

VAN Radar 2019

Perspective session summary

Session: How to lead under fire

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When our teams and clients are going through crisis situations, we need to be aware of how people typically respond to acute stress.

Although our perception and reactions to stress will vary, depending on our personal background and the situation at hand, there are common elements. Stressful situations will often be accompanied by: strong emotion, acute anxiety, stress, fear, shame, anger and aggression.

Understanding the physiology around stress is valuable. The optimum decision-making zone is when a heart rate is between 90-120 beats per minute. This indicates a heightened sense of awareness, but means we're making decisions before the fight or flight reaction has engaged. Once above this rate, some cognitive processing collapses and, typically, decision-making reverts to natural instinct or to what is familiar.

Where possible, prepare and plan meticulously

- **Mission analysis** – Examine the overall organisational goal and how the stressful task fits within the mission
- **Course of action development** – Examine different ways to break down the problem and try to solve it sequentially
- **Course of action analysis** – Examine how a solution will play out on the ground
- **Decision and execution** – With the above preparation, this will be highly monitored and tailored.

Make your team as resilient as possible

- **Model** – Be conscious of your presence. Control your facial expressions, your voice (tone and pitch) and your breath.
- **Practice** – Stress response behaviour needs to be instinctive. A team practiced in its roles and familiar with pressure is strong. Stress test them. Incremental resilience is the way to get behavioural change and better responses to stress.
- **Build familiarity** – Good leaders understand their team members' thresholds for what they can achieve and their optimum capacity.
- **Communicate** – People need to know the intent and purpose, method and end result required. Enunciate these clearly and confirm team members' understanding.
- **Involve** – Supervise carefully, but not to the detriment of initiative. Give the team freedom to come up with solutions and to achieve the required result. Remember: the stressful situation is happening to **everyone**.
- **Learn** – After every single decision, when the opportunity arises, build a nurturing environment to allow the team to learn from the process, the outcomes and what is needed to get a better outcome next time.
- **Understand** what is in your control – and what is not.
- **Embed** yourself in the team and be respectful of the structure before making changes.