



Leadership in a Post-Trauma Environment

Working for America

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

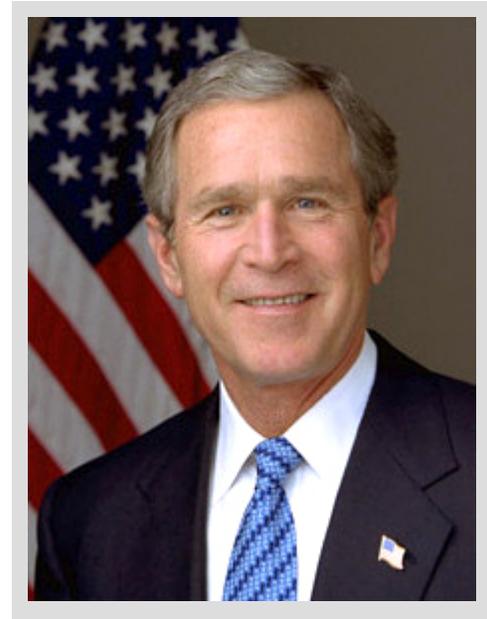


Message from the President

“I’ve been witness to the character of the people of America, who have shown calm in times of danger, compassion for one another, and toughness for the long haul.”

.

- George W. Bush



Message from the Director



Director James: “Without debate or dissent, with calm and courage, the patriot civil servants in your agencies responded with logic and intelligence to a catastrophe that brought America together.”

- Kay Coles James

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Key points

- Organizational recovery is a leadership issue
- Prior planning, training are key
- Groups heal themselves and their members
- Mental health professionals should support the organization's social fabric, leadership, and its healing processes
- People are resilient; recovery should be expected, even though some may need professional help



Data sources

- Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) studies of fatal training accidents
- Other WRAIR studies: Gander, Ramstein, etc.
- Professional experience with Hurricane Andrew, Northridge Earthquake, OKC Bombing, 9/11, anthrax attacks
- 2001 NIH Consensus Study and other recent research
- Lessons learned from more recent terrorist incidents

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Stage 1 of a Traumatic Event:

The Impact

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The immediate impact

- Situation is overwhelming
- Key issues: survival, safety, security
- Training and experience are key
- Simple training like fire drills can help
- Informal and formal rescuers emerge
- Exhaustion, guilt, numbness are common reactions

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Your past leadership will affect your employees' responses

- Are they trained for an emergency?
- Are they self confident, encouraged to experiment, take risks...or are they afraid to take initiative and make a mistake?
- Are they a cohesive group, used to teamwork...or have they been pitted against each other, led to mistrust one another?

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The impact

“In the bank building a few yards away, I was unaware of the extent of destruction and chaos outside. Initially knocked out by the bomb blast, which I thought was directed at the bank, I started down the 21 flights of stairs with one of my...colleagues. Along with hundreds of bloodied people crushed together, we went down those endless stairs littered with debris and rubble and were soon engulfed in smoke. If we could get out alive, I kept thinking, we would find safety in the embassy. That thought evaporated as soon as we saw the burning hulk of our building and the carnage around it.”

**- Ambassador Prudence Bushnell,
U.S. Ambassador to Kenya**

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Stage 2 of a Traumatic Event: Disaster Management

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Disaster management stage

- Formal networks regaining control
- Life focused on the disaster
- Many are working very hard, being heroic
- Hard work driven by necessity and also the need to regain control
- Many are still exhausted from initial impact



Disaster management

“We got teams organized to search morgues, hospitals, and homes for the missing, and as the news spread, community members fanned out to help the families of those we knew were lost. No task was too heroic or too mundane. Whatever panic we may have felt was directed toward the singular focus of doing what was necessary to save people’s lives. By the end of a long day, we had organized ourselves into a purposeful community.”

- Ambassador Bushnell

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Monitor the environment, prevent further injury

- Additional attacks
- Chemical/biological hazards
- Traffic
- Poor sanitation
- Overwork, sleep deprivation
- Dehydration



Support the staff

- Food, water, shelter, a place to rest
- Personal items
- First aid
- Information about event
- Communication links to loved ones and coworkers
- Leadership presence
- Opportunity to talk with fellow survivors and co-workers
- Emotional first aid (support and screening)

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Prevent overwork and exhaustion

- Set limits on work hours and monitor
- Monitor leaders and very responsible people extra carefully
- Ensure enough staff, cross training if necessary
- Set clear priorities – everything can't be done
- Buffer staff against outside demands (press, investigators)

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Leaders are needed!

- Be there, observe, talk with staff
- Support subordinate leaders, respect organizational structure
- Make sure everybody has meaningful work
- Support care-giving efforts
- Ensure the deceased and the bereaved are shown proper respect

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Mental health staff are important!

- Be there, be available, monitor functioning of groups and individuals
- If you're an outsider, respect the survivors' "ownership" of their disaster
- Support the group's leaders and natural caregivers
- Offer emotional first aid and triage as needed
- Provide information about stress and self-care
- Point out hazards to leaders



PIES Model works for most

- P - Proximity
- I - Immediacy
- E - Expectancy
- S - Simplicity

However, some people may need more extensive evaluation and treatment.

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Phase 3 of a traumatic event:
Recovery, return to normalcy



Recovery, return to normalcy

- Pace slows somewhat
- More time to attend to recovery factors
- Fatigue, frustration can grow as situation becomes less heroic
- Leaders should continue prioritizing, monitoring for overwork, supporting staff
- Mental health professionals should continue monitoring, supporting employees

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Some people more likely to need professional help

- Higher level of exposure
- Bereavement
- Pre-existing illness, or life stress
- Lack of social support
- Providing too much social support
- Lack of “hardiness”
- Just because people are different and we don’t know why

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What about people who seem fine?

- Rejoice!
- Don't suggest they are insensitive, didn't really go through much, or will eventually be overcome by symptoms of distress
- Remember, people are all different and most are resilient



What about debriefing?

- Current research suggests caution, though more research is needed
- Sometimes useful, if based on a thorough evaluation, part of a continuum of services by qualified professionals
- Sometimes harmful, if participants aren't ready for the emotional upheaval
- Should not be a one-time, drop-in event
- Should not be forced on unwilling participants

Operational debriefings, not “psychological” ones

- Factual, to improve planning for “next time”
- May help survivors make sense out of the event and establish a sense of control
- May help first responders deal with unrealistic feelings of guilt

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Recovery factors

- A caring, functioning community
- Taking charge, regaining control of life and work, succeeding
- Caring for others, honoring the dead
- Finding spiritual meaning

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Community

“Over the next two days, hundreds of people arrived from the United States and other countries to help, but for us, the worst had already come to pass. In those long hours after the bombing, the victims-turned-rescuers had become a tight, protective and insular community. As utterly exhausted as we were, we stubbornly refused to relinquish control of what we thought of as our tragedy. As the one responsible for the lives of American citizens in Kenya, I was particularly adamant about the need to stay in charge.”

- Ambassador Bushnell



Community

“The chaplain was there if you wanted to talk to him, but it was pretty much people in Alpha hanging on to each other.”

-Enlisted soldier*

*This and other quotations from military personnel are taken from the presenter’s interviews with soldiers after fatal training accidents in Germany.



Community, normalization

“That was really important for us to have people see us, tell us about the accident, tell us how everybody was while we were in the hospital. That was the most important thing, to talk with the people in the unit... People like the nurse, the psychiatrist, they can’t talk to you because they don’t understand. Having people that know what you are going through because of the accident is the best thing.”

- Enlisted soldier



Community, normalization

“...In Washington in September, I remember telling my sister about the huge abyss I felt between my own shattered inner reality and the normalcy of life in the United States. I was anxious to return to Nairobi, not just to begin reconstruction efforts, but also to take comfort among those I felt understood and perhaps shared the foreign sensations inside me.”

- Ambassador Bushnell

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Building community

- Challenge groups
- Involve employees in planning
- Avoid isolating individuals
- Maintain group stability when you can



Taking charge, succeeding

“I gambled...had confidence they would either come together as a unit and do well, or if I had to I could pull them out or reinforce them. I was going to let them fight the battle. They pulled together as a unit, had a superb operation, which immediately brought back esprit.”

- Battalion Commander

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Providing opportunities to succeed

- Challenge employees
- Have a backup plan
- Make sure work has real meaning and value

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Honoring the dead, finding spiritual meaning

“When everybody found I was going home with him, they asked me to give him something...one was a ring, and some medals. One was a medal Pfc. L’s father, his first medal in basic training, the first he had, he wanted me to give it to him. The ring was from Pvt. J. He wrote a poem, a lovely poem, to go with the ring, to give him. I told him I would read it inside the church. So I collected the things from everyone, told them I would say a speech for all of us here, telling how we felt about him, what he meant to us, what he stands for.”

- Enlisted Soldier

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Honoring the dead, finding spiritual meaning

“In late January, we marked another step of our journey as we dedicated a memorial garden on the beautiful grounds of the ambassador’s residence. The rim of the fountain was made of bricks inscribed with the names of all who had died in our building. For me, it was a symbol that I had finally gathered back the community that exploded on August 7. Bereaved family members from as far away as the United States attended what for many was another important ritual of healing.”

- Ambassador Bushnell

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Honoring the dead

- Remember, the way you do this speaks volumes about your concern for the living
- Involve those most affected in planning rituals
- Find meaning in the values and sacrifices of the deceased

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The community heals its members

“Sgt. V, an E6 medic, and myself and Sgt. K started loosening him up for preventing shock, started an IV, started checking him for injuries. To help him out of shock I brought his best friend. I ordered somebody to get Sgt. L and to bring him over right away. I thought, being coherent, he might understand the words of his best friend. I brought him over to hold his hand.”

- NCO

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The community heals its members

“By Christmas...when we closed the embassy and cancelled holiday activities, I was at an all-time low. It was then that the power of family and community really kicked in. If at times some of us felt unduly vulnerable, short-tempered or off mark in our performance, others felt OK and picked up the slack. The diversity in our reactions to trauma, which was in some respects troubling, was also a blessing.”

- Ambassador Bushnell

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The community heals its members

“He was the medic on the scene, started crying, said, “Guys, I did all I could, forgive me. I wish I could have done more.” The guys handled it well. They said, “Tom, we did the best we could, too. We dug with our helmets, our hands.” They said, “Thanks, Tom, for what you did.” I held him in my arms as he cried; we cried together. Some healing took place in that room.”

- Army Chaplain



Contact Information

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