

Tabletop Exercise Guide: Courage Under Fire

Audience: For Executives, Security Leaders, and Crisis Teams

Purpose: This tabletop exercise leverages *Courage Under Fire* as a foundational case study to explore **decision-making, governance, coordination, and accountability under high-pressure crisis conditions**. It is designed for executive teams, boards, and senior security leaders and can be adapted for public or private sector organizations.

Exercise Objectives

Participants will:

1. Understand the After-Action Review (AAR) Process
2. Identify critical areas of the organization to review, such as leadership, policies, decision-making, communications, and preparedness
3. Apply lessons learned to enhance organizational structure and crisis preparedness

Recommended Participants

- Executive leadership team
- Board members or trustees
- Security, risk, legal, and communications leaders
- Crisis management or emergency response teams

Exercise Format

- **Duration:** 90–120 minutes
- **Format:** Facilitated discussion
- **Materials Needed:**
 - Selected excerpts from *Courage Under Fire*
 - Organizational charts and crisis plans
 - This exercise guide

Scenario Framework

Participants respond to a **rapidly evolving crisis** characterized by:

- Large-scale public activity or events
- Conflicting or incomplete intelligence
- Multiple agencies or departments with overlapping roles
- Limited clarity on authority for resource escalation

Note: Facilitators should avoid recreating January 6 directly; focus on organizational dynamics, communication, and decision-making structures.

Discussion Modules

Module 1: Early Indicators & Preparation

- What warning signs were present?
- Who had authority to act—and who did not?
- What assumptions shaped early decisions?

Module 2: Escalation & Authority

- Where did authority and responsibility diverge?
- What approvals were required—and why?
- How did governance structures enable or delay action?

Module 3: Coordination & Communication

- How was information tracked and shared across entities?
- What barriers existed between partners?
- How were conflicting priorities resolved?

Module 4: Public Narrative & Accountability

- How did external perception form during the crisis?
- What information was missing or misunderstood?
- How should institutions document and communicate after-action findings?

After-Action Reflection

Participants should identify:

- One governance change needed
- One coordination improvement
- One decision authority clarification
- One action to improve overall preparedness
- Potential influences of political or corporate pressures on transparency and accountability