



# ASSET

## SHARE AND MOVE TO FACE NASTY BUGS

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Recognize and respect fear. This is one of the main lessons Ron Klain claims to have learned [9] by his efforts against Ebola. Klain has recently served as the first White House Ebola Response Coordinator, also known as the Ebola Czar. From such a high position, he got a close and deep insight into the dramatic threat to global health represented by the West Africa outbreak.

During an epidemic, fear may strike in many different ways. There is the fear of becoming infected, the fear of being quarantined, the fear of being discriminated [10] for having ? or being suspected of ? been contaminated. Moreover, each disease has its characteristic traits, which in turn may lead to characteristic fears. As far as Ebola concerns [11], in some areas within West Africa, the disease was thought to be a product of witchcraft, or the result of a plot warped by Westerners or even by local governments. Furthermore, people from Western countries were particularly scared by what they considered an unknown and lethal virus coming from the Dark Continent and able to make patients bleeding out until their organs and bodies liquefy.

In the US, many experts pointed out that they were far more likely to die from a car crash or a heart attack than Ebola, but Klain disagree with such an approach. Acknowledging and addressing these fears, rather than dismissing them, is a better way to face them. As he told to *Fortune*, ?People fear new threats and if you deny them, you only drive them underground where they fester and get

worse?. As it was recognized by TELL ME experts too [12], fear is nurtured by both misinformation and lack of information, and this is why it is necessary to employ science-based decision making with transparent communication.

Another aspect related to communication raised by Klain is the great advantage of dealing face to-face with people working in crisis management, be it in person or via video. By doing this, all the people involved become more than just an email address or a small thumbnail, thus improving the quality and effectiveness of those interactions.

Another key point, in Klain's opinion, is the handling of the data. Of the right data. The total number of cases and deaths have a great media coverage but they are not very useful in terms of crisis management, since they represent cumulative cases in a wide range of time that may include patients either cured or dead. Better to focus on the most recent cases and on those that are currently infected, in order to try to guess where the infection could be spreading next. Also, as pointed out by Roberto Satolli ? physician and journalist, who joined the Emergency team in Sierra Leone for some weeks ? total numbers are not very reliable due to discrepancies in the way they are collected, which could lead to local underestimation or overestimation of the real impact of the outbreak.

Ron Klain also stressed out the necessity to focus closely on cultural differences and perspectives, which could play a relevant role [12], especially in West Africa, and the importance of flexibility, which allows to reassess plans and correct any information if and when the situation changes [13].

While paying due credit to all the people standing on the front against Ebola, Klain claims that learning such lessons greatly improved the efficacy of management and coordination in Washington, which in turns helped make a difference.

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