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REPUTATION MATTERS

CHAOS LEADERSHIP:

When Does Global Crisis
Turn Into Chaos and
How Do We Survive It?

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CHAOS LEADERSHIP: WHEN DOES GLOBAL CRISIS TURN INTO CHAOS AND HOW DO WE SURVIVE IT?

When crisis management fails, chaos ensues.

TEETERING ON THE BRINK

As we balance on the cusp between global crisis and total chaos — and we could make the jump into full-bore chaos at any moment — it is time to explore the difference between the two.

It also is time to talk about how the rules for handling **chaos** differ substantially from those that govern **crisis response**. Because if we cling to crisis management rules in order to address chaos, it will be as ineffective as if we treat coronavirus the same way we treat the common cold.

CHAOS DEFINED

Chaos is defined as [“a state of extreme confusion and disorder...”](#)

“The word *chaos* derives from a Greek word meaning ‘chasm’ or ‘void,’ and also refers to the formless state of

matter before the cosmos was created. In math and science, *chaos* describes a system that will develop in wildly different ways with only tiny changes to the initial conditions...”

Sound familiar?

In chaos, all bets are off, all rules of natural order (except perhaps at the subatomic level) are off too. Compasses fail. Up is down, down is up, and it’s almost impossible to distinguish between sky and ground. In fact, unlike with crisis, the very concept of chaos “management” is an oxymoron. By its very nature, chaos can not be managed; it is ungovernable.

CRISIS DEFINED

Crisis, on the other hand, even a global crisis such as our COVID-19 pandemic, retains causality, and logic: If you do x, y will probably follow. Lightning strikes, thus your home burns; but you can quell the fire by calling the fire department and applying water or fire retardant. Someone gets sick, you test them immediately to see if they have COVID-19. If they do, you isolate them from the general population, or you get them to a hospital where there are ample ventilators, and health care workers are protected with adequate gear, and the escalation of the pandemic slows down.

You don't do these things, the pandemic worsens. Causality.

So, crisis also retains the hope of agency — if we can follow the rules and strategies of crisis management, we have the power to change our fate. If we see clearly, accept reality quickly, research thoroughly, step up to the plate early and put new policies in place, and lead wisely and courageously, we can most likely change the outcome of a crisis or at least its trajectory. **There is hope, and our leadership can make the situation improve.** (See [Crisis Leadership in Real Time: 8 Pandemic Best Practices](#), [Great Crisis Management is Counterintuitive](#), and [Communicating in Crisis: Building Trust in an Untrustworthy World](#).)

LEADERSHIP WORKS IN CRISES

Even “black swan” or unpredictable crises still can be mitigated by prompt, wise and coordinated action. We can be agile, flexible, innovative, indomitable, and gritty. And these qualities have power. They can have an effect.

LEADERSHIP DOES NOT WORK AS WELL IN CHAOS

But once we descend into chaos, this is no longer true. In chaos causality is lost,

strategy and leadership no longer work as well, and we are left powerless.

And that is where we almost are now. So many different black swan crises (pandemic, financial meltdown, mass layoffs, soaring unemployment, untrustworthy leaders, misinformation everywhere) are crashing into one another, clumping together into an indistinguishable mass, it's no longer quite as clear how to sort it all out. With leadership all but abandoned on the national level, with crisis management rules ignored, and misinformation everywhere, it's no longer clear that even if we could put in logical fixes now, they would work.

And this will hit home more, in the United States at least, as more people we know get sick, or worse.

SO, WHAT WORKS IN CHAOS?

First, of course, is to try to stop ourselves from reaching the tipping point. A few business leaders are stepping into the void to not only lead their own organizations, but to extend their leadership to the country and world. This is a ray of hope.

But, when and if all external compasses are no longer pointing in a reliable direction, our own moral compass must guide us. And this is

true for organizations as well as for individuals.

True North becomes a sense of integrity, morality, courage and humanity. This beacon prizes kindness and compassion and rejects narcissism, self-dealing, drama, liars and cowardice. It puts people first, without destroying the systems and companies that have always supported us, and will again.

If we slip into chaos, these are the attributes that can guide us out of it. And it will become critical to evaluate each of our decisions — both micro and macro, both corporate and individual — in their light.

And if we can not find the leadership to do this **outside** of ourselves, then each of us will have to do it **for** ourselves, from boards to C-suite leaders, to workers, parents, family and friends.

True Chaos Leadership rests on an inner sense of morality and direction in the face of utter pandemonium. Think about that.

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About Temin and Company

Temin and Company Incorporated creates, enhances, and saves reputations.

Temin and Company also markets by leveraging the expertise, ideas and insight of its clients to produce differentiated intellectual capital and content.

The firm helps corporations, professional services firms, and other institutions define and strengthen their public image – and their bottom line – through strategic marketing; branding; media relations; thought leadership; social media; speaker, media and leadership coaching; financial communications; and crisis and reputation management.

Strategists, coaches, writers, and social media experts are available “25/8” to assure that every crisis is addressed, and every opportunity leveraged.

Clients include the CEOs and Boards of some of the world’s largest and most well-known corporations, financial institutions, portfolio companies, pharma and biotech companies, law firms, consulting firms, publishing houses, venture capital and private equity firms, authors, politicians, and colleges and universities.