



Stepping Up During Tough Times

Here are seven suggestions to help you improve morale, motivation and productivity in your in-plant.

One approach during the tough economic times we live in is to stick our heads in the sand, and wish all of this would just go away. I suggest there is a better approach: meet the tough times head on and be proactive. How can we be proactive and weather the economic storm? Here are seven suggestions for your consideration:

1 Build Credibility. It is important to constantly enhance the reputation of your operation. This will help you avoid excessive budget cuts and improve the probability of acquiring the resources you need to be successful. Here are tactics to help build credibility:

- Use internal communications channels (e.g., company newsletters, e-mail, intranet Web page, etc.) to let others know of your team's accomplishments.
- Sponsor an open house and have tours so people better understand what you do and the value it brings.
- Develop a team promotional brochure that describes the services you provide and has pictures of the staff and equipment.
- Develop a professional looking and informative service guide. Consider doing a periodic newsletter.
- Make sure your team members that deal with internal and external customers dress professionally. Provide phone and communication skill training for all.

- Pursue personal certifications. Attend IPMA conferences and earn a certificate or awards. Frame and display prominently all certificates and awards.
- Get involved with trade organizations like IPMA and your local Postal Customer Council (if you have mail responsibilities).
- Develop and tell a great "green" story.
- Finally, provide *great* customer service and consistently high quality. Do a periodic customer survey and work together as a team to improve on the results.

2 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.

Studies have shown that employees want to know how the team and the organization are doing, and the person they most trust for this information is their immediate supervisor. Our employees want to hear both the positive and negative news from us. If we fail to communicate, a vacuum

is created—and that vacuum is filled by the "rumor mill," which invariably is negative and destructive to morale and motivation.

3 Give Your People Hope.

Napoleon said that "Great leaders are dealers in hope." We don't want to sugar-coat current realities, but we can share the strategies in motion to make the future brighter. We can also remind people that every prior recession has been followed by several years of growth and prosperity.

4 Dole out "Hugs."

As leaders we can generously give out verbal, written and even physical "hugs" to our team members. What the great philosopher Plato reportedly said years ago is especially relevant today: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Putting our emotional intelligence to work will help build camaraderie and ease a bit of the pain that people are feeling.

5 Manage Your Costs.

Everybody is feeling the pressure to hold the line on costs or even lower costs. One key to manage costs is to invite your employees into

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the process. It's surprising the good ideas that employees come up with if you are candid with them and invite their participation. For example, my company (Portland General Electric) needed to cut our 2009 operating budget by \$25 million. We shared the need with employees, brain stormed, and came up with the budget cuts without any employee layoffs.

Here are a few cost-saving ideas my teams have implemented: reduction of overtime by process improvements and awareness of need to cut back; reduced employee business expenses by scaling back purchased food and outside meals (in some cases food has been eliminated; in other cases employees have brought in food items on their own dime). We are also saving on training and development costs by focusing on the most value-added uses of our training dollars, such as local IPMA or PCC events and resources. One team eliminated a recently vacated position. The team came up with process improvements and unanimously agreed to fill in the gap.

Another challenge is the replacement of capital equipment. One key is to ensure you have a strong preventative maintenance program in place. This may extend the life of equipment until capital funds become available. When you are ready to make a request for capital funds, build a good business case including how your costs compare to those of an outside vendor. Take a look at used equipment. There may be some great deals that meet your needs. Doing a multi-year Net Present Value (NPV) comparison is helpful, assuming your NPV of costs is lower than what an external vendor would charge.

6 Consider Insourcing or Outsourcing. Insourcing involves bringing in work from another company or organization. If you have a well managed operation and have available capacity, bringing in external work can leverage your assets and provide a means to subsidize your costs.

An alternative to consider is outsourcing. Ask the following ques-

tions: Do we have a high-quality, low-cost in-plant? Is our company committed to the in-plant and keeping up with best practices and industry trends? Is our company willing to invest in vintage replacement of equipment? If your answer is "yes" to all these questions, then keeping the in-plant is likely the best option. But if you have any "no" answers, outsourcing the operation to a vendor or another in-plant may be the best choice.

7 Build Morale, Motivation and Productivity through Recognition.

Research has led to the development of what some have called the "Greatest Management Principle in the World": you get what you reward. Sincere, regular and positive recognition and rewarding of desired behaviors is common sense, but not common practice. A recent Gallop poll of thousands of employees found that 65 percent claimed to

have received no praise or recognition the past year.

Ongoing recognition and praise makes a person feel appreciated, important and stimulates the intrinsic motivation to excel. Gallop research found that individuals that receive regular recognition and praise:

- Increase their individual productivity.
- Increase engagement among their colleagues.
- Are more likely to stay with their organization.
- Receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers.
- Have better safety records and fewer accidents on the job.

Our economic tough times will eventually come to an end. Meanwhile, we have the opportunity to make a positive difference within our organization and help navigate through the tough waters we are in. Good luck as you proactively steer your ship.

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