

# 5 Things Great Leaders Do in a Crisis



This pandemic crisis is disrupting global markets, businesses, healthcare, and every sector of our lives. Leaders, depending on how they act during this crisis, have the ability to sink an organization faster than the crisis normally would, or, with great leadership they can literally lift an organization up from the ashes.

From a former Air Force fighter pilot and combat veteran, here are five things great leaders do in the midst of crisis.

## 1 Maintain Accountability

Now, more than ever, your team must do what they say they are going to do when they say they're going to do it. Key principles for accountability are:

- Never forget that **People are Your Biggest Asset** - nothing gets done in a crisis without your team
- **Focus on the “why”** not the “what”
- **Don't allow cliques or play favorites**
- **Conduct crucial conversations** - identify non-performers & take action because **what you permit you promote**



## 2 Be Decisive but Adaptable

In a crisis, you must make quick and/or hard decisions. Decisiveness includes:

- **Know and communicate your desired Key Results** and the roadmap for achieving them
- **Use Team Problem Solving** (get inputs in a structured way)
- **Avoid “analysis paralysis”** - take massive imperfect action and adapt as needed later
- **Communicate the plan** - what do you know, who needs to know it, have you told them?
- **Debrief** - conduct consistent performance feedback on what went well and what needs to be improved for next time



## 3 Control the Chaos

In a crisis, the work environment can very quickly degenerate into chaos because of excessive stress and fear. Leaders stop the panic from spreading by:

- Immediately delegate tasks (and give your team something proactive to do)
- Control your own emotions
- Praise the little things (what gets rewarded get repeated)
- Show empathy



## 4 Exercise Caution While Taking Action

A crisis is not an excuse to throw caution to the wind and risk it all. A crisis is the combination of both Danger and Opportunity.

- Be transparent
- Be alert to Red Flags (warning signs that something is amiss)
- Take quick but measured action

## 5 Stay Positive

Keep a game face on until the worst of the crisis has passed. Key actions are:

- **Realize that your team will adopt the leader's traits**
- Remember that **optimism is contagious**
- **You will still lead in the aftermath**



**About the author:** Karl "Korky" von Kessel is the Senior Vice President for LifeWings and brings 25 years of experience in aviation leadership and safety processes to his ten years of experience as a TeamSTEPPS™ Master Trainer in healthcare. A retired Colonel and former Air Force Command Pilot, Mr. von Kessel has logged over 3000 flight hours in fighter aircraft. He has flown the F-4, A-7, F-16, and F-15E. Additionally, he was one of the very first pilots to ever fly the top-secret F-117 stealth fighter. A Desert Storm veteran with over 300 combat sorties, Mr. von Kessel has commanded at all levels in the United States Air Force. He served as the Director of Operations for NORAD's Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center and is a founding member of US Northern Command staff. Mr. von Kessel was also a Senior Fellow in the National Defense Fellowship program. Mr. von Kessel graduated from the United States Air Force Academy with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering.

Korky, along with all of the LifeWings team, is deeply grateful for the heroic work you are doing on the frontlines. Together, we will prevail.