

Find the phoenix *in the ashes.*

> *The phoenix doesn't rise after the ashes are swept away.*

When bad news hits, what is your first move? Most leaders react first and think second. They stress over what might happen, then go straight into damage control. The Pre-Phoenix exercise offers a better option: a simple way to look for the good while the negative is still in the air.

Before you react, pause.

The research supports the instinct. In his well-known review of emotion regulation, James Gross found that reappraisal, changing how you interpret a situation early, reduces both the experience and the expression of emotion. Suppression, holding it in later, reduces only the expression.

So take 15 to 20 minutes with your team and ask one question: what is the best possible outcome that could come from this?

A phoenix is a legendary bird that dies in flames and is reborn from its own ashes. That is the shift. You stop dwelling on the damage and start looking for where the phoenix could rise, and you focus on maximizing that. That's the Pre-Phoenix exercise.

Consider Domino's. Customer feedback on the quality of its pizza was harsh and hurting sales, so in December 2009 it launched its Pizza Turnaround: a rebuilt recipe, and ads airing customers' harshest comments, including that the crust tasted like cardboard.

Domestic same-store sales rose 14.3 percent in the first full quarter after the launch. Domino's did not dwell on the damage. It looked for where the phoenix could rise, and the criticism became the campaign.

That's the phoenix.

At Boaz Strategic, we develop leaders who know how to respond with strength to chaos.

Gross, Psychophysiology 39(3), 2002; Columbia Business School, "Domino's Wins by Eating a Little Humble Pie"; MediaPost, 2010

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