

Carpe Diem

By Adrian Cruz

Seize the day. Being in the right place at the right time is not enough...you have to see the big picture and recognize your “bullhorn moment” in order to effectively deal with crisis. G.W. Bush saw it on 9/11, but missed it with Hurricane Katrina. If you are an airline pilot, you better get it right the first time you have engine failure, or risk disaster. That is why pilots train hundreds of hours in simulators - they learn to be cool under pressure. It is imperative they make the right decisions in the right state of mind, sequence and order. Leaders must be heard and appear to be in control. Only then can they voice confidence to potentially panicking passengers and take the proper steps to avert disaster.

If you are platoon leader in a combat zone, you take charge the moment bullets start buzzing around you and mortars are raining down on your team. There is no time to hesitate or you lose control. It is sometimes a matter of seconds; your first reaction is crucial. Your men will draw courage from your demeanor and confidence. You are either born with leadership skills or you have trained until you seem to have been born with it. You must master the art of crisis management if you want to lead your squad, platoon, company or community out of harms way. Yes, it’s an art; it’s circumstantial and comes in different forms. There is no set formula or manuals worth the paper they are printed on - just sheer presence of mind in the midst of chaos. Someone rises above the confusion and starts making sense. Orders are given, shouted, cajoled - no one must doubt your authority. The right resources, people and materials, are soon brought in to tackle the problem. Others will eagerly follow, panic is soon averted, and there is a chance to come out of the mess alive.

Anyone who has been in combat knows the adrenaline rush mixed with feelings of anger, fear, and helpless mortality. Anyone in charge during combat must learn not to show those feelings if he/she is to be an effective leader. More often than not, the guy that looks like Woody Allen, rather than the one that looks like Rambo, turns out to be the real hero when the chips are down. You just don’t know unless you have trained together and tested the team’s effectiveness through simulation exercises. Only then can you be certain of each of your team members’ skills, capabilities, expertise, attitude, style, resourcefulness, demeanor and commitment. When the bullets are flying or the levee breaks, its too late...you have to go with what you have and face the consequences.

About the Author

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