

Don't Accept Excuses

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As I have worked with the Wisconsin Technical Colleges on Business Continuity and Crisis Response Planning over the past 8 years, I have heard many excuses for procrastinating that hinder the colleges from moving forward with important measures. At times these excuses come from coworkers, people wearing too many hats and sometimes even from leaders who don't recognize the value. It is very frustrating for those trying to make impactful, positive changes.

What I have discovered is that the "excuses" fall into 4 basic categories that I am summarizing here in the hope that we can manage this behavior and focus on this important task.

1. It will never happen here!

Classic denial and magical thinking. As much as we would like to, we can't wish emergencies away. And, as we have seen reported, serious crises can occur on college campuses in large and small communities – just ask the University of Virginia folks in Charlottesville.

2. Risk Management is not my job!

Another form of denial – this one is denial of responsibility. The truth, and the Best Practice, is that EVERY EMPLOYEE must be a risk manager. To achieve a safe and secure campus, every employee must practice *Situational Awareness* – if nothing else, we all must follow the simple but very effective guidance of *If you See Something, Say Something*. This

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includes identifying suspicious behavior as well as potentially dangerous conditions, like trip and fall hazards. If we believe that only one person or one department is responsible for risk management, then we will fail at creating a safe campus.

3. We are a smart group of people, and we can figure it out when it happens!

In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, research has proven that the environment is typically chaotic, with stress and anxiety very high. In these times, when heart rates are 100 miles per hour, breathing is shallow, and fear and confusion are rampant, no one can stay calm and think clearly; however, research has also demonstrated that having an *Emergency Response Plan* that has been practiced, will help move from chaos to control faster. Being smart is a great asset, but not much help in the first hours following a crisis event absent a plan.

4. Practicing emergency response takes away from real college work!

What could be more important than practicing a plan that will protect the health and safety of students and staff, protect property and equipment, and ensure continuity of operations? It seems logical that without these protections, the “real work” couldn’t take place! Safety and security are essential for a productive higher education institution.

One strategy to confront the above thinking is to conduct a refresher training of crisis management best practices, combined with a tabletop exercise using a relevant and realistic crisis scenario. Such an exercise will help participants recognize the benefits of crisis management planning and practice and provide an opportunity to talk through the importance of all staff acting as risk managers. Your DMI Consultants are ready to help create and implement training and exercises.

I hope the above doesn’t seem like complaining or blaming – it’s my attempt to create awareness of issues that may be impeding the successful implementation of Business Continuity and Emergency Response Plans. I’m convinced we all want the same result, a safe and secure campus, and maybe awareness of these behaviors will help eliminate the excuses.