



Triage

-Mark Haeussler, CEO



Triage is a French term, meaning “to break into three pieces.” The term dates back to the battlefield, and now is used in emergency medicine. It is a way to manage overwhelming and time-sensitive issues to making quick evaluations as to the right resources at the right time. Modern medicine uses 3, 4, and even 5 levels of triage, but we’ll follow a 3-level approach and relate it to an organization here; as you read through this, consider where certain areas of the organization are at present, and where your attention *needs* to be:

1. **Immediate and Life Threatening:** These are conditions that are an immediate threat to survival and require quick intervention. These have included physical distancing, shifting to remote work to the extent possible, closing store fronts and school campuses, and so on. Some of these came as a result of government mandates, and some of these were driven by organizations. These actions often are the easiest to identify as they are obvious and, to a certain extent, unifying; people appreciate having a focus and that something is being done. These are items that have attention in the first 30-45 days.
2. **Urgent:** These fall just below the immediate life-threat to the organization, but simply could not be addressed in the first few weeks of the outbreak; these can include an assessment of resources (financial, inventory, intellectual, and so forth), morale and stamina of the staff, assessment of systems, and next-level risks. While camaraderie may have been strong during the life-threatening stage with the immediacy of action, uncertainty or the awakening of new and longer-term issues take their toll on morale. These are items that need attention in days 45 to 90.
3. **Non-Urgent:** In response to the spread of the virus, it can be easy to see everything as either immediate or urgent, but this is unrealistic. Leaders will need to park some issues further down the activity list out of necessity and address them in days 90-120 and on. An emergency threat to an enterprise will generate a host of longer-term issues. Whatever business plan was in place for 2020 will need to be reassessed as some consumer behavior and attitudes will change forever. As the original 90 days of the shock pass, a sense of magnanimity of all parties may wane as a function of fatigue and uncertainty. There may be a growing realization that some things may never return to normal.

As the daily meetings that focused on the immediate tactical needs become less important, the leader needs to shift their focus on the strategy shifts facing the organization, including financial survivability. Teams likely came together and worked in greater unison to fight the threat; this momentum will carry itself to a point; over time, unwanted but real socio-emotional issues may begin to present. Beyond frustration and uncertainty, there ultimately be a sense of loss, on many levels, to face. There is the potential of leadership fatigue stemming from contemplating weighty issues and stepping into significant decisions. Be kind to yourself, remain open to others, and attend to self-care. Recognize where sensations end and moods begin; being tired and having events change daily can lead to resignation, or, a leader can be tired and commit to something more useful such as a mood of determination and a commitment to teamwork.

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