



Leaders in Time of True Crisis

In the wake of the horrors that occurred on Saturday, October 27, 2018 at Tree Of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, we have seen leaders rise and provide strength and even hope for devastated Jewish communities worldwide. This tragedy and response from leaders of all faiths resonated with us as the convener and resource for addressing issues of leadership in our community; what sort of individual makes the best leader in times of true crisis?

Pepperdine University conducted a survey of crisis management experts, and here are 14 characteristics they identified.

The Top of the List

While not statistically significant, it is interesting to look at the three leadership characteristics that received the most frequent mention by the survey respondents: **training/knowledge/preparedness; listening skills; and decision-making skills**. It seems reasonable, to suggest that these three factors may be among the basic or core factors that correlate with fundamental dimensions of leader effectiveness. Along these same lines, a secondary list of effective leader characteristics, by frequency, includes: open-mindedness; solution/problem analysis and critical-thinking skills; and communication skills. These might correlate with secondary traits to consider when selecting, training, or evaluating team leaders.

Many if not all of these 14 characteristics of effective team leaders can be taught and developed through supplemental training or continuing education. Consider sending team leaders to leadership development seminars or courses. In the event of a disaster or major disruption, the investment will prove to be well justified.

1. Coordinated

An effective leader has coordination skills. He or she should have experience, knowledge, and/or training in how to get individuals to function together as a single unit. According to the respondents, a leader should have the ability to create team cohesion, team coordination, and integration.

2. Decisive

An effective leader should be able to make the right decisions during contingencies. Respondents to the survey suggested that inappropriate hesitation or reluctance to act undermined effective leadership.

3. Experienced

Leaders should have plenty of field experience to draw upon. The value of a seasoned veteran's experiences is clearly indicated as a factor for effective leadership. Look for actual hands-on experience when selecting leaders. If everyone is a newcomer, it is imperative that the training regimen include plenty of mock drills, simulations, and hands-on training to increase the experience level of the designated leader.

4. Goal-Oriented

Effective leaders have goal-setting abilities. They are skillful in laying out short- and long-term goals, setting specific objectives, making task assignments to meet those goals, and following through to achieve them.

5. Able to Communicate

Leaders provide and solicit key information, engage in two-way communication, and interact in open and honest ways with others. They have the ability to communicate successfully, with few misunderstandings, in a wide variety of contexts and situations.

6. Able to Facilitate

Effective leaders are not dictators. Rather, they are able to get the most out of team members by facilitating input from others, creating a situation in which the team makes decisions in a collaborative manner, fostering team work, and creating a sense of cohesion among all team members.

7. Able to Handle Stress

Clearly, crises, contingencies, disaster recovery, and emergency management situations can be very stressful. Those who do not manage stress successfully are often failures at leading during these situations. Emotional and mental stability is a prerequisite for effective leadership. An effective leader has the capacity to remain calm, stable, and focused during the most chaotic periods. A sense of stability must be maintained in order to keep recovery efforts on track during the stressful periods of a crisis.

8. Able to Listen

It is imperative that leaders be good and active listeners, with the capacity to digest a large amount of information and different perspectives. The effective leader practices and trains to listen, and has the capability to exert active effort to understand, process, and evaluate others' input.

9. Open-Minded

An effective leader is not dogmatic and "hard-headed," but rather is open to differing viewpoints and perspectives. He or she is willing to "think outside the box" when considering solutions to contingency situations and has the ability to interpret and understand different ways of looking at an event.

10. Responsible

An effective leader takes ownership of and responsibility for the resolution of a contingency. A leader should take responsibility for the team, support team

ownership of the crisis response, and shield the team from inappropriate external interference. It is also important for the leader to ensure that the team as a whole gets recognition for success.

11. Able to Prioritize

An effective leader must have the capacity to recognize which tasks must come first and which can be delayed, retain a clear sense of priorities of both purpose and process, and have knowledge of when to follow and when to deviate from the plan. Effective leaders have a sense of balance to recognize what issues need to be tackled first and which ones are key to resolving other decisions and solutions.

12. Able to Think Critically

A leader should possess problem/solution analysis and critical-thinking skills. According to the survey respondents, an effective leader should have the capacity to define, analyze, and understand the unique complexities of each crisis. Further, the leader should be able to critically analyze possible solutions and envision both the intended and unintended consequences of each solution. This requires a leader to read the unique aspects of every situation and to have a great capacity to visualize what it will look like once it has been implemented.

13. Adaptive

An effective leader should have the capacity to adapt and respond to unique aspects of crises and changing circumstances. Inflexibility, rigidity, and inability to adapt severely limit the effectiveness of a leader.

14. Trained and Prepared

The value of addressing leadership as a development and training goal was clearly endorsed in this survey. To be effective, one must be prepared for the role of leader by being thoroughly knowledgeable of the organization's

contingency plans and recovery operations; however, the leader also should be knowledgeable of the skills and capabilities of the members, the traits of all who are working on the crisis, and the overall purpose, function, responsibilities, and boundaries of the team during the crisis.

References:

<https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/docs/hazdem/the%20marks%20of%20a%20leader.doc>