

Supporting Teams in a Crisis

This resource will help you to support your team during a crisis, through structured debriefing and extracting the gifts and lessons from the experience. It will help you to be the leader your people need in a time of crisis.

Supporting Teams in a Crisis



When we experience a crisis, major upheaval or shock, some known patterns of thinking and behaviour play out. For leaders, it's critical to know what to expect, what's normal and how to support their teams through challenging events.

It's long been implied that emotion has no place in business. I beg to differ.

As long as we're working in social systems, with warm humans, with brains that think independently, hearts that beat and bleed and bodies that feel pain, we need to acknowledge and support the inner experience of anxiety, stress, fear, frustration and confusion that occurs when we experience a crisis.

To pretend that the broader societal context is not affecting our people, their mindset, productivity and quality of connection with each other is ridiculous and vastly oversimplifying the impacts of crisis on human behaviour.

The following activity will help leaders to debrief with our teams during a crisis. We're going to help leaders:

- Run a debriefing conversation with our team.
- Understand the basic psychology of human behaviour in response to crisis and upheaval.
- Extract the gifts and lessons from the experience.

Implementing this process means our teams will feel heard, acknowledged, accepted and supported. This is our role as leaders.

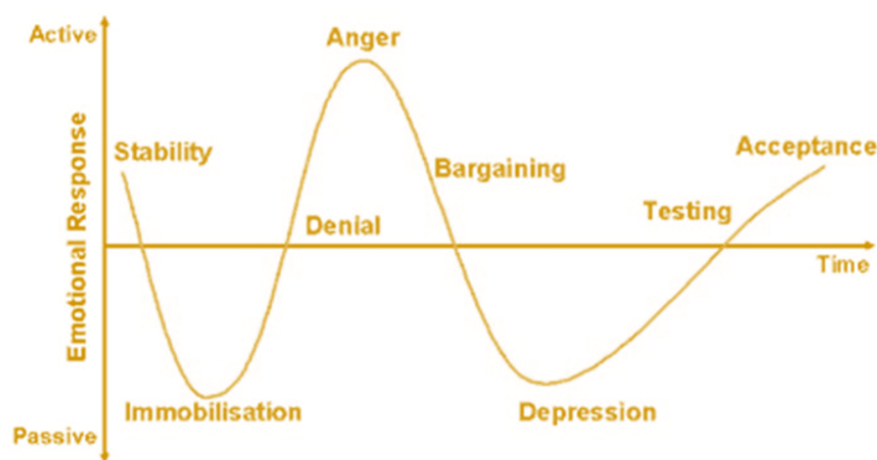
Human Responses to Crisis



How do people respond in crisis?

We'll use the globally accepted *Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle* to discuss the human behavioural response to crisis.

Why is the Grief Cycle so useful? Because in crisis, we experience loss. It could be sudden and unexpected, or even foreseen – in any case, it's loss. Loss of freedom, connection, choice, independence, another person or what we experience as 'normality'.



Kubler-Ross E (1997)

So, how do these behavioural responses play out in practice? It sounds like this:

- **Stability** – It's business and life as usual. Ho hum. Nothing to see here.
- **Immobilisation** – Whoah, something very bad is happening. It's knocked the wind out of me. I need to sit down. I'm in shock.
- **Denial** – Surely not? These things don't happen to me. It can't be true. Can it?
- **Anger** – Why is this happening? Why me? I want to lash out. Who can I blame?
- **Bargaining** – Ok, I can accept some of this. But not all of it. How can I take my power back? What choices are still mine?
- **Depression** – Uggghhh. This really IS bad. I'm sad and hurt. Life as I know it has changed forever. I feel stuck. It hurts to accept this.
- **Testing** – I'm so tired of being sad. Could there be any gifts or lessons in this? What good might come out of this experience?
- **Acceptance** – Okay. It's time to move on and create a new normal. I accept this event has happened and I'm navigating the changes to my life.

Team Discussion



How is the Grief Cycle playing out for us? What does it look and sound like?

Where are we right now? Are we moving back and forth along the curve?

Are our people getting stuck at any one point on the curve (other than acceptance)?

What are the strategies we can use when we feel stuck? How can we get help?

Team Debrief



The purpose of a team debrief is to facilitate acknowledgement of our teams' experiences of the crisis or event, and to assist with healing, extracting gifts and lessons, and moving forward together.

It also allows us to identify who might need additional support.

Team debriefs are useful after critical events, particularly stressful periods and times of crisis. Sometimes a crisis is a series of traumatic events – in this case, offer debriefs whenever the team could benefit from reflection, even if the event is still ongoing.

Tips for Leaders:

- Set up a safe discussion by emphasising confidentiality and respectful discussion. Every thought and emotion is *allowed*.
- Make sure you offer every person opportunity and time to speak.
- Allocate sufficient time. If we rush a debrief it will seem like a token or superficial exercise, when what we really want to communicate is care and support.
- Avoid judging emotion or reframing statements, even when the responses are negative or critical. The aim of a debrief is to have our people feel heard – it's not for us to shape the narrative or rewrite the story of the event.
- Listen and acknowledge the messages. Even when it feels like we're being criticised or challenged.
- Thank our people for what they've shared.
- Follow up with the most affected people individually and offer additional support, such as further conversations and access to the Employee Assistance Program.

Debriefing Questions



Here are some questions that leaders might ask to facilitate sharing of experiences, feelings and thoughts. Just choose the ones that feel most natural and useful to you.

1. What are our thoughts about the events that have unfolded?
2. If I asked you to name the feeling you're experiencing in relation to this event, what would it be? How is this playing out for you?
3. What have been the hardest or most impactful moments?
4. What were the key events, and what lessons might they offer us for the future?
5. Could it be possible that there are some gifts in this experience? What might they be?
6. Looking back on this experience, what can we be most proud of?
7. How can we help each other moving forward?



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LEADERSHIP & LEARNING



Congratulations on completing the Supporting Teams During a Crisis coaching tool. We encourage you to share this resource with your team so they can also run effective debriefs with their teams through times of crisis.

Want some help with running a team debrief? Please reach out for a conversation. I'm here to help you.

Lead yourself well and everything else falls into place.

- Angela Koning -

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