

Facing Fear in Uncertain Situations

Featuring Chris Voss with Host Danielle Strickland

We're on a continuum of change management in crisis. There are some leaders on one side of the spectrum excited about the opportunity for creativity, and on the other end, there are leaders who are suffering and struggling. You are somewhere on that continuum. We're re-thinking how the world works, and what is considered normal. We're thinking about how to go from here to there every day. There are so many things that need to be negotiated in our new way of living. Your leadership matters now more than ever. And that's why the conversation with FBI hostage negotiator, Chris Voss, on May 5th during our GLSnext Event Series is so important.

The season we're in feels like Groundhog Day. It's the same day over and over. But like in the movie Groundhog Day, the main character had to get a little better every day. But there were also things in the movie that couldn't change. We can apply the ideas from this movie to what we're going through now.

Let's talk about how we can use hostage negotiation skills to cope and navigate in uncertainty, and also lead people when you're not in charge. How do you lead when you're not in charge? You shift to emotional intelligence. People appreciate it, especially in times of crisis. Emotional intelligence is a key theme.

What to do as a hostage negotiator:

- The first thing I recommend as a hostage negotiator is not to listen to the media.
- The second thing is to use a late-night FM DJ voice. The sound of my voice can help you calm down. What happens? It hits the mirror neurons in your brain.
 - And then smile when you use the late-night FM DJ voice. It will help people feel safe and protected in the moment.
- Next, I want you to be scared. I want you to be embarrassed. I want you to be horrified... then you'll say, "What, are you nuts?" But if I say that to you, I can help snap you back into a rational mindset.
- You can't tell people there is no elephant in the room. They will say, "What are you smoking? There is an elephant right there!" But when you tell them, they say, "yea, alright." That's how we deal with people using emotional intelligence.
- The quickest way to calm fears is to call them out. This is how to soothe people.

Leading people in high-stress situations:

- We want people to feel like we're with them, but the difference between telling them you're with them, and them feeling like you're with them are two different things.
- If you're about to be trampled by an elephant, and I say, "After he's done with you, he'll trample me too." They don't care. People worry about their survival first.
 - If somebody is in quicksand, it doesn't do them any good to get in the quicksand with them.
 - People will help you when they stabilize themselves, but they're not going to help you when they are not stabilized.
 - Saying "we're in this together" is well intentioned, but it doesn't help the people on the other end.
 - When someone is scared, don't say you're scared too. Say, "I know you're scared."

Label what you notice, but not under high-stress:

- Labels like: "you seem", "you sound", and "you look" can be helpful to say in low stress situations.
 - I might say, "It seems like it's been a tough day" and someone feels a weight off their shoulders.
- But if I say, "it seems like" under high-stress periods of time, it doesn't work.
 - People want to know you know.
 - Under high-stress, say "I know."
 - When I walk into situations with people under a lot of stress, I say, "I know you're scared, I know you're angry..."
 - Don't say, "it seems like..." in high-stress situations.

Everyone is scared and underneath that they're angry. How do you work with people who are scared and angry?

- Recognizing fear and anger is the fastest way to deal with it.
- When you're leading people in high-stress, you have to say **you know** they're scared and angry.
- About 1 in 13 people are not going to be on your side. The other 12 will work with you. 90% of people will work with you because they want to be with you on the other side.
 - Tell people you know that they are worried about their survival.
 - Tell people you know they don't have a lot of faith in you because they are worried about their own survival.
 - Don't use the word "But"! If the word "but" is getting ready to crawl off your lips, it's a good time to be quiet.

- Call out the negatives and the fears.
 - It's not emotions that are bad for us, it's negative emotions that are bad for us.
 - If you give a speech when you're angry, it'll be the greatest speech you'll ever regret.
 - Anger underlies fear. Fear always triggers anger. But when we're angry, we feel more certain we are right, and we make poor decisions. You're dumber when you're angry.
 - Fearlessly call out fears. If you sense someone is angry, step up the level of your game from saying, "it seems like you're angry", to "I know you're angry".

Take the word trust away and put in the word predictability.

- Make your world more predictable in tiny little ways.
- The people you're communicating with don't always know when you're going to have good news, but they shouldn't wonder when you are going to communicate with them.
- You don't know when you are going to have good news or bad news.
- Communicate with people when you have good news AND bad news.
- When you don't communicate, the people you lead will be left in uncertainty.
- Don't let people wonder when you're going to communicate with them.
- Be fearless about having nothing to say.

The power of saying, "I know."

- When you ask somebody, who is under a lot of stress, how they are doing, they will think you don't know what is going on.
 - They will think you are stupid or insensitive, because you are either too dumb to know, or you don't care.
 - Saying, "how are you?" is well intentioned, and you are well concerned, but under stress, the message on the other end, is that they wonder if you know what's going on.
- Tell people you know what they are going through. And then they will **feel** like you're in this together. They need to **feel** like you are in it with them.

Negotiation is not about being hard-nosed. Negotiation is about collaboration.

- At least 70% of people want to collaborate, and if you give them a chance, you can collaborate.
- Go at it by realizing you're on the same side. It's about the situation, not the person on the other side of the table.
- The right step is to make an emotional connection, boil the problem down, and challenge the other side to act.

How do you move from negotiation being a rational decision to an emotional connection?

- When I wanted to be a hostage negotiator, the first thing they wanted me to do was volunteer on a suicide hotline.
 - The first thing I learned is that the right first step to getting things done is making an emotional connection.
 - The first part of the process had nothing to do with rational thought at all.
 - The best way to a rational decision is an emotional connection.
- Everyone is in survival mode in a crisis.
- Survival mode is 75% negative. Our brain amplifies negative thoughts.
- It's a hack to deactivate negative thoughts and open up rational thought through emotional connection

Active listening is key.

- In active listening, a lot of people think it's just not talking. But that's not true.
 - You have to sense what people are thinking and feeling. Put all five senses on them.
 - You've heard—seek first to understand and then be understood... Take it further: seek first to demonstrate understanding of what you're hearing.
 - Ask yourself what you're hearing in someone's tone of voice.
 - If you want to get your point across, you have to show the other side that you understand first.
 - When do you know? They will say, "That's right."

How do you negotiate in the virtual world?

- All the information you pick up from body language is going to go into tone of voice.
 - It's a read of the moment. You can get it if you slow down and ask what you're hearing in someone's tone of voice.
- For about 60% of the population, your primary sense is your vision. For about 30% of the population, it's hearing, and the other 10% is taste, touch and smell.
 - If you're in the 60% and you go to the phone, or you can't see them, you suddenly feel blind.
 - It feels like writing with your left hand when you normally write with your right hand.
 - How do you learn to write with your left hand? You do it, but you take your time.
 - Slow deliberate practice will leave you astonished at what your brain can pick up.

How do I negotiate in new territory?

- Call out fears.
- People want to work with people who are smart enough to get through this.
- There are mindset shifts you can implement.
 - Call people and say you know the situation is bad.
 - Articulate each fear they have.
 - Don't say "but"
 - Wait for them to answer.
 - If someone is prepared to listen, they will say, "Ok, what is it?"
 - Then ask 'how' questions. Ask thought-shaping questions.
 - Say, "how do we work through this?"

The problem with "How are you today?"

- People have been hit with 50 other people who've also asked this too.
 - They're conditioned to think you don't actually care.
 - People have enough bad experience with the question.
- Instead, of saying, "How are you today?"
 - Do a cold read on the situation.
 - Take an emotionally educated shot in the dark. They will appreciate your instincts.
 - Put a label out there, and let people react to it.
 - Do some small stakes practice every day.
 - Whoever you lay eyes on first thing in the morning, make an observation and you'll be delighted at how quickly you can do a cold read on the situation. People will appreciate that you really saw them.

When a person repeats the same dysfunctional behavior, how do we address it?

People repeat the same dysfunctional behavior because it's a loop they know. The fear of the unknown drives us into a survival mechanism, even when it's not helping us.

How do you deal with it?

- If people are repeating negative coping mechanisms, it will be hard to get them out of it. But asking "how" questions help people get out of that cycle.
- Be curious.
- Don't let there be accusation in your tone of voice.
- Help people think about what you want them to think about.

How do you keep your cool when you expect people to react in an unpredictable way?

- Be genuinely curious. You can't lose your cool while you are genuinely curious.
- In a positive frame of mind, you are 30% smarter.
 - Curiosity is one of those frames of mind.
 - The other frame of mind is gratitude. Gratitude is, in fact, a hack in negotiation.
 - It's curiosity or gratitude that will get you into a positive frame of mind. With these two hacks, you'll be able to handle anything that comes your way.