



Ask the Experts

You've got questions – and we've got answers straight from the pros. What better way to work through a problem than with a little support and advice from those who have been there ... done that?

This month, Jim E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CCEP, offers food for thought on how to sell the need for readiness and preparation to management.

CPM-Global Assurance is pleased to announce this new column, "Ask the Experts," which will field readers' questions regarding the business continuity, security and risk management industries.

Question: I've been around the industry for a while – even before Y2K times in the late 1990s. And aside from Y2K and September 11th, it's pretty hard to maintain management's attention on business resumption and continuation processes. Apart from some obvious threat, businesses' commitment to readiness concepts seems to decline, marginally, every day. How can I counter this insidious trend?

Answer: As it turns out, planning for adversity is one of the most detested activities in management. Sadly, management rarely compensates for excellence in readiness and preparation. Business disruption and interruption is a small part of what managers go to school to learn, and they usually hear some heroic case study where the leader prevails. There is the more prevalent management over optimism, with respect to

the manager's capacity to work through bad situations and the assumption that the really bad stuff will happen to someone else. Part of it is the realization that many adverse events that are planned for have only a remote possibility of occurring and are often far less devastating than originally proposed or hypothesized.

In addition, management is trained and compensated for success. Advancement, bonuses, recognition and the future depend far more on success than on being ready to deal with something that will likely never happen. Y2K is, in fact, a shining example of this reality.

Let me make three suggestions.

First, planning for business or organizational adversity has to begin with those events or situations that top leadership fear most. Failure to find out and include these scenarios in your planning makes all the rest of your work that much more difficult. Find out what these hot-button issues are and then find ways to prepare. If there are areas where your experience is minimal, bring in people who can educate and prepare you.

The most important lesson of preparation and planning is failing to start where the boss' fears begin. That means when adverse event does happen, the plans you've made will take second place to whatever the boss and the management team thinks up on the spot, even where various kinds of preparations are required by law. Nowadays, if it's required by law, the boss is probably responsible. Bring management in on the discussions and make sure they understand the need for the plans: to protect them.

Second, develop a steady diet of smaller problems and issues with which to occasionally tweak management's interest. I call this the "what if it happened here" approach. Condition the culture gradually rather than with a handful of decimating scenarios whose gigantic calamity is unbelievable and for which the amount of preparation may still not be adequate. Don't allow your scenarios to become so complicated that preparation seems almost impossible to accomplish. Stick to the doable. Stick to the achievable. Stick to the knowable. Stick to the predictable. Be incremental. All readiness work, even the smallest details, contributes to response success.

Third, use a scenario basis for every hypothesis you envision. There are now many excellent texts on scenario planning. Visit

www.amazon.com and search for books on the topic. At least six good titles will come up. Find scenarios that relate to your business or that relate to the threats and opportunities your business presents – through the eyes of the boss – first.

Always present your concepts in an organizational-based scenario or story. These approaches are better internalized, better personally visualized and, ultimately, are more managerially intriguing. Fear rarely sells effectively, but a good story with a choice of punch lines based on senior management readiness and sound decision making will work.

Let's assume that your boss is almost totally resistant. In this case, of course, you will have to make preparations for those scenarios you feel are the most threatening, devastating or carry extreme levels of risk. A conversation with several of your colleagues will undoubtedly confirm that you will be able to rush in when something occurs and be extremely helpful, but only after a lot of foolishness, time-wasting meetings, and silly thinking fails. You are being hired to get the organization ready against a broad cross-section of risks. It is far better to start with the boss. Don't try to ride in on the white horse when things are bad. It will take even longer to get through the gates if that is how you plan to operate. And getting through the gates is what matters.

– James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CCEP, has been a trusted advisor for nearly 30 years. Corporate Legal Times named him as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and PR Week called him one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis." His new book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You*, published by Jossey-Bass, will be released in January of 2008. (Amazon.com will be accepting pre-orders of this book this month.)

If you have a question and need an expert answer, e-mail dkichline@contingencyplanning.com, or Jim Lukaszewski at crisisguru@e911.com. Title your subject line "CPM Questions." Also, please include your full contact information, including telephone number and e-mail address, so that we can contact you if we require clarification of your question.

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