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Emotional Continuity Management for Disasters

Nowhere is a system-wide, in-place, pre-drilled, and ready-to-go ECM plan more necessary than during and after a disaster. And if companies don't plan ahead, there can be more of a disaster after the "real" disaster has passed. The long-term emotional consequences of a natural or man-made disaster can be more heinous than the actual event. Many people recover well and quickly after a disaster. Some Don't: recover quickly. Some never do.

7.1 Phases of Disaster Planning to Consider

7.1.1 Planning Phase

Prior to a disaster incident:

- ▶ Define qualifications necessary for membership and leadership in the emotional continuity management team.
- ▶ Select and interview applicants.
- ▶ Provide training and continuing education.
- ▶ Provide regular training and practice drills.
- ▶ Plan task assignments, authority lines, and delegations of responsibility.
- ▶ Create a disaster buddy system.
- ▶ Provide chain of command structure to all employees.
- ▶ Negotiate contracts with external disaster services providers.

7.1.2 Implementation Phase

- ▶ Provide a central location for communications for your team and outside teams.
- ▶ Do a disaster buddy check-in.
- ▶ Initiate pre-planned task assignments, authority lines, and delegations of responsibility.
- ▶ Coordinate responses.
- ▶ Coordinate lines of supply, equipment, and information.
- ▶ Assess needs with an ongoing process of open communications.
- ▶ Provide a clerical manager for support.
- ▶ Provide other support services such as communications, logistics, supply.
- ▶ Orient team to the specific event.
- ▶ Define event status and review plan.
- ▶ Profile the participants of the event.
- ▶ Collect resources, make network connections, implement memos of understanding (MOUs).

- ▶ Create a blueprint of actions for immediate response and build in plan for long-term.
- ▶ Make task assignments.
- ▶ Continue training as needed with regular updates and support.
- ▶ Review short-term response.
- ▶ Begin discussions of intermediate and long-term responses.
- ▶ Continue status updates, consultations, liaisons, MOUs, and provider partnerships.
- ▶ Provide expert consultations and trainings.
- ▶ Support staff and manage self-care.
- ▶ Defuse as needed.
- ▶ Document activities.

7.13 Recovery Phase

After an incident:

- ▶ Debrief participants and team members.
- ▶ Continue self-care.
- ▶ Maintain liaisons and links with other network connections.
- ▶ Ongoing training should continue.
- ▶ Discussions on lessons learned.
- ▶ Wrap up details.
- ▶ Paper work completion, filings, recordings.
- ▶ Support process over the long term, no matter how long it takes.
- ▶ Send thank you letters.
- ▶ Support and encourage buddy sets, and support and reorganize around any buddy losses.
- ▶ Provide memorials and commemoration programs.
- ▶ Acknowledge and give appropriate recognitions.
- ▶ Return to phase one and begin new phase of recruitment for planning for next disaster.

7.2 Increasing Competency of Emotional Continuity Management

7.2.1 Questions to Ask With Every Incident

With every incident ask:

- ▶ What can I learn from this?
- ▶ Why would I need to continue to hang on to hurt feelings?
- ▶ What fear does this expose for me? Why am I vulnerable?
- ▶ What sacred issues of mine are at risk or being threatened?
- ▶ Can I think of ways to let this go?
- ▶ Did I take this issue personally?
- ▶ Was it really about me?
- ▶ Can I use my spiritual practice and move on?
- ▶ Could I let this incident simply pass?
- ▶ Would I let this incident simply pass?
- ▶ When will I allow this incident to simply pass?
- ▶ Can I give myself permission for the feelings I had?
- ▶ Is this temporary or permanent?
- ▶ Did I make a positive or negative contribution?

My colleagues who specialize in information technology (IT) disaster planning and business continuity management (BCM) have taught me well. My physical well-being is my hardware; my emotions are my software; and I participate willingly in drills to protect them both.

7.2.2 Preparation is Just Good Thinking

The interruption of business to practice physical evacuations or emotional debriefing appears to be an annoyance until you actually need these skills in reality. Drills with first responders, the American Red Cross, and with critical incident stress management teams have taken my valuable time. I have whined about volunteering my time to “practice.” Then an incident happens, and I can’t say enough about the value of drills. I practiced. Now it makes sense. Now it is rational and not a waste of my time. I get it.