

Leading in crisis

US Senator **Ted Cruz** received criticism for failing Texas in the winter storm crisis and his later 'helping hand'. **Sapna Sarfare** talks about being a true leader in catastrophe



US Senator Ted Cruz must be recalling A Bug's Life quote – First rule of leadership: everything is your fault. Recently, while his state Texas suffered severe crisis after a winter storm, he took off to Cancun, Mexico with family. This, and his later photo-op of handing bottled water to the affected were heavily criticised. It's time to discover a leader who can handle crisis.

The Ted Cruz episode

Psychologist, businesswoman and human and social rights activist Dr. Malini Saba feels Cruz is 'a father first' and then a politician. "He was being a good dad, regardless of how the people want to portray him or his actions. The key to successful leadership lies solely in our ability to understand the perspective of others and then coming to a conclusion. I appreciate that Texas has a senator with family values who puts them first regardless of the political price he's paying now."

She finds support in Kaustubh Sonalkar, Group Director – Human Capital Management (HCM), General Affairs, CSR and Corporate Communication, Welspun Group. "As a human, he was concerned about the safety of his family. Subsequently, his quality as a leader to realise his mistakes and stand up for it is appreciated. He was dubbed a criminal by the people, who didn't spare him only because Ted, as a leader had faulted. But he looked back at

his questionable behaviour, and stood by his people. Thereafter, everything blew out of proportion by the media, political parties and some opposition political leaders." He feels Cruz's one human slip cannot be used to judge him.

As per Prakriti Poddar, Global Head for Mental Health at Round Glass and Managing Trustee, Poddar Foundation, feels during crisis, the most vital element to keep going would be leadership. "There are many ways of showing leadership and leading by example is the best mode. However, there can be unprecedented circumstances where the leader has to lead in absentia but those are definitely extraordinary circumstances."

But Vivek Singh Bagri, Political Strategist & Founder, Leadtech, is in disbelief regarding the episode. "Not just from a marketing point of view or bad press, but also as a leader. If I were at his place, I would have questioned myself – Is this the right thing to do at this point in time? It isn't the way a true leader or even a humane person would behave, especially when the whole state is in a situation of panic, and people are hurting."

Marks of a leader

Sonalkar rightly states that any crisis tests leadership. "It entails doing away with some undesirable plans, and strategise and be ready with Plan B & C, if Plan A fails. A leader should be passionate about his job,

other people, understands the cry of the public and knows how to create equilibrium when needed. Another quality is how grounded he or she is, how connected he or she is to the masses and how responsible he or she is towards not just the public but the government as well."

Poddar considers a true leader as someone who during a crisis, can adapt fast, be trustworthy, can take tough, can withstand criticism or issues and be transparent. "There are some more skills which are acknowledged less but are essential for proactive and pre-emptive leadership. These are the ability to anticipate and define priorities, navigate by continuous course correction, listen to understand, and apply experience to address the crisis at hand."

Advice corner

Poddar suggests few principles for leaders to follow during crisis. "Seek complete facts right away. This helps in the decision making process. Communicate to people with empathy and show they care directly. Taking a decision and communicating with affected people are the most critical aspects of leadership during a crisis that bolsters people's faith in their leader."

Dr. Saba hints, "Understand the crisis. Designing a process implementation strategy to control the chaos is critical. A loyal and smart team to manage or resolve crisis is a must. Provide information to the people or public. There has to be a positive attitude from start to finish."

Bagri truly feels that leaders must focus on vital things. "Identifying what needs immediate attention and setting priority helps. A leader's patience can encourage people to not panic and be optimistic. The leader should address the situation as a 'Personal Crisis'. It'll not just help find the right answers but also help win trust. People need concern, love and assurance that someone is there for them."

Sonalkar defines a leader as someone 'who knows the way, shows the way and goes the way'. "Solution orientation is a huge quality of a good leader. A leader is actually a person who actually has a vision, knows how to reach that vision, can take people along, can understand the feeling and emotions, and can drive emotions to achieve that objective."

Besides being strong-headed, a true leader is someone who is compassionate at the same time, stands for other people, understands the cry of the public and knows how to create equilibrium when needed.

— Vivek Singh Bagri, Political Strategist & Founder, Leadtech

invariably be solutions-oriented and can always think on his feet. He must install faith in people and have the quality to empower them while continuing to enjoy autonomy. He has to go an extra mile and set no limits, or boundaries. He may not be technically perfect or most intelligent or articulate, but has to have a charismatic personality who can think out of the box, and come up with solutions. He must encourage his team and instil confidence."

For Bagri, a 'true leader' comes with the character and potential of not breaking or backing out in crisis, but taking charge and providing guidance. "I also feel that emotional intelligence plays a vital role today in determining who is a true leader. Besides being strong-headed, a true leader is someone who is compassionate at the same time, stands for