

**The Big Uneasy:**  
***Katrina's Unsung Heroes***

**Facilitator's Guide**

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# The Big Uneasy: Katrina's Unsung Heroes

## Facilitator's Guide

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## Introduction

### *Worse than Desert Storm...*

Emergencies can happen anywhere. The lessons learned from Katrina, during the storm and its protracted aftermath, have universal applicability. The heroism of nursing home staff provides lessons in humanity and courage. The leadership practices that prepared staff to rise to the challenges exemplify the best in leadership, in emergencies and also in daily operations.

This film is a part of a project initiated after Hurricane Katrina to address the staffing needs of New Orleans area nursing homes. These needs became particularly acute in the months that followed the storm as residents and staff began returning to the devastated area.

Many homes evacuated before the storm; others did not or could not evacuate and stayed until they were rescued after the city was made uninhabitable. Some never stopped operations, despite the chaos around them. All faced challenges as they worked to return to full operation. Their experiences varied and yet had common threads.

Over the course of three years, the project provided on-site assistance and shared learning sessions to facilities in the affected areas. As the homes compared experiences, they became aware of how their own good practices contributed to positive results. Together they shared ways of building on their experiences in crisis as they worked to return to normal operations.

Six of the homes graciously allowed us to capture their stories on film as a way to share lessons learned. All told their stories in hopes of helping others. In the course of their telling, both extraordinary character and exemplary leadership are revealed.

What emerged most clearly from the stories was that strong leadership and commitment to staff built *before* the storm served nursing homes well in a time of crisis. We witnessed creative and participatory decision-making and the fostering of relationships that allowed homes to become emotional havens in times of extreme stress.

The most enduring truth we learned is this: Every nursing home is vulnerable to disasters – both natural and man-made – and no plan is infallible. The best preparation – and the best response – is to care for staff, because people do best in a climate of trust and teamwork, and when they have the support they need to take care of residents.

This film is also intended as a tribute to the staff of Louisiana’s nursing homes who brought thousands of residents safely through the storm and the difficulties that followed. One of the staff in the film says, “disaster doesn’t build character, it reveals character.” While those staff members interviewed for this film displayed deep integrity and commitment, most nursing homes on most days have the same kind of people filling their ranks. Most nursing home staff find that the work of caring for others is truly a calling that they respond to everyday.

## Using this Film

This film is intended to promote discussion, generate ideas, and serve as a learning tool. This guide helps you extract lessons from the film about leadership practices and related emergency preparedness practices. It provides guiding questions, highlights good practices, and identifies resources.

Most people heard some stories about nursing homes in New Orleans during Katrina. Almost all the coverage focused on the rare occurrences of tragedy and lost lives. This film tells a different story. It is the story of nursing home staff who kept others safe and cared for, even while their own safety and their own family's safety was uncertain.

What audiences are saying:

*"It showed the compassion"*

*"As a receiving facility it was good to see the whole picture of what people went through to get to us – we knew - but not really"*

*"It's not just the tragedy – you showed the positives"*

These are just a sampling of comments heard when the film premiered in Louisiana in June 2009. Some nursing homes plan to use the film to help build teamwork; others to inspire empathy, compassion and understanding. Still others will use it to help their staff have realistic expectations of what may be asked of them in an emergency, or when receiving others who've been through an emergency evacuation.

The film can be used in many different ways by anyone affiliated with nursing homes and by those interested in a real story of human strength, courage and commitment. Use the film for:

- **Inspiration, Motivation, Appreciation** – to share with staff, as an inspirational film, depicting the dedication of nursing home staff
- **Preparation and Education** – to help staff in nursing homes and other care settings throughout the country be aware of what may be called for in times of disaster or in being a receiving facility that takes people in after a disaster
- **Leadership Development** – to teach about and develop good leadership practices
- **Teaching Teamwork** – to articulate concepts and practices for "being in it together"
- **Teaching ways to nurture resilience** – to support psychological preparedness; "steady today means ready tomorrow;" to be ready for good leadership and teamwork practices in a crisis by making these practices part of the day-to-day
- **Planning and Community Awareness** – to promote understanding in the community about the support people living and working in nursing homes may need in a disaster
- **Social History** – for knowledge about a historical event: how the New Orleans area nursing homes responded during Katrina

We recommend showing the film in its entirety. Topic areas are easily accessed so you can return to sections during discussion using the menu provided on the CD. The guide focuses discussion on the three primary themes:

1. Preparation
2. Nurturing resilience
3. Practicing good leadership

The film is 49 minutes long and has an introduction and two parts:

### **Part I: “*You can’t just hope for the best*”**

Part I tells the story of the six nursing homes’ experiences during Katrina and its aftermath. It describes their preparation for their storm, getting through the storm itself, and then facing an unprecedented set of challenges as the crisis grew around them. The film captures both individual and organizational challenges. Hearing directly from staff as they talk about their experiences highlights the severity of the difficulties people faced and how they survived by working together. This section also illustrates the degree of planning, preparation, and teamwork needed to successfully execute an evacuation of a nursing home. It helps viewers think about how they would personally respond to a similar situation, and provides information about effective practices in doing so. It is the foundation for discussion of what worked in Part II.

### **Part II: “*Sharing what works*”**

Part II captures reflections of staff members from the same six homes as they share what worked, and describe some of the practices that allowed them to get through this disaster and back on their feet. Clearly leadership made a difference in how these six homes fared. Their stories reveal leadership practices essential to their survival, which had roots in their everyday ways of leading.

#### **FACILITATOR TIPS:**

- As facilitator, preview the film before showing it to a group.
- Allow participants for reflective time prior to and after viewing the film to absorb its emotional impact
- Use paired conversation and/or small group discussion to allow space for the intimate nature of the reflection the film generates, in any size group.
- The guide provides suggested discussion topics, and includes resources on leadership.

## Discussion Guide

### Prior to Showing the Film

#### INTRODUCE FILM:

- Share information about how and why the film came about, using the background from the Acknowledgements and Introduction sections.
- Share any current information you have about rebuilding progress in New Orleans.

#### DISCUSSION:

Ask the audience to talk in pairs about Katrina. Allow this discussion to take time – it is a personal reflection time. Possible discussion questions:

1. Where were you when you first heard of the devastation in New Orleans? What do you remember seeing?
2. What do you remember hearing about nursing homes during Katrina?

### After Showing the Film

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION AFTER VIEWING:

Some people may have an emotional reaction to this film. Allow a pause after the film ends. Then before any focused discussion, give the audience a few minutes to gather their thoughts and share in pairs or small groups by inviting people to debrief on what they just viewed.

Additional general discussion: ask the audience to reflect back on the discussion they had before viewing the film. Ask if after viewing the film, they changed what they had thought about the situation. Have them start this discussion in their original pairs, or in small groups.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS

Ask people to talk in pairs for a few minutes about how they mentally prepare for something stressful or worrisome.

**Resource Information:** Emergency preparedness is multilayered and each layer is critical to success. Evacuation plans, sheltering plans, contingency plans are all for naught if staff and leaders lack the emotional reserve and fortitude to carry out those plans. When staffs are psychologically prepared, they feel confident, competent and cared about, and not only carry out those plans but do so against all odds. This capacity is often called resilience and is a capacity that can be developed and nourished. As with other lessons that emerged from Katrina, nurturing resilience - which we have called psychological preparedness – *before* the storm, served nursing homes well in a time of crisis. ***If we are steady today, we are ready tomorrow, no matter what tomorrow may bring.***

## Psychological preparedness has three key ingredients:

### 1. A sense of team: *We are in this together*

Leaders reinforce this by being a daily visible presence. By walking about, saying hello, learning and addressing residents and staff by name, saying thanks, leaders convey a sense of being in it together.

Leaders reinforce this by ensuring the needs of staff and their families are taken into account when developing evacuation plans

Leaders reinforce this by rolling up their sleeves and working side by side with staff.

In short, practicing good leadership skills builds a sense of team.

### 2. A sense of confidence: *We can do this*

Staff need to have confidence in leadership as well as in themselves and each other. Leaders earn confidence by regularly providing accurate information about emergency plans, communicating clearly and often, and establishing clear roles. Leaders build confidence by being credible which includes being fair, consistent and reliable.

Staff develop confidence when leaders notice and praise a job well done (*“catch me doin’ something good”*) and routinely solicit and utilize their ideas.

### 3. Emotional reserves: *We value your health*

Promoting wellness - in staff as well as in residents - is a hot topic in healthcare and is crucial to psychological preparedness. Good health includes both physical and mental health. Good health habits and stress management skills boost brainpower and help prevent depletion of critical brain reserves during a crisis.

Leaders support health in a variety of ways ranging from providing health benefits to providing nutritious food and ensuring adequate supplies to do the job (*a straightforward way to reduce stress*).

Leaders support health by modeling good self-care (*“your oxygen mask goes on first”*) and maintaining an attitude of optimism.

Leaders support health by incorporating stress busters into the workplace (deep breathing, laughing, stretching, taking a break).

## DISCUSSION:

Embedded in the film are steps leaders took to ensure psychological preparedness:

How many can you spot?

What does your organization have in place for psychological preparedness?



## GOOD PRACTICES IN AN EMERGENCY

*You can't just hope for the best*

Embedded throughout the film are examples of good practices for evacuations in a disaster. Living these practices helped the homes to get through trying times and maintain their ability to provide good care even on a gymnasium floor. These same practices helped staff deal with the crises that ensued when their best laid plans fell through.

The importance of being prepared runs through this film. This film is ideal as an aid for disaster planning or when you review your facility's plan with staff. If you are using this film as a tool for disaster preparedness, ask the viewers to watch with a pencil in hand and to jot down examples of good practices as they see them.

Here are examples of good practices that you can highlight and use to prompt discussion among participants about best practices. They are listed along with subsection titles in the film so you can replay them if you want to focus in on a particular area for discussion.

### DISCUSSION:

Encourage participants to share tips and best practices, to help everyone be better prepared.

- **On the bus: [First section in "*You can't just hope for the best*"]**
  - **Loading a bus:** This is physically difficult and is an enormous organizational undertaking. Have you ever done a drill in loading a bus?
  - **Staffing on the bus:** "We had nurses, CNAs and administrators on the bus." Not knowing how long the ride to their evacuation site would take, they made sure that the bus had adequate staff, no matter how long the journey.
  - **Supplies on the bus:** "We took the medicine in case a resident had a seizure." Even though the ride to Baton Rouge was usually less than an hour, the staff knew that in an event like this would take much longer. So having medicine, water, food, coolers, and care-related supplies on the bus was a necessity.
  - **Systems of checks and balances:** A system for checking residents, medications, and supplies was adhered to—"You bring the residents to the bus, pick up the meds from the med cart and check off that the resident is on board." To make sure no one is left behind, everywhere, including closets are carefully checked.
  
- **At the evacuation site: ["*setting up shop*"]**
  - **Creating a safe space:** As they prepared to set up shop on a gym floor, the housekeeping staff disinfected the mattresses. Keeping the area where care is provided clean is important. How else did staff in the film maintain cleanliness?
  - **Community assistance:** "We find that if there are volunteers in the community at the receiving end, people feel welcome. It's just such an uplifting thing and it really helps a lot and then if we can [have] policemen, national guardsmen there to help off load the patients it really does relieve a lot of stress.' Do you have the

community contacts in place to make this happen? How do you develop these contacts?

- **Planning, and Having Plan B: [*best laid plans and “I’m not leaving anybody”*]**
  - **When plans change:** Remember how Patrick and Kathy had to make Plan B when their evacuation site was changed to one that couldn’t support them. Do you have a back-up plan?
  - **Courage in the face of the unexpected:** Staff at St. Margaret’s Daughters Home moved residents when the storm blew off the roof of their shelter. Staff at Chateau Living Center readied to move their residents when they heard flood waters were coming their way.
  - **Emergency Supplies and Contingencies: [*“it was hot”*]** Do you have the capacity to care for people in a power outage? Do you have working relationships with rescuers who can back you up if you need it?
  
- **Communication and Staff Support:**
  - **Staff’s families: [*“I couldn’t find my son”*]** Ask staff if they and their families have created an emergency plan. This film can be used as a springboard for discussion about how you plan to support those who evacuate with you.
  - **Back up communication systems:** How would you get in touch with people and how would they get in touch with you, in the event of a regional disaster?

## PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS

If you would like to ask people to focus on their personal preparedness and to think about what nursing home staff went through as individuals, here are some sample discussion questions:

1. Have you thought about what might happen in your nursing home if you were ever forced to evacuate?
2. Would you choose to evacuate with the home, or to stay with your own family?
3. If you could, would you bring your own family with the home in an evacuation?
4. If you elected to go with the home, what would you take?
5. What would the home need to do to make it so you would choose to go?
6. Could you live in a wing of a nursing home? How might you see things differently if you lived where you work?
7. Is your family prepared for a disaster? Do you have plans for relocation and communication?
8. How do you keep your spirits up when things are not going well?
9. Do you identify with anyone in the film, and why?

## LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

The leadership practices exemplified in this film are relevant not only to emergency preparedness but also to everyday leadership. These practices create workplaces where

individual workers thrive, and work well with each other. Working well together is crucial to being able to prepare for and respond to an emergency. It is also crucial for staff retention.

Good leadership is a skill, and like any other skill, the more we practice it, the better we get at it. Katrina gave people many opportunities to exercise leadership skills. Most of the time life does not come at us quite as fast as it did for those who lived through Katrina and its aftermath. A disaster such as Katrina challenges people caught in it to behave in ways that ordinary life does not call for us to do. Clearly leadership made a difference in how these six homes fared.

Their stories reveal leadership practices essential to their survival, which had roots in their everyday ways of leading. Their practices echo the “Level 5 leaders” Jim Collins describes in *Good to Great*, Jim Collins as seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results.

### **THREE KEY RESOURCES ON LEADERSHIP**

Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, found Level 5 leadership to be the main ingredient in companies that were able to make the leap from good to great. Some of the characteristics of Level 5 may be surprising. He talks about the leaders being humble, shy, gracious, self-effacing and understated, yet fanatically driven to positive outcomes for their organizations. Collins noted that Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs *from* themselves and *into* the larger goal of building a great company.

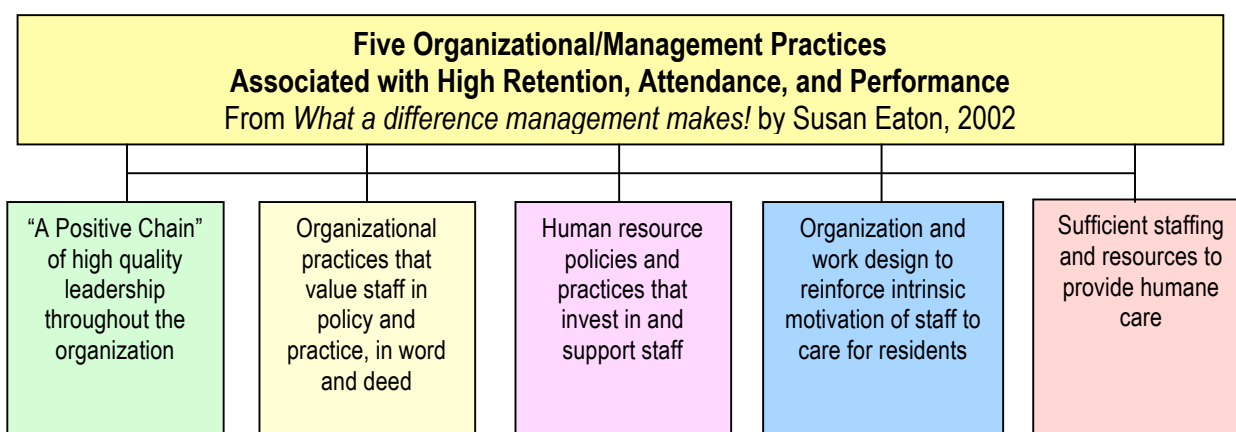
He especially highlighted the way Level 5 leaders “create a climate where the truth can be heard,” using four key practices:

- Lead with questions, not answers
- Engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion
- Conduct autopsies without blame
- Build “red flag” mechanisms

In *The Leadership Challenge*, a popular evidence based manual on leadership, Kouzes and Posner found five fundamental practices that enabled leaders to get extraordinary things done:

- Model the way
- Inspire a shared vision
- Challenge the process
- Enable others to act
- Encourage the heart

Susan Eaton, in her 2002 CMS-funded study, *What a difference management makes!*, applied leadership concepts to nursing homes, comparing high and low turnover homes. She identified the following key management practices at nursing homes with high retention and high performance:



See Resource Section for more information about how to obtain these resources.

**DISCUSSION:**

You can introduce Kouzes and Posner, and Eaton prior to showing the film and ask viewers to watch for examples of these leadership practices, or you can share this leadership information after the film is viewed. Ask people about leadership practices they saw in the film, and/or to share best practices in leadership they are aware of in their own workplaces.

Link to the practices described in the section on Psychological Preparedness, as everyday good leadership practices.

You can replay sections that highlight certain practices (as noted below). Use any combination of these practices as a springboard for further probing.

Other possible discussion questions, with references to subsections of the guide, include:

- **Good Leadership:** What makes a good leader? Select quotes from film that speak to this issue “in their own words.”
- **Good leadership prior to an event/Good preparation:** [*“What’s the story? What’s the plan?”*] Ask viewers to respond to the following quote from the film: *“If you ever have to have an evacuation or you have to go through something to this extent, I hope that you have your daily business in check. Because if you don’t, you will probably fail.”* What do they think about this? What is needed in the daily business of leadership in order to be successful in an evacuation?
- **Communication:** [*“What’s the story? What’s the plan?”*] Communication is essential for any organization’s success – whether in surviving a disaster or retaining staff. Identify specific examples of good communication practices by some of the leaders in this film.
- **Valuing Staff:** [*“I know what you’re going through”*] Would you say the leaders in this film valued their staff? Respected them? Discovered – or re-discovered – their common humanity? Give examples of each.

- **Enabling Others to Act: [*“I think we can run with this”*]** One key dimension of good leadership is enabling others to act. Discuss examples in the film and then discuss the ways in your organization that you enable others to act.
- **Participatory Leadership: [*“I think we can run with this”*]**
  - What did you think when Bob said “I’ll steal any idea. If it’s working somewhere, I’ll steal it, I’m not proud.”
    - Self-check: Do you seek out good ideas from your staff? If so, what is your method for getting good ideas from staff? Do you reward good ideas?
  - Discuss what Kellie and Dena said, that, “Everyone has something to offer and you value their opinion. And we’ve carried that forward a lot since we’ve been back. When we’re making policy change or big decisions, we invite the people in it’s going to effect and say how will this really affect you because you do the job day to day.” How do you/can you make that operational where you work?
- **Taking Care of Staff:** Some nursing homes described providing housing for their staff after the storm. What do you think of that? How is it a component of good leadership?
- **Ingenuity: [*“I think we can run with this”*]** In the film there were numerous examples of ingenuity. [Porta Johns, cutting up the towels, the make-shift laundry, building a shower, contamination signs]
  - What struck you as particularly ingenious?
  - Self-check: Are your staff able to take initiative? If so, how do you encourage them? What happens if a good idea doesn’t work out as well as hoped?
- **Developing Leadership in Others:** How did the official leaders in these homes develop the leadership abilities of those around them?
- **Being in Community: [*“in it together”* and *“egg salad”*]**
  - What did staff say about teamwork and how leaders promoted it?
  - How did leaders Model the Way?
  - What relationships does your nursing home have with others in the community who are responsible for coordinating local or regional disasters?

## Resources

Other resources that you might find helpful:

### ***What You Do Matters A Curriculum for Staff Stability***

This training curriculum is the culmination of the Lake Charles Nursing Home Staffing Project, a year-long learning collaborative designed to help nursing homes in the Lake Charles region stabilize staffing and resume their culture change journey after Hurricane Rita. The manual gives participating homes a way to review and renew their work and provides an opportunity for non-participating homes to understand and use the work to make positive changes. The manual includes all of the materials presented at the four learning sessions along with instructions for their use. It is available by contacting the Governor's Office on Elder Affairs, Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman, at [lasadden@goea.la.gov](mailto:lasadden@goea.la.gov).

**Staff Stability Tool Kit** by B&F Consulting for Quality Partners of Rhode Island: Provides practical guidance for improving retention and stabilizing day-to-day staffing. Available at [www.riguqualitypartners.org](http://www.riguqualitypartners.org). Click on "HATCh model" and then on "Workforce."

**Good to Great** by Jim Collins articulates what it takes to go from just being good to being great. It describes leadership and organizational practices that help companies excel.

**The Leadership Challenge** by James Kouzes and Barry Posner: Written as a field guide to leadership, it identifies five practices of exemplary leaders and describes how to implement these practices in everyday leadership.

***What a difference management makes!*** by Susan C. Eaton, commissioned in 2002 by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS): Compares nursing homes with high and low turnover to identify management practices that contribute to turnover and practices that contribute to stability. Available on the web at: [www.BandFConsultingInc.com](http://www.BandFConsultingInc.com)

**From Institutional to Individualized Care Part Four: The "How" of Change: *What a difference management makes!*** a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Satellite Broadcast and Webcast aired on Friday, September 14, 2007. Identifies practices that support good leadership in times of change available through [www.Pioneernetwork.net](http://www.Pioneernetwork.net)

**New Orleans Nursing Home Staffing Project:** Resources and materials used for learning sessions from November 2, 2006 through June 30, 2009, can be found at: <http://www.lhcr.org>. Click on "Nursing Homes" and then "Workforce."

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