

Concept

*an idea
distilled
to its
essential
elements*

For many years, my work day was guided by the scope and number of crises in the world. That's what happens when you work for a national news outlet or manage communications for an organization that responds to disasters.

My informal executive training began at my first job, as a desk assistant in a network TV newsroom. The job entailed such tedious tasks as distributing newspapers and fetching coffee for writers and editors.

But several colossal news events occurred that year: the return of the Americans held hostage in Iran, the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, and the attempted assassinations of Pope John Paul II and President Reagan. Each time the news wires rang out the latest news flash, I observed a senior editor or producer spur the entire newsroom staff into high-speed action.

In whatever time fate had provided before the evening newscast, those leaders oversaw the rapid gathering, sharing, and analysis of interviews and data. Within just a few hours, priorities were set, plans were developed, and information was collated into a coherent evening news report.

More than a decade later, I held a position as a communications manager for American Red Cross Disaster Services. First as a journalist and later

directing communications during national disasters, I honed five critical skills for successfully leading a team and communicating with external audiences. Any senior executive might benefit from these tips, especially when the pressure is on:

- Stay calm and focused no matter how hectic things get.
- Articulate a clear vision that brings the organization's mission to life. It will help motivate and keep everyone on track.
- Be both analytical and strategic in your planning. Rushing too quickly to action can be more damaging than delayed, but correct, action.
- If you make a mistake, admit it, apologize, and take corrective action immediately. Denial has the appearance of arrogance, creates resentment, and builds mistrust.
- Believe in the old adage that sometimes when it rains, it pours. Crises often happen in clusters. So, stay ahead of the curve by simultaneously preparing for new challenges while you respond to the issue at hand.

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Bad News Days

Taught me everything I need to know about good leadership.



By Gisele McAuliffe