



LEADING IN TURBULENT ECONOMIC TIMES

Keeping morale and performance up when the economy is down

"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors"
Timeless Proverb

Times of economic, environmental and social crisis require leaders to be fully present. At the same time they must model courage, critical thinking and compassion. This guide presents specific strategies to enhance leader effectiveness in turbulent times.

COMMON MISTAKES THAT LEADERS MAKE IN TURBULENT ECONOMIC TIMES:

- Feeling like they have to have all the answers
- Not paying attention to people and their concerns
- Under-communicating
- Not taking care of themselves
- Waiting for the “perfect” message to send
- Emphasizing urgency over importance
- Playing it safe
- Worrying about things they cannot control

FIVE KEY LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR TURBULENT ECONOMIC TIMES

1. SHOW THAT YOU CARE:

During times of uncertainty, employees experience a range of emotions, from anxiety, defensiveness and confusion to excitement and hope. Helping employees cope presents a key leadership opportunity. **Here are some strategies to enhance morale, maximize support, and minimize stress-related health problems.**

- Lead with passion and compassion.
- Encourage employees to take care of themselves: exercise, eat well, get enough sleep, and stay connected to their social support systems.
- Recognize people and express appreciation. Don't forget the simple power of *thank you*.
- Involve people in decisions that have an impact on them so they have an experience of control and influence. Use all of the wisdom of the people in your organization (not just those at the top).
- Remind everyone that this, too, shall pass. It may seem cliché, but it's true. Good times are interspersed with difficult times – it is part of the cycle of business (and life).
- Look for things to celebrate and have some fun.

2. PROVIDE DIRECTION

In difficult times, people tend to put their heads down and focus inward. If the organization is shifting priorities, restructuring, or laying people off, it is challenging to keep employees focused. **Here are some strategies to enhance productivity, maximize alignment, and minimize confusion.**

- Focus on the important and strategic issues. Don't get distracted by the short-term, urgent matters at the expense of the longer-term view.
- Take this opportunity to revisit and communicate the organizational purpose, vision, and values. Use organizational values to guide the decision-making process.
- Be clear about current priorities and articulate how job responsibilities contribute to organizational success. If employees have something toward which to work, it will help keep their attention on what needs to get done, rather than on worrying or waiting.

3. OPTIMIZE COMMUNICATION

During difficult and uncertain times, employees need MORE information and discussion, not less. Without information, people will make it up and feed the rumor mill. **Here are some strategies to enhance communication, maximize trust, and minimize suspicion.**

- Have ongoing dialogue among senior leaders and all employees about current realities and what must and must not change in order to accomplish organizational priorities.
- Be honest. Making things sound better than they are or sugarcoating the details can prompt suspicion. Employees want and deserve to know the truth.
- Be transparent. Clearly communicate what is known at this point in time rather than waiting until things are finalized. Minimize closed-door sessions. Secrecy can ignite fear, fan rumors and lower morale.
- Draw on past experience. Most companies have faced difficult times before. Remind people of the organization's history of success.
- Engage people in conversation to ensure they understand the information presented. Understanding does NOT come from hearing or reading a message—it comes from dialogue.

4. ENCOURAGE INNOVATION

During times of uncertainty, it is more important than ever to create new ways of working that will allow employees to increase efficiency and do more with less. **Here are some strategies to enhance collaboration, maximize creativity and minimize feelings of hopelessness.**

- Continually give the message that the “old way of doing things” may no longer be appropriate and that “together, we have the opportunity to create the future.” *Now is the time to challenge ideas that have become sacred.*
- Invite people at all levels of the organization to generate strategies for increased efficiency and quality. Provide incentive by rewarding new solutions to old problems.
- Endorse and reward new partnerships across the organization. Encourage people to talk and work with people who will offer new perspectives and solutions.

5. MANAGE YOURSELF

Leaders set the emotional tone in an organization and their mood has an impact on those around them. Fear and confidence are equally contagious. **Here are some strategies to enhance stamina, maximize resourcefulness, and minimize burnout.**

- Be aware of what you are experiencing so you can effectively manage how you are acting.
- Be clear about your values as they are the foundation for your behavior.
- Stay focused on what's important.
- Model the behaviors you want to reinforce in others: calmness, confidence, focus, and caring.
- Manage your mood: be optimistic, sincere and realistic.
- Take care of your health: exercise, eat well, get enough sleep, and stay connected to your social support systems.

HARD WON WISDOM – WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

- Bring employees together to share information and engage in conversation. Written communication is necessary but not sufficient.
- Encourage people to be creative and bold, and to focus on things they can control.
- Concentrate on growth, opportunity, and possibility rather than decline, challenges, and limited options.
- Remember that people react differently to stress; adapt your approach accordingly.
- Break things down into small steps; empower people to feel successful in place of overwhelmed.
- Self-care is your responsibility! Remember the airplane safety talk –you need to ensure your supply of oxygen before helping others.