Leadership Behaviors in War and Disasters for Civilian and Military Populations to Foster Action, Sustainment, and Recovery

Joshua Morganstein, M.D.
Captain, U.S. Public Health Service
Deputy Director, Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
Professor & Vice Chair, Department of Psychiatry
School of Medicine, Uniformed Services University
www.cstsonline.org
Disclaimer

The ideas, attitudes, and opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Uniformed Services University, the U.S. Public Health Service, the Department of Defense, or other branches of the U.S. government. I am not endorsing any of the entities or resources mentioned in this presentation and have no relevant disclosures or conflicts of interest to report.
ASPECTS OF THE DISASTER ENVIRONMENT TO GUIDE LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING AND BEHAVIORS
Disasters Collide…

Challenges to our Values
(caring, equity, justice, connectedness)

- Pandemic (Health)
- Natural Disaster (Emer Mgmt.)
- Social/Civil Unrest (LE)
- Economic Crisis (?)
- War (military/civilians)
6.8 Million Seeking Refuge from Russia’s Invasion

Number of Ukrainian war refugees crossing into neighboring countries*

* Data extracted on June 2, 12 PM CET. Accumulated number higher than total due to border crossings between countries.

Source: UNHCR
COVID-19 Global Deaths (Jul 22, 2022)

### Dimensions of Disasters – War & Pandemics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>WAR</th>
<th>PANDEMIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altered sense of safety</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local &amp; National fear</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged stress</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences over time</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community disruptions</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelm health systems</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National bereavement</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact societal infrastructure</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent is visible</td>
<td>++++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional trust loss</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++++</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychological & Behavioral Responses to War & Disasters

- Sleep difficulties
- Decreased Sense of Safety
- Physical (Somatic) Symptoms
- Irritability, Anger
- Distraction, Isolation

- Depression
- PTSD
- Anxiety
- Complex Grief

- Alcohol, Tobacco, Rx meds
- Family Distress
- Interpersonal Conflict/Violence
- Disrupted Work/Life Balance
- Restricted Activities/Travel

## Stress Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>READY</th>
<th>REACTING</th>
<th>INJURED</th>
<th>ILL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEFINITION</strong></td>
<td>• Adaptive coping • Effective functioning • Well-being</td>
<td>• Mild and transient distress or loss of function</td>
<td>• More severe and persistent distress or loss of function</td>
<td>• Clinical mental disorders • Unhealed stress injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEATURES</strong></td>
<td>• In control • Calm and steady • Getting the job done • Playing • Sense of humor • Sleeping enough • Ethical and moral behavior</td>
<td>• Anxious • Irritable, angry • Worrying • Cutting corners • Poor sleep • Poor mental focus • Social isolation • Too loud and hyperactive</td>
<td>• Trauma • Fatigue • Grief • Moral injury</td>
<td>• PTSD • Depression • Anxiety • Substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TYPES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEATURES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEADERSHIP/ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF HELP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychological & Behavioral Community Phases

Who is at Risk?

PRE-EVENT
- Socioeconomic Status
- Social Support
- Training Status
- Work Environment
- Underlying Health Conditions
- Help-Seeking Behaviors

EVENT
- Duration & Severity of Exposure
- Psychological Identification
- Illness
- Bereavement
- Guilt / Moral injury

RECOVERY
- Loss of Home & Community
- Displacement
- Financial Hardship
- Social Support Loss
- Low Organizational Support
- Poor Leadership
- Lack of Rest & Recovery

PRE

POST


LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS TO FOSTER ACTION, SUSTAINMENT & RECOVERY
Psychological First Aid (PFA)

**Five Essential Elements:**
- Safety
- Calming
- Self/Community Efficacy
- Connectedness
- Hope/Optimism

- Analogous to “First Aid”
- Population-based “framework”
- “Do no harm” approach
- Resilience-focused
- NOT a cure/tx for illness
- MAY mitigate illness/dz

Leadership Through Walking Around

- Walk around, be present, listen to concerns
- Engage in protective leadership behaviors
- Make time for “face-to-face” activities
- Enhance communication and connection
- Facilitate team building activities
- Pandemic/other factors caused leaders to “hunker down”… creates challenges
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Leadership Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Communicate Effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage Self-Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support Emotion Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Foster Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitate Help-Seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote Reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Address Grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sustain Morale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Communicate Effectively

- Build trust, cohesion, morale
- Facilitate risk / threat perception
- Influence behaviors & recovery
- Say what you know and don’t know
- Early, honest, often
- Mission, goals, objectives
- Anticipate, clarify, normalize
- Rituals & symbols


Encourage Self-Care

• Personal needs
• Sleep, food, water
• Family needs
• Safety, clothing, shelter
• Stress management
• Media exposure, calming
• Peer support


## Promote Cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>COLLECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage proximity for team member interactions</td>
<td>Communicate (mission, goals, objectives, schedules)</td>
<td>Explain and model pride in being a member of the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice inclusiveness; discourage &quot;out groups&quot;</td>
<td>Train... And train some more… to build confidence in team capability</td>
<td>Highlight successes to enhance sense of pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolve conflict to show team strength</td>
<td>Establish incentives and rewards to encourage pursuit of goals</td>
<td>Conduct tough training (team does what others shy away from)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know challenges of your people &amp; share your own</td>
<td>Provide guidance on achieving goals and feedback on progress</td>
<td>Foster friendly competition between team elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage knowing &amp; caring for people &amp; their families</td>
<td>Cross-train on tasks to enhance shared understanding / confidence</td>
<td>Build group identity with mottos and symbols</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: https://juniorofficer.army.mil/16-ways-effective-leaders-build-cohesive-teams-in-the-army/
Support Emotion Regulation

• Anger is common - adaptive vs problematic
• Sadness, boredom, shame, grief
• Contagion and impact on morale / cohesion
• Breathing, grounding for intense emotions
• Focus & regulate to enhance performance
  • Acceptance – what can you control?
  • Perspective – will it matter 1 wk / mon / yr?
  • Compartmentalize – “Put it away”

Foster Purpose

- Fosters meaning & understanding of individual/shared sacrifices
- Connect the present to the future
- New York National Guard (4k) following COVID-19 missions
  - Leaders reminding people of the purpose of their work a/w:
    - Better health
    - Better mental health
    - Greater unit cohesion


Facilitate Help-Seeking

- Normalize emotions
- Encourage getting help early
- Remove barriers to care
- Avoid perceived punishment
- Get help/support for yourself
- Leverage family/peer support


Address Grief

- Communicate openly & regularly
- Be visible and present
- Encourage working together
- Anticipate and acknowledge grief
- Honor losses; make meaning
- Look to the future
- Encourage finding a “new normal”

Encourage Growth

- Culture of Learning
- What has been gained
- Soldiers 4 mon post-combat deployment w/ growth-focused leaders reported:
  - Lower PTSD and depression
  - Higher unit cohesion, organizational support

**AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually happened?
- How can we learn from this?
- Why was there a difference?

---


Promote Reintegration

- Transition from prolonged high stress back to “normal life”
- Loss of meaning and purpose
- Tight knit teams dissolve
- Lack of a shared experience
- Others don’t understand
- Usual “problems” seem trivial
- Family expectations collide


“Confident and positive state of mind and persistent motivation to engage in the shared purpose of the group, especially during challenging conditions.”

Sustain Morale

8 Factors Influencing Morale

- Cohesion
- Esprit de corps
- Leadership
- Shared purpose/goal
- Resilience
- Preparedness & training
- Discipline
- Working conditions

Negative Impact on Morale

- Poor communication, rumors
- Mission uncertainty/confusion
- Inadequate supplies
- Disrespect / harassment / racism
- Unresolved interpersonal conflict
- Substance abuse
- Lack of exercise / boredom
- Defeat in combat

References:


Stockdale Paradox

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”
Thank You