

*Seasoned managers share their very best practices, practical tips and timeless insights on...*

## Managing In the Midst of Chaos

By Mark Cutshall



**Dan Bolin**



**John Frank**



**Jim Gwinn**



**Ed Morgan**

### **Crisis didn't take God by surprise**

"For a radio station, chaos occurs when your 1,080-ft transmission tower suddenly collapses and crumbles to the ground and demolishes half of your building," says **Dan Bolin**, President of Encouragement FM in Tyler, Texas.

Bolin remembers the calamitous morning of February 3: When the station went off the air, he and his team remained encouraged. "The heart of our ministry is communications, so we asked our vendors to help. Fourteen hours later we were back on the air, even while broadcasting at a mere fraction of our normal 100,000-watt signal.

"In those first, critical hours, we needed to be as responsible, hardworking and wise as we could. Still, no matter how bizarre or devastating our circumstances were, our crises didn't take God by surprise," says Dan.

"Months earlier, the station had scheduled its first all-day, Saturday board planning meeting in 22 years for February 4, the very next day. Through prayer and prompt planning, our board decided to embark on an on-air fundraising blitz. We were hoping to raise \$35,000. We brought in \$175,000, a third of which was raised while the station limped along on 500 watts."

**After the dust settled:** "Through the crisis and the chaos, we realized the loyalty of our listening audience. The temporary chaos provided deeper wisdom, new finances and the faith that matters."

**John Frank**, President of The Frank Group, Woodinville, Wash., recalls the day one of his clients, the head of a school, poured out his heart. "In the

middle of a capital campaign, he was totally exhausted. A valued staff member had to be let go due to ethical issues, a board member had resigned, the city had let them know their feeder school couldn't stay in the same building next year, and he was having health issues. In the middle of this, the communication between the school head and the director of development was deteriorating.

"As I pondered and prayed about my response, I realized he was in a spiritual battle that affected the school's direction and plans. When he caught his breath I asked him, 'Have you kept your campaign prayer support committee informed of these situations?'" The client said, "No."

Frank, a seasoned development consultant, concludes: "A capital campaign is about more than money. It's a strategy to add additional tools to the ministry, and that provokes a spiritual battle. Every time I've seen these 'attacks,' I'm reminded why I establish a prayer support committee in every campaign organization chart. Prayer is the key to these battles that attack us from within. When we can be defeated emotionally and spiritually, we're seldom effective."

**Frank wisdom:** "In this midst of these chaotic issues, prayer was the tool that brought this school director the wisdom and peace needed to continue the process of leading the organization forward."

### **Do something!**

For **Jim Gwinn**, chaos must have felt like a brooding black cloud – with no silver lining in the forecast. As President of CRISTA Ministries in Seattle, Wash., Jim had championed the organization's purchase and redevelopment of Alderbrook Inn, southeast of Tacoma. He envisioned the remade resort as a Northwest conference center and a spiritual and recreational haven. Looking back, he says, "From day one, Bill Brown, CRISTA's chief financial officer, told me it wouldn't pencil out. I

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looked at Alderbrook as ministry; he looked at it as a financier. He was right and I was wrong."

A special CRISTA-led panel determined the organization needed to cut short the dream and divest the property. Gwinn credits Board Chairman Dave Ederer, Bill Brown and real estate developer Mike Caven with the combined expertise CRISTA needed to recoup its initial investment, along with much of its operating losses, and actually turn a profit.

Gwinn notes through CRISTA's short-lived development efforts, a number of Native American Indians from a nearby reservation became involved in Alderbrook and found Christ as Savior.

“For that reason alone,” he says, “it was a spiritual success.”

**Quotable:** Reflecting on Alderbrook caused Jim to recall a quote Frank Maltby gave to John Stevens, a visionary who earned President Theodore Roosevelt’s blessing to build the Panama Canal: “You won’t get fired if you do something. You will if you don’t do anything. Do something, even if it’s wrong, for you can correct that. But there is no way to correct nothing.”

### **Slay the dragon**

**Ed Morgan**, President, Christian Herald Association in New York City, isn’t at a loss for words to analyze what caused the downward spiral of a funding campaign for a chapel renovation at Kids With A Promise Camp in Bushkill, Penna. “When things go south, people’s tendency is to discover problems and elaborate on them. When faced with a failing process, the classic solution is to call for a meeting, recast the vision and slay a dragon in front of everyone, so your team can see that the slew of problems in your path are not invincible.”

The most ominous dragon for Ed

and crew was finding the right contractor when bids from previous builders proved unrealistic. The camp director mentioned a builder who happened to be roofing the ministry’s cabins. “Instead of reconvening in 48 hours, we simply walked down the road and asked him if he could do the work. It was too simple.” The camp hired the builder for the chapel project that’s now moving forward. This summer the camp, a ministry to inner-city kids, will host 800 children, 93 percent of whom live below the federal poverty levels.

**Courageous choice:** “Slay the dragon. Face the problem head on. Consider chaos as a restless ocean: You can’t make an ocean into a wave pool, but you can point your ship into the wind.”

### **A speed bump provides for a smooth meeting**

**Dave Cox**, Executive Coach, Wheaton, Ill., is no fan of speed bumps. One pitch-black night, while walking fast through a parking lot trying to find his hotel building, his foot caught hold of an asphalt bump that sent him flying – and crashing. “The fall took the skin

off my elbow and tore my calf muscle. On the eve of leading a senior executive summit of a difficult management team, I had to call my client, the company president. He graciously drove me to the emergency room and sat with me there for two hours.”

Cox’s accident proved fortuitous. The next day, the potentially contentious participants zeroed in on Cox’s injury. A mound of speed bump jokes generated two days of good-natured humor. “The guys were on their best behavior, and we had a productive summit.”

**Chaotic resolve:** “Teams are unified by principles and values (including their mutual concern for an injured executive coach),” says Cox. “When we’re united in our purpose, we’ll stop at nothing to get the problem solved. What we can do together more than overcomes our eccentricities.”

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