



Nicoletti-Flater Associates, PLLP

3595 S. Teller St. Suite 310 | Lakewood, CO. 80235

Ph: 303-989-1617 | Fax: 303-985-3133 | www.nicolettiflater.com

PHASE IV (A) IN THE NEW NORMAL

Leadership's Responsibility in Dealing with the Loss of One of Your Own to the Coronavirus (COVID 19): Issues, Preparation, and Response Considerations

When the potential of losing a co-worker, friend or family member moves from a possibility to a reality that becomes a game-changer. The hope that you, your co-worker, or your family members won't contract the virus, or if you do you will survive, is now shattered by the reality of a loss to this invisible enemy. Even if you have dealt with line of duty deaths over your career as a Leader, the COVID 19 loss can be more difficult. There is no bad actor that you can run down, catch and bring to justice. There is no one person or group of individuals you can track down and teach them a lesson. The invisible enemy is not fazed by your anger or your grief. There was no armor, physical or mental, that could protect you. One of the major difficulties in dealing a COVID-19 fatality is that the victim more than likely will die alone separated from family, friends and co-worker. This reality will interfere with both the grieving process as well as finding closure. As a leader, you may be struggling not only with your own feelings, but how do you assist the family and your other employees. The following information is intended to provide leaders with specific intervention options considerations for dealing with this type of event. The information will be presented in three specific categories.

- a) **Pre-Event Horizon**---what you need to develop and consider before there is a COVID-19 fatality
 - b) **Event Horizon**---what you need to develop and consider when the fatality has occurred
 - c) **Post-Event Horizon**---what you need to develop and consider in the Recovery Phase or for the 'Long Haul'.
- **Pre-Event Horizon**-Preparing for the event that you theoretically knew would come someday, but still hoped you could avoid it. Unfortunately, 'Hope' is not a plan and therefore, you must proactively prepare for this event. This section will focus on providing specific considerations and techniques for three areas of; Administrative issues, the Victim's Family issues and the Co-workers' issues.
 - **Administrative Issues**
 - The first issue in this category is determining if a death because of the COVID-19 considered a line of duty death? The answer to this requires a combination of legal, policy and financial input. The second issue in this category is the determination if COVID-19 occurred as a result of on duty assignments or occurred as a result off-duty actions. Developing and communicating such a policy ahead of an incident will be important in order to prevent the employees from feeling that there is no support for them if they get contaminated and die. A second issue is related to what kind of financial and mental health support can or will be provided to the family and for how long. You should also identify what resources are available or will be



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- available for your employees as well as the deceased employee's family.
- Develop and have in place alternate communication methods in case everyone is under shelter in place or the family is in quarantine.
 - Develop specific roles ahead of time such as family liaison, hospital liaison, funeral liaison, etc. If possible, pre assign individuals to each of those positions.
 - **Co-workers' Issues**
 - Your employees will be experiencing a roller coaster of emotions to include shock, disbelief, panic, anger, depression. Accept those reactions are normal, even if they are angry with the department.
 - All levels of leadership need to make it a point to be visible. It can become problematic if some leaders are missing in action.
 - Co-workers need information. Develop a protocol for providing information on a regular basis.
 - Develop a staffing contingency plan for employees that may have also been exposed to the deceased individual or who seem to be having difficulty coping.
 - **Victim's Family Issues**
 - If you have observed television coverage of the families of COVID-19 fatalities, you will have noticed that one of their main struggles center around not being with their loved ones when they passed away. Your actions and responses as leaders can have either a positive or negative effect on the family members. Preplan your responses as well as your words.
 - Screen and select your response and intervention team. Remember that responding to a loss is a skill set not a position.
 - Anticipate and have ready the family's questions, requirements and needs.
 - If possible, consult with other agencies that have had a loss to the COVID-19 and discuss their lessons learned.
 - **Event Horizon**-The employee has passed away and you have been notified. Hopefully all your **Pre-Event Horizon** issues and interventions are in place. As you progress in this phase, keep in mind that there really is not a totally acceptable blueprint for dealing with this type of loss. We all have assumptions about the world and our lives. These assumptions can be things like 'my kids are safe at school and nothing bad can happen there, 'movie theaters are safe places' or 'My family and I are safe from death due to the COVID 19. When these assumptions become shattered you must make a choice to engage in denial (it won't be that bad), psychologically deteriorate into feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. Avoid the tendency to slip down that 'Rabbit Hole' by focusing on a specific task, areas in which you have control and developing a 'New Normal'



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○ **Administrative Issues**

- Consider the operation of the agency as having to under a New Normal.
- All levels of leadership must be activated and activated
- You must develop the 'New Normal' thinking in which you assume that other losses can and will occur, but you will have contingency plans for that possibility.
- Balancing politicians wanting to be involved and make speeches with the morale of the employees.
- Activate a protocol for having consistent statements and updates from all leaders. Inconsistent messages will only increase the negative emotions from the employees. Remember words are like bullets, once they are launched, they will never be retrieved.
- Make stress reduction and self-care a priority and part of the department culture and climate; model this behavior.
- Activate all your departmental resources such a peer support, chaplains, EAP and psychological services.
- Assign a Psychological Incident Commander
- If possible, avoid unilateral decision making in regard to the Co-workers or the deceased family members.

○ **Co-workers' Issues**

- If possible, meet with the various stakeholders or Points of Contacts (POC) such as commanders, union representatives, peer support, psychological services, etc. The goal of the meeting is to develop a meaningful and standardized response protocol to providing information and support to the Co-workers. You will have to be creative with this meeting due to social distancing. Give yourself the flexibility to adapt.
- All levels of leadership should be visible and available.
- Provide accurate and timely updates.
- Have psychological support services be onsite and available. If being onsite is not available due to shelter in place, activate teleconference systems such as Webex.
- Provide options for the employees to grieve as well as them paying their respects to the family in a manner that the family requested.
- Activate the various liaisons such as family, hospital, etc.
- Take advantage of your Agency's psychological services
- Ask for input from the employees as to how they would like to pay their respect to their fallen Co-worker.
- Provide handouts related to coping as well as resources and have them available in many different locations or formats.
- Leader should also model self-care.



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- If you see an individual struggling, you should mandate that he/she take time off or seek some form of support services.
- Understand that the funeral service will be different than other LODD due to social distancing and gathering restrictions. Communicate your understanding and empathy to the officers that want to be present but cannot be. Find alternative ways for them to memorialize the fallen officer in the moment (for example, through the processional, streaming the service, etc.), and be flexible by potentially having multiple services/memorials at some point.
- **Victim's Family Issues**
 - It will be important that you don't try to provide the family with ideas for memorial services or invite them to ceremonies without first talking with them.
 - Ask the family what they would like from the department or what are their needs.
 - Ask the family if they would like to have a family liaison from the department to help them deal with the demands. Let them have a choice in picking the liaison.
 - If the family is struggling with certain issues or responsibilities, at that point in time you can become their outboard brain and provide them with solutions or problem-solving options.
 - Provide the family resources as well as options to utilize your psychological services or the EAP
 - If the family is willing, provide them with a media liaison.
- **Post-Event Horizon**-This may be the hardest issue you will face as a leader because of having to develop a protocol for recovering from and dealing with an invisible and possibly reoccurring adversary. It is reasonable to assume that the old normal will become a 'New Normal,' which will probably change several times. The first basic requirement for recovery from the COVID-19 is that the probability of reoccurrence will be close to 100%. How do you balance careers with your families escalating concerns and wishes? If you or your officers choose one over the other there will be resentment either by officers or family members. At this point in time families will need plans, not 'bumper sticker' statements such as 'Don't worry, I will be fine'. After a loss significant others and children will have their fears increase regarding safety as well as their own safety.
 - **Departmental Issues and Intervention Options**
 - Conduct a series of 'Hot Washes' to develop a 'Lessons Learned' Document for the next generation of responders.
 - When conducting a 'Lessons Learned' activity make sure to include all of the POCs and stakeholders. 'Lessons Learned' should be not be a



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conversation of blame. Instead, it is about making positive changes moving forward.

- Consider options for dealing with the various anniversaries to include the date of the deceased individuals, the starting date of COVID-19 and the date it was controlled. Some of the events may not warrant an anniversary acknowledgment.
- Don't forget the families of the COVID-19 victims over the 'long haul'.
- Problem-solve ways to meet work demands while at the same time dealing with the reoccurrence of the COVID and the accompanying fears and anxieties of your employees and their families.

PHASE IV WILL BE THE FINAL DOCUMENT IN THIS SERIES, AND WILL BE DEALING MORE IN DEPTH WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF RECOVERY FROM THE COVID 19. HOWEVER, IT WILL NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL THE CURVE HAS FLATTENED AND THE END IS, HOPEFULLY, IN SIGHT.