

A perfect storm.

That's how Author Mike Barger describes what became known as the "Valentine's Day Crisis" for JetBlue — a fateful event during which a busy travel weekend, an optimistic leadership team, and a catastrophic snowstorm would converge to create one of the most infamous and challenging incidents in the company's history.

Hold on to your seat.

In 2007, JetBlue was in its seventh successful year of operations and all things pointed to a continued trajectory of growth. JetBlue was one of the top performers in the U.S. airline industry and recognized as Ad Age's Marketer of the Year. It was clear JetBlue had secured a unique reputation of transparency and unmatched customer service. But, like all organizations, they weren't immune to a crisis, and the Valentine's Day Crisis would be the company's first major self-imposed catastrophe.

While intentions were always to best serve immediate customer and investor interests, the company's reluctance to cancel flights amidst news of an incoming winter storm set off a chain reaction of events that ultimately led to thousands of passengers stranded on taxiways and in airports around the country and millions of dollars in lost revenue and credit for future travel. The result was a set of invaluable lessons learned in approaching crisis management proactively and — as Barger explores in his book, *High-Stakes Leadership in Turbulent Times* — with a strategy of evaluating the near, mid-, and long-term interests of all key stakeholder groups well before being faced with a major operational crisis.

Put on your oxygen mask first.

The best growth opportunities come from reflecting on the most challenging of circumstances. In his book, Barger discusses in detail how the company should have evaluated the interests of stakeholders including customers, investors, crew members (i.e., company employees), regulatory agencies, the media, and even competitors, before making decisions.



The opportunity to learn is always in sight.

Although likely painful to recount at times, the Valentine's Day meltdown is, in Barger's words, "a useful, relatable, somewhat entertaining, and wonderfully illustrative of the application of stakeholder theory."

It's easy to retroactively dissect and evaluate a company's stumble from the outside, but the perspective gained from having managed a crisis firsthand is the kind of invaluable lesson that can only be gleaned from Barger's book. As Barger writes, "the harsh reality for many company leaders is that they will find themselves in a crisis without having dedicated the time to truly understand their stakeholders or build relationships before the crisis strikes. When this happens, leaders at a company discover they have no trust capital to fall back on." It's not a matter of *if*, but rather *when*, a crisis will occur. Barger's take on crisis management is a significant resource in the toolbox of any leader looking to strategically manage a crisis head-on.

Learn from a leader who understands.

Barger's best-selling book is chockfull of real-world case studies like JetBlue's Valentine's Day Massacre, providing tangible and relatable situations to assist in articulating the value of loving your stakeholders in good times and in bad.

From his personal, on-the-ground experiences to his reflection on other large, high-stakes crises, Barger leaves his audiences with the insights they need to be better prepared and more resilient to the harsh complexities of business today.

