LESSONS LEARNED: A CRISIS RESPONDER’S JOURNEY SUPPORTING FRIENDS IN CRISIS

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

LESSONS LEARNED: A CRISIS RESPONDER’S JOURNEY SUPPORTING FRIENDS IN CRISIS
(August 2011)

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Crisis is an educational leadership concern as evidenced by crises that have impacted schools like 9-11, the rampage shootings at Columbine High School, and Hurricane Katrina. Educational leaders experience crisis on both personal and professional levels. This dissertation is my Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) about my journey as an educational leader in crisis response who supported friends in crisis. This dissertation is framed by literature related to chaos theory and crisis response.

Crisis responders have friends and some of those friends will at some time experience a crisis. Yet, there is limited scholarly literature about crisis responders supporting friends in crisis. This project addresses that gap in the literature by introducing the topic of crisis responders supporting friends in crisis and presenting the narrative of my journey as a crisis responder supporting three intimate friends in crisis.

This research project uses the qualitative, postmodern methodology of Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) as described in Liberating scholarly writing: The power of personal narrative (Nash, 2004) and Me-search and re-search: A guide for writing scholarly personal narrative manuscripts (Nash & Bradley, 2011). SPN connects my personal narrative with the scholarly literature by flowing back and forth between the particulars of

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my journey to the universalizable lessons learned for my audience of educational leaders, crisis responders, counselors, and crisis response educators. My narrative was written from embodied memories of supporting my friends through specific crises. I then tied the narrative to the scholarly literature and gathered both personal and professional lessons learned.

The lessons learned are unpacked in Chapter 5. I first discuss my personal insights that demonstrate the importance of stress management, self care, and the role of faith. The term “identity triage” is introduced as a description of the skill I used to prioritize my multiple identities. The concept of “crisis responder operations mode” is also introduced to describe a crisis responder’s mentality when on-duty. I then discuss the professional lessons learned. I developed two crisis response quick reference guides: T.U.R.R.E.T for educational leaders to use as a guide for developing crisis response plans, and T.R.U.S.T., a guide for educational leaders that list desirable characteristics for crisis response team members. Limitations of the study are also discussed followed by suggestions for future research.

Key Words: Educational Leadership, Crisis Response, Crisis Responders, Scholarly Personal Narrative, SPN, Friends, Chaos Theory.