



CENTER FOR NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT  
*strong nonprofits build strong communities*

## ***Continuing Good Amid An Economic Crisis*** **15 Tips on Leading through Crisis**

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Road Map for Focus and Action in Tough Times

(Attribution: Continuous Learning Group, Pittsburgh, PA; Clara Miller, Nonprofit Finance Fund, NYC; Todd Cohen, eTapestry, Inside Philanthropy; Center for Nonprofit Management)

1. Identifying the Challenges
  - Know your assets and liabilities.
  - Determine what your problems areas are and develop a strategy to mitigate them.
  
2. Eye on the External Marketplace
  - Be keenly aware of the marketplace (all stakeholders). Know what your customers can and cannot do without and focus your attention in the direction of greatest demand and need.
  - Take some calculated risks. Evaluate your actions and outcomes. Repeat what works and eliminate what does not work.
  
3. Respond Swiftly to Uncertainty
  - Do not over-think situations. After getting sound advice and considering the matter - then act.
  
4. Set a Clear Direction
  - Once you know your vulnerabilities, set a clear goal and identify the right course of action to achieve it.
  - Develop new strategies for higher productivity and collaborative models for delivering services and generating resources.

5. Accurate Forecasts
  - Be able to predict outcomes, timeframes and goal results with relative accuracy.
  - Improve planning and processing.
  
6. Communicate Clearly and Often
  - Ensure employees understand the issues and the course of action you are taking to resolve them.
  - Use employees as part of the solution – to bring energy, creativity and focus to solving these new problems.
  
7. Alignment of the Leadership Team
  - New results typically require new behavior.
  - Make sure all team members are going in the same direction.
  - Gain agreement on the direction necessary while in survival mode, in stabilization activity mode and in post-crisis re-engagement mode.
  - Get agreement with leadership team members how to rally and mobilize the organization.
  - Develop clear milestones and tactical steps to reach new goals.
  
8. Alignment of Consequences
  - Encourage the mobilization of talent and energy of the entire organization toward specific and common objectives.
  - Discourage behaviors that undermine focus and unity.
  
9. New Behaviors that Drive New Results
  - Delineate high-impact behaviors, by work area, that will make the biggest difference.
  - After you deliver the message on what you cannot do during the downturn, open up communication on what employees can do to help.

10. Retain the Right People
  - Before you cut, reevaluate. Take advantage of attrition, combine job duties and communicate higher expectations of those currently on your team.
  - If you have cut-backs, ensure you select the right ones to be retained. Look at skills, high performance and commitment. Retain those who provide multiple benefits even if they have to be retrained to do other jobs.
  - Get good HR advice before you release any employees.
  
11. Be Firm with Poor Performers
  - If you haven't evaluated performance, do so. It is prudent to make the case if you must release some employees.
  - Know who is most valuable to the organization at this time of crisis. Don't look at this as being kind to individuals, but rather as engaging the right strategy to meet organizational goals.
  
12. Heads and Hearts in the Game
  - Expect emotional and financial uncertainty from employees.
  - Replace fear with clear understanding, purpose, acceptance and hope.
  
13. Leveraging Improvement Initiatives
  - Don't completely rule out the investment in improvements that don't have immediate returns.
  - Conduct a cost benefit analysis for critical improvements strategies.
  
14. Keep Cool, Be Confident
  - Don't allow a little wind to knock you over. Confidence is infectious and required of leaders. People take their cues from you. If you speak doom and gloom, you will instill fear in your employees and board they will not act wisely or trust you.

15. Preparation for New Leaders

- Leaders who entered the ranks in recent years may not have the exposure to crisis conditions. Surround yourself with individuals who have had these experiences and who will walk with you through yours.
- Find out what they did to prepare for and sustain them through a crisis. Look for specific transferable skills and character traits to emulate that will be helpful to you during your crisis.
- Remember that times of crisis are also full of opportunity. Look for ways to take your organization to a new level of performance, step up to a new level of leadership, ensure there are ways for talented people can execute flawlessly.