



Lucien Canton is a nationally recognized expert on strategic planning for crisis and disasters. A popular speaker and lecturer, he is the author of the best-selling *Emergency Management: Concepts and Strategies for Effective Programs* used as a textbook in many higher education courses.

Prior to starting his own company, Mr. Canton served as the Director of Emergency Services for the city and county of San Francisco and as an Emergency Management Programs Specialist and Chief of the Hazard Mitigation Branch for FEMA Region IX.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC), is a management consulting firm specializing in the development of effective solutions to crisis planning.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC)
783 45th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
415.221.2562
415.520.5218
LCanton@LucienCanton.com
WWW.LucienCanton.com

Gloom and Doom Doesn't Sell! *Influencing Senior Executives*

“Boss, it’s the end of the world as we know and if we don’t do something about it right now, we’re all going to hell in a hand basket!” How often have you tried to sell your program’s budget with this approach? Maybe you haven’t used these exact words, but if you’re honest, you’ll probably admit to trying scare tactics at some point. And if you’re really honest, you’ll admit that it didn’t really work.

In my experience, the very best emergency managers are passionate about what we do. One of my favorite quotes is from my friend, Hank Renteria, the Director of the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, who once said, “emergency management is not what you *do*; it’s who you *are*.” We take risk very seriously and we are always aware of the consequences if we fail. I used to keep a panoramic photograph of San Francisco’s Marina District following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in my office as a daily reminder of the importance of my job. We understand the nature of disaster and believe that those that don’t just need to be shown the facts in order to become believers.

Except that those heretics just won’t get religion. Why can’t they see

what’s under their noses? Why have we historically failed to take action to prepare for or avoid disaster? Why doesn’t gloom and doom work?

Your senior executive doesn’t buy the gloom and doom approach for a very simple reason: *he or she doesn’t really believe it will happen!* This is human nature. When warned of impending danger we either think, “This won’t really happen to *me*,” or “If it does happen, it won’t be *that* bad.” We have a considerable body of sociological research that confirms this attitude. We also have research that shows that senior executives tend to be disengaged from emergency management issues. So how do we get their attention?

Well, the first thing you have to do is forget for a moment that you are an emergency manager. Instead, you must think like a negotiator. As Michael Corleone said in *The Godfather*, “it’s just business; it’s not personal.” You have to put your passion on hold and focus on the person with whom you are negotiating. And the heart of any negotiation is the ability to answer a simple question for that person: “what’s in it for *me*?”

This may sound a bit cynical but it's not really. People are not going to listen to you unless they see some value to themselves. You've got to engage them on an emotional level first to get them to listen to your rational arguments. Any good salesperson will tell you this. So in dealing with senior executives, think about what really motivates *them*, not what *you* think is important.

Let's take a specific example. Next month the Department of Homeland Security is expected to identify the first set of standards for the private sector voluntary preparedness program. You need to convince your senior executive that complying with one of these standards is a "good thing". How will you do it? An emergency manager would approach this from the perspective that it is a "good thing" because it will increase corporate resilience, build response capacity, save lives, etc. A negotiator would use arguments more appealing to a business executive: compliance will lower insurance costs by X. Compliance can offer us a competitive advantage (or put us at competitive disadvantage) over similar companies. Compliance will improve our S&P rating.

Here's another example from the public sector. You're trying to replace an aging siren system and need to convince the city council to provide funds for to match a federal grant. Do you sell them on the potential to save lives or their duty to warn the public? That's how an emergency manager would justify the cost. However, a more effective approach might be to emphasize the amount of federal dollars brought into the community or the potential to create jobs. You could also identify the improvement in each council member's district or potential non-emergency uses.

Get the picture? Gloom and doom doesn't sell. You need to demonstrate the advantages of your proposal to the decision maker in terms they can understand and get their emotional engagement before using rational arguments. You need to show that what you are offering adds value. Passion and altruistic arguments will not help you much in this time of tight budgets.

Pandemic Issues

Two new developments have occurred lately of which you should be aware. The first is the emergence of a Tamiflu®-resistant strain of H1N1. While there are only a few such cases so far, coupled with the discovery that a key component of Tamiflu® is water soluble and does not degrade in sewer systems, this raises obvious concerns about the future utility of Tamiflu®.

Also of concern is a recent study by the University of Wisconsin suggesting that H1N1 is more virulent than first thought and is "frighteningly similar" to other pandemic viruses such as the 1918 virus. H1N1 replicates significantly better in the lungs than the seasonal flu.

You can find more information at my colleague Regina Phelps' excellent blog at <http://emssolutionsinc.wordpress.com/>

WHAT'S NEW?

*In addition to **Emergency Management Solutions**, I'm now joining the blog world! You can sign up for both at www.LucienCanton.com.*

Please feel free to send me your comments on this issue or suggestions for future topics.