

Paralysis or Recovery, Your Choice

BY MIKE SCHOETTLER

Ok, bad things do happen to good people. Even if you don't deserve it, you can find yourself cleaning up after a disaster that never should have happened. As buyers or sellers, we are seldom truly blameless and the only question we should be asking is, "What do we have to do to get back on track".

But in many organizations, that is not what happens. As stories get passed around the organization, the 'facts' keep growing with each retelling and the problem grows completely out of proportion. For many people their expected reaction is to be upset that they have to deal with these problems and focus on how it happened and whom they can blame. At the minimum, they want to make sure that everyone understands that it was not their fault. Some will actually distance themselves from the company.

Meanwhile nothing constructive happens. Paralysis has set in and the team seems incapable for addressing the issues required to get back on track.

Staff morale is a combination of their confidence and discipline. While poor confidence will only produce a token effort, poor discipline will stop any effort.

As a rule, our expectations come from our view of past and present events. So, when your business suffers a major set back, you need to establish in the minds of your employees that the immediate problem is over, or at least under control. However bad it may be, you must put it behind them so you can all move on to recovery.

It is time for your six-step plan to recovery.

What Really Happened

Time to get back to basics. Separate fact from fiction and clearly establish exactly what happened. Don't try to minimize anything, just get to the facts and set aside the emotional content.

If you can't manage your emotions, you can't manage anything. Warren Buffet

Put it into Perspective

Things go wrong in every business, everyday. And companies are invariably measured more by their responses to this challenge than the problem itself. Your organization has faced worse problems before and some of your people have survived tougher challenges. Put things back into their business context. Emotions will change with the perceived proportions.

The Good News

Find something your team can feel good about. If you can find even one person who produced a good result in the midst of this disaster, they can be a lesson for everyone that the situation wasn't impossible, just challenging. Every disaster is an opportunity for individuals to shine. Now is the time to publicly identify and praise them. You can even highlight the things that could have gone wrong, but didn't.

Future Focus

Secure your team's agreement that lots of people now depend on their actions. You can't turn back the clock or pretend that nothing happened. But many people who are powerless to fix things are depending on your team to correct the situation. Capture their imagination.

"The right attitude can convert negative stress into a positive challenge." Anon

The Plan

A realistic plan doesn't minimize the efforts that will be required or exaggerate the immediate gains possible. Even politicians understand that they can claim a victory when things are getting worse, but at a slower rate. So, don't feel that you are responsible for coming up with a magic solution.

A modest plan is not a cause for embarrassment. What is critical is that people believe that the plan is realistic. So rather than trying to immediately produce your 'master stroke' plan, include them in the process. They will have some good ideas and important refinements. Their faith and commitment to the plan will also reflect their sense of involvement. You need their ideas so make sure they know you value their input.

This is also a time for discipline. It is not acceptable for a few to carry the load while some just sit back and watch. You are responsible for making sure everyone has a role and knows exactly what is expected.

Share the Results

Early accomplishments are important and everyone needs to hear the initial results. Whenever possible use the names of the people involved. You can't generate any momentum if everyone is working in the dark. People can handle bad news if they feel they are being told the whole truth and can trust the official sources. Your openness and accuracy are the best defences against any destructive rumours so don't try to hide the bad news. Just stay with your realistic expectations, be flexible, and emphasis the people producing encouraging results.

"Morale is when your hands and feet keep on working when your head says it can't be done."

Admiral Ben Moreell



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