



Crisis Averted – How Local Officials Create Calm During Emergencies

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**“There cannot be a crisis next week.
My schedule is already full.”**

- Henry Kissinger



Hillside above Route 28 in Harmar deemed 'stable' day after landslide

U.S./WORLD

National Guard called out after police shoot Black man

U.S./WORLD

Apocalyptic-looking sky hovers over California, Oregon amid uncontrolled wildfires

COVID-19 Update: Pa. reports 1,161 new cases, 19 more deaths

Allegheny County has 4 new deaths, 73 more cases

New steps being taken to fix long-standing Route 51 flooding problem

Gas Explosion Injures One At North Fayette Assisted Living Facility



Today's Presentation...

Is NOT about:

- ◆ Emergency management (NIMS)
- ◆ How to fund recovery efforts
- ◆ Formal emergency communication

IS about:

- ◆ Creating calm and building trust
- ◆ Exhibiting leadership under difficult circumstances
- ◆ Understanding how to “solve” for the relationship between government and constituent

“

Why should you take my word on any of this?



Consulting with
Local Governments

Serving My
Community Directly



Our goals for today:

- ◆ What type of relationship should we build in crisis?
- ◆ What does a trust-based relationship look like?
- ◆ Crisis Case Study
- ◆ Questions/Answers





*What kind of relationship
should we build during a crisis?*

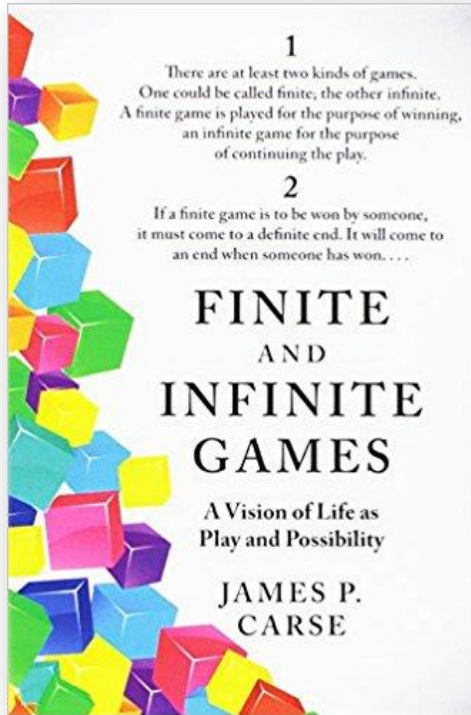


Solving for a Situation VS Solving for a Relationship





Finite and Infinite Relationships



**“A finite game is played for the
purpose of winning,
an infinite game for the purpose
of continuing play.”**



The Finite and Infinite in Government

Finite “Games” We Play:

- ◆ Constituent Complaint
- ◆ Policy Opposition
- ◆ Neighbor Dispute
- ◆ Singular Code Enforcement

Infinite “Games” We Play:

- ◆ Tax Increases/Decreases
- ◆ Community Investments
- ◆ Labor Agreements
- ◆ Delivery of Services Generally
- ◆ Economic Development
- ◆ **Public Safety & Crisis Management**



Takeaways

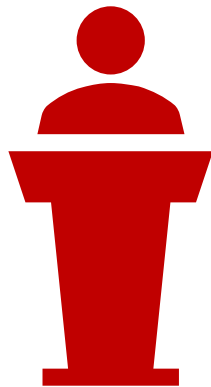
Crises Require an “Infinite” Approach to Governance

- ◆ Solve for the affected and their relationship with government IN ADDITION TO solving the logistics of the crisis.
- ◆ Even finite moments in government can have infinite impacts if compounded over time.
- ◆ The only “normal” we can bank on is that another crisis will happen, so embrace the infinite approach now.



*How do we build trust with
constituents in crisis?**

1



Present the Situation Honestly

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Straight shooting with credibility, empathy.

- Where We Fall Short: The unknown can grant us an excuse to defer.
We confuse concern, anger for blame.
- Solutions: “Here’s what we know.”
“Here’s what we don’t know.”
“Here’s what we are doing to learn more.”
- Examples: House fire



2



Get on the Constituent's Level

Get on Your Constituent's Level

Demonstrate mutuality and an extension of partnership.

- Where We Fall Short: The power dynamic is established, but moldable
Tendency to respond with facts over empathy
- Solutions: “We” statements in place of “you” statements
Exhibit a “listen-first” posture
“I would be upset as well if it were me.”
- Examples: Flooded properties from a heavy rain



3



Prove to Be a Capable, Reputable Partner

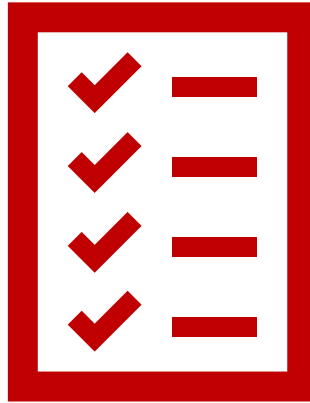
Prove to be a Capable, Reputable Partner

Create a trusted, communicated process towards resolution.

- Where We Fall Short: We assume “being there” is enough.
A lack of updates doesn't bother us the same way.
Honoring stated commitments is our job.
- Solutions: Over-communicate throughout the recovery.
Hire/refer vendors who conduct themselves well in crisis
Create expectations with the public
- Example: Bank robbery



4



Deliver the Goods, Prepare for Next Time

Deliver the Goods, Prepare for Next Time

Be known for completing projects as expected, creating a vision.

- Where We Fall Short: Not all crises are random, require planning
Realizing that the next “crisis” is on the way
“Complete the circle” to the public
- Solutions: Talk about what happened in an accessible way.
Demonstrate a shift in priority/care.
Check in on the affected some interval out.
- Examples: Landslide





Takeaways

Crisis Mitigation is equally relational as it is tactical.

- ◆ The public expects more than pure mitigation, even if they don't explicitly ask for it (as infinite games require).
- ◆ Prioritizing the relationships with constituents in crisis is tactical, purposeful work. Language, empathy, availability matter.
- ◆ The job isn't "over" when the incident ends.
- ◆ Investments of energy and empathy in crisis can yield significant gains in trust longitudinally. There is a real bias towards remembering how you acted in crisis.



*Case Study:
Landslide Mitigation*



The Facts

After a season of heavy rains, a landslide occurs that damages the backyards, driveways and sewer infrastructure supporting 5 homes.

- ◆ No injuries, major property damage above and below the slide.
- ◆ Emergency crews determined no immediate risk, engineering on-site.
- ◆ Sanitary smells and pooling apparent, potential for additional slide.
- ◆ History of undermining within the neighborhood in question.



Infinite-Oriented Responses

- ◆ Present Situation Honestly
 - ◆ Overview of geo-technical work, limitations on uses of property
 - ◆ Monitor for sanitary system leaks, back-ups
 - ◆ Contact insurers immediately; municipality will as well
 - ◆ Expect surveyors and staff periodically
- ◆ Get on Constituent's Level
 - ◆ Ask how involved they would like us to be with updates, intros
 - ◆ Offer support where able, vendors who may be able to help
 - ◆ Apprise them of what to expect (legal, equipment, testing)



Infinite-Oriented Responses

- ◆ Be a Capable Partner
 - ◆ Introduce key staff and site personnel to home owners
 - ◆ Commit to daily updates for a time, weekly updates when appropriate
 - ◆ Share municipal measures and expenses for mutuality
 - ◆ Ask mitigation crew to be mindful of disruptions to homeowners
- ◆ Deliver the Goods
 - ◆ Make budgetary commitments for future landslide events
 - ◆ Do a better-than-expected job of clean-up (finishing work)
 - ◆ Schedule a check-in with property owners months out
 - ◆ Update the public accordingly

Questions or Comments?



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