LEADERSHIP IN TOUGH TIMES

Leadership is critical in tough times because employees take their lead from their leaders. Forty-seven percent of executives say that communicating and motivating are the most important things they can do in tough times. Leaders incite others to act. They provide the momentum for employees to execute. Leaders guide with their heads and their hearts. In fact, current research demonstrates that leaders who use empathy, especially in tough times, are more effective. Tough times demand tough minded leadership. These tips will help you lead more effective in tough times.

Spend more time with your salespeople

Salespeople like immediate reinforcement, a.k.a. instant gratification. There is not as much of that going around during tough times. Salespeople need to hear from management that everyone is experiencing tough times, that it's not just them. Everyone feels the pinch. This doesn't mean that you excuse the salesperson from sales accountability; it means that you explain what's going on with the economy so that the sales force can adjust accordingly.

You may find yourself micro-managing the sales force during tough times, and that's probably okay, depending on how you do it. Asking your sales team to check in more frequently keeps them closer to the fountain of acceptance that you represent. Examine their itineraries and guide them accordingly. Help them with prospecting ideas. Make sure they are spending enough time with existing customers. You are the number one cheerleader in tough times. You may be the only cheerful voice they hear on any given day.

In tough times when customers are buying less, you may need to shift your focus to activity goals versus productivity goals. Keep your folks active. Discuss the number of calls they make; the number of proposals they submit; the amount of demonstrations they make; and their ordering activity. You're reinforcing the effort, not just the results. Yours salespeople cannot control the outcome of their efforts, only their input. Reward the input with positive feedback. Give them something positive to feel good about. Let them know that you appreciate all of the hard work they are putting into their territories.

Manage like there is a tomorrow

During periods of turbulence human beings naturally focus on the moment. It's part of the fight-or-flight instinct. We are hard-wired to detect and respond to adversity. The danger is that too many people use tough times as an excuse to lock in on today's misery, foregoing discussion and deliberations about the future. Simply, these folks manage like there is no tomorrow. Their time horizons are about as short-term as you can get. And their decisions reflect this immediacy and urgency.

Don't cut so deep that it affects your culture. This will take too long to repair and you will miss the rebound. Some people believe that they must cut to the core. That's okay. We call that focusing. Just don't cut into your core. If you're known for superior technical solutions, don't cut R&D; it's part of your culture. If you're known for incredible customer service, don't cut your customer service reps. If you're known as a strong sales & marketing company, why would you relinquish that position to another company by cutting back on promotions?
As spring follows winter and day follows night, good times follow tough times. Manage for the good times as well as the tough times. The danger with obsessing over tough times is that you may unwittingly suffer the consequences of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Because you obsess on tough times you make decisions that create outcomes that reinforce your beliefs that tough times will never end. Your thinking has become your own worst enemy.

Author byline: Tom Reilly is a professional speaker and author of twelve books. Tom is literally the guy who wrote the book on *Value-Added Selling* (McGraw-Hill, 2010), the book that started the value selling revolution. For more information on Tom's presentations, training, and products, visit his website www.TomReillyTraining.com or call his office, 636-537-3360.