

Motivating Employees through Today's Economic Crisis: Executive Strategies

By Daniel Leidl, PhD

Tough Times Call for Tough Measures, Rallying the Troops, Circling the Wagons, Bunkering Down may all seem like maxed-out maxims in today's ailing economy, but what other rallying cries can today's executives call on? As layoffs and cutbacks ravage the headlines, is it possible to keep employees motivated to turn a profit, trudge forward, and maintain business as usual? The future seems murky, as the economy has only been weaker at one other point in the nation's history, an era defined by a moniker of human suffering. A Great Depression does not seem like anything we would want to revisit, and yet, we have been assured that our current situation is sure to get worse before it gets better.

While times may look bleak, there is still work to be done and opportunities to prosper. As with much in life, forward we go regardless of whether we are prepared and willing. So how do we best advance in such uncommon hours? As organizational leaders, how do we strive forward while motivating others to do the same? First off, we may be best to cast aside the trite sayings from above and reach down into deeper wells, as profound concerns demand profound solutions. In this regard, increasing the gravity of your language, and painting a sincere picture of your business amidst the looming historical crisis may actually benefit motivation. Tying daily efforts into larger, global, and historical issues infuses the oftentimes monotonous work environment with a well-founded sense of importance and magnitude. Reminding employees that sidestepping the obstacles of today's markets is the stuff of history creates an engaging motivational narrative that frames a paycheck as more of a bonus than a single motivational carrot.

Highlighting the historic importance of the mission only sets the stage for the real motivational punch. First employees have to believe that their efforts are needed, and then they have to understand how they can help. Establishing expectations and goals for your staff will serve you well. Providing employees with a plan of action and objectives to strive for will assist them in channeling their energy and skill-sets toward accomplishing the tasks ahead. Begin the journey with a defined destination, and then invite the talents and enthusiasm of the staff to help the organization advance towards its ends.

People want to achieve, want to be a part of success, and want a stake in the advancements with which they are associated. Empowering employees to roll up their sleeves and help out wherever they may be needed could yield unexpected and welcomed results while augmenting motivation. People will passionately throw themselves into an opportunity if they have the skills to succeed and are empowered to try. Encouraging employees to dedicate themselves to the organization's success regardless of their position or bureaucratic policies will enhance motivation while increasing communication and inter-departmental synchronicity. In such times, decreasing red-tape

may increase buy-in and output as employees become motivated to give all of themselves to efforts they have a personal stake in.

Finally, an inspiring leader is keen at pointing out moments of achievement with praise and acknowledgment. As employees sail the organization through rough and tumble waters, the captain needs to continually call out words of encouragement and support while more formally addressing triumphs as the waters calm. As you advance toward your goals take the time to congratulate and praise the good ideas, the late nights, the lunch-less days, and early morning arrivals that keep the organization moving forward. Similarly, each employee is a necessary cog in the machine, all working to keep the machine functioning efficiently and effectively, and all efforts to advance the organization should be praised regardless of how rudimentary they may seem.

From *The Hobbit* and *Lawrence of Arabia* to Harriet Tubman and Moses, great journeys are wrought with peril, loss, suffering, and pain. But they also reap great reward. History has left us with a belief in the balanced equation: The more we put in, the more we gain. Today's climate is teeming with possibility and hope, but the payout is unlikely to come quickly or easily. The leaders of today's organizations have a distinct opportunity to sail through and navigate uncharted and rough waters. Those who are successful will maintain a motivated staff that may not even know why they are continually excited to go to work. The savvy leaders among us will subtly instill the philosophies outlined herein through day to day efforts, unexpected opportunities for career advancement, and unscheduled celebrations. In adopting such principles employees are likely to continue to work hard and advance in the direction of the organization's goals regardless of the difficult times ahead.

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