

Keeping Your Team Up When the Economy Is Down

By Carole Nicolaidis

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There is nothing like a recession to cause a drastic decline in employee morale and performance. For that matter, it causes a drastic decline in manager morale and performance, too! When lay offs are looming and pay cuts are inevitable, how do you keep yourself and your team upbeat and productive?

I often hear managers complain that their people are not "good enough", that they do not understand what drives a business forward, and that they don't know how they can stay motivated and optimistic when sales drop. As I allow my clients to vent out loud, I then ask a few powerful questions such as " How do you communicate to them that you need them now more than ever?" "How do your employees know what's expected from them during this time" and finally "Are you able to admit that sometimes you may simply not have the answer?" All these questions will help YOU to help them. Employees that are uninformed and afraid often complain rather than react logically. Your job, as the team leader, is to adorn your "motivator" hat and be sure that they get the reassurance they need to stay positive and keep producing.

Taking a few minutes from your time and becoming really personal with each one of your top performers will allow them to feel much better because they will feel that are being included. Be vulnerable, let them know that in certain instances you don't have all the answers. Finally, involve them in brainstorming sessions. Not only are you showing them you are a strong leader who is not afraid of asking for help and but you are also building rapport.

Below are a few tips that can help you maintain an upbeat staff during a downed economy:

1. Give Them Verbal Support - Everyone wants to know that what they do has a meaning to the company's overall progress. Take the time to insure that each team member understands the importance of their contribution and that they DO make a difference.
2. Job Security - I know... job security practically doesn't exist anymore. That may be true in some corporations, however there are ways to instill confidence in your employees regarding their positions. Research your employee turnover. How high is it? Is this due to poor hiring practices, the recession or some other combination of factors? Once the answer is found, explain the situation to your team. Keep them informed and offer suggestions as to how they can help create job security. Be careful not to make promises you may not be able to keep. But do offer solid guidelines that will

give them back some control.

3. Be a role model - Do your employees see you "panic" at the slightest downturn in sales? Or do they marvel at your strength and confidence that your organization will prevail over the recession? Your attitude and outward expressions are what they look to for leadership. Be sure you set forth an image that is positive and encouraging.

4. Encourage A Life Outside The Office - The stress and frustration that comes with working in a company which is experiencing the effects of a recession can be traumatic for everyone. One of the best ways to combat this is to encourage that your team members pursue fun and relaxing activities outside of work. The change will do them good, and the stress reduction will help to improve their performance, too.

5. Provide Training - If your people do not grow the company will not grow. Enough said.

6. Give Your People The Tools They Need - Too often we place blame when a job is not performed correctly or up to our standards. However, the problem may lie in the fact that the necessary tools for success are lacking. It may be that they need training, extra software or some other resource. Abraham Maslow said, " If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." Be sure the proper tools are available in order to achieve maximum results.

Above all, remember that a recession will not last forever. Yes, the threat of losing a job can be outright terrifying for some who live paycheck to paycheck. However, alleviating as much of the additional stress as possible will contribute to a more pleasant working environment and to keeping your people up when the economy is down.

Carole is President of Progressive Leadership Inc offering personal and corporate success coaching, consulting and training in Knowledge Management and Organizational Development. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & subscribe to her FREE Ezine.

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