



Habit, Hysteria or Reason?

By Dr. Stacy Feiner
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If you are sitting on the executive team, the board, or a committee making these decisions, make sure you're controlling your own destiny with concern for your business, employees, and larger community.

Never has the truth of my mantra, *People Drive the Numbers*, been so evident as today. The large-scale reaction to the coronavirus COVID-19 has literally stopped business in its tracks and threatened the market.

WARNING: Whenever there is a situation when you cannot distinguish clearly between the right thing to do and the wrong thing to do, we're in trouble in ways far bigger than a single news story.

As I looked to history to shed light on this kind of public health scare—Bird Flu, Eboli, Mad Cow, SARS, for example—I realized that maybe we're being neither hysterical nor reasonable. Instead, we are simply reacting based on precedent – old habits. Almost like a superstition, if we collectively get into a frenzy, something we do will stick and make the bad thing go away.

There is no doubt that everything that has happened during the past several weeks, from the panic to the level-headed, holds the good intention of mitigating risk and limiting exposure. However, good intention is not enough. Efforts must be coordinated. In the absence of a coordinated effort, the lowest common denominator wins out. In this case, it's frantic, random and extreme. Eventually, the hysteria causes the level-headed to lose ground and become equally reactionary. Again, the lowest common denominator wins.

Psychologists can fill this vacuum of leadership. Of the fifteen disciplines of



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concurrently, social psychologists, health psychologists, and business psychologist are the most capable professionals to help organizations manage through this escalating public concern.

A fundamental aspect of my profession is applying a refined set of relational tools — evolved from theory, research, experience, training and practice — to create the conditions for healthy functioning, such as group effort and individual efficacy. There are psychology-based strategies for de-escalating anxiety and panic, elevating personal agency, and fostering connection and community.

Some recent examples of the ways we're helping leaders circumvent business interruption with information and judgment include:

- Katherine, Chief People Officer, called us late in the week asking for help crafting a position statement to present to her board on instituting health and safety protocols in all 50 offices nationally, and the strategy proposed for ensuring the workforce adheres to them.
- Owner/operator, Josh and I devised an impromptu Remote Work policy with the input of his HR manager, COO, and a trusted advisor from his benefits firm which we then superimposed into a project plan that we rolled out, step by step, to a receptive workforce.
- And Molly, CEO of a large non-profit, called for guidance on establishing a communication plan for key stakeholders, including hundreds of agencies, hospitals, suppliers, and donors about their decision to shut-down production of plasma products, indefinitely. Knowing this decision would trigger an entirely different chain of events, the communication plan had laddered announcements to control who got informed when.

The landscape is changing fast, information today might contradict information tomorrow. It might feel like a free fall, but a mindset comprised of perspective, sensitivity, and good judgement will keep you on the right course.

1. Choose one or two reputable sources to guide your decisions. If you go to the extreme right out of the gate you deplete your options quickly, your thinking narrows and you give up self-determination.
2. Establish health protocols from OSHA, WHO or other compliance approved organizations and follow them. Announce to key stakeholders that these protocols are required, highlighting the benefits
3. Adopt a Remote Work policy that maps out the tasks that will be affected (primary, secondary, tertiary); consider the technology (both hardware and software) that will be needed, upgraded and tracked; set up a communication protocol and establish “working pods” for accountability and efficiency
4. Know your stakeholders and establish a communication strategy for them: customers, vendors employees, employees’ families’ investors, board members, and the executive team
5. Assemble a contingency committee to guide you through you the contingency plan you have, or advice you as you create one impromptu.

In these complex times, the most powerful science for channeling human drive, connection and potential is needed more than ever. Achieving desired outcomes in high stakes situations requires judgment, sensitivity and the ability to move people in a positive, forward, upward direction. Psychologists provide solutions at the root where invisible human dynamics often derail progress. Increasingly we are finding that using tested psychological tools to address crises of all sizes in a thoughtful, scientific manner lead to positive and desired outcomes, and steer us away from letting our most primitive instincts overwhelm reason and lead us to irrational decisions. Psychology solves the hidden impediments in human systems, and focuses us on healthy growth and development. Human health is our goal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“When you start a conversation with Stacy, prepare to be engaged.”

Dr. Stacy Feiner is the CEO of Psynamics and business psychologist. Stacy's distinctive coaching method brings psychology and the responsibilities of leadership to the forefront of business, so leaders get the results they want faster. Her approach improves complex dynamics within corporations, private enterprise, management teams, and boards by solving for the hidden impediments that hold them back. Stacy's latest book is *Talent Mindset: The Business Owner's Guide to Building Bench Strength*.