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After El Paso And Dayton: Resilience In The Face Of Trauma



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Leadership Strategy

I write about risk and resilience both personal and professional.

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The nation is in near perpetual mourning and grim about the prospect of facing more mass shootings. (AP Photo/Christian Chavez) ASSOCIATED PRESS

One week ago, America yet again faced tragedy as gunmen in two unrelated incidents shot into crowds at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas and an active nightlife area in Dayton, Ohio. The combined death toll stands at 31. The nation is in near perpetual mourning and grim about the prospect of facing more mass shootings. Terrorism, whether domestic or international, has a broad effect on our collective wellbeing that extends far beyond the immediate tragedy. Constant vigilance takes energy and can have effects that are difficult to measure. This unease can cause widespread panic as was observed when [motorcycles backfired in Times Square](#) this week and the crowd reacted as though it was another active shooter.

We are left with a sense of unease and a need to respond to something that feels intangible. While we may not know the exact nature of the threat or how or when it will manifest, we can and should prepare for the potential effects. We can talk to our families, our friends, our employees, our colleagues about how they are feeling and what they are doing to prepare for events like these. How does it affect us? How does it affect business and performance at work? Is your team carrying fears for their personal safety that they might not even want to acknowledge in the workplace?

Strong leadership will be required to address this traumatic topic in a caring and meaningful way. To help prepare, every kind of organization needs to have an emergency action plan for how to address active shooter terrorism and other forms of workplace violence. The protection of employees, customers and other stakeholders needs to be at the center of any plan and this must be reinforced through a comprehensive, sensitive and effective awareness and training program. The plan must also take into account the regulatory environment and should include a mechanism for coordination with public agencies that would be involved such as the police and fire departments.

Specific plans will vary greatly among different types of entities, because a stadium or airport faces a very different type of threat environment from an office building or a university. There are many resources out there to support this work for organizations of all types and sizes including from the [Department of Homeland Security](#) and the [Occupational Health and Safety Administration](#). Leaders need to be thoughtful to choose the right mix of best practices and customization to fit their own unique circumstances.

Above all, organizations must set aside business-as-usual to care for their people both physically and emotionally in times of crisis. Some of this work can and should be done in advance of an incident and if done right, can help people feel more comfortable. Planning and training can save lives as exemplified by the heroic efforts to evacuate [Morgan Stanley on 9/11](#) that spared thousands. We also know that planning can have negative effects if handled clumsily such as in the case of an active shooter drill held at an [AT&T facility in Chicago](#) that unaware employees mistook for an actual shooter incident or the endless school shooting drills that are causing [widespread anxiety among school children](#). Nevertheless, action needs to be taken to prepare because this threat is not going away anytime soon. Leaders need to make it a priority. 🐦

Leaders can set an example of openness to discussion, empathy for whatever their teams may be experiencing, and a commitment to personal preparedness. It takes energy to build a reserve of personal resilience. It takes resources to build organizational resilience. It all takes time and focus, both of which are scarce resources in the modern era. But the age of mass shootings is not over and we must not forget just how much is at stake – our organizations, our communities, our country, our lives. It's worth preparing for.



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I am the president and CEO of Disaster Recovery Institute International (DRI), where I help organizations prepare for and recover from disasters both natural and manmade... **Read More**