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People First

Tips for trying times

Lessons from smart business leaders for succeeding in a down economy

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Business lessons from a rough 2009 continue apace. Are you learning? The following examples from business executives may give pause for thought on how to survive and thrive in trying times.

“I am excited! We are more aware, taking responsibility. We are working harder, we expect less and we are more grateful. The year 2009 has provided important lessons; our goal is to enter 2010 with velocity.” — Alan Masarek, CEO, Quickoffice.

Velocity: rapidity of operation; swiftness; speed. Masarek gets it. True leaders are moving forward. They realize the rules have changed, and they’re recalibrating their thinking.

Awareness

In late 2008, Gail Warrior-Lawrence, CEO of the [W](#)**The Warrior Group**, set her sights on a growth strategy of extraordinary proportions. It was clear that, to achieve this goal, free-flowing communication was crucial.

Her action? She empowered managers to act as entrepreneurs. The outcome? Increased communications allowed Warrior to make critical decisions quicker. Now, Warrior’s managers have a sense of ownership — they feel directly tied to the success of the project. “If you get the right people on the bus, you need to let them drive,” says Warrior-Lawrence.

A few old words, then, that have fresh meaning for The Warrior Group: Communication, collaboration and courage.

Creativity

Trisha Wilson, founder and CEO of interior architectural firm Wilson Associates, credits her success to the notion that the answer to her company’s challenges is down the hall. “They have the answers. I ask them and then trust their ideas,” says Wilson.

When luxury interiors became increasingly hard to sell, Wilson’s team came up with a specialty food and beverage studio, Blue Plate. This studio focuses on creating exciting restaurant concepts worldwide. Wilson stokes the creative fires every time she asks a question, listens and gives credit where credit is due. Her employees feel valued and respected — feelings that compensate them well beyond money.

Wilson’s three-step approach: Ask, listen and respond. No one is paid what they think they are worth — no one. Money buys only physical comfort, and is not nearly as important to us

as being appreciated. To be known, to have ideas valued and our individuality respected is paramount to a paycheck.

Camaraderie

“When you fall on your butt, you get better at helping each other up.” — Chip Brewer, CEO, Adams Golf.

Brewer’s team has been together since 1999. No stranger to tough times, the “road warriors,” as he calls them, stay focused. Chip, a self-described benevolent dictator, takes a no-nonsense approach: He provides a safe environment where mistakes are owned. The warriors rally; messes are corrected (not protected). “We have each other’s back,” he explains.

Some tips from Brewer:

- Admit failure and define success
- Set concrete, measurable goals
- Keep the business plan alive — balance short- and long-term goals

Instincts

Our instincts keep us physically and emotionally safe. Then, we use our judgment to discount our instincts. Our judgment has made us lethargic — slow to respond to the changing world around us.

You can’t help but enjoy working with Lee Constantino, CFO of [W Ignite Technologies](#). Lee is a hot jock who suffered a staggering humiliation early in his career. “Shutting down my first company was the hardest thing I have ever done,” he recalls. “The upside of that experience was that it provided me with instincts that, to date, override my ego.” Early in 2008, Constantino looked around and decided that Ignite needed to be profitable. That’s when he shifted his focus away from dependence on investor capital. He cut expenses and improved efficiencies. Ignite became nimble and, in the process, increased its options.

Trust

There’s a secret to being nimble — and that’s trust. Roger Staubach has just pulled off another awe-inspiring Hail Mary pass. The Staubach Empire comprised dozens of people who, under a single focus, operated independently with a single mantra: How you behave matters — and how you do it doesn’t.

With Staubach, transparency brought trust. The result? Roger’s latest long-shot pass fell brilliantly into the arms of Jones Lang LaSalle. The former quarterback never anticipated this grand outcome; he’s way too humble. Staubach led his team based on the belief that valued and respected people will trust in you.

Today, the **WStaubach Co.** is no more — 99% of his team sailed across the end zone.

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