

The Trump Administration's bungling of the coronavirus pandemic surely should feature in management textbooks. Just about everything that could go wrong, did go wrong.

Some of the problems derived from having a top manager who was fundamentally indifferent and seemingly incapable of grasping basic facts. But other problems were due to inability to manage the organizational response.

There are now several books about the pandemic response, of which *Nightmare Scenario* is probably best in describing the internal management fiasco. Here are a dozen lessons that every crisis manager, in the public or private sector, should learn:

1. **Don't** bring in your son-in-law, who has no relevant expertise or experience, as your troubleshooter. Even if he's a quick study, a disaster is no time for on-the-job learning.
2. **Don't** approach an impending disaster solely as a PR problem. No matter how good you are with PR, if you don't fix the underlying crisis, you're going to have PR issues.
3. **Don't** dither in a crisis. Make a decision and move on. For instance, don't waste weeks trying to figure out what to do with sick people on cruise ships, ignoring the bigger problem of protecting the general population. (Also, trying to keep some deaths "off the books" by having them offshore doesn't really work.)
4. **Don't** establish competing power centers to handle an emergency. There was much too much conflict within the COVID response team, and far too much energy was sunk into internal power struggles.
5. **Do** have top experts on call. However, **don't** simply ignore what they tell you about the situation. And **don't** bring in completely unqualified advisors (looking at you, Dr. Atlas) just because you like what they said on TV.
6. **Avoid** letting subordinates blockade information coming from their own subordinates.
7. **Do** understand that logistics matter. Massive amounts of material, information, or workers, aren't going to be deployed effectively without planning. Learn from Ulysses S. Grant: logistics was his secret weapon during the Civil War.
8. **Avoid** changing your messaging on a daily basis. In a quickly evolving situation with a lot of uncertainties, changes in messaging are unavoidable. But **don't** compound the problem by constantly flip-flopping.
9. **Avoid** making key personnel decisions based solely on a person's willingness

to fawn over you. Like cotton candy, fawning is great in the short run but lacks nutritional value.

10. **Do** listen to the people who are on the front lines, dealing with the problems on a daily basis — such as, in this case, state governors.
11. **Avoid** basing decisions on fantasies, such as the possibility that inhaling bleach might cure a disease.
12. And definitely **don't** pick a reality TV star as CEO.

Good people did struggle to try to do their jobs despite the organizational chaos, but they were battling strong headwinds. Seriously, folks, this is no way to run a convenience store on a slow day, let alone a country in the grips of a pandemic.