NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

BUILDING A TEAM TO LEAD IN A CRISIS: FOUR KEY STEPS

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

THE GOAL

Successfully manage any crisis by creating and leveraging the right team.

NANO TOOL

Crises are experienced in different ways by different people at different levels of an organization or ecosystem. Senior decision makers are unlikely to have the same understanding or insights as those who directly interface with customers or those grappling with the operational technicalities of the situation. For this reason, "Prepared Leaders" (those who have worked to ready themselves and their organizations to withstand crises) should be open to all input and perspectives that can help create a solution and improve outcomes, wherever that input and those perspectives surface within the organizational hierarchy.

As a Prepared Leader, you need to be ready to do the following:

- Make space for other people to stand up, speak up, and contribute as the situation dictates

- Let go of your ego and be humble enough to allow others to take the lead as the situation dictates

- Let these things happen spontaneously and without obstacles as the situation changes

Building a crisis team is like putting together a puzzle. Each piece should play its role and fit well enough with the others to make a complete picture. The four Action Steps below can be used to guide your efforts

ACTION STEPS

1. **Compose the Team:** Be diverse, strategic, and inclusive in your thinking. Source diverse competencies that will help you overcome blind spots, make connections, and join the dots. Look all over your organization for this talent—don't stick to the usual suspects or those who volunteer first. And make it a priority to really listen and to value other people's contributions.

2. **Establish Purpose and Accountability:** Align around a shared vision, goal, and actions by being purposeful, clear, and personally accountable. Set out the team's purpose, and establish goals that you can assess and revise at different points. Make it clear you all share responsibility for achieving your goals.

3. **Create the Culture:** Empower your team to experiment, try new things, bounce back (or forward) when things go wrong, and fully leverage all the learning opportunities along the way. Let them know you don't have all the answers and that you are open-minded. Encourage them to forge new connections and to unearth expertise from new or different sources. Inspire everyone to share, exchange, and respect all ideas and input—wherever they come from—without blame or judgment. Model this mindset and lead by example.

4. **Empower Your Team to Respond and Adapt:** Minimize red tape and bureaucracy, and remain as open and accessible as possible. Be ready to share bad as well as good news so as not to minimize real threats or risks, and encourage your people to share feelings of anxiety or stress. Know, too, when to step away and let others take the lead. Understand when you need to focus on the long-term strategy, leaving the immediacy of the crisis to your team, and when it's time to defer to the expertise of others.

HOW LEADERS USE IT

Mark Turner was director of commissioning for the London region of NHS (National Health Service) England during the pandemic. He attributes the extraordinary resilience of the organization to one strategic decision: expanding the crisis leadership team and inviting the expertise of a critical but underused resource into all key decision making—the expertise of physicians working at the front line of the NHS. He says, "Within weeks, clinicians and managers put together a group of 'elective hubs'…where high-volume, low-complexity elective operations and procedures could be performed by physicians on patients from all over London, irrespective of their administrative borough or health-care system. Working together in this way—across organizational boundaries and rivalries—meant that NHS London was able to clear its backlog even as hospitals steeled themselves for a second influx of COVID patients….[This change] achieved two things: First, it leveraged our workforce better, with everyone doing the same thing and working the same way; and then second, it created a virtuous circle of higher volume, which led to better quality, greater efficiency, and more shared learning outcomes."

Mary Barra started her tenure as CEO of General Motors with a product recall that threatened the company's future. The first thing she did was create a team, and a team culture, to figure out how GM would deal with the crisis. "Some days we met for two hours and some days we met for 20 minutes," she said. "When you are in a crisis, it's not like you have perfect information on day one…. As we met every day, we quickly defined guiding principles based on our values, and so the first was, we're going to do everything possible for the customer, we're going to be transparent, and we're going to make sure we do everything in our power to make sure this never happens again," she added. "And that literally guided us every step of the way."

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ABOUT NANO TOOLS

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.