

Handling Crises with Calm



We have all encountered managers who face crisis after crisis with complete calm. They seem to handle daily hassles and conquer big obstacles easily, emerging from every battle without a hair out of place. They make coping look simple.

What makes coping hard?

We can learn a lot from these managers about how to negotiate around the little things that throw us off so that we have energy left to deal with real crises. The first step is to determine what causes us to blow things out of proportion in the first place.

- Misplaced perfectionism - wasting valuable time and energy perfecting things that just aren't that important.
- Other people's behaviour – reacting to behaviour over which we have absolutely no control.
- Emotional garbage – delayed reactions to other people's anger
- Catastrophizing - allowing one tiny issue to affect everything that happens all day.

Creating your own calm

There is hope, though, for managers who feel surrounded by minor brush fires that are threatening to burn out of control.

Create a time gap between the event and your reaction to it. When you feel yourself starting to overreact, do something that will take you away from the situation briefly. Take a short walk, get a drink of water, or call a break in the meeting. A momentary lapse in the action is often all that is needed to put things back in perspective again.

Use "thought stopping" to halt negative thinking that sabotages your actions. When you find yourself focusing on someone's annoying habit or an insignificant flaw, force yourself to refocus. Then replace those negative thoughts with more reasonable positive ones.

Look at the big picture. Sometimes we're so close to a situation that we can't evaluate its impact realistically. The solution involves asking yourself two questions that root you in reality: "What's the worst possible thing that can happen as a result of this?" and "What is realistically going to happen?"

Keeping things in perspective may be a talent that's easier said than done. But as managers who have mastered it know, it's well worth the effort.