

Michael Roberto

SEMINAR

Facing Ambiguous Threats— An Interactive Leadership Exercise Based on Columbia's Final Mission



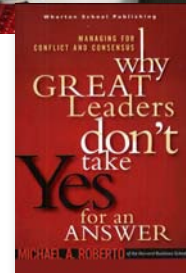
BACKGROUND. The space shuttle Columbia's final mission in January 2003 ended in tragedy. According to the investigating commission, seven astronauts died because of leadership failures, tied primarily to the natural human tendency to downgrade ambiguous threats and to a management culture that suppressed vigorous debate and constructive conflict.

THE CASE. Michael Roberto has prepared one of the most authentic and interactive multi-media case studies ever assembled for use in leadership development. And he's developed an executive education seminar based on the case that delivers an extraordinary experience. *Columbia's Final Mission* is Harvard Business School Press's best-selling case study and won the prestigious Cody Award.

THE SESSION. The case is packaged on a CD that includes an original background documentary on NASA and the mission, real launch footage and other unique multimedia features. Your participants are pre-assigned one of six managers or engineers that were key to the program and given password access to transcripts and, in some cases, the real audio of crucial meetings attended by their role-play personae, and to their actual emails, documents, reports, slide presentations, and other real materials. Each participant gets only his or her own persona's materials covering the seven days leading up to the critical Mission Management Team meeting that took place on Flight Day 8, when the decision to proceed was made. Then the group role plays the meeting and analyzes the organizational causes of the tragedy (not the technical causes). The first-person perspective combined with the extraordinary value of authentic prep materials makes the role play and ensuing discussion extremely rich.

PROGRAM LENGTH. Three hours is ideal and recommended; this allows a full role-play of the meeting. More time allows a second role play and fuller discussion. The program can be stripped to two hours of presentation and some interaction. Preparation time with the CD requires only two hours.

continued > >



Michael Roberto

SEMINAR

continued > > >

THE TAKE-AWAYS. Participants learn to recognize and deal with the forces that cause leaders to ignore weak signals that should tell them that disaster looms. They experience first-hand the pressures that tend to undermine effective decision-making and practice overcoming these pressures to find their own path to strong leadership. Participants aggressively explore the question of leadership accountability and apply the lessons to their own roles as leaders, with concrete take-aways.

Shorter programs

Michael also does shorter programs that combine a presentation and his signature interactive approach. These include:

- ✧ Learning the Lessons—Decision Making in the Kennedy administration during the The Bay of Pigs vs the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- ✧ Decisive Leadership—the 1996 Mount Everest Tragedy
- ✧ Healthcare—The Turnaround of Boston’s Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Keynote Presentation Topics

Michael can apply the principles outlined in his well-received book, *Why Great Leaders Don’t Take Yes for an Answer: Managing for Conflict and Consensus* to your company’s needs and goals for the meeting, using cases that relate most effectively to your audience.