

Guest Author Bob Cooper: Leadership Lessons from Hurricane Irene

The east coast has experienced one of the worst hurricanes in recent history, with tremendous damage and loss of life. Some of the most significant lessons can be learned by observing leadership during extremely difficult times.

The following are several observations relative to leadership during this difficult time:

Goal Clarity

Several leaders from the President to local officials consistently stated that every effort is being made to save lives. This is very important to assist individuals to understand the rationale for decisions being made. For example, mandatory evacuations were being ordered to protect individuals. Many people thought this was an overreaction. It's impossible to get everyone to agree on an action – but the decisions link directly to the goal. It's very easy after the fact to criticize, but had these actions not been taken, more lives would have been lost. During times of change and uncertainty leaders must communicate the focus of the effort, with a clarity of purpose.

Ongoing Communication

I recall seeing New York City Mayor Bloomberg at least 3 or 4 times providing status updates, and reinforcing the objective. He would ask other members of his team to give additional information as required.

Poise

Regardless of how these leaders were feeling inside, they conveyed a sense of optimism. They clearly communicated their level of concern, but showed a sense of being in control. Great leaders understand that when others are losing their cool, they must project a sense of confidence – both in the people who are executing the various strategies, and the outcome overall.

Collaboration

It was evident that officials at all levels of government were in constant communication with the objective of coordinating efforts toward a common goal. Great leaders ensure the right people are at the table when critical decisions need to be made, and with an expectation that each member of the team will support each other in achieving the stated goal. In the long run for this to truly work, the leader must model what it means to be a good team player.

Acknowledge Others

I appreciated every time a leader thanked others for their efforts. This not only included rescuers, but all citizens for their cooperation and support of fellow citizens. This helps to keep morale up, especially when individuals are working many hours under extreme conditions.

Future Vision

After the storm passed, leaders outlined the next phase in the process. This involves helping individuals in need and bringing things back to order as best as possible. This includes specific next steps, with expected timelines wherever possible.

Compassion

Several leaders expressed their concern for others, and their commitment to helping others in need. During difficult times, it is very important to show concern for those impacted.

These are several lessons for leaders in handling challenging situations. What ultimately makes this work is believability. Authentic leaders who are coming from a place of integrity are not scripted, they are real. People believe in these leaders because they truly believe that the leader has their best interest at heart.

As you reflect on these issues, evaluate the degree to which these initiatives come natural and are truly heartfelt. It's difficult to fake that you care. That's why people willingly follow authentic leaders.

As I have stated many times before, and speak at length in my book "Heart and Soul in the Boardroom," great leaders are not only good business people, they are good people.



RL Cooper Associates provides executive consultation to assist leaders to build team loyalty, and effectively manage during times of change. For additional information, please contact us at (845) 639-1741 or visit us at www.rlcooperassoc.com