



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Are you prepared for the unexpected?

by Jerry Glass

We live in a world where natural disasters, accidents, acts of terrorism, violence inside and outside the workplace, and technology-related malfunctions are all genuine concerns. In this day and age, there's no excuse for not preparing your employees for a potential disaster.

As the East Coast continues to recover from the devastation of Superstorm Sandy, I keep thinking about a phrase I've heard many times in my career: "Preparation is the key to success." When I advise our clients about being prepared for any type of catastrophe, I am continually amazed by how many organizations aren't prepared for external events and don't regularly communicate with employees about how to respond to "unexpected" events.

Businesses can do a lot to prepare. Although not all hazards are predictable, preparing a contingency plan that involves communication, education, and testing can help any organization be ready to face a problem.

The time to prepare is well in advance of any potential catastrophe. Establish a task force of employees from across your organization to meet regularly and establish contingency plans. Have them work on multiple scenarios and conduct drills with employees in your buildings. Analyze how other organizations have handled similar situations. Your plan should always be a work in progress and should continually evolve based on new technologies, fresh ideas, and good old common sense.

If you work in the service industry, understand how your employee contingency plans will affect your customers. If you work in the public sector, decide which services are essential to the public. If you have a unionized workforce, make sure your union leadership is willing to assist the company in getting critical information out to employees. Make certain your collective bargaining agreement covers as many contingencies as possible.

Whatever plan your organization is working on, make sure the direction is clear and concise. A model of clarity would not be telling your employees to use their discretion in coming to work. Lead by example, and don't expect employees to do something you wouldn't do as a manager. No matter what event is confronting you, employees must feel confident

about your organization. The best way to gain that confidence is to have a well-thought-out plan that addresses important employee concerns.

Employees want to know basic information, including:

- Will my paycheck be affected? Will my employer force me to use my sick leave or vacation time if I am unable to get into the office?
- What if I have a medical or family emergency? Will someone from the HR department be available? Is there a 24-hour number or e-mail address that enables me to communicate with someone from my office?
- Does the company have a way to communicate with employees, either through text message or via social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter?
- How do I stay in contact with my coworkers? Is there a phone tree for each department that allows people to stay in touch?
- What happens if my building is evacuated and I cannot get back into the area where I work? Is there a checklist of what employees should always have when being evacuated—ID, cell phones, and valuables?
- Is it safe to come to work?

The bottom line is, not all disasters can be predicted and each situation is different. You can do your best to prepare your business and your employees as much as possible; however, employees will be able to assist the organization only if they are given clear direction.

We live in a world of constant communication, which can create its own issues for disseminating accurate information. As a result, it's extremely important that your employees know how to respond to all types of critical situations, good or bad. Take the time now to prepare for emergency situations that might occur down the road. Your investment in preparation will pay dividends later on when it's needed most.



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