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# 3 Steps To Gaining Leadership Buy-In For Crisis Preparedness



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Here are some tried and true ways to get leadership on board with taking a proactive approach to crisis preparedness.  
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Implementing a crisis-ready corporate culture needs to begin at the top. This means that leadership buy-in for an ongoing proactive commitment, is essential.

So how can you go about gaining this buy-in and getting the executive team to commit?

In my experience as a crisis management consultant who works with some of today's leading global organizations, buy-in can come due to a multitude of

reasons, depending on the organization, its culture and its leadership team. As this question of gaining buy-in is one that I get asked often, I thought I'd share some of my experiences that have proven to work for my clients.

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**Step 1: It Starts With The Right People Who Have The Right Mindset**

A friend of mine who works for a major pharmaceutical organization that does *not* have a crisis-ready culture, recently asked me what the most common reason is for gaining the buy-in that she's been working to gain. She wondered if it happened primarily after the organization experienced a crisis and learned the value of crisis preparedness the hard way.

While this is a likely reason, thankfully, it's not the most common reason that I see with my clients. In my experience, it all starts with having a few people on the management or supervisory levels that truly understand the value of crisis preparedness and are openly aware of the organization's lack-there-of.

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These people may or may not have experienced a crisis in their careers, but that's not what's important. What's important is that they care about the organization, they're aware of its risks and are worried of the potential impact that a lack of being crisis-ready can have on its reputation and, ultimately, its success and bottom line, in the event of a crisis.

Oftentimes, these people aren't necessarily the decision makers, but they're the starting point for getting the decision makers on board. And if you're reading this article, then it's very likely that you are one of these people – and your organization is lucky to have you.

**Step 2: Strategize The Best Way To Create Awareness And Gain That Buy-In**

The type of strategy depends on the type of people you're trying to reach. But no matter the execution format towards gaining that buy-in, the goal is to demonstrate the value that a crisis-ready culture will bring to the organization, both in and out of a crisis.

To do this, you'll want to educate, create a small amount of fear or discomfort (for example, showcasing what can go wrong and its potential impact on the organization), and identify some reasonable, proactive next steps that will help the organization begin to strengthen its crisis management weaknesses.

Some ways that I've successfully done this in the past, include:

- **Begin a discussion with the right people.** Have an open and honest discussion about your organization's high-risk scenarios, the likelihood of them occurring (feel free to use relatable real-world case studies here) and the level of preparedness your organization currently has in the event that it needs to manage such a situation. If you take this approach, be sure to make it a conversation, rather than a presentation. For example, ask the different members of your leadership team to share their own concerns and the types of scenarios that keep them up at night. Having this type of discussion and bringing these issues to the table in an open dialog is a great place to begin. Odds are, that through this process, you'll unveil some fears and gaps that you can then gain the necessary buy-in to strengthen.
- **Engage an outside professional to present a tailored message to your leadership team.** This presentation should last no more than an hour or two and should be strategically crafted to open eyes and inspire buy-in for taking the appropriate next steps. It should be engaging, educational and practical, leaving the team with an understanding of where the organization currently sits on the crisis preparedness spectrum, and motivating them to want to do more. It should also *not* be a sales pitch!
- **Conduct a crisis simulation.** A targeted simulation will give your leadership team the opportunity to experience a very realistic crisis – though in a controlled setting. It will give them the opportunity to experience the challenges that they will face in a crisis, and put their crisis management skills to the test. A successful

crisis simulation will help to strengthen existing strengths and identify current gaps and weaknesses. It also feels so realistic that leadership tends to walk away *wanting* to be better prepared, because they don't want to have to experience such an event for real!

### **Step 3: Realize That You Don't Have To Start By Going All-In**

Developing and implementing a comprehensive crisis preparedness program requires resources and a deep commitment from a lot of people. And to be honest, it's a rare organization that will give buy-in to the entirety of this undertaking right from the start. So, if you're experiencing resistance from leadership, then aiming to undertake the entirety of this type of initiative at once is probably not the best strategy. Instead, start small and build your way up. Identify some initial steps that you can take that will a) help you begin to implement a crisis-ready culture and b) result in a successful outcome that will lead to additional buy-in.

Some of my best clients – the ones that truly understand the value that a crisis-ready culture provides to their entire organization, on multiple levels – started working with me on much smaller, yet beneficial aspects of their crisis preparedness. The initial “foot in the door” allowed me to help them prepare on the level that they were ready to commit to, and eventually with one successful deliverable after another, they realized the value of continuing to take proactive steps in the right direction.

And that should always be your goal: to work every day to take a proactive step in the direction towards crisis preparedness. Steps towards creating organizational awareness; towards building and strengthening **trust with your key stakeholders**; towards identifying and strengthening current gaps and weaknesses; towards **empowering your team** to make the right decisions in tough situations; and so on.

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Author of "Crisis Ready: Building an Invincible Brand in an Uncertain World", Melissa Agnes is a leading authority on crisis preparedness, reputation management, and brand protection. Agnes is a coveted speaker, commentator, and advisor to some of today's leading organizati...

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