

Salon Series on Leadership in Times of Crisis

Carol O'Connell '69, Fran Engoron '70 and
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LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A SERIES OF ESSAYS

Introduction



(Image description: 14 of the first 24 women to enroll at William & Mary in 1918)¹

The entry of women into William & Mary in 1918 was born from two crises: World War I and the Spanish Flu pandemic. The College's very survival was based on replacing the men lost in these two tragedies with a new flow of students, so the College reluctantly admitted women for the first time. And because of the pandemic, after a single day of classes, the women were quarantined from the men which had two positive results: the women bonded among themselves and the men grew increasingly curious about their new classmates. As they say, the rest is history!

This anthology or series of essays addresses key aspects of Leadership in Times of Crisis. Each essay can be read as a stand-alone piece but we also encourage reading all of these short pieces to gain more insight. We have endeavored to provide examples, including outstanding women leaders who have exhibited exemplary leadership. And since W&M has a long tradition of strong women and women leaders, we have chosen to end the series with an essay about the current pandemic crisis and how President Katherine Rowe and her team have demonstrated their leadership skills at this critical time in the College's history. We have also included the early response of President Rowe to the late May and early June social and racial justice crisis.

In our research, we uncovered a few interesting observations specific to women and crisis leadership. The first was a recent discussion by Madeleine Albright on why she believes women are so adept at leading in crisis, based on their life experiences as women. Secretary Albright cites the following: women leaders are very good at multi-tasking, decisiveness, learning and adapting, telling hard truths, and have the relational skills to manage and influence people. We also found significant literature that women are often thrust into crises that men believe are unwinnable - the "glass cliff" - and women more than men are willing to take on these "lost causes" often achieving success but sometimes failing and damaging their careers.

Our essays cover the following topics. Please enjoy and add your own observations about leading in times of crisis and the women you admire for their success in meeting these challenges.

The Role of Leader and Organizational Values and Culture
Leadership and Organizing for Action
The Importance of Communications and Leadership Role Modeling
Innovation, Expertise, Collaboration, and Decisiveness Key to Leadership in a Crisis
The Power of Women Acting Collectively to Catalyze Change
William & Mary in the Current Crises

As a reader, you may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my personal experiences in managing crisis-what would I add to these essays?
- What are the best examples of crisis management I have observed in others?
- If I could give three pieces of advice to others, what would they be?



¹ <https://www.wm.edu/sites/100yearsofwomen/anniversary-story/index.php>

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The Role of Leader and Organizational Values and Culture

Leading during a crisis tests an individual's and an organization's fidelity to core values. We would observe that those leaders who are most effective during a crisis are faithful to a strong personal and professional value system. First, are those values already in place? The strongest leaders come to the table with a robust personal value system that draws clear lines between what is obviously right and wrong, as well as where the grey areas are. Moreover, these leaders are known to lead lives of principled achievement in business and in life. They are better prepared to deal with ambiguity because they can discern what actions are obvious and which require more data, debate and thoughtful decision-making. And, their consistent living of their values gives their stakeholders and teams confidence and trust in their judgment. Organizational values inform both the culture and decision-making under pressure. They guide the leadership team to make good, thoughtful decisions that are consistent with those values and that recognize the impact on each stakeholder.



(Image description: Margaret Thatcher, former Chancellor of William & Mary)¹

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the UK for 11 years (as well as Chancellor of William & Mary). Thatcher, the Iron Lady, was known and respected for her consistent values that included decisiveness during crisis moments, dedication to the sovereignty of the United Kingdom as a great power and a commitment to the liberal world order against Soviet Russia. These values guided her actions in a number of crises including the Falklands War, the Iranian Embassy siege, the Solidarity freedom movement in Poland and collaboration with Ronald Reagan to defeat communism.

The current crisis in social and racial justice calls to mind many

examples of value-based leadership. Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, DC has worked diligently to protect the rights of peaceful protestors in a city with unusually high political tensions. Through negotiation and taking strong values-based symbolic stands, she has affirmed freedom of speech and assembly while taking an appropriately tough stance on violent protest or looting. Mitt Romney was also proudly seen marching with protestors in Washington, affirming his commitment to those same values. And there have been many local police officers who have demonstrated their values by marching or dialoguing with protestors.



(Image description: Tim Ryan, US Chairman and Senior Partner of PwC)²

Another recent example is Tim Ryan, US Chairman and Senior Partner of PwC. Ryan urged other CEOs at the beginning of the pandemic to put their people first, arguing that he and his partners had chosen to do the right thing by PwC's people despite the impact on profitability. And he argued for taking the long view, recognizing that fidelity to that value would ensure success long after the COVID-19 crisis has passed. Ryan's decision was supported by a strong organizational culture of "people first". This view was echoed by many US corporate leaders but not all.



(Image description: Angela Merkel, Prime Minister of Germany)³

Another current example of crisis leadership is Angela Merkel, the Prime Minister of Germany. Ms. Merkel's culture and value system as a scientist encouraged her to seek the facts and then act quickly.

Her background also gave her credibility with the electorate. A recent NY Times article touting her crisis leadership, said "Beyond politics, economics and science lie qualities of character that can't be faked, chiefly compassion, which may be the most important in reassuring a frightened, insecure and stricken population. Ms. Merkel is arguably among the least flashy, charismatic or eloquent of Europe's leaders, but nobody would ever question her decency."



(Image description, Ursula Burns, Former Xerox Chairman and CEO)⁴

Ursula Burns served as chairman and CEO of Xerox from 2009 - 2017. She led a workforce of over 140,000 employees and served more than 160 client companies. Ms. Burns is known as being the first African-American woman to serve as head of a Fortune 500 company. She rose through the technical ranks of Xerox and led the company with a highly authentic and pragmatic personal style grounded in deep values. "Being bold, outspoken and down to earth is typical Burns." When Burns took up the helm of Xerox in early 2009, she undertook the colossal task of turning around a company that was losing its mojo. Having invented many of technologies that we use today, like graphical user interface that were bought by Apple and other tech companies, Xerox had not itself leveraged those technologies to its advantage, Xerox had even lost its dominance in the core copier business. Back in 2001, she had been part of a small group of executives who had saved the company from bankruptcy and pushed for diversification, particularly in business processing services. As the company's CEO, she had the opportunity to implement these ideas at full scale. Ms. Burns championed diversity from the Boardroom to the shop floor and has continued that mission since her retirement from Xerox. And as one of the most successful female engineers in the history of US manufacturing, Burns is determined to change the male engineering culture by promoting the merits of STEM education, particularly for women.

Katherine Graham became President and de facto publisher of The Washington Post in 1963 following her husband's death and followed a long line of her family in the paper's life. She became the first female Fortune 500 CEO in 1972. Ms. Graham clarified her views about freedom and the responsibility of the press vs. government secrecy in a 1988 speech to a packed auditorium at the CIA headquarters. Graham said: "We live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know, and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows." She lived those values especially during the Watergate era and Pentagon Papers investigation, where she backed her editorial staff in publishing highly damaging information to the federal government and its officials. Each of these decisions was not easy and she was guided by her commitment to the values of a free but responsible press.

As a leader, you can ask right now what are my personal values that will enable me to lead in a crisis? Do others recognize I have those values? How can I tangibly demonstrate those values? Are my values and decisions also consistent with the stated and lived values of my organization? How will those values impact my leadership team's decision-making in a crisis?



(Image description: Golda Meir, Former Israeli Prime Minister)⁵

Golda Meir, who served as the Israeli Prime Minister in the mid-1960's, had spent more than 30 years cultivating internal and international collaborative relationships to further the nascent Zionist movement for a Jewish homeland. Her strong value of cooperation vs. conflict caused her to rise quickly in the founding Israeli leadership, becoming the first woman prime minister (and third in the world). Her tactics included shrewd negotiations with both the US and Jordan. But, unfortunately, her time in office ended in tragedy, when Israel was caught off guard by Egypt and Syria's surprise attack on Yom Kippur in 1973. The stress of that war, including potential use of a nuclear weapon, caused Meir to resign from the government.

1 <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2012/the-iron-lady-triumphantly-returns-540.php>

2 <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/about/leadership/tim-ryan.html>

3 <https://www.forbes.com/profile/angela-merkel/#59ff0b4722dd>

4 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ursula-Burns>

5 <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/golda-meir>

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Leadership and Organizing for Action

A leader's ability to organize for action—to suspend hierarchy while recognizing and regrouping talent—is critical to the future of any organization and its members. For a leader, a crisis is both a test and a means of shaping the future. A crisis demands immediate action, widespread effort, and a recognition that success depends on the commitment and action of the larger community. A crisis can clarify, unify, and fundamentally alter the way an organization does business. For leaders in all ventures--government, business, education, nonprofits, and the arts--a crisis forces a re-evaluation of what matters and how best to achieve it.

In an article on reimagining the post-pandemic organization, a team at McKinsey identified purpose, reimagining value for the organization and those it serves, and a culture of ownership as essential to the health and survival of the organization. What will emerge from a crisis such as we face today, they predict, is a flatter organization with greater autonomy for those at the farther edges to make decisions and get things done.

Those who have studied leadership during crisis at the Center for Creative Leadership and the Harvard Business School emphasize that the individual leader's actions affect more than a single organization. Gene Klann at the Center for Creative Leadership writes that leaders "must be prepared to provide leadership not only to those in their organization, but also to those in the greater orbit of their influence." Nancy Koehn at Harvard observes that "real leaders charge individuals to act in service of the broader community. They give people jobs to do."

In these next examples, we look at what we can learn from those who led in past crises.

Surviving a crisis depends on the ability of the leader to direct but not constrain a team. Stanley McChrystal and Chris Fussell, who have successfully led US Special Operations, summarized what 9/11 taught about leadership in a crisis. They advocate visibility, candor, and

giving up more authority than feels natural. Their advice is based on experience. Fifteen years ago they moved from "a centrally located thousands-strong enterprise to a network of small teams spread around the world." They became the military's ultimate remote-work force and champions of digital leadership. In a daily video call, more than 7,000 members of the Joint Special Operations Command met to discuss their efforts. The effectiveness of those leaders, the authors point out, depended not on wisdom or charisma, but on a "willingness to leverage somewhat awkward video and other digital media to connect, listen, learn, and inspire a team, most of whom would never be in the same room with one another."

Leaders establish systems that will work in a crisis and recruit talent to manage them. Nelson Lichtenstein, who wrote *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, about United Auto workers union president Walter Reuther, observed, "It wasn't just that leaders like Franklin Roosevelt or Winston Churchill could inspire millions to sacrifice for a cause greater than themselves. It was that they laid out systematic plans for how to do so. In his biography, which included an account of how US industry mobilized during World War II, Lichtenstein wrote: "Under Roosevelt, the US government built hundreds of factories and then wrote cost-plus contracts so manufacturers like GM could run them and churn out vast armadas of ships and planes almost overnight. Roosevelt recruited executives like GM President William Knudsen to coordinate the mobilization."

Leaders recognize that the ability to successfully mobilize a team or a company is based on compelling need and a unifying vision. Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors, began her career at GM in 1980 checking fender panels and inspecting hoods to pay for college tuition. As CEO in January 2014, she led the company through a product-safety crisis she inherited on her first month on the job, when an ignition switch led to many deaths in earlier years. During her first year as CEO, GM issued over 84 recalls involving over 30 million cars. The recalls led to the creation of

new policies encouraging workers to report problems they encounter. In 2019, the Yale Chief Executive Institute chose Mary Barra to receive the Legend in Leadership Award, noting, "Through toughness, transparency, competence, and putting her A-team talent on this challenge as a top priority, she restored and enhanced public trust."



(Image description: Mary Barra, CEO of GM)¹

Barra has been credited with possessing a "leadership jujitsu," an ability to "tap into forces coming at her and effectively redirect them." At GM, she established a strategic direction putting the customer at the center of everything the company does. A Forbes profile of Mary Barra notes that GM is ranked number 1 on the 2018 Global Report on Gender Equality, one of only two global businesses that have no gender pay gap. In March 2020, Mary Barra wrote, "A gender-equal world is an enabled world—where diversity of thought and experience sparks an innovative and collaborative culture. I look forward to the day when a woman CEO is the norm and not the exception."



(Image description: Condoleezza Rice, First African-American secretary of State)²

Both Condoleezza Rice and Susan E. Rice, scholars, leaders, and Ambassadors, can be said to possess a similar "leadership jujitsu." Condoleezza Rice, who served as the first female national security adviser and the first African-American secretary of state, began a program of "transformational democracy" as secretary of state, highlighting the importance of more difficult posts in Afghanistan and Iraq as key to promoting democracy. Susan Rice, Ambassador to the United Nations, led US engagement efforts for the President, having served in previous administrations as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the

Department of State. Her doctoral dissertation at Oxford University on the transition of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe won an award from Chatham House as the most distinguished in the UK in international relations. She advises, “If you’re excited about something and passionate about it, that’s what you ought to do.”



(Image description: Dorothy Kosinski, Director and CEO of the Phillips Collection)³

Leaders recognize that crisis inevitably involves emotion— both an immediate attempt to deal with unpredictability and chaos and a more sustained effort to find significance in loss and change. Emotion, born of crisis, can fuel discovery, vision, and connection. In 1921, Duncan Phillips, facing his own crisis of loss, established The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, as a memorial to his father who died in 1917 and to his brother who died from the Spanish influenza epidemic in 1918. Dorothy Kosinski, current curator and director at the Museum, writes, “The institution I lead is proof that art has been associated with wellness long before the current focus on this connection.” She notes that Duncan Phillips had made the connection between art, community, and the world, and, in his gift, sought to promote empathy and enhance compassion. He wrote: “Art offers two great gifts of emotion—the emotion of recognition and the emotion of escape. Both emotions take us out of the boundaries of self—At my period of crisis I was prompted to create something which would express my awareness of life’s returning joys and my potential escape to the land of artists’ dreams.” His creation and his escape became America’s first museum of modern art.

What emerges from examples of leading in a crisis is that crisis provokes creation-- whether it be developing a new organizational structure, creating a larger vision that serves a changing community, or reorienting an organization to broader values. Our response to crisis both shapes our future and reveals our humanity.



1 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2013/12/10/mary-barra-named-as-new-gm-ceo-becoming-first-female-chief-for-the-automaker/#2605e251642e>

2 <https://time.com/4837393/condoleezza-rice-talks-racism-sexism/>

3 <https://www.phillipscollection.org/about/administration>