

## Covid-19 Response for Association Leaders

**Crisis Planning Response – CPR for the Pandemic & Beyond**

September 11, 2001, I hand-typed the message to all staff to evacuate the World Bank in downtown Washington, DC. I had led the technology team that designed an emergency message broadcast system that could interrupt staff at their desks around the world in case of an emergency. Little did I know I would use that very system myself just two weeks after it was ready. I was serving on the Internal Communications team, a team whose mandate I helped to write. During the 9/11 emergency it was my job, among others, to interface with the Department of Treasury coordinating the emergency response downtown. After that unforgettable and horrific day I participated in a group of federal agencies focused on emergency preparedness as we planned for other crises that could hit the nation's capital.

My **Crisis Planning Response – CPR for the Pandemic & Beyond**, below, is based on this experience and my knowledge of association leadership from working with 100+ CEOs of trade associations and professional societies.

**First things first: we are still in early stages of the pandemic; the peaks have not hit yet.** We must simultaneously adapt to the exigencies of the moment and plan for the future. This means focusing on two tasks at once: survive the immediate still unfolding and prepare for when circumstances stabilize. To help this process I built the framework below.

**1. Prioritize human safety: members and staff.**

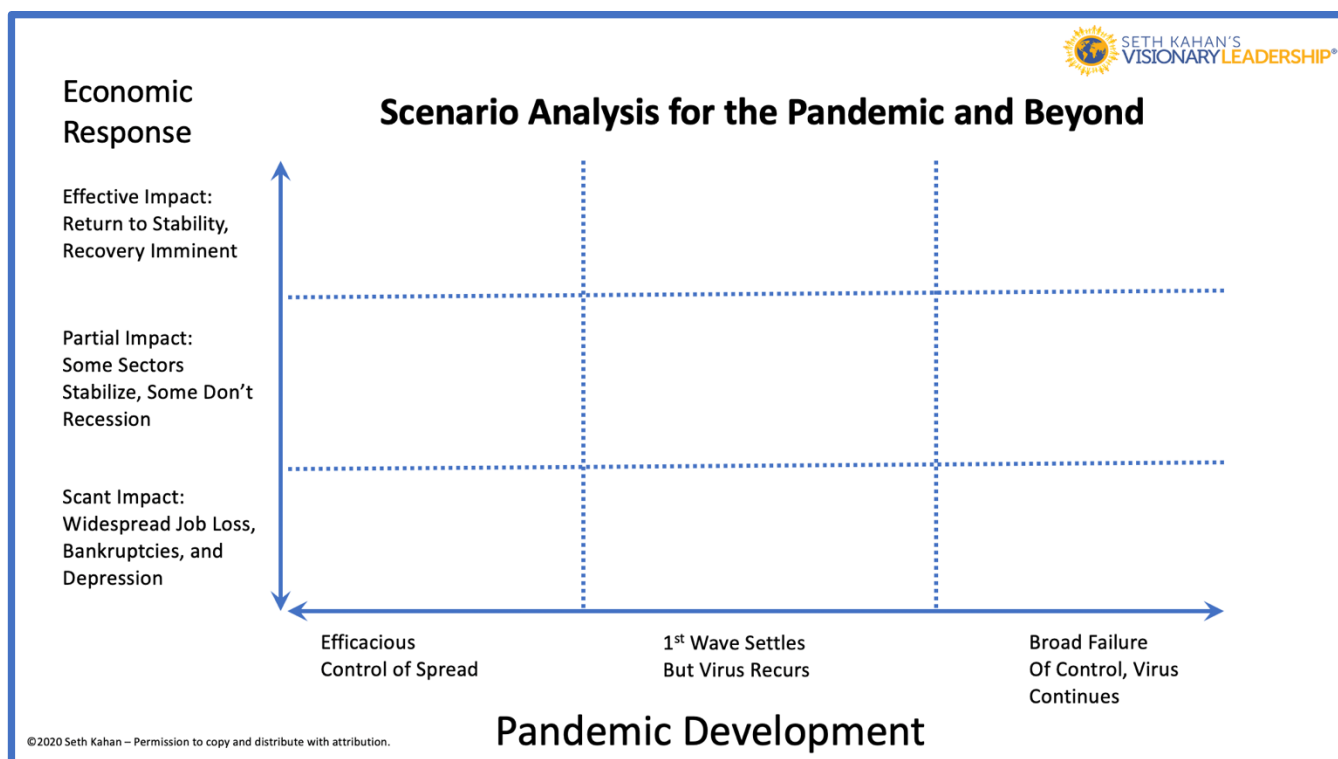
- a. Identify where people are and the implications of their location.
- b. Track the state of health both for them and their loved ones.
- c. For those in essential businesses, distribute the information they need to maximize safety.

**2. Focus on business continuity**

- a. Evaluate cash flow and determine short-term liquidity.
- b. List and then evaluate financial and operational vulnerabilities.
- c. Use my **Scenario Analysis for the Pandemic & Beyond** – see below.

[How can I help? We don't have to have a contract to have a conversation.](#)

3. **Systematically engage volunteer leaders, partners, and peers.**
  - a. Contact your chair and executive committee to take the board through scenario planning and corresponding resource decisions.
  - b. Call every partner to discuss collective responses that will improve both your situations; consider a group meeting with multiple partners where appropriate.
  - c. Contact peers to share status and your actions. Build your brain trust.
  
4. **Make best use of government assistance efforts**
  - a. Contact legislators at local, state and federal level on behalf of your members and your association to influence policies under development.
  - b. Read legislation as it becomes available and convey the relief options to your members.
  - c. Take action to secure the relief options that apply to your organization.
  
5. **Develop resilience for coming changes.**
  - a. Abandon operational activities that do not provide value or heavily tax resources unnecessarily.
  - b. Drill on strategic foresight with your board and executive team; anticipation is power during crises.
  - c. Conduct periodic assessments of your organizational structure so you can reorganize to meet new and different challenges; shift the culture of senior leaders to embrace nimble restructuring.
  
6. **Plan now for recovery.**
  - a. Leverage silver linings; e.g., opportunity to increase trust and loyalty among members by serving their needs in a time of crisis, jettisoning of non-value add products and services, heightened focus on urgent priorities, potential M&A opportunities.
  - b. Identify your failure points and invest in them now. When a bone breaks and heals, it's stronger along the break. What will be your strengths when recovery begins?
  - c. Lead sessions with your board and your executive team to identify secondary and tertiary impacts.
    - i. Secondary impacts are those that happen as a direct result of the crisis.
    - ii. Tertiary impacts happen as secondary impacts collide.



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