

Rose Consulting Group, Inc.

Client Newsletter

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Things never go right – but that doesn't mean they can't go well enough.

It's all in how you look at it and how you plan for it.

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW AT TIMES IT SEEMS EVERYTHING GOES WRONG IN LIFE AND ESPECIALLY AT WORK?

Your football team is ahead and then loses in the last two minutes (our home office is in Dallas). The heavyweight champ gets KO'd by some palooka with a haymaker. No one invited Mom to Thanksgiving.

And here's the conundrum: that team that lost against all odds is composed of the top 1/10th of 1% of highly trained and experienced athletes with the best coaches and intricate planning for every contingency. That champ is twice as fast as the palooka and no one can catch him with a clumsy haymaker. Everyone knows that Mom will be hurt if she is forgotten so everyone is going to invite her. These fiascos just couldn't happen -- but they do.

It happens at work, too. Your executive team couldn't make a decision about what started as a minor personnel matter, a matter that has now disrupted the whole company. That CFO who cost you \$75,000 to find can't seem to write the most basic reports or use Excel. Two of your key Branch Managers need to work together but they won't even speak.

This isn't the first week on the job for your E-team and they have faced much more complicated matters and resolved them. You interviewed five CFOs, all of whom the search firm assured you had the correct credentials and you chose the best – and he's a flake. Your Branch Managers are gray-haired professionals not kids at a sleepover (although they are acting as if they are). Those problems just couldn't happen – but they do. You know this to be true because these kinds of things have happened to you. They happen to everyone, even the best organizations.

OKAY BUT...WHY? REMEMBER YOUR HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE CLASS

THINGS ALMOST ALWAYS GO WRONG

Our firm was interviewed about Katrina and the way it was mishandled (1). We explained that the normal state of affairs is that things are almost always mishandled. There are a lot more ways for things to go wrong than to go right.

What we said applies to Katrina but generalizes further. "Like all scientists, psychologists know that the final state of any system is maximum disorder absent tremendous outside energy and organization...an orderly and reasonable approach to Katrina would have been much like a day without a car wreck in Dallas."

Science 101 (don't worry if you don't remember the word 'entropy' but we promise you heard it years ago) says there are always more ways for things to go wrong than right. If you randomly drop magazines you will probably not drop them face up on the coffee table and if you randomly pull a file it will almost certainly not be the one you wanted. It takes hundreds of correct steps to solve even a simple math problem but it takes only one careless mistake to get it wrong.

Problems tend to be recurrent and usually predictable

We tend to see problems as crises that are solved and then become things of the past. But most 'sudden crises' were, in fact, a long time in the making and they will recur.

There was an article in National Geographic that described Katrina – a year before it happened.

If you look back on the 'didn't see that one coming!' events in your life – you *could* have seen them coming if you had paid attention. Right?

It's a basic human defense mechanism. We like to assume that no one could have predicted this problem and that bad things just go away.

CHEER UP – WE DIDN'T SAY 'THINGS ALWAYS GO WRONG'

Remember the qualification— 'Unless you have outside energy and organization.'

Of course you can put the magazines face up in the correct order. But it takes effort and thought. Of course you can get math problems correct. You just have to recheck your work. You'll still miss some problems but you'll get a lot more right than wrong.

And even Katrina was not totally mishandled. We volunteered at a large shelter the weekend after. With The Red Cross and The City of Dallas coordinating donations, within hours every one of the evacuees had a bed, medication, television, activities for the children, as much restaurant-quality food as they could eat, and enough police per square foot to make it the safest place in the Metroplex.

It was good and thorough planning, not an accident, that led the City of Dallas and The Red Cross to act seamlessly and be a model for everyone.

IF YOU APPLY THE LESSONS OF KATRINA TO WORK YOU CAN AVOID SOME PROBLEMS

LET'S LOOK AT TEAMWORK

Crises involving teamwork will occur – and most of the time the signals were there in advance.

Bill and Mary started grating on each other **eight** months ago and met with their boss to help them work it out. **Six** months ago they asked the CEO to put them on separate teams. Four months ago HR heard complaints that they were gossiping about each other. **Two** months ago Mary did not invite Bill to a meeting. **One** month ago the other five VPs noticed that they weren't speaking to each other. Last week they had a tiff in front of a major client who then fired the whole firm. Now a lot of people are shaking their heads saying 'how could that have happened with two of our sharpest people?' A crisis for sure – and a lot of people should have seen it coming.

Don't expect teamwork – it takes work to build it every day

It's fine to handle crises after they occur and that will invariably happen. But wouldn't it be nice to have some proactive 'levees?' Mission statements, declarations of core values, training in communication and constructive conflict training in groups and one on one, policies on attitudes toward risk, accountability, playing for team goals – look at the 'couldn't happen' snafus that even your own great E-team has made: we'll bet some of the elements we described weren't there -- right?

We constantly advise and help our clients to anticipate crises and plan for them before they occur. Even better we help them build their teams on and individual and group basis so a lot of crises never come up. Sometimes crisis will occur, but with good planning and a good response, they don't have to become hurricane strength.

(1) November 2005 Psychological Society Monitor, Hebert

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