

# 7 Ways Leaders Maintain Their Composure in Difficult Times



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## Leadership Strategy

*I help organizations build high-performance leaders, teams and cultures focused on inclusion and the power of individuality. Leadership in the Age of Personalization.*



Leaders need to show more composure than ever before in the workplace. With the [change management requirements](#), increased marketplace demands and intensifying competitive factors that surround us, leaders must have greater poise, agility and patience to minimize the impact of uncertainty. How leaders respond to these and other growing pressures is an indicator of their leadership preparedness, maturity and acumen.

The composure of a leader is reflected in their attitude, body language and [overall presence](#). In today's evolving business environment, it is clear that leadership is not only about elevating the performance, aptitude and development of people – but more so about the ability to make people feel safe and secure. [Employees have grown tired of working in survival mode](#) and thus want to be part of a workplace culture where they can get back to doing their best work without the fear of losing their jobs.

I worked with a colleague that lacked composure and was always in a panic. Though he had tremendous credentials, he lacked the ability to remain calm and thus often made his employees feel uneasy. His leadership role was just too big for what he was capable of handling. He was often too dramatic and the smallest of [problems launched him into crisis management mode](#). Needless to say, his wasn't an effective leadership that could deal with real crisis and change. Because he was unable to reinvent himself and adapt to the unexpected, his tenure was short-lived.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century leader sees adversity [through the lens of opportunity](#). Rather than panic, a leader with composure takes a step back and [begins to connect the dots of opportunity](#) within adverse circumstances. These types of leaders quickly detect the

causes of adversity and solve for them immediately. They then enable the opportunities previously unseen that could have avoided the adversity to begin with. ***Many times crisis results when composure is missing.***

*The next time a problem arises, ask yourself if you or your leader could have shown a greater sense of composure and avoided the problem from surfacing.*

When leading – especially during times of uncertainty and adversity, crisis and change – you must avoid showing any signs of leadership immaturity or lack of preparedness that will make your employees feel unsafe and insecure. Here are seven ways to maintain leadership composure during the most pressure-packed moments:

Today In: Leadership

### **1. Don't Allow Your Emotions to Get in the Way**

Seasoned leaders know not to wear their emotions on their sleeves. They don't yell or get overly animated when times get tough. These types of leaders have such emotional self-control that even their body language does not give them away.

When you allow your emotions to get in the way, employees interpret this as a sign you are not being objective enough and too passionate about the situation at hand. Strong-willed leaders can maintain their composure and still express concern and care, but not to the point that their emotions become a distraction – or that they can't responsibly handle the issues at hand.

### **2. Don't Take Things Personally**

Leaders shouldn't take things personally when things don't go their way. Business decisions and circumstances don't always play out logically because office politics and other dynamics factor into the process. As a leader, remain calm and don't get defensive or think that you always must justify your thinking and actions.

When you begin to take things personally, it's difficult to maintain your composure and make those around you believe that you have things under control. In fact, when leaders take issues too close to heart, they allow the noise and politics around them to suffocate their thinking and decision-making capabilities.

### **3. Keep a Positive Mental Attitude**

Employees are always watching their leader's actions, behavior, relationships and overall demeanor. During the most difficult of times, leaders must maintain a positive mental attitude and **manage a narrative that keeps their employees inspired and hopeful**. This is where your leadership experience and resolve can really shine – by staying strong, smiling often and authentically exhibiting a sense of compassion.

Leaders set the tone for the organization they serve. A positive attitude can neutralize chaos and allow a leader to course correct through any negativity. Employees feed off the attitude of these leaders during times of uncertainty. Keep a positive mental attitude and never stop moving forward. Stay focused on building positive momentum for the betterment of the healthier whole

#### **4. Remain Fearless**

When leaders project confidence, they instill it in others. During uncertain times, leaders must remain fearless and project a cool persona that communicates composure to those they lead.

I've been through ups and downs in my career and have learned that when you begin to fear adverse circumstances, you not only put yourself in a position of vulnerability, but it becomes extremely difficult to act rationally and objectively. When you panic, you mentally freeze and your mind loses focus.

When you begin to get fearful, ask yourself: What is the worst possible thing that can happen? If you are objective about it and have the will and confidence to face it, you will eventually realize that the situation is manageable and can be resolved. Faced with adversity several times over, your fears will eventually vanish and **uncertainty will become your best friend**.

#### **5. Respond Decisively**

Leaders who maintain their composure will never show any signs of doubt. They speak with conviction, confidence and authority – whether they know the answer or not! With their delivery alone, they give their employees a sense that everything is under control.

Recently, **Mack Brown**, the former coach of the **University of Texas(UT)** football team, was put under a lot of pressure to resign as a result of his team underperforming in 2013. Though **the University handled his forced resignation poorly** – considering Mr. Brown had coached the team successfully for the past 16 years – **his decisiveness the day he announced his resignation** made you feel that his transition out of the job was a positive thing for the university. Human nature will tell you that he must have been hurting inside, but his decisiveness and presence of mind made those that were watching him speak believe that the future looked bright for UT football.

#### **6. Take Accountability**

Leaders are most composed during times of crisis and change when they are fully committed to resolving the issue at hand. When you are accountable, this means that you have made the decision to assume responsibility and take **the required steps to problem solve** before the situation gets out of hand.

When leaders assume accountability, they begin to neutralize the problem and place the environment from which it sprung on pause – much like **New Jersey Governor Chris Christie** did when he announced that he did not have any prior knowledge of the decision his aides made to close down access lanes to the George Washington Bridge. Though there may be legal woes to come, the manner in which he handled the initial news conference (temporarily) neutralized the crisis – as he answered all of the reporters' questions and took full responsibility and accountability to punish the perpetrators and keep something like this from happening again.

#### **7. Act Like You Have Been There Before**

Great leaders know that one of the most effective ways to maintain composure during difficult times is to act like you have been there before. Leaders that act to show they have been through the problem solving process numerous times before are those with strong executive presence who approach the matter at hand with a sense of elegance and grace. **They are patient**, they **are active listeners**, and they will genuinely take a compassionate approach to ease the hardships that anyone else is experiencing.

Just ask any technical support representative. When you are on the phone with them, their job is to make you feel that even your most difficult challenges can be easily resolved. They are there to calm you down and give you hope that your problem will soon be solved. Pay attention to their demeanor and how they are masters at soothing your frustrations. They always act to show that they have been there before; their composure puts your mind at ease.

It's easy to lose composure during times of crisis and change if you let concern turn into worry and worry turn into fear. By maintaining composure, the best leaders remain calm, cool and in control – enabling them to step back, critically evaluate the cards that they have been dealt and face problems head-on. A show of composure also puts those you lead at ease and creates a safe and secure workplace culture where no one need panic in the face of adversity.

As the saying goes, “Keep Calm and Carry On!”