

From the Introduction to Bruce T. Blythe's

Blindsided:

A Manager's guide to Catastrophic Incidents in the Workplace

Terrorism. Earthquakes. Hostage situations. As the CEO of Crisis Management International, an Atlanta-based crisis consulting firm with clients around the world, I have dealt with countless earth-shattering events. The impossible-to-imagine tragedies that are the stuff of "Breaking News" fill my average workday.

I have witnessed the life-changing events that rock our world.

To save kidnap and ransom hostages, I have trekked deep into the jungle of Ecuador.

I was at a school bus crash in Texas that resulted in the tragic loss of 23 young children.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, my firm provided relief to 28 companies simultaneously.

And then, on July 29, 1999, it was our turn. A crazed gunman was on the loose in the office complex that is home to our company, Crisis Management International (CMI). As I walked to our front door to assure it was locked, I was informed by my office manager that our vice president of operations, a trusted and loyal employee of sixteen years, had just left for the bank through the very corridor where the gunman reportedly was on the loose.

I was overcome with an immediate need to rush out to assist. Yet my years of crisis experience training told me this was a time to put my veteran crisis management team and our communications capabilities into action.

The shooter, we would come to learn, was Mark Barton, a disgruntled day-trader in Atlanta's financial district. By day's end he would kill nine people and injure another dozen. My immediate concern was for our vice president. The question I presented to our staff was, "*Now what do we do?*"

I reached for the crisis manual, the same one that has evolved through use with countless CMI clients over the years. It was our turn to take our own medicine. The Checklist for Immediate Actions reminded us to address ongoing danger, communications with those impacted, notifications, family concerns and escalation potential.

Before long, we were told erroneously that the gunman was holed up in an office *in our building* with hostages. We were instructed to stay away from windows and hallways. Through the plate glass front window, I could see police officers running with guns drawn. Something big was going down and this time our role was potential target, not crisis management consultants. Eerily, our staff watched on television as our building appeared on the screen.

Finally, we received the phone call we had been waiting for, but dreading. It was good news – our vice president was unhurt! In fact, she had been the second person on the scene and had been pressed into service to tend to frightened employees in other offices. Two hours later, police officers finally escorted us from the building. Our staff members recoiled as we were led past the nearby office whose glass walls revealed a sickening saga of death and destruction.

After years of helping others cope with traumatic incidents, this experience gave me and my colleagues at CMI a new perspective on experiencing crisis. We were near the shooting and identified closely with the incident. The impact on all of us was considerable.

Although begun before the attacks of September 11, 2001, this book was completed with recognition that the rules have changed. A sense of safety and security once commonplace among employees and employers has been severely compromised. The possibilities for crisis in the workplace are more ominous and far more real.

The events of September 11, 2001 and previous catastrophes succeeded in heightening the awareness of business leaders that anything, and everything, is now possible. They see – as they have never seen before – that *strong, proactive measures are required to protect their workers and, in turn, their businesses and reputations.*

My goal in writing *Blindsided* was to bring order and purpose to the potentially overwhelming task of preparing for crisis. I want to help reduce your company's exposure to chaos and threat, by teaching you to analyze foreseeable risks and create a master plan for crisis response. These are lessons that until recently may have seemed merely interesting. Now they have become essential.

I bring my years of experience to these pages: middle-of-the-night calls from frantic executives; heart-rending visits to hospitals; and the palpable desolation as colleagues gather around a television, learning that the hijacking victim on the screen is one of their own.

The first half of this book covers field-tested approaches for responding to critical incidents *during the heat of battle.* The second half

offers a structured methodology for preparing your organization for crisis, in advance. It is intended to be used at a slower pace, as you plan and enhance your crisis preparedness over time.

I placed the section on response before that on preparedness to give you a full understanding of what you will encounter in a real catastrophe, before you start to develop a plan. To prepare adequately for crisis, you need to “see” what you are up against.

Each chapter is followed by a Quick Use Guide, a tool for instant reference during a crisis or any time. The final chapter provides additional checklists, guidelines and management considerations for a range of specific crises, from natural disasters and workplace murders, to corporate kidnappings and air crashes.

My message offers unparalleled relevance to today’s workplace. But these are not newly minted, untried concepts. Rather, these are lessons I have learned and shared with business leaders around the world for two decades.

CMI’s ideas and strategies have been put to use by leading corporations that range from medium sized companies to a Who’s-Who of the Fortune 500. These methods have helped forward-thinking managers respond to those terrible events that no one wants to anticipate – but that no one can afford any longer to pretend will not occur.

I saw them work in the rubble of the September 11 attacks. Amid chaos, death and unspeakable destruction, well-trained, prepared companies were able to quickly react, assessing the needs of their people and putting into place the plans they never wanted to need. And they will work for you.

I have witnessed the devastation that can result when unprepared managers are left to respond through improvisation. Conversely, I have seen the overwhelmingly centered, positive results when employers reach out with appropriate communications and actions to manage not only the physical, but the emotional after effects of a crisis.

Yesterday’s crisis management plan does not accommodate the possibilities of tomorrow. What’s needed by businesses now is a proven method to assure that not only your facilities are rebuilt, but that the spirit, cohesion and productivity of your employees are, too.

It is my hope that the ideas and instruction contained in these pages will be thoroughly understood and practiced – and hopefully never put to the real test. But if you follow them and crisis does strike, you will be ready. You may feel concerned and unsure in some ways, but *you will not be blindsided*. It is my pleasure to assist you as you strive to achieve the calm assurance of preparedness.

Blindsided: A Manager's Guide to Catastrophic Incidents in the Workplace

By Bruce T. Blythe

On September 11, 2001, we all learned a terrible lesson about our vulnerability in the workplace. Every manager in America was confronted with an awful new responsibility. We must prepare our companies for the unthinkable, so that we will be ready when catastrophe strikes.

But how do you plan for the unimaginable? And what should you do if disaster strikes?

When faced with this question, hundreds of companies have turned to Bruce Blythe - and with good reason. For more than a decade, Blythe has led companies to recovery, as he has advised managers on disaster preparedness and response.

Drawing on his unique experience, Blythe now offers *BLINDSIDED*, a complete manual for managers on how to prepare themselves and their companies for what he describes as "workplace catastrophes" - natural disasters, kidnappings, aviation and industrial accidents, terrorism and armed attack.

Blythe distills his experience into a step-by-step process that can help any company deal with customers, employees and the media after a crisis.

Here's what *BLINDSIDED* will teach you:

- What to do in the immediate aftermath of a crisis
- How to address the human side of crisis response, recovery and preparedness
- How to quickly reduce your company's vulnerability to disaster
- How to increase the effectiveness of your communications
- How to analyze foreseeable risks and create a master plan for crisis response
- How to manage employee stress in the aftermath of a crisis
- How to accelerate recovery
- The A,E,I,O,U and sometimes Y of crisis preparedness
- How to prepare for future terrorism

Blindsided does more than secure the structure of a business. It shows you how to rebuild the spirit of your employees, so that your business can come back stronger than before.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, Bruce T. Blythe and other members of his firm dispatched to New York and Washington, D.C., to assist more than 200 corporate, military and governmental organizations. In his new book, he offers managers the best of his highly-sought-after expertise – a step-by-step guide to a subject that has intimidated all too many managers.

About the author

As founder and CEO of Crisis Management International, Bruce T. Blythe has helped businesses recover from the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Hurricane Andrew, the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, multiple commercial and corporate air crashes, and numerous workplace shootings. With more than 1,000 clients, CMI maintains the nation's largest network of specially trained crisis consultants, and has operations in Europe, South America, Canada and Australia. Blythe lives in Atlanta with his wife and daughter.

“We chose the services of CMI due to the same structured crisis response protocol found in this book. A large part of truly being able to take care of your people/team, is ensuring your leaders have the training and ability to effectively deal with threats and crises.”

-Chris W. Nelson, Director, Investigations, Target Corporation Assets Protection