

What's your best bet in challenging times?

Acting strategically, creatively and decisively leads to survival, growth

Now that global economies are going through tough times that may get even tougher before the pain stops, fear and its resulting knee-jerk reactions are counterproductive.

The time-honoured wisdom is to cut expenses and reduce staff by laying off, downsizing and closing offices and plants. For those still employed, morale can be lower than the belly of a worm. What's needed is the alchemy of an engaged workforce, who rise to exceptional performance.

A meltdown doesn't have to happen to everyone. Combining hope with decisive action, communication, collaboration and innovation are more likely to deter such a result. The value of acting strategically, creatively and decisively for the long term — while making specific plans for the short term — results in survival, growth and an edge on the competition.

Throughout the millennia, it's been proven crisis can bring opportunity for change and innovation. Extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures. Workplace loyalty doesn't happen overnight, particularly with a stressed, overworked and overwhelmed staff. Inspired leaders create an inspired culture that generates hopeful, co-operative, passionate staff who believe in and support necessary change.

In this atmosphere, people feel free to share ideas, give opinions and know they've been respected and heard. Morale is high. Bottom line soars.

Obviously, an organization's most important asset is people. Some will need training in new skills to perform more effectively in their current or future job to help the organization move toward increased success.



■ GUEST COMMENTARY

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Maintaining older workers saves time, money and efficiency. They have the experience, intelligence and knowledge — much of it in their heads, not on paper. In the past, many of the companies that maintained and retrained staff succeeded where others did not. Be creative.

Learn from the past

Learn from the mistakes organizations made in past recessions. When morale is low, demoralized staff will leave at the first opportunity. Although they may feel fortunate to be employed, when their stress levels rise, their productivity dips — slowly devaluing your organization.

Innovation is critical for long-term success. Look at your business model. Could it use reinventing or critical surgery? For example, Apple was not the first to bring small, digital media players to the marketplace. However, when it launched the iPod in combination with the iTunes store, it simplified technology by enabling customers to easily and conveniently download music, thus revolutionizing portable entertainment.

This innovation and business-model change accounted for a huge increase

in sales and revenue and transformed the company. What can you do to put a new spark in the marketplace, and with whom?

The 'aha' moment

Innovation doesn't just drop out of the sky. Sometimes it begins with an "aha" moment. To develop it, you need collaboration and a problem-solving process. Some people are more creative than others. They excel at generating new ideas, find alternatives or are able to find problems where others don't see them. Innovators are rare and need to be nurtured and developed to create breakthrough change. Do you know if you have any innovators, where they are and how to best develop them?

Innovators need people to challenge and help develop their ideas. Others excel at working out the details or implementing a well-planned and well-designed new concept, process or product. There is nothing like a team whose players have different thinking styles, who can collaborate for the good of all. Their differences are their greatest assets.

Creativity and innovation drive economic growth. Twenty-first century leaders drive change rather than being chased by it. The key is adaptability, constant reinvention and the maintenance of a proactive stance with an inspired and loyal workforce. Everyone is capable of leaving a meaningful legacy. What will yours be?

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