

RESTORATION

By now we have all read articles and listened to many news commentaries about the “recession” and the challenges business organizations currently face. Clearly, many organizations are struggling to move forward with their growth plans; others are finding the need to retrench, downsize and take other measures to significantly cut costs. Unfortunately, some may not survive the declining economic conditions. In many respects there may not be much we can do other than “adapt”. Perhaps most disturbing is that none of us has any real control over these circumstances, yet, we must find ways to move forward despite these bleak conditions.

We’ve all heard the old saying that “hope is not a strategy.” Yet today, “hope” may be just what most people need amidst all this woe, concern and turmoil. I do believe that there are a few important things those who occupy leadership positions can do to restore some level of “confidence,” not only for ourselves but others as well. Here are just a few things that can help restore that confidence and resurrect a sense of optimism in our workplace.

1. Restoring a Sense of “Purpose”

This is a good time for all of us to re-examine our business “purpose” (or what some refer to as “mission”). The key questions are:

- **Who Are We?** Our answers should address values, culture, norms and expectations.
- **What Is It That We Do?** Here, our answers should address our product or service offerings.
- **For Whom Do We Do It?** This refers to our intended market space, customers or clients.
- **Why Should They Choose Us?** This is our “value proposition. It’s what differentiates us and makes our products or services both special and desirable.

No doubt many businesses in the retrenchment mode have found that they cannot economically sustain all that they wish or once provided. This generally results in cutbacks, reductions and possibly the elimination of some offerings. And, if it needs to be cut...it needs to be cut! But the key is not to cut into those offerings critical to our business purpose or the infrastructure necessary to support that purpose.

So, how do you best remain true to your core business purpose and sustain what truly makes your organization special? In recent weeks I have heard a number of stories where organizations forced to adapt to the sluggish economy have re-examined their offerings relative to newly expressed customer needs, made adjustments (some relatively minor) in the mix or nature of those offerings, and have found themselves with revenues and profits well beyond what they imagined. Is that possible for you?

2. Restoring “Customer Focus”

Chris Stiehl, marketing guru, educator, co-author of the book *Painkiller Marketing* often reminds his readers that many of us in leadership positions are excessively overly confident about the “customer experience” associated with our offerings. He can provide many stories of “good

intentions gone bad” because of a lack of regular communication with customers or those employees within our organizations who have regular contact with customers.

It would seem that in these difficult times a refocus on customer’s relationships, needs, preferences and requirements is very wise as we are forced to compete more vigorously for a smaller pot of available dollars. One might also argue that those who do the best in terms of maintaining these customer relationships (and customer services) will be the survivors at the other end of this economic downturn.

3. Restoring “Employee Confidence and Commitment”

If your confidence is waning, what must your employees be thinking? This is particularly the case when an organization is forced to retrench, eliminate jobs and/or take other drastic measures to reduce costs. Nevertheless, whether you’ve had workforce reductions or not, all of us need to set a positive, hopeful tone for those in our organization and lead them with a realistic measure of confidence and optimism. One thing we can do to maintain an optimistic outlook is re-focusing everyone’s attention on the “vision” for the organization, and instilling a sustained belief that “we can get there!” Good vision statements will address the following questions:

- **Who/What Do We Want to Be?**
- **Where Are We Going?**
- **What Do We Want to Achieve?**

Descriptive answers to these questions are nice, but it’s best if they are addressed using measures and metrics of magnitude or mixture (e.g., “Grow to \$150M company by 2010” or “Expand and establish visible market presence within 12 states by 2011”).

Of course your organization’s “vision” may need to be slightly adjusted for the realities of the day, but casting an achievable vision (even if it is a stretch) is still a sound way to recapture interest, passion, commitment and a sense of confidence that we “can do.” Sure, it may take a little longer than originally planned, but if the vision still has legs, it is worth pursuing! After all, there is always a “rise” on the other side of any recession, and these difficult times may provide your organization with just the opportunity necessary to position your organization for the next ascent.

To maintain momentum and ensure commitment, visions need to be translated into goal statements, and those goals need to be associated with recognition and tangible rewards. Many of us are still limited by ineffective performance management tools and/or reward programs built upon subjectivity. Now is a good time to revisit your salary and bonus programs to ensure that:

- a) Fixed and variable pay are available and properly apportioned
- b) Employees are provided with significant inducements for advancing toward the vision
- c) Rewards are based upon predictable formulas and measureable outcomes (not subjectivity)

4. Restoring “Team Effectiveness”

During these challenging economic times it is likely that circumstances and events have detracted from the key elements necessary for effective team composition and functioning. In more difficult cases, some teams may have seen members leave due to change efforts or cost cutting measures. Even under more favorable circumstances, tough economic times tend to strain team-member relationships and challenge the basic *fiber* that bonds teams ...“trust.”

One of the best things that we can do to restore confidence is to revitalize the teams within our organization. Revitalizing teams works because most of us, during threatening or uncertain times, tend to find solace and safety staying *close to the flock*.

In some cases revitalizing teams may require establishing new team leaders with appreciable efforts made to solidify members around the new leader. In other cases, and especially for those that have suffered a loss of members, redefinition and/or recommitment to the team's purpose (charter), objectives, composition, roles, norms and mutual expectations may be in order. Others may benefit from "team-building" exercises as a valuable means for reinforcing team bonds and cohesiveness. However, in almost all cases teams will benefit from some good old social activities where "fun" is reintroduced and bonding can occur in a natural, comfortable environment.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to set the tone with our own behavior. Are we consistently acting in a "trustworthy" fashion? Are we requiring trustworthy behavior on the part of our managers and leaders? Do we communicate frequently, openly and directly, both ways? Do we mean what we say, and walk our own talk? Nothing is more important in helping folks cope with uncertain times than to give them something to be confident in...that can be the sense of hope, confidence and integrity inspired by our own leadership!

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