

You Survived Economic Crisis --- Now What?

By Dr. Rick Johnson

Is the recovery on its way? Some will have you believe the signs are there. At any rate, you have survived what seems to be the worst that can be thrown at you from an economic standpoint. What now? We can't possibly believe that its time to return to business as usual. That questionable beginning glow of the recovery beam, although welcome, must not cloud your judgment in preparing to face an entirely different business landscape that requires that we run our businesses differently.

The first challenge is recognizing that during recessionary economic times sales people succumb to much longer selling cycles, pricing pressures, low demand and enormous fear and skepticism in the market place. This puts tremendous pressure on the individual's ability to maintain self esteem and an attitude that promotes success. This attitude controls their ability to successfully engage customers with an optimistic approach embracing offensive selling instead of defensive selling that makes price the primary topic of conversation.

Abandon the "Old Approach"

In the past we always start off with the sales forecast. We ask our sales people to look at their territories and come up with projections on both sales and gross margin dollars. Often times these are simply delusionary rectal diatribes with very little real thought and research behind the numbers. That is never a problem if the fish are jumping in the boat. However, we won't see those days for a long time to come. If we use this process in today's environment our expectations for future results may end up driving our behavior due to the attitudes that have been molded by the past eighteen months of recessionary market turbulence. The lower our expectation of success, the worse our results; which further diminishes expectation and future results.

Reestablish your Standards of Expectations

Invoke and engage your sales team in your entire company planning process. Get them intimately involved in the operation and let them share in the successes and failures. Challenge each and everyone on your team to become more creative, more innovative seeking new ways to impact revenue streams, find new customers, create new profit opportunities and manage profitability. Remember, it is amazing how much your employees can accomplish if you will listen and let them do it. The issue many sales people encounter is the failure to adapt their selling model to the pressures faced by their customers. They can't keep doing the same old things the same old ways.

Invest in Employee Development

Training and development is the last thing to cut once you have survived economic crisis. Remember, what worked in the past may not work in the future. That means that employee training and development based on the current environment must become a priority. Training itself can often reenergize your workforce.

Without a doubt you are probably frustrated with the level of sales you are currently experiencing based on the turbulent economic market. This is true for most industries today with only a few exceptions. (Gun distributors come to mind as one exception) Consider the vicious economic conditions your sales people have been facing and how it may have impacted their own personal expectations. Attitude is powerful. It sets expectations. Weak sales lead to lack of enthusiasm, a questioning of our personal skills and higher turnover. This leads to sub standard performance, complacency and a never ending justification to use the economy as an excuse. Change of this type of behavior can only be realized by our actions and our actions are controlled by how we think and feel. This composes our attitude. Consequently we must focus our efforts toward

success with the right kind of attitude, an attitude of confidence and conviction. If you anticipate negative results from a particular activity how enthusiastic are you about engaging in that activity?

Most Leaders respond to these circumstances by trying to drive additional repetitive behavior in sales people. The theme is often, make more calls, work harder, talk to more people. Unfortunately, this method generally ends up with more of the same lackluster results. If current methodology does not produce the desired results, doing more of the same and expecting different results borders on insanity. It's like being stuck on stupid. The solution is to change their attitude opposed to driving it. If you want to change the results you need to change the approach, method and mind set adopted. This is about attitude.

Attitude can change behaviors

Ask yourself this question; "Does attitude really matter?" I'll answer it for you. The answer is unequivocally --- YES! Attitude has an impact on everything you do. To be successful it is imperative that you embrace a positive attitude as much as possible. This is probably one of the most significant factors in determining your success. Having a positive attitude is not the same as blind optimism. It doesn't mean that you bury your head in the sand and ignore problems and challenges. You must acknowledge reality but you don't have to let it control you. You must act accordingly. The "Law of Attraction" only works if you do something positive to create success.

Let us not forget that our attitude can affect the attitude of others and how others react to us can affect our attitude. But remember, it starts with you. You need to control your thinking. Your thoughts are powerful. They are energy. How you feel and how you act depends on your thoughts. Master your thoughts and **you** control your attitude. You have the power of focus. Focus your thoughts on positive things.

Remember, as individuals we have a tendency to adapt. If you're entire sales team is made up of under performers, adding a super star will quickly lower that super stars performance to average. To succeed in turbulent economic times you have to invest in the training and development in the entire team. It also means that you need to take advantage of the opportunity to upgrade your workforce and kill all your sacred cows. Now is not the time to accept sub standard performance from anyone that doesn't have the ability, the willingness and the attitude to change. There are always a few who will readily tell you that "it can't be done" and "you'll never make it". You can't afford to have employees with this attitude on your team. Now is the time to "weed the garden".