



“Play the Puck Where it is Going to Be” - What Wayne Gretzky Can Teach Us About COVID-19 Crisis Management

Insights

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Like many Americans, when I’m not talking on the phone before I get to the office during my morning commute, I listen to audiobooks or podcasts. Recently, during one such commute, I listened to an informative yet alarming interview with Dr. Michael T. Osterholm, Ph.D., MPH, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, about the COVID-19 virus outbreak.

Immediately, what struck me most about Mr. Osterholm’s take on today’s happenings was his “straight-talk” – as Osterholm calls it – about the virus and the world’s unpreparedness to deal with it. Without fear-mongering, Mr. Osterholm painted a rather bleak future for responding to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, thrust by a strained health care system ill-equipped to deal with the viruses’ effects. Osterholm detailed that hospitals throughout the country have limited supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers – a point with which many safety professionals can relate – with no indication of whether PPE manufacturers can or will be capable of addressing shortages.

Of course, after listening to Mr. Osterholm’s interview that morning, I opened my Audible app and downloaded his 2017 book, *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*. To my satisfaction, the book begins much the way I envision many native Minnesotans start their day: expressing gratification for loved ones and...hockey. The narrator says, “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be. – attributed to Wayne Gretzky.” Despite being from Pittsburgh and preferring Lemieux over Gretzky, the point was well-taken. In the world of crisis management and response, preparedness and forward-thinking separates the good from the great.

Preparedness is vital to not only managing crises but managing crises successfully. The key to successfully responding to challenging situations is optimizing crisis-readiness long before the crisis hits. Undoubtedly, the current panic and misinformation surrounding the COVID-19 virus outbreak stem, at least in part, by unpreparedness.

In the world of crisis management and response, merely playing the puck where it is may lead to devastating consequences. The COVID-19 virus is here, so play the puck where it is going to be and act now. Develop a detailed crisis response and management plan tailored to your company’s unique

needs. If your company already has a plan, take the time to review and fortify the existing plan. It is never too late to have a process in place to implement the necessary measures to deal with a crisis.

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