

STRATEGIES

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DISASTER PLANNING

HOW TO RESPOND TO A DISASTER AT THE WORKPLACE



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Employers like to think they're farsighted enough to prevent tragedies.

But the human error persists; hurricanes, tornadoes and wildfires happen. And even if many potential bad actors are spotted and stopped, terrorists and mass shooters only have to succeed once. When the worst does happen, many managers are so shocked and paralyzed that at first, they find taking any kind of action to be difficult. When they do act, their first instinct may be to try to minimize the event or take immediate refuge in an "it wasn't my fault" position, which helps no one. The savvy manager will instead follow three guiding principles:

ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HAPPENED

Even if all the facts aren't known yet, the company or organization should acknowledge and communicate that something has happened, and more information will be released as soon as it becomes known.

RESPOND AND CONTROL

Activate the emergency response plan immediately. It's too late to prevent the event. Instead, it's essential to laser-focus on managing the consequences: helping survivors and families of the deceased, maintaining or restoring business continuity, and communicating with employees, customers and relevant governmental entities.

EXPRESS COMPASSION AND CONCERN

Saying with all sincerity that you're sorry this happened is not an admission of liability.

It's almost impossible to overstate how important it is to provide all possible assistance and support to survivors and families of any deceased, many of whom may be experiencing the worst loss of a lifetime. However, every situation is different and providing comprehensive support is a delicate activity.

It's hard to generalize, but no matter the circumstances, it's essential to be honest, transparent, empathetic and kind.

When a tragedy occurs, most family members do not respond to terrible news by immediately calling a lawyer. If the event involves a workplace, they will first try to get in touch with the company in an attempt to find out what

happened. If they can't get answers or don't believe they're getting honest answers, or their inquiries are being treated as annoyances, then understandable anger can lead to prolonged efforts at settlement or even litigation later.

The fact of the event can't be changed, but it's incumbent on everyone involved in the aftermath not to make things worse for people who are already suffering.

Here's the bottom line: a crisis quickly reveals who is a leader, capable of

making hard decisions under pressure and facing up to people who have lost everything, and who is merely a manager, relying on focus groups, rigid rules or popular opinion to guide their actions.

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