Houtkin ConsultingNewsletter

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This Newsletter: The Biggest Variable: Staff Response to an Event.

Introduction.

I received responses from November's Newsletter and one, from my Colleague, Wendell Brown, was particularly poignant. He had experienced 9/11 as a technical administrator and requested that I mention the importance of the family and the ability to connect and then remain with family during the initial days after the event.

November's newsletter dealt with ideas for creating a process that permits the business to communicate within the first 0-1 hours after an event to identify who may be missing or in need of medical attention. In this Newsletter, I hope to communicate the importance of understanding your staff and the possible psychological stress that staff may experience for weeks/months, after an event.

Accountability

As we saw in November's issue it is important to create a way to identify who is missing or in need of medical attention between 0-1/hrs after an event. This process helps to communicate concerns to first responders so that they may better direct their searches into the building - and hopefully save their lives as well.

Accountability also helps the business baseline who is safe and who could potentially be available to continue the mission critical business process via the business continuity plan based on the Recovery Time Objective (RTO).

We must remember that buy-in from staff is required for the success of the Accountability process primarily because you are asking staff to: 1) be at a physical location directly after the event and 2) communicate periodically with the company for the first 24 hours after an event for information or direction.

In addition to buy-in, you must engage the staff in regular drills for each part of the Accountability process to ensure that it is second nature for staff.

Staff should also be asked to educate their family about the accountability process in the case that staff prefer to just communicate with their family and not meet at the assembly point. The hope is that family will take the responsibility of communicating staff health/ well-being to the company if staff are not in the position to do so.

Availability Defined

Availability during and after an event is about "being in the moment"-- being able to respond to sometimes catastrophic issues by focussing on what is required to maintain your safety and evacuate the impacted structure or area.

After an event, it is the goal to normalize because your mind is battling between "being in the moment" and processing the event or being in the past. This is an internal battle for each individual. It must be faced, the work performed in order to be able to understand the impact of one's experience on our psyche, learn the trigger points to future bouts of post traumatic stress and then hopefully, heal. Do we ever go back to the kind of normalcy we experienced before the event? I am not sure. It is up to the trauma of the event and essence of who the person is and their historical and emotional history. Can the business do anything? This is what this article is about. Ultimately, it is the individual's battle, not yours, but you can take this concern into consideration when working through your plan.

Because of the concepts of business continuity, many people create plans with the assumption that staff will be available -- physically and emotionally. And although many businesses consider "A" and "B" teams, when it comes down to it, you must still deal with the biggest variable: staff response to an event, time to process the event and the possibilities of a lifelong battle with post traumatic stress.

We need to identify various means of communication based on time as it moves away from the event and where staff are in the overall, end-to-end process. And we need to find ways to keep a percentage of critical staff who perform critical functions working from different locations on a daily basis. For example, we

may account for staff at the assembly point, but they still have to make it home; still need to check in - especially to gather information from their Management or actually identify that they are able to fulfill the role of performing mission critical business processes the next day. This could take up to 24 hours-all the while a percentage of staff, having worked in a different place that day, can focus on the business and keep it generating revenue.

The success of accountability closest to the time of impact is based on the education and consistent practice of safety, evacuation and business continuity processes and procedures as well as a keen awareness of your and your staff's tolerance for stress and the process you put in place to deal with post-traumatic stress.

Building Loyalty - Preventative Measures

We cannot expect preventative measures to resolve individual response to an event -- however, it does build loyalty that can result in a better percentage of adherence to policy and process. Let's face it, staff would be more interested in practicing drills if they knew that their basic needs were being taken care of:

1. Establish a plan that permits staff to connect with family directly after an event.

2. Establish policies on staff payroll (including time sheet completion). No-one wants to worry about getting paid on-top of experiencing a catastrophic event.

3. Refine the technical environment to support a technical failover process that is not disruptive and permits staff to handle remotely or work from home.

4. Engage with post traumatic stress experts and integrate into the day-to-day with individual counseling and bi-annual presentations.

5. An easy accountability process supported by easy-to-use tools.

Staff Retention

Staff retention is a delicate problem during an incident. With every major event resulting from terrorists, for example, there are copy-cats. So, if you are going to move staff from one building to another, consider the location of this second building: Is it also a soft target? Are there soft targets in the neighborhood?

NOTE: After several events, there are copy-cat callers and sometimes an over-abundance of evacuations as a result of these calls into police or the fire department. The responses to copy-cat evacuations weigh heavily on staff. Rather than focussing on normalizing, they are, in a sense, re-living the initial experience each time they evacuate.

Every time your staff evacuates, you have the potential of loose a percentage of your staff. They just walk home or to the train or bus and never return. There is only so much a person can take in a short period of time.

What other issues result in staff retention?

Anger at the company for putting them in this position. Although this may seem unrealistic, it is their feeling that could potentially be bound up with processing the event that cannot be disputed.

You will have people who no longer want to work in the city where your offices are located. You have to decide how to handle this. Nevermind walking out the door, these people never come back after the initial evacuation.

You may have phone numbers with dates embedded in them that present the date of the event. I have personally seen this trigger melt-downs at work.

Do not underestimate staff retention as an issue after an event.

Scenarios and How They May Play Out

Staff have a choice: participate or not to participate in the accountability/communication/ business continuity process. A review of two scenarios and how they could potentially play out may help to identify the concerns and possible resolutions.

The accountability process maintains several phases and can take place over a 48 hour period of time. As you move further away from

"0" hour, in time, people begin to remember more and may act differently towards the Business Continuity communication process as reality sets in. I'd like to consider 2 possible scenarios for 2 of the phases in the Accountability process: 1. Accountability immediately during/ after the event and 2. After the event but with the first 24 hours after the event.

Hopefully we can then see the importance of ensuring that the business continuity plan takes staff into consideration and how creation and education of this plan fosters a larger percentage of safer staff, faster closure to the accountability process, faster deployment of the actual business plan and some level of loyalty from your staff resulting in a better percentage of process engagement should an event occur.

Pre-requisites

0 hr = Incident

No matter the incident, some staff may be injured, dead, dazed or in need of medical attention.

0-.5 hr = Evacuation

1. Some Staff may follow instructions provided by building manager emergency staff or go directly to the nearest exist.
2. Some exits may be unusable, some may be blocked by debris or, sad to say, blocked as a result of being used as a storage area.
3. Staff may be in a different part of the building and may not be familiar with where the exits are from their point in situ which could potentially delay their evacuation from the building and/or keep them from meeting up with staff (for example, if the stairwell takes them to the lobby and not outside of the building, or if the stairwell leads them to another place on the street altogether different from where they may be used to exiting.)
4. The evacuation process can possibly take longer for those who are impacted by the incident and need the help of first responders to extricate themselves from the impact.

Scenario 1: "Best Effort to Adhere to Process"

.5-1/hr = Accountability / Phase I

1. Staff assemble at the assembly point.
2. Staff perform the Accountability Process through the call tree process.
3. Hand-off of the call tree to first responders for those missing or believed injured to direct their search.
4. Staff leave the area.
5. Some may go home or to the alternate site, if that is what the agreement is.
6. Some staff may go to the local train/bus depot as part of their intention to go home. The only issue here is that the city may be "locked down" by local police, transportation may be delayed and you have many people who have experienced an event that is now elevated to a social or community level with additional stress of delays. In the obvious view, the police have to deal with this, if they are available and not focussed on the event itself. Your concern, as a business owner, is whether this set of actions after assembly further impacts individual stress and the possible result of staff falling off the "accountability/business continuity track" and giving up on the process.
7. Once home, staff or their family call into the accountability hotline or message number and communicate that they made it to their destination.
8. From Home, they may call-into their department meeting later in the afternoon and/or evening.

Scenario 2: "No Adherence to Process"

1. Some people may not go to the assembly point. This is your first weak link in the process. Their options?
   a. Wander about. If staff are wandering and not going home or to the alternate site, they may be trying to handle what they experienced and time may not be of importance. Also, they risk endangering themselves by possibly hanging out around the impacted area-but preferring not to connect. They could be injured as well.

b. Some staff may go to the nearest hospital, thinking that it is safe. The hospitals, fire departments and police stations may shut-down to focus on the immediately injured or because policemen and firemen are out doing their job at the site. This could further anger or impact staff psychologically.

c. Some staff may be taken to the hospital as a result of injuries.

d. Some staff may be so angry that they end up in jail for assault or other mis-demeanor.

e. Some people may go to a bar to decompress, attempt to go to the nearest office of friends or loved ones, try to make it home, sit in a park, and believe it or not, go shopping-all in a partial daze while they are attempting to deal with what they just experienced.

f. Some people may lose partial short-term memory as their brain is processing the event and not remember how to get home, how to connect.

1-8/hrs = Accountability / Phase 2

Phase 2 of the process may include these steps. Remember that we are defining Phase 2 as occurring within the first 4-8 hours. This phase could potentially be repeated every 4-8 hours over the span of 48-72 hours after "0" hour. Without close adherence to this process it could take weeks to account for staff, consultants, temporary workers, etc.

1. Checking call trees.
2. Checking messages on the accountability hotline.
3. Trying to communicate with staff in your call tree branch.
4. Attempting to communicate with family who have left messages on the accountability hotline.
5. Management meeting.
6. Departmental meeting.
7. Next day: scheduled sets of management and departmental meetings.
8. Checkout with hospitals for missing staff believed to be injured.
9. Checkout with the City for staff that have believed to have died and then follow-through with the City until the death certificate is provided to the family.

You cannot fully engage your business continuity plan unless you can answer these questions:

1. Did staff evacuate the building?
2. Have you been able to identify those who you cannot account for on your call tree? Could they still be in the building?
3. Have you provided a call tree to First Responders to help them in their search for staff who were not accounted for and may still be in the building?
4. Can you account for staff who are in the hospital, jail or who have passed on as a result of the incident?
5. Did all staff make it home?
6. Are critical staff able to assume their roles to respond to the next-day mission critical business process?
7. Is the team of critical alternate staff available to assume the role of critical staff to perform the mission critical process.

Where do you start?

1.0. Create policies that focus staff on the family.

The sooner anyone normalizes after an event, the sooner that person can carry on in life and shorten the time to process and deal with post traumatic stress.

People need to normalize by being with family.

This is an issue with regards to the design of your business continuity plan. How do you keep staff with family while still engaging your plan?

Some ideas:

1. Engage a quality notification system with a strong maintenance procedure. In other words, engage staff to ensure that the

contact information is always correct and that there is a person or team responsible for keeping this data correct in the database and call tree process at all times.

1. Engage a quality business continuity hotline and message center/process with strong maintenance procedures.
2. Consider building alternate sites within 25 miles of staff homes and engage split staffing so that a percentage of staff are always engaged at this site and those not in the same location of the event, can keep the business running. This means reviewing your process and possibly training staff on procedures that they do not normally perform day-to-day.
3. Engage a remote access solution so staff may work from home and integrate into your daily work plan.
4. Review the technical architecture of your physical, network, server, operating system, operating system services, database/ database replication and application levels. Look at ways to facilitate failover of each level (whether on the edge or via DNS redirect).

NOTE: A viable technical environment and failover strategy will refine the efficiency of the failover process, the time to be ready for the business as well as limit the number of staff required to failover and normalize the alternate site -- permitting staff to lower stress levels during an event.

5. Create technical disaster recovery solutions and logistics as part of your production environment. This, again, will facilitate the need to failover in times of stress.
6. Consider outsourcing some aspect of the failover and management of the technical environment for the first 4 hours of an event - permitting staff who have experienced the event, to decompress.

2.0. Meet with Management and Staff to identify their role in your plan.

1. Everyone is equal when it comes to disaster events. Just because they are senior

management does not mean that they will handle an event better than a junior person in your business.
2. Meet with all members of staff privately and ask them what role they feel they could play in a disaster event. Do not assume that because they perform a function day-to-day, that they will have the wherewithal to perform the same function after experiencing a traumatic event.
3. Most importantly, identify, if possible, staff roles throughout the accountability process and how well they may deal with stress. Will they be able to handle accounting for staff within their call tree branch? Do they really want to be part of the crisis management plan? What has been going on in their lives that could potentially impact their roles in the crisis management team?
4. Honor everyone's request. Honor everyone's feelings.
5. Identify staff who may have severe medical issues and work out procedures for their evacuation with the building management or local fire department, if required.
6. Meet with Human Resources and ask whether they have the acumen to handle staff death with the family and the process with the city.

3.0. Create the Crisis Management Plan

The Crisis management Plan will help to engage these policies created in Item 1 as well as consider the feelings of management and staff as identified in Item 2.

4.0. Create the Accountability process and plan based on the information you have received from items 1 and 2.

Map the full process from evacuation to assembly point, accounting for staff, communication to first responders and leaving the area. Once you reach the assembly point, it should only take a few mins to account for staff.

5.0. Choose your assembly point.

Choose your assembly point based on building management and fire department ideas and recommendations. **Remember, according to NYFD Rule 27.02, it must be as far away from your building as it is tall.**

6.0. Evacuation and Evacuation Tools

1.   Check with your Corporate Security or Building Manager regarding their fire and non-fire emergency plans with a focus on Evacuation and Assembly point.

2.   If your Building Manager has not defined an non-fire emergency plan, call your local Fire Department for support.

3.   Train your staff on both the evacuation process including location of exits as well as other egress points in the building so that they know whether the exit leads to a lobby in the building or an area on the street. This avoids disorientation should they take an exit that they are not so familiar with.

4.   Schedule regular evacuation and Shelter-in-lace drills with the Corporate Security or Building Manager/Fire-Safety Director. In most cases, these drills are already scheduled.

5.   Check staff with health issues and suggest that they bring in 1-3 day's worth of medication in case of a shelter-in-place.

6.   Check with your building manager re: the availability of an evacuation chair or trauma board to carry staff down stairs who may be infirm during an evacuation.

7.0. Call Tree/Call Tree Process

This is an important aspect of connecting to staff and identify staff who need help or cannot engage in the business continuity plan.

8.0. The Accountability Hotline.

Find a program from your phone company that provides an off-premise emergency number and voicemail that can accommodate directory trees, for business to enable staff to leave/retrieve messages by business. You want a number that could potentially be answered by staff in another geographic area or where staff and family can leave quick messages re: their status.

Do not under-estimate how many staff will walk away, hide, not communicate at all. A remote or mechanical means to communicate may make it easier for these people to at least connect to let you know their status. A voicemail is better than no response. Consider the number of human resources you need to find people. Give your staff various ways to communicate.

9.0. Schedule drills one year in advance.

This builds loyalty and ensures staff engagement.

•   Call Tree Testing: 1x quarter.

•   Evacuation: 3x year.

•   Accountability: 3x year.

•   Notification System/Accountability Hotline: 1x quarter.

•   Plan Review: 2x year.

•   Disaster Recovery testing: major failover - 2-3x year depending on growth of business

10.0. Educate Staff/Educate Families

Educate the family regarding accountability. You may have staff who just are not interested or are too dazed, angry to connect.

11.0. Engage with Companies who handle post traumatic stress.

Throughout the year, make them available for individual counseling and have them come in at least twice to discuss event stress and post traumatic stress.

Everyone must attend.

Video-tape the presentation and make available on the corporate home intranet site.

12.0. Tighten up the complete Human Resources process

Throughout my career, I have seen Human Resources personnel who cannot deal with the staff accountability process. It is somewhat technical in nature and may be better off performed by Financial Control or Operations with the results sent to Human Resources. Human Resource personnel must be able to handle death and know how to engage the process with family and the City with a certain aspect of dignity. This means no personal issues can get in the way of expediting the process. In other words, as Human Resources personnel, you must look inside, ask yourself who you are, what your needs are during an event and then identify how you are going to deal with this process.

Also, I recommend that Human Resources define:

1) a policy for dealing with staff who stay home/work remotely during an event.

2) a payroll process that works during an event that ensures no interruption of the receipt of earnings. This includes easy ways to communicate hours worked and the translation of this information into the regular payroll process.

3) identify a regular way to communicate with staff who do not have access to the intranet.

This is very important.

Final Thoughts

I have read policy guidelines from major companies that state first and foremost, that "staff are their number one asset." However, when it comes to really responding to an event, they focus on what plans are required to present to the regulators or respond to Sarbanes/Oxley

instead. If you are really interested in maintaining staff loyalty and staff, and keeping your business afloat during a catastrophic event in general, you have to accept the fact that you or your staff may not know who they are and will therefore not know how they are going to respond to a major event.

I have had Corporate Security from companies tell me that if someone does not follow their process, then staff are on their own and take their lives into their own hands. That militaristic approach does not work in the business world.

This is a direct impact to your business and your ability to maintain mission critical business process/revenue generation after an event.

You can perform some of the recommendations presented in this article - based on the needs of your staff and business. You have to create the Risk Assessment and perform a Business impact Analysis to really understand how you would accommodate staff during an event.

Creating a plan that does not consider staff retention as a result of your staff's emotional needs is essentially like writing a novel. It may represent facets of reality, but it is not real. Worst case, your business recovery could fail because there isn't anyone or enough people to perform the mission critical process to keep the business afloat.

Either way, the best solution is transparency and communication. They do not cost anything -- but can potentially be the most valuable thing you have before an event -- without these qualities you cannot guarantee that you will have the staff available to support your business.

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