

PEOPLE matters



Resilience in crisis

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on adversity and crisis management.

The COVID-19 crisis has profound implications which require global, collective and personal responses.

We live in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, and when we hit a crisis like this it can test us all to the limit. Can we learn from previous crises or are we in uncharted territory? What strategies should we adopt? How do we cope?

Remember there's a light at the end of the tunnel

Crises don't last for ever, although it can feel like that at the time. An inspiring vision, mission and sense of purpose - which everyone can buy into - becomes really important. In the Brussels case, a determination that the airport would 'come back stronger' proved a very effective rallying cry. In the COVID-19 situation, we need to remind ourselves that there will be an end in sight, even if we can't see it right now. We are all in this together. It is important to focus on what we can do now, where we are, that will contribute to the overall collective and global response required.

Take personal responsibility and leadership

Quite often 'natural' leaders emerge, sometimes unexpectedly, in response to fast moving and rapidly changing local circumstances. We are seeing it already in local WhatsApp groups, online volunteering, supportive messaging and virtual 'keeping in touch'.

Support others rather than behave selfishly

There is a human toll with emotional and physical exhaustion, fear, panic and anxiety common responses. A combination of practical and psychological support is required which is based on a strong evidence base. All of us need to think of how we personally behave: are we creating a positive spirit? Are we supporting the vulnerable? Are we being kind? Are we using our emotional intelligence? The evidence is that a positive proactive approach to helping others makes us feel better too.

Prioritise communication

In a world of social media and 24/7 news coverage, speculation and misinformation can swiftly fill any communications vacuum. As soon as relevant and accurate information emerges, it needs to be communicated. Delivering clear messages, which people understand in the way that is intended - and which they are prepared to act on - is very difficult to do. A balance must be struck between 'rationality and humanity', and care taken in how information is presented. Pictures of empty supermarket shelves, for example, can just reinforce the perception that no food is available and make the situation worse. The

social isolation that will be essential to get us through this period is a particular challenge. We can all play a part in making sure we keep in touch with others, only spread accurate information, keep our emotions in check and don't get trapped into believing and spreading fake news.

Stay rational

Crises can lead to fear, anxiety and ultimately panic as we stop thinking rationally and instead react emotionally. This is rarely effective in uncertain and crisis situations where we do better if we keep our cool. If you feel yourself starting to become anxious, a useful way of trying to prevent this is to think 'STOPP' - **S**top: pause for a moment; **T**ake a breath; **O**bserve how you are thinking and feeling; **P**ull back and put things in perspective; **P**roceed: Think before you act.

Pay attention to our own wellbeing

It's really important to take care of our wellbeing, particularly if we are isolated for long periods. Ways to do this include keeping physically active and rationing our intake of information.

In times of crises we can become overwhelmed by the volume of information that we receive. Listening to the news non-stop not only takes up an enormous amount of time that could be spent on more useful activity but also can make people feel depressed and anxious. This is especially so if the news is distressing and there is nothing that they can do about it. On the other hand, shutting out all information is not sensible either. Better to filter news so as to keep up to date and aware but not get overloaded. Control the things that you can control

Keep the big picture in mind

Airports connect the world physically. In times of crisis, we need to connect in mind and spirit as well as body. Global collaboration, sharing information and resources, being open and transparent, working together, and taking a whole world view are all vitally important at the same time as paying attention to our local situation. There is much we can learn from others if we are prepared to take a step back, listen to the evidence, and are prepared to change our minds when necessary.

About the authors

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are managing director and chair, respectively of This Is...and deliver ACI World's Airport Human Resources training. Their new book, *'Uncertainty Rules? Making Uncertainty Work for You'* (<https://b2l.bz/Rhjcc7>) will be out shortly. You can contact them at info@thisis.eu