

Things to do to thrive in a recession while others complain

We are knee-deep in what is now being called the “Great Recession.” I’ve read and heard various viewpoints on things people can do, usually directed at the recently unemployed, to keep up their spirits and position themselves for success in today’s economic environment.

Cameron Herold, founder of BackPocket COO, recently showed me a list he shares with the CEOs he coaches, of things people can do to succeed in a recession. After studying his list, I came to the conclusion that not only do CEOs need a list, but so do the 90 percent of people who are still employed and trying to battle their way out of these troubling economic times. I’m referring to the everyday leaders and the employees who follow them.

So the economy is awful right now. Some say we’ve bottomed out, some say we are making a turn for the better and still others say watch out for more downsizing, missed earnings and layoffs to come. I say, “So what?” Focus on what you and your company—if you collect a paycheck for work, then yes, it is your company too—can do to thrive in this “Great Recession” while your competition complains about it. The Brand Integrity team and I came up with the top things we are doing and others can do to thrive during these times.

Let’s start with the obvious:

1. Keep your glass half full. Keeping a positive attitude at work takes a bit more focus and discipline these days. Look for and share positive news each day. It’s out there; look for it! When success happens, make sure to share it. In the most difficult times, even the smallest victories can really boost morale. Before you know it, your company will put together a string of momentum-building wins.

2. Focus on the vital 20 percent. Typically, 20 percent of your efforts yield 80 percent of your desired results. All employees should determine the most important activities they do to produce results, their 20 percent, and get laser-focused on applying resources and energy to achieve them.

3. Create a hyperfocused work environment. We’ve done several things at Brand



ON PERFORMANCE

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Integrity to increase engagement and drive more positive business outcomes.

First off, we start each day, even before checking our e-mail, by building our individual “Top 5” list of things we want to accomplish. We list the most important things we need to do that day to help our business achieve its purpose and reach its goals.

Next we prioritize our Top 5 lists from most to least critical. It is amazing how much you can get done within the 20 percent focus area when you have the discipline to take a few minutes each day to document your priorities. It’s even more amazing how you’ll feel when you wrap up your day knowing that you worked on the most important things. And even if you don’t finish all five, you are better prepared to carry over high-priority initiatives to complete with the next day’s top things to do.

Another hyperfocused strategy we’ve used successfully is measuring our success on three weekly critical results. Why wait for annual review time to track progress on results and share thoughts about performance? In this fast-paced, ultracompetitive environment, leading companies manage to attain short-term results that enable the achievement of long-term goals. Each week, you and every person on your team should take five minutes to jot down the three highest-priority results you would like to achieve. Be careful not to confuse a result with a task; a result is a goal to accomplish.

4. Make a “Stop Doing” list. What are some of the things you or people in your company are spending time or money on that simply fail to produce results? Make a list and take action to stop doing those things!

5. Reinforce important relationships. Make extra effort to connect with your best custom-

ers and prospects. For example, send an article of interest or reach out to them to share news that is relevant to them. You’ll notice that I did not say e-mail. Send a letter, pay a visit or make a phone call.

6. Add more value instead of lowering the price. In difficult times it may be tempting to lower prices to drive additional sales. However, before you know it, you will be commoditizing your product and the customer experience. Try to provide additional value before price chopping.

7. Recognize daily success around you. There seems to be a permanent divide regarding the best way to recognize success. On the one hand, researchers and scholars agree that performance is best improved by recognizing incremental improvements. The rest of the world—perhaps including you or your company?—waits for profound achievements before working up enough enthusiasm to capture success and show appreciation. Survey after survey shows that employees want more appreciation for their performance. Find success, even if only incremental improvement, and recognize it!

8. Communicate, communicate, communicate. If you want to increase employee engagement, the amount of additional discretionary effort an employee will make to improve your business, at a time when stress, burnout and anxiety over job security are at all-time highs, then make sure to “clip the grapevine” by regularly sharing business realities, company challenges and employee/company successes. Develop a communications plan for all levels within your company, and stick to it as if your life depended on it. Remember that in the absence of facts, people make up their own interpretation of what’s going on. More often than not, rumors spreading on misinformation will have a dramatically negative effect on productivity in the workplace.

A focused work force with a positive attitude, where employees are routinely recognized, communicated with, feel in control of their jobs and go to work knowing they’re being productive and contributing to a common goal, is sig-

nificantly more engaged than its “clock-in, clock-out” counterparts. Conversely, employees who are disengaged, not focused and not thinking about results can be fatal to your company in good times and bad. Disengaged employees spread negativity, take more resources to manage, are disloyal and tend to be far less productive.

These eight things to do to thrive in a recession are difficult to refute and are

simple, though not easy. They take focus and energy. Pick the ones that seem most relevant to you and your company, and obsess about executing them. You may be astounded by the resulting increase in discretionary effort, a reserve of productivity in you and people around you.

With encouragement, your company can create a healthy, high-performing work force that truly thrives, even during a “Great Recession”!

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