

Final Thoughts

Moderator: *I want to ask each of you to take a minute to sum up your strongest impression, your most important lesson, or the most far-reaching change that your organization should or did experience in this crisis. What did it teach us? What should it have taught us that is a lesson for ordinary times?*

Steve Kos: The event put a focus on the strategic nature of business continuity and risk management. It wasn't that way before 9/11, but it became that way after 9/11.

The other thing that is important here is that specialists in risk management point out weaknesses to senior management. I'm not afraid to do that. That's my job. I will try to provide them with some alternatives. But they always come with a price tag. These days it seems like they will pay the price tag if it makes sense and it helps build resiliency in our systems. And so my job has become much easier in that regard. The thing I worry about is whether I will be able to sustain this attention.

Karen Schimke: One of my observations is—both over the short term and over the somewhat longer term—the impact all of this had on staff. Many mental health professionals, for example, were seeing a severely traumatized people and were really struggling with sustaining their own motivation, right after.

I happened to be in the city that day with a colleague, and when we received word it threw their organization into a complete tailspin. Why? Because they had a staff person who had lost her husband in the earlier World Trade Center attack and so everything was revived. And things that happen locally, much smaller things like the power outage had tremendous impact on people, or things that happen elsewhere immediately revive all this flood of experience and memories. And I think it underscores the need to think organizationally about helping the helper, about providing support to staff, about sustaining the ability of people who have had to do terribly tough things to keep on doing it day after day after day.

Peter Levin: Practice. People have just got to practice and you have got to talk across organizations and disciplines. You need the police and the ambulance attendants and the people who are used to emergency situations telling you what they need and how to do it. And unless you move it up across organizations, I just don't think you get the interconnectedness and the kind of planning that you need to deal with a major event in a community.

Larry Knafo: We have an amazing group of people in the city that know each other and know the right people to call to get things done. The problem is, you better hope that the person that you know can get you a back hoe or whatever you might need in an emergency, is available right then. We have got to start spending a lot more of our time writing that information down so that when the three people that you rely on leave city government, there's somebody else that you can call. A formalized plan enables you to start to get ahead of these emergencies and be more proactive.