 911 in the Homeland Security world. The Governor's Office of Homeland Security of Emergency Preparedness, the Homeland Security said well let me see what I can do down there. So we got in touch. I was fortunate enough to get hired. I thought I was getting hired as the Homeland Security Director and when I came in my boss says well, I think I've got something else I want you to do. And he sent me over to the Joint Field Office to take over the recovery process.

So it wasn't as purposeful as it might have, should have been, but this is where I am. And when I showed up here I couldn't spell FEMA. I didn't know what the Stafford Act was so you know, now I spell FEMA 30-40 times a day and I sleep with the Stafford Act. So that was the transition to this world.

Mike Kearney: Well it's amazing. I could probably share a lot of stories what my wife has made me do over the years together.

Mark Riley: Exactly.

Mike Kearney: So Mark, one of the things that I think is fascinating about Katrina, not only back in 2005, but even just in the ensuing years are some of the real life stories. You already shared some just in the first few minutes, but is there a story that you go to that really brings to life the impact that Katrina and the ensuing hurricanes had on the people within Louisiana?

Mark Riley: Unfortunately in the world that I'm in I don't get to interact as much as I'd like with the individuals that are affected, but I'm going to go back to St. Bernard Parish. So the topic of this forum is leadership. So they had a superintendent of schools who was an English teacher and that's all she had been all her life was an English teacher.

The disaster hit and she was such a leader that she recognized immediately that – and it literally destroyed all the schools in St. Bernard Parish. She realized that people aren't going to come back to the Parish unless we have schools that are operating. So she came and she conned FEMA into putting trailers immediately down in St. Bernard Parish so the teachers could come back. And then they jury rigged buildings to be schools and then with the teachers and the schools, and she announced the schools were opened, people started coming back.

So every year they host an anniversary event and it's usually a breakfast and it's at the high school that's been completely rebuilt and they hold an anniversary event and it's full of leaders from all over the state, significant individuals from the Parish and it's a presentation by the kids who at the tenth anniversary, which was last August, the kids that were given the program were in the fourth grade at the time. And so they were recounting their experiences in the program.

We've had people like Betty Ford come, senators. The first lady come one time. It's a significant event, a significant event. But listening to those kids talk about the impact that the event had on their life and their feeling about the recovery process and where they are today is just an amazing experience.

Mike Kearney: But she was not – she was just an English teacher?

Mark Riley: She was the superintendent of the schools --

Mike Kearney: Oh, she was?

Mark Riley: -- but her background was an English teacher.

Mike Kearney: Okay.

Mark Riley: And she was like me and she would admit this to you that she didn't know how to spell Stafford Act when this came about, but she is probably a premier expert right now, because she figured out and she's implemented it and she brought that school system back.

Mike Kearney: Mark, before we get into – I really want to talk about, you know, you came in and what some of your priorities are, but one of the things I'm finding is that the leaders that are at the center of these crises in many respects are special. And a lot of times it goes back to their upbringing, the things that they did.

So I'd love to just spend a few minutes just talking about you and where you grew up and some things that maybe shaped you as a leader. I'd love to talk about your time in the Marines, but maybe just start where you grew up.

Mark Riley: Well, my dad was in the Navy so in my younger days we lived around. I probably – by the time I was probably 12 I'd been around the world

at least once, but within the states, I was born in Virginia. I did spend some time here in Baton Rouge and made a couple of good friends and that's how I ended up back here in my college days. I actually graduated from a high school in Hobbs, New Mexico. So you know, and lived some time in Texas during middle school and high school.

So you've know I've gotten all kind of flavors, you know, from my family is from – my parents are from the Boston and New Hampshire area so I have that flavor. Living in the deep south and then in the west. So I've kind of been all over.

Mike Kearney: Anything that you can point to when you were younger that really started to shape who you are today, the values that you have which we'll be getting into later.

Mark Riley: Well, you know, obviously, I say obviously, my father had a big impact on my values. And one of the things he did when I was a young teenager is he decided that I wasn't going to sit around all summer long. I was going to do something productive. And he had friends all over the country. So he would buy me an airplane ticket and send me to one of his friends to work. And he put me on the plane he'd say okay, if you want to come back you have to earn the money to buy the ticket to come back.

So I would go off during the summer. I mean one summer I went to a pig farm. One summer I went to a cotton mill in North Carolina. I think the pig farm was in Texas. I worked on a survey crew here in Louisiana one summer. My sole responsibility was to be able to get back home. So that gave me a sense of independence and, you know, take care of myself and that sort of thing.

Mike Kearney: It's funny because I can almost quote my father, show you the text that I have with my son last night. I was flying across the country. He's 16 years old and our biggest argument is what are you going to do this summer. So maybe I should find a place, send him on a plane and have him pay for his ticket to come home.

Mark Riley: Well you learn. I mean as a young man you learn some life-long lessons. For example, when you work on a pig farm, a girl won't go out with you more than twice if you smell like a pig. So you learn those sorts of things and it's a good lesson for a young man.

Mike Kearney: So you became a Marine. You didn't go into the Navy. So what compelled you to enlist in the Marines?

Mark Riley: Well, my dad was actually a Naval Academy graduate and my older brother was an Air Force Academy graduate and they were both pressuring me to go Academy. LSU was known as a party school and that attracted me more than the Academy, but I always, you know, because of the environment I grew up in I always knew that I would eventually end up in the services somewhere, so when I was at law

school I went to an event and ran across a Marine Corps recruiter and he signed me up on the spot. And there you go.

Mike Kearney: Any lessons that you pulled in from your time as a Marine to what you do today? How did that shape who you are today?

Mark Riley: Well, you asked me earlier about people who had influenced. The Marine Corps has a pretty strong tradition of leadership, and I ran across a number of people that I consider even to this day as great leaders. And my experience with them taught me a lot. I'll give you a short example. So I was a judge advocate in the Marine Corps, a lawyer in the Marine Corps, right? And I did that for a number of years.

And then decided that I wanted to do something more exciting than that and so I went to the general of my command. I said I want to do something different. And so there's a – this was a Marine Corps brigade and within the brigade you have a headquarters and service company. He was losing his company commander and so I asked if I could do it and he said yeah, I'll allow you to go ahead and do it. And he appointed me as a company commander.

And he said I want to give you one piece of advice. He said you go into that company. You find that staff sergeant or gunnery sergeant, which is mid-level management in an organization like that. You figure out which one of those staff sergeants or gunnery sergeants are running the operation. And you become friends with them and figure out how to do it because I can tell you, you don't know how to do it. And you find people around you that know how to do it and then you'll succeed. And so I did that and we did succeed very well.

Mike Kearney: And you've taken that lesson into other parts of your life?

Mark Riley: Exactly. You apply lessons like that wherever you go.

Mike Kearney: You know, it's funny. One of the things that's beginning to pop up is kind of a common theme and it sounds like this is what you're saying is the importance of mentors. And often times people think oh, you know, those who have ascended to great places don't need mentors, which I think is absolutely incorrect because it's a common theme we're beginning to hear from each of these leaders that we're speaking to.

Mark Riley: No, I mean shoot, I would have never made – for example if I were to walk into that headquarters and service company and taken charge as if I knew anything I'd have been a complete failure.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: And there are other things you – you know, in life you not only have mentors but you have examples of things not to do.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: And so you pick up on those things also.

Mike Kearney: So let's pivot to when you came in in 2007. Can you – and it sounded like you had a lot to learn. You learned how to spell FEMA and the Stafford Act and things of that nature, but in all sincerity when you started to really think about what was most important in, say your first 100 days, 180 days, whatever it may be, what were some of your initial priorities, Mark?

Mark Riley: Well, again, the first 100 days I concentrated on learning the regulatory and statutory environment with which I was working because I fuss at FEMA all the time. You know, a disaster happens and what do you do? You bring this huge bureaucracy not only in the staff that you bring but in the programs you bring. And you have to understand that bureaucracy to be successful. So I spent a lot of time doing that.

But I identified the key players in the environment in a disaster both response and recovery, and that's an important distinction because they're really two different activities.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: There are three primary pairs. The federal government, and in my case—which is FEMA – the state government, which was myself and the locals are the applicants. We call them applicants in the program. And when I came in it became very apparent that the relationship between those three primary players was very dysfunctional.

So I went about trying to figure out things that we could do to put some functionality in how we were operating and really try to build a partnership between those three entities so that we could all have a unified goal and work forward to it.

But an earlier question – just to put all this into context, an earlier question that you asked was how bad was it?

Mike Kearney: Yep.

Mark Riley: Currently Louisiana has 11 open disasters. We're managing close to \$17 billion with 35,000, over 35,000 projects, about 35,500 projects.

Mike Kearney: And Mark can you define just because everybody may not – what is a project?

Mark Riley: Okay. So and this is in a public assistance and hazard mitigation grant program –

Mike Kearney: Yeah.

Mark Riley: --so if this building was damaged by an event, we bring FEMA in here and we look at the damage. We identify what damage in the building was caused by a hurricane and then we would put an estimated amount to repair that and we put that in a project worksheet. It's a formal document that FEMA then obligates dollars to complete that project, to repair this building. And so that's a project.

Mike Kearney: Can you go back to the – because you brought up something that there's broader applicability than just within your world and that's about relationships. You said one of the key things that you came in and really had to do was create a deep relationship between those three entities.

Mark Riley: Right.

Mike Kearney: Do you have any perspectives on or maybe even any lessons or just thinking back around the importance of that beyond maybe what you've shared around the importance of relationships because it sounds so common. Of course you need to develop relationships, but that was the first thing that you mentioned.

Mark Riley: We talked off of this broadcast about a thing I call the Riley Rules and it's a one-page document that I created, I don't know, probably 20 years ago, and I modified it over time, but two of the concepts in it are trust is indispensable and a requirement in any sort of activity like this is communicate, collaborate, cooperate.

And so without that partnership in which A, I trust you and we understand our – because we all communicate differently, so when I'm in an event like this the first thing I do is go in and establish and try to understand what your method of communication is so that there's clear understanding between us. And that builds that partnership so that when you say something, and I can understand it and I respond to it then we've got that trust.

And it doesn't require, and this happens all the time, it doesn't require that we agree on everything. But if we disagree it's within that environment and there's clear understanding in between us and respect between us about the disagreement.

Mike Kearney: One of the things in doing my homework that I've heard about you is that you're a pretty innovative guy or try to find innovative solutions to some of the challenges that you have. And one of the examples that I loved and maybe you could explain this is that there are things called meal replacements, and there's a certain cost associated with that.

And I heard a story where you actually engaged local restaurants and food trucks to supplement meal replacements at a fraction of the cost. And hopefully I got that story right. Can you share that story with us?

Mark Riley: So this was actually during Hurricane Gustav. So when an event like a big hurricane happens, the Governor stands up the unified command group which is really all of his cabinet secretaries and then we were meeting during Gustav sometimes twice a day to talk about things that were going on and things that we're needing. FEMA comes in and at that point in time they were the pipeline for water and meals ready to eat, MREs. Right? That's actually a military grade quantity. When I'm out in the field that's what I eat, right?

Mike Kearney: Yep.

Mark Riley: But we had – in Gustav we evacuated two million people from South Louisiana. Many of the homes in South Louisiana were without electricity for up to 60 days, you know, so you can't cook. You can't do all that stuff.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: So there are people that need food. So we would rely on FEMA to provide us with these MREs and we would distribute these MREs to people that need it. Well, the FEMA pipeline dries up and it was a surprise to everybody.

Mike Kearney: Meaning they have no more MREs.

Mark Riley: Right. The logistics train coming into this state was disrupted and it was going to be disrupted for three or four days. And so I'm sitting around with the Commissioner of the Division of Administration, which is a senior state agency and we're talking about what our options are. And she says well, you know, I know the Director of the Louisiana Restaurant Association. Let's call him and find out if they can help. And so we did.

And sure enough he said oh, yeah, we've got many restaurants that have a mobile feeding facilities and we'll be glad to mobilize these people to get them out in the field to feed them. So for three days or for three to four days, we distributed over 500,000 hot meals—MREs are not hot meals, they come in a bag—hot meals. So when it was all done and things started getting quiet I asked the question I wonder how much this is going to cost us?

So we did some accounting and an MRE from FEMA cost us \$9.40. These hot meals that we were getting were costing us \$5.60. So we saved almost \$4.00 a meal. Not only that. In an emergency like this the economics of the community are disrupted. For example, people don't go to restaurants. Restaurants lose money, but here was an opportunity to get that same money that otherwise we would have given to the federal government back into our local economies.

Mike Kearney: So it sounds like, Mark, that innovation is pretty core to how you've lead this group over the last ten years. I think this is a great example, not only of just identifying that one opportunity, but really scaling it

and creating something programmatic so that it goes well beyond restaurants as you indicated.

Any additional thoughts on innovation? Any other examples on the importance of innovation in this type of environment?

Mark Riley: Well I think innovation is important in any environment. I'm going to go back to Riley Rules again. One of my Riley Rules is a thing I call destructive innovation. I have distributed a copy of the Riley Rules to all my staff and I talk to them all the time about destructive innovation. And I say if you see something that you think can be done better and you don't raise that issue, to your management, than you failed.

Mike Kearney: Shame on you, yeah.

Mark Riley: Yes. The other thing I like about destructive innovation, if somebody brings an idea to me I test it harshly and if that individual can stand up to that idea he's got then it's my concept that it's a good idea because he believes in it and he can stand up to it. If they fall quickly because of the questions I ask them well I say go back and rethink what you're saying. So that concept is important.

And so I try to apply that in everything we do. And our systems here are really – it's hard to explain in this environment the process that takes place with those 300 people out there, but it is a process. We have created a system, but that system is always changing because what we've created the first day, you know, we experience and then we're able to rethink it and look at it and also understand that this isn't a widget-making business where all the widgets look alike. So you have to have a flexible process that adjusts to the type of widget that's coming through. And so we make those adjustments all the time.

Mike Kearney: Hey Mark, I'm going to put you on the spot. Those Riley Rules, which I have in front of me, they're fantastic. Are you okay if we post them with this podcast?

Mark Riley: Sure. Yeah.

Mike Kearney: I love them. I wanted to ask you a question though on the destructive innovation. What it says before that is 'welcome dissent; and then after that it says 'destructive innovation', but when a decision is made execute as a team regardless of whose idea is that.

Mark Riley: Right.

Mike Kearney: Can you expand on the dissent because I think that's really important.

Mark Riley: Well, I would hate to walk into a room of my managers and say okay, here's my idea. Let's go execute it. I want them as I would test it if they came in, I want them to test me. And I emphasize a lot in the

way I speak about a team effort and a team effort is not a hierarchal structure of management where what the director says is absolute and golden. It is a team environment where everyone within that team, within that environment has an equal footing to stand up and say what they're thinking.

Now at the end of the day a decision has to be made, and that decision is usually the senior organizational piece in that structure. And once that decision is made I expect all the team to get aboard with it whether they have agreed with it individually or not, right. So there's an opportunity to speak your mind and hopefully everybody in the room is open minded enough to listen. But at the end of the day a decision has to be made and then we're going to go forward with that as a team.

Mike Kearney: So Mark, you're brought in in 2007, have been managing this for nine years. Is there anything in retrospect you would say gosh, I would do that a little differently?

Mark Riley: Good question. I actually try hard not to look back too much. Again, I learn from mistakes, but I don't try to dwell too much on what's happened in the past. And those things that are big mistakes I'm not sure I'm willing to disclose them in front of this microphone.

Mike Kearney: I would love to get your thoughts on – and it's a question that we're really interested from a firm perspective because a lot of times clients ask us is why do certain leaders thrive in a crisis where some fail? Do you have a perspective on that?

Mark Riley: I think temperament is a big thing and there's – I didn't come up with this. This was – we talked earlier about mentors. There's a difference between leadership by example and leadership by direction, right? I can tell you to do something but is that leadership? I don't think so. There's a difference between leading from the front and leading from behind and I learned that very, very quickly especially in the Marine Corps.

I remember in one instance we were doing an exercise when I was the Commander of H and S Company, and we had to set up all these tents because the H and S Company supports the Command structure for a brigade which are all of these senior officers that come in and all right. So I go out there and I say okay, we're going to set the tents up here and then the Marines get out there and they're setting up tents.

And I can see that, you know, we need more capacity. So I got out there and started driving stake pegs myself, and all of a sudden all these people came out there that –

Mike Kearney: Leadership by example?

Mark Riley: Right. And started and we put this thing up in record time, but, you know, I could have sat there and directed all these people, but they don't with the same level of enthusiasm as they do if you go out there yourself and participate with this. I personally have always been known as someone that doesn't mind getting their hands dirty. And I do that even here in this office where there's really no mud around, but you know.

Mike Kearney: What I think is fascinating is I think there's a misnomer about the military, those that have not been in the military, is that it's not just about command and control.

Mark Riley: Uh-huh.

Mike Kearney: And I've actually heard this from several folks, that you actually have to develop that trust with the group that you're commanding and you can't just tell them what to do.

Mark Riley: Well again, back to my story about my first command, you know, General Waters advice to me and it's kind of a concept. Find the organizational center and you're not it by the way.

Mike Kearney: Yep.

Mark Riley: Right? Find the organization center. Find out what makes it tick and help it go. Another General I worked with one time I asked him. I said well, how did you become General? And he said because I'm a generalist. He says I know a little bit about everything but I know I don't know everything. So I surround myself with experts that know--

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: -- and I listen to them as I'm making my decisions. And I thought that was a great piece of advice too.

Mike Kearney: I thought that generalist, I have never heard -

Mark Riley: Yeah. He was a very clever guy. But you've seen leaders that come in and I know everything and so just listen to what I have to say and do it, you know. And to me that misses the organizational imperatives that are already there in place, the idea of a team. A team is going to be more successful than an individual is. And it misses that if you just come in and dictate.

Mike Kearney: Mark, one of the questions I'm curious of is you said temperament and crisis leaders. That would almost begin to insinuate that even if you're at a leadership level certain folks that have that standing within an organization may not be really equipped to lead. Do you agree with that statement, lead through a crisis?

Mark Riley: Right. I mean, you know, certainly there are different leadership styles that will be successful in different venues.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: In a crisis, the worst thing to do is come in with an uncontrollable temperament. I do my best to stay calm, you know, not to raise my voice and it – you'll notice if you do that it will kind of –

Mike Kearney: It sets a tone for the entire –

Mark Riley: -- spread over the entire environment and everybody is that way. And then if I see somebody that is kind of too active in the crisis I'll pull them aside and tell them to go sit down and drink a Coke or something, you know.

Mike Kearney: Let's move to team. What do you think makes a good or great crisis recovery team?

Mark Riley: I think in your question the word team is very important. It's got to be an emphasis on the team environment and not necessarily organizational seniority, right, especially in a crisis. I mean if you've seen people operate in a – I mean the real response type stuff, search and rescue and all, you see people taking different roles like logistics or, you know, lead scout or something. But it's all a team effort.

Mike Kearney: Right.

Mark Riley: And you know, there's nobody pointing at you to go do this and you go do that. And again, a team is good because it practices before the event. And that's very important not only in response but in recovery too and that's a theme that I picked up in another lightbulb moment. Even in recovery, if you're not organized and practiced in terms of how you bring that community back together, it's going to take you a lot longer to get it done. So organize and practice that.

Understand the capability of the team and the capacity of the team, but also clearly understand the capability and capacity of the individuals in the team. Don't assign a mission to someone who is not equipped to execute that mission.

Mike Kearney: Yeah. Understand what they're good at –

Mark Riley: Right.

Mike Kearney: -- and deploy them appropriately.

Mark Riley: Right. And put them where they're good and, you know, make sure that you don't set them up for failure.

Mike Kearney: People either love this question or they hate it. Do you have any thoughts on how you want to be remembered for the work that you've done in Louisiana, your legacy?

Mark Riley: You're right. I don't like the question. I don't care whether I'm remembered or not. I hope that years from now when they look at at the things that Louisiana has gone through, the historical conclusion is that Louisiana did a good job, you know, and that would make me feel good.

Mike Kearney: Can you paint maybe a picture of what life is like now in Louisiana?

Mark Riley: I don't know that it's a lot different than it was before. One of the things that struck me and I've seen it in other places and it's not just Louisiana but how really resilient the American people are. You know, you're hit by something that is genuinely catastrophic yet you're still willing to go back and fight and build it back and all.

And those places that were hit hard with Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, you go back to them today and you can see the resilience that has been built back not only in the physical infrastructure but in the people. Those people are resilient. They're hard. They come back. They don't give up.

Mike Kearney: You know what I like about that because one of the last questions I wanted to ask is, what are the most important attributes of a resilient leader, but actually it doesn't even matter if it's a leader. What's the most important attributes of a resilient person? Any thoughts on that, Mark?

Mark Riley: I think we've already talked about a lot of this, but trust. I'll keep saying trust. You know, you need to get into an environment and not only create an environment where people will trust you, right. Understanding the individual uniqueness of those that you're dealing with is going to make you more successful.

If you come in with this stereotype, you know, this is how people ought to react, you're not going to get that trust. First of all you're not going to get that trust and you're not going to get the communication that's necessary. And then don't take your role as a leader for granted. I'm in charge so I must know what's going on. It's a heavy burden and it's not only a heavy burden for you, but you have a responsibility.

The heavy burden is the responsibility you have to others in order to make this work. And don't get carried away with yourself and don't be – we talked about it – don't be afraid to make a mistake. Learn from the mistakes that you made. In my experience if you come in and you make that known to the people that are around you that you're trying to make us part of this team, they relax. They start making better decisions and you end up with good results.

Mike Kearney: It's funny, Mark, because usually I summarize a lot of what we talked about. You just did a great job. I am going to summarize a couple of additional things, but I really appreciate you being on the podcast. I know you're extremely busy. There's a lot going on and I appreciate the gift of time.

There was a few things that I just want to call out. Maybe repeating some of the things, but I think it's extremely important. I think one of the things that you said right up front was the importance of

relationships. I think sometimes when we get into crisis situations or managing day-to-day, we forget about that.

And quite frankly, you know, most interactions are a people business, or most businesses are about people whether it's in the governmental sector, the private sector or whatever it may be. And my experience is if you can create relationships built on trust, you're going to be more successful irrespective of what it is.

The other thing that you really hit on which I think is interesting is innovation can come in many different forms, and I love kind of where you talked about where we had the big idea with the meal replacements, but then there were also a lot of other things that you do within the organization.

And I think one of the things that I'm taking away as a great leader is encouraging your people to innovate, encouraging your people to have the case that they need to make when they come to you and then you as a leader letting them take the risk of going off and doing it and if they fail that's okay because like we talked about. Often times the best innovations are where you identify some failures you improve at, you fail, you improve and you keep iterating it.

And then I think a couple of other last things is collaboration I think is another important theme. And you know in my prior history some of the work I did was heavy on bringing groups together so I really appreciated your example of bringing the state, FEMA and applicants together really to collaborate to create a better solution. And I think that's one of the things we could certainly use that in politics a little now. But I think the more people collaborate the better solutions that they come up with.

I think that ties back to innovation is better ideas are developed when you collaborate and come together. There was a saying from a company that I worked from is, basically an idea that is developed by a group is always better than the idea of a lone genius. I'm getting it wrong, but I think it's true. And then I love the fact that – and this is a theme that we're hearing through many of our podcasts as well is that it's not about kind of a leading from your perch in your office and telling people what to do but great leaders really kind of show up and work hand-in-hand, get their hands dirty with the folks that they're working for.

So any last comments, Mark? Hopefully I did a good summarize of what you were talking about.

Mark Riley:

No, you did. And I think I mean another – there's a great quote from Teddy Roosevelt that I wish I could remember the whole thing, but it

starts off by saying it's not the critic that counts. It's the guy that's – and I'm paraphrasing.

Mike Kearney: Yes.

Mark Riley: It's the guy that's in the arena with dust and blood and the leader will get into the arena, put the dust and blood on him and show people how to get something done.

Mike Kearney: Well the important thing there is if you're in the game you're always going to have critics.

Mark Riley: Right. Exactly.

Mike Kearney: Hey, thank you very much for listening to [Resilient](#), a Deloitte podcast produced by our friends at Rivet Radio. You can hear us by going to [Deloitte.com](#) or visiting your favorite podcatcher, keyword resilient.

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