



STEPHEN
MCGHEE
LEADERSHIP

results

From Disaster to Preparedness

Southwest Georgia Public Health District

THE SITUATION

Shortly after the infamous September 11, Dr. Paul Newell of *Southwest Georgia Public Health District* was in the midst of an Anthrax scare. It was dominating his entire department. Literally everyone on his staff was overwhelmed, as an unprecedented number of people heading to the Health Department for services, increased relentlessly.

Despite the urgency of the Anthrax scare and the temptation to just deal with emergencies as they arose, Dr. Newell recognized that serious planning was needed. He said, "If there was ever a time to address the issue of strategy and leadership this was it." Newell hired Stephen McGhee amidst a great deal of skepticism about spending time in a planning session.

THE PROCESS

The first order was to take a step back even though there was a great deal of perceived urgency. Stephen challenged the organization to start paying attention to their language of disaster and pointed out how it was contributing to a perception of emergency. He showed them how, by shifting their vocabulary, they could literally shift the focus and the direction toward strategic solutions. Subsequently the team created a strategic plan with Key Result Areas for each leader that supported a sound organizational infrastructure, and focused on how to achieve positive results.

THE RESULT

The time spent planning created a landmark shift from putting out endless emergency "brush fires" in favor of preparedness. Newell says "from our planning session we saw distinct movement in virtually all areas of the department with increased commitment from a broad range of people."

The bottom line: Positive objectives previously viewed as unlikely were set and then met, because leadership adopted a new focus that, under the circumstances, were considered unreasonable.

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