

Crises - How To Avoid Them

By Carol Halsey

Crises - How To Avoid Them

Carol Halsey
chalsey@gci.net

Piles to Files <http://pilestofiles.com>

You have heard of Murphy's Law, "If anything can go wrong, it will." If you have ever had your best laid plans go awry, you very well know that Murphy's Law can rear its ugly head at the most unexpected times. Things do have a way of going wrong, and usually will, unless you take steps to prevent it.

Crises can pop up from just about anywhere, involve just about anyone, and come in many different shapes, but the consequences are always very similar – stressful and a big waste of time. By anticipating crises and taking steps to prevent them, you can reduce by half the time now spent reacting to them.

A crisis will take you away from your best laid plans and priorities for the day. You may have an important deadline to meet, but will be diverted to resolve a crisis. For example, some information you are waiting for is late getting to you, which means your project is behind schedule, and on top of it, something else goes wrong.

Another example: One of your key managers becomes unexpectedly ill or has a family crisis and has to be absent from work for several weeks. These kinds of crises cause tension that can have a devastating impact on your morale, quality of work, and your business. But how can you prevent crises from invading your well planned work schedules? You probably can't, 100%, but you sure can avert most of them. It is done by anticipation.

Crisis management is dealing with a crisis after it occurs, and the best way to handle a crisis is to keep it from occurring in the first place. And the best way to do this is to anticipate what might happen and make plans to prevent it, or at least reduce its impact. You may be wondering how you can know what will go wrong, as you cannot predict what will happen next, because a crisis is unpredictable.

The same way you anticipate the possibility of a fire, or an emergency. You don't know when, or if there will be one, but you have the 911 number either speed dialed in your phone or imbedded in your brain, and know the location of the fire extinguisher and how to use it. There is also a first aid kit hanging. What you have done is taken some reasonable precautions, just in case.

In the work environment, you would be doing essentially the same thing. You cannot predict when a crises will arise, but with careful planning you can be prepared when you see it coming, and may very well be able to prevent it. The techniques to be used for anticipating problems and preventing them is called contingency planning. It is the most powerful crisis control tool. In the example

above, the 911 number, fire extinguisher and first aid kit are contingency planning. A contingency plan for business as usual if a manager is absent, would be to have someone trained as a back up for each of your key personnel, so business can proceed at a reasonably normal pace.

Get in the habit of asking yourself, "What can go wrong?" and "What else can go wrong?" Try to identify potential problems, and draw on past crises experiences. Go over thoroughly each step of a project or situation, and keep asking yourself, "What could go wrong?" When you have identified any potential problem areas, consider the seriousness of each. By prioritizing, you will know to concentrate on the biggest potential problems which can be catastrophic, and work on ways to divert or resolve them before they hit.

If similar problems have developed in the past, draw on that experience. How did it happen? What was the cause? How was it resolved? What were the consequences? What could I have done to prevent it? Drawing on past experience is the only benefit out of a crisis. At least you can learn from it to prevent it from happening again.

Another good way to prevent a crisis is to give yourself time to catch a minor problem before it becomes a major problem. For instance, recognize that everything takes longer than you think it will (is this another Murphy's Law?). Always build in a cushion of at least 20% more time than you think is needed to accomplish a task, and when working towards a deadline. On projects that will take more than a week to complete, build in interim deadlines for completion of each step of the project. This will keep you on target and give you time to deal with any minor problems along the way.

Have you ever seen someone who never seems to get anything done because they spend their day putting out fires? Firefighting is not crisis handling because fires are minor annoyances that eat up time. A firefighter is someone who does not know how to anticipate, does not see the big picture of their job responsibilities, and lives from moment to moment. They continually have small problems erupting around them and race around madly trying to resolve them. Their days consist of a mixture of small annoying inconveniences that never should have happened in the first place.

However, these small problems do not constitute a crisis. But be aware that whether you have a pattern of continually fighting fires or managing crises, you are undermining your efficiency and losing a lot of precious time. Preplanning and anticipation are your best ways of conquering these time wasters.

©2002 Carol Halsey

Carol Halsey is Founder and President of Business Organizing Solutions. She is a professional organizer, consultant, speaker, and author of "93 Organizing Tips to Simplify Your Business Life." You can get this booklet, articles and ideas on how to get 14 hours work out of an 8 hour day, simply by visiting her web site: <http://www.PilesToFiles.com> . Subscribe to her free organizing newsletter, "Organizing Ideas," sent twice a month.

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)