

# MANAGEMENT LESSONS FROM MOVIES

4



## LESSONS ON DEALING WITH A CRISIS FROM **WE ARE MARSHALL**

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**MANAGEMENT**  
**LESSONS FROM**  
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## THE STORY IN BRIEF

Imagine a plane crashing - and your entire team including coaches and staff are in it? This is starting point of the movie : and it portrays how an entire community goes through the grieving process, and how one Coach becomes there catalyst to not only overcome and go beyond the tragedy, but also bring renewed hope to a grief stricken community.

Starting with just one survivor who didn't board the plane and a set of absolute freshers, the Coach brings a motley crew of members together to play for the season : given their scholarship program would have been nullified otherwise.

Though somewhat 'slow' compared to other sports based movies, the storyline is poignant and extremely evocative with many points to ponder on.... Well worth the watch...



## 1. TAKE A DEFINITIVE STANCE

In a crisis, it is important to take that first bold step, and take charge of the situation. You may not be the best to lead a crisis : but you need to be able to step in, take charge, and ensure those initial first steps are taken when everyone around you are reeling from shock and uncertainty associated with it.

This is critical. Before despondency sets in takes root, it is important to initiate change and offer some hope. In a crisis it is not easy to whip up support and hope : but it needs to be done : in some small measure at least. Take that initial step, and very importantly, ensure : you have someone who can lead the charge.





## 2. CHOOSE YOUR LEADER CAREFULLY

Leadership in a crisis is very different to leadership when all is well. It requires a steely resolve, a calm head and disposition, and a certain something that enables you to remain unfazed and unhinged about what is happening around you. **Coach Jack Lengyl** was an 'outsider' and as such, even though clearly moved by the situation wasn't 'in it'. This is important : as being able to remove yourself from the here and the now and being able to move himself, and the team around him towards a Vision of the future is about the only way to successfully turn crisis into a new beginning.

So, if you are in a crisis, choose the leader to drive the new chapter carefully, as in a crisis, that one man at the top will make all the difference in the world.



### 3. GIVE IT TIME

Crisis to be overcome takes time. Coach Lengyl makes only one request : he leads the team 'his way'. You cannot rush change : specially if you want true commitment and involvement. This does not mean you lackadaisically buy time and pot around hoping for the best : but it does not mean rushing things either. There is a fine line to follow.

People need time to heal from a catastrophe. Many times, in organisations, change becomes a milestone pegged 'project' rather than understanding that there is a lot of emotion to deal with **BEFORE** that real 'turn' takes place. So, give it time : not only to initiate and build confidence but also to allow the emotions to regularise and allow everyone that time to take a deep breath and calm down.



## 4. RALLY SUPPORT - ONE STEP, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

Rallying support : and fast : is critical. Sometimes, you just need that **ONE** key convert to becomes the flag bearer : which the Coach was astute to find. Together, they find a few others who 'believe' : so that when the nay sayers make 'noice' there is enough people to offer the voice of hope and confidence. If you do not have this 'baseline' support structure chances are change : specially during a crisis becomes tough.

So, you need to take the time to really garner the support of the hardcore few that will convert others until the 'critical mass' is achieved. More than anything else, in the short term, this gathering of 'flag bearers' become essential for long term success.



## 5. GIVE SPACE FOR FEELINGS

It is important to ensure that feelings are not 'swept under the carpet' and 'dismissed' as 'irrelevant.' A crisis cannot be successfully overcome by logic and reason alone : you need to give space to vent, to let it out. It is also important to truly empathise **AND** sympathise with the situation and the feelings of others.

The Coach has sincere respect for the feelings of the parents and others who lost their families : and never belittles their loss nor disregards it as 'irrelevant' to the task he has undertaken : rather : he looks at it as an integral part of it. He understands that the team will come together : and with it : the opportunity to bring an entire community together once again.

So, always look at the 'bigger picture' and never allow your ego to come in the way of harnessing the collective spirit during a crisis. Always be respectful. Always be supportive. Always understand.





## 6. GIVE HOPE : CHAMPION POSITIVITY

No matter how many defeats the Coach faces, he never loses hope. He understands that winning the championship is not possible : but having **ONE** win can bring hope and confidence to a fledgling group of what is essentially a rag tag collection of raw potential. He know that **ONE** win will ensure they are held with respect and dignity : and that it will lay the foundation for a awesome team in the future. His belief comes true when the team wins their first championship a few years later.

You need to champion positivity in times of crisis. Not some wishful thinking type positivity : but a positivity that is rooted in hard work, disciplined processes and committed collaboration that enables wins : which offer renewed hope in the future.



## 7. DON'T FORGET THE PAST : DON'T LET IT RULE THE FUTURE EITHER

It is important that you always pay homage to the past : but not allow it to 'rule' the future.

The past is a wonderful foundation to build on : but it becomes 'baggage' unless properly managed. So, strike that balance always.

In the movie we can clearly see the Coach being deeply respectful of the past success and heritage of the team and the University, but standing firm on the way forward as he understands the 'old ways' will not be able to bring the change required and the radical shift needed in this time of crisis. It is important to always find that balance.





## 8. MAKE SURE THAT ALL IMPORTANT FIRST WIN TAKES PLACE

No change can take place without hope and confidence. No hope and confidence is possible without a few wins along the way. So, it is important to put all your effort into getting that first win : which becomes critical to boost flagging morale and ensure the nay sayers are silenced (even momentarily).

The Coach understands this very well : which is why there is such deep emphasis in that first win. Similarly those leading crisis situations need to have a win **FAST** : because the longer the 'crisis' lasts, the less hope people are going to have. Take too long : chances are the leader will be replaced.

So, ensure you have that first 'big' win fast !



## 9. ALLOW THE JOURNEY TO FLOW THROUGH

Once the win comes, it is important to widen the support base and allow others to be involved in the process and take a step back. It is important that 'normalcy' returns and the general tight grip that is required in a crisis is loosened so that everyone understands that the change is successful and that things will become 'better again'

The Coach pushes the team hard : and drives them towards being the best they can be : but he also eases the near fanatical push towards a win after the win takes place.

It is important to understand that too much of anything is good for nothing. The coach understood that unless the 'pressure' is released it will become counter productive : something that all leaders navigating crisis to understand.





## 10. REMEMBER THE LEGACY : REMEMBER THE LESSONS

Crisis becomes a great teacher : and many invaluable lessons can be learnt if we are willing to put our heads down and commit to learning from them.

Once the crisis is averted and normalcy returns, tell the story, live the legacy and remember the stories : as these will propagate as part of the culture. Never treat crisis as an 'event' : always use them as rich stories that can help instill great values, celebrate people and heroes and an overall opportunity to truly bring the best in everyone.



MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY

# WE ARE MARSHALL

A TRUE STORY



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