

## Chapter 9

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# Starting to Prepare Now—Five-Minute Planning Steps

This chapter suggests a number of planning actions that can each be carried out in five minutes. The basic idea is that some disaster planning is better than none, and the planning process need not be an onerous obligation.

### Overview

For many of us, time is our most precious resource. Why spend it planning for events that might not occur when you already have many pressing demands? The answer is that a variety of unexpected things can happen, as the real-life examples in this book show, and those who took the time to plan generally have benefited from a faster, more complete recovery.

If you remain unconvinced that planning is worth your time, consider the following sets of actions that you can do in five-minute time slots. You may not solve all of the problems that arise, but you'll bring to the surface important issues that you can then handle one by one over time. By taking action in small bursts, you may be able to stay a few steps ahead when a disaster strikes. Carry out these actions in any order you choose—just take five to survive.

### Connect with Your Internal Partners

When was the last time you checked in with your partners in disaster preparedness? Think about taking a few minutes to connect with individuals in the following departments:

- Safety and security
- Media in cities where employees are concentrated
- EAP
- Information technology
- Communications, including the individuals designated to make website/intranet changes quickly and to set up a special site
- Operations
- HR, including generalists in the field

Ask them what's new in their area in terms of disaster preparedness/business continuity planning. Are they anticipating any changes? Have they attended any seminars of interest on this topic, or read any articles or books that might influence planning? Are their key messages up to date? Would there be any value in getting together in advance of the next simulation?

## Refresh Records

Establish a regular schedule for updating key records, such as:

- Employee emergency contact information, including a local contact and an out-of-area contact
- Media lists
- Fact sheets for your company, facilities, and products
- Location of key data and supplies
- Posters, wallet cards, ID cards, website postings, and other materials that provide employees with directions on what to do in an emergency

## Run Through Redundancies

How much redundancy have you built into your communications, so that if one method or system goes down, you can access alternative means? For example, you should allow for at least two, and preferably three or more, ways to:

- Reach key individuals using the e-mail addresses and phone numbers you have on record
- Send electronic and text messages
- Make phone calls, such as using cell, satellite, and landline phones. You should also have an old-fashioned analog phone at work and at home that you can use when the power is out

- Get the word out to employees
- Contact customers

Have you tested your multiple methods recently? Is there at least one backup person (and preferably two) to help you update your website/intranet or launch a special site?

## Estimate Risk and ROI

If you're having difficulty getting your leaders' attention and help in preparing for a disaster and developing a business continuity plan, step back and perform the following analysis. (This exercise will take more than five minutes, but you can break it into steps.) You can either do a back-of-an-envelope calculation or something more sophisticated. Consider:

- Your organization's tolerance for risk. In general, the bigger the organization, the greater its ability to absorb losses and, therefore, the higher its tolerance for risk. But also take into account your organization's view toward insurance and other risks. And calculate how much business you'd lose if you had to shut down for several days, or even several weeks.
- The probability of a disaster. If you have no clue, make it 50%. Experts say that if you don't know, it's always best to assign equal probabilities.<sup>1</sup> (But if you're in southern Florida or on the Gulf Coast, make it closer to 100%.)
- The cost of disaster planning and business continuity planning, in both soft and hard dollars. As a rule of thumb, expect each member of the core team to put in 160 to 200 hours—about one month's work time. Estimate a half month for the other team members. Then think about hiring experts to help you. Also consider the hard-dollar cost of the supplies and services you'll need for handling the emergency and getting the business going again. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 2.)
- The return on investment (ROI). What if you could restart the business in two days instead of five? What would the difference in dollars be, less the one-time cost for disaster planning/business preparedness? How would this quick recovery help your reputation with customers, employees, investors, and other key groups?

If you want to get fancy, you also can consider the time value of money; you might ask individuals in your finance department for help with this. By carrying out any level of analysis, however, you can start to understand the value of disaster planning and preparedness.

## Hunt and Tame the Silent, Sugarcoated Moose<sup>®</sup>

Do you face challenges from the Silent, Sugarcoated Moose regarding disaster planning? The Silent, Sugarcoated Moose is a mutated species of the “moose on the table” or the “elephant in the room.” Everyone sees and knows about the moose, but no one says anything. And everyone continues to ignore it when someone tries to put a positive spin on negative news. Or people attempt to silence the moose, which feeds the rumor mill.

You can improve the situation by asking tough questions and practicing scenario playing, especially if your colleagues are dragging their feet or doing a sloppy job in their planning efforts. For example, you can ask your colleagues:

- What assumptions are we operating under as we’re doing (or not doing) our planning? Are they still valid?
- What do you think our competitors or harshest critics would say or do if they knew we weren’t taking disaster planning seriously, or were doing it haphazardly or carelessly?
- How would it look if our disaster planning problems were featured on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* or the local newspaper?
- Are we thinking as creatively as possible in considering crises that could occur?
- Are there any potential crises smoldering within our organization that we’re ignoring?
- Do our actions or decisions reflect the way we want to be remembered?
- What are the ramifications if we do nothing?
- What if there’s no disaster? Can we still benefit from doing disaster planning and addressing the issues that have surfaced?

By confronting issues up close rather than tiptoeing around them, you can move people to take positive action.

## Chew over Separation Anxiety

What dog trainers call “sep-anx” is a daily but surmountable challenge for their four-legged charges. When a disaster separates family members from each other and from their pets for long periods of time, anxiety on both sides escalates. If a significant number of your employees work in areas involving long commutes and heavy traffic jams, have you considered how they could be reunited quickly and safely with their family and pets under a variety of scenarios?

What support would you be willing to provide if it meant that employees could return to work faster? Or does it better fit your company culture to raise this issue in your emergency reminders and encourage employees to figure out the best alternative for them and their families?

## Review with New Eyes

How about asking someone who has recently moved to the area to vet your business continuity plan? Their fresh perspective may uncover some vulnerability in your plan that deserves investigation. For instance, when Joe Bagan of Adelphia Communications moved from Denver to Florida in summer 2004 to become Senior Vice President of the Southeast Region, he noticed displays in Florida grocery stores that he had never seen in Colorado: sug-gested supplies to have on hand when a hurricane hits.

Bagan picked up a free guide on hurricane preparation and brought it to work. His senior leadership team reviewed the region’s disaster preparedness plan against the guide and made some updates. He then asked each of the cable systems in the region to update their plans. Within a few weeks hurricane season was in full fury, and all the Adelphia cable systems in the Southeast were successfully putting their revised plans into action.

## Check Your Supplies

What if the power were to go out in your office? Would you be able to do these basic activities (followed by recommended supplies in each case)?

- See (flashlight and candles)
- Make a phone call (cell phone or regular phone, preferably on an analog phone line)

- Listen to the radio (battery-operated radio)
- Watch TV (battery-operated TV)
- Send an e-mail or text message (cell or smart phone or wireless PC)
- Power your cell phone or PDA (car or hand-powered charger)

Would you have cash on hand? Would you have enough gas in your vehicle to be able to drive? If you think you or others might be caught flat-footed, stock up on supplies.

## Build a “Just-in-Case” Inventory of Emergency Supplies

With many companies adopting “just-in-time” business practices in recent years to cut storage costs and ensure that inventory is fresh when it’s needed, it can be difficult for consumers (businesses and individuals) to buy what they need when typical hiccups occur in the system, not to mention power outages, road closures, and other problems associated with disasters. Even if you and your organization are proponents of just-in-time inventory for your business supplies, you should consider adopting a *just-in-case* supply of emergency provisions for your work sites. Having supplies on hand is important for two key reasons: (1) you need easy access to them when a disaster strikes, and (2) you might not be able to get supplies, especially reasonably priced ones, when you need them.

You should also encourage employees to keep some emergency supplies at their homes and in their cars. See “Suggested Actions to Take at Home” in the Resources section on page 157.

What emergency supplies do you need? Experts say you should stockpile water, food, first-aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, and special items for common medical conditions. Both the Red Cross and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), as well as other organizations, have lists of recommended items on their websites. You also need to take into account the type of disaster that you are likely to encounter. For example, if you’re in tornado alley or an area subject to hurricanes, the appropriate supplies may be slightly different from those needed for earthquakes.

These lists can change, especially information on how to rotate items to make sure the ingredients don’t expire. You should con-

sult the websites listed in the Resources section of this book starting on page 138.

## Figure Out How to Make Your Small Size Work to Your Benefit

If you're a small employer, you may not have all the resources that larger companies have at their disposal for disaster and business continuity planning. Rather than use your size as an excuse for not doing all the necessary planning, reframe the issue. Think about how you can creatively partner with customers, employees, vendors, and other businesses to successfully confront a disaster and strengthen your business.

Ask yourself these questions:

- If the business takes a hit and has to halt operations for a few hours, days, or weeks, who will suffer, besides employees? Vendors, suppliers, customers, or others? Can you present a convincing business case for them to work together with you in disaster planning? Can you pool resources with them to respond to a disaster? If you don't have the cash to cover resources, could you barter time and your products or services?
- Are there businesses in your geographic area that you can join forces with? For example, can you and another company jointly hire experts and other resources, such as an EAP provider?
- If you're a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, or other community-based business organization, do you know what services they provide to their members?
- Are you storing computer records, files, and other critical information off-site? Or are you using "on-demand" software or "software as a service," which allows you to run programs over the Internet so that you can access critical data wherever you are (assuming the Internet is up and you can access it)?
- Are there businesses outside your geographic area, even competitors, that you can approach about being a "disaster buddy"? You can help each other out by providing phone coverage, office space, customer support, and other services.

- Can you incorporate in audit plans the need to revisit the status of your business continuity planning?
- Do you know what your peers are doing in terms of the planning effort? Can you share ideas or combine resources with them?

## **Build Goodwill with Employees**

Will your employees want to return to work after a disaster? Or will the disaster serve as a great excuse for them to leave and never return?

Now is the time to make an honest assessment of how employees rank you as an employer. To what extent do your employees view your organization as a good place to work? What data do you have to support your opinion? Have you done an employee survey lately? If so, what have you learned and what actions have you taken to make improvements? If not, it's probably time to check in with employees on a variety of issues, and also to assess the amount of goodwill you've accumulated.

Think about any changes you could make that would serve a dual purpose—both improving your reserve of goodwill and better positioning you to handle the people side of any disaster.

## **Action Steps**

1. Decide where to begin planning, now that you've reached the end of the last chapter. Determine where you can get the most traction from your efforts. Also think about what interests and excites you most, and the area where you have the most energy. You may want to start there.
2. Talk to others who should work with you on the planning, and determine how you will work together. As you've seen throughout this book, disaster planning and business continuity planning are a team endeavor.
3. Get ready to lead people and make a difference!