

SUCCESS IS ALL ABOUT HOW YOU HANDLE “PLAN B”



Written by: Mary Deibert
(630) 534-4600
marydeibert@kiara.com
www.kiara.com

No, this is not an article about all the “doom and gloom” bombarding us every time we turn on our televisions, radios, or check our P&L. And, no, it’s not about being a Polly Anna and suggesting that it isn’t a tough time in today’s economy -- especially for family-owned businesses.

Success is all about how you handle “Plan B.” When things are slow in a down economy, it is a great time to make some smart moves. Most companies do the opposite by putting their heads in the sand and hoping everything will blow over.

Work on what you can control.

A few things to focus on:

1. *Your morale and the morale of your staff is your greatest asset.*

Good morale doesn’t cost much, but poor morale can deteriorate your bottom- line and your company’s ability to rebound quickly. Don’t feel obligated to carry the weight of your current situation alone. Reach out for camaraderie and encouragement when you need it. Get support from friends, family, or perhaps, most importantly, your forum brothers and sisters.

If you or members of your staff are struggling emotionally, consider obtaining an executive or personal coach. *This isn’t the time that you can’t afford one.* If your morale is suffering, *you can’t afford not to have one.* Keep your thoughts and behavior moving in a positive direction.

Learn how to focus on what is happening *now* versus what you think may happen tomorrow or a few months from now. Thinking negatively about the future is emotionally paralyzing and generally not helpful. Consider...what can I do *now*?

2. *Conduct employee performance reviews soon or at the beginning of the New Year.*

This is important even if you can't afford staff raises or bonuses. Letting people know where they stand and encouraging them on their contributions to the company builds staff morale. High performing employees (the people who are keeping you afloat) need communication and encouragement now more than ever. This is your opportunity to be a leader and praise them for their good work.

Employee performance reviews can also provide an important roadmap for you. Reviews create "real talk." "Real talk" precipitates *real solutions* to pressing issues.

Employee performance reviews show you who is working well under pressure and who is underperforming or not dedicated to you and your company. Tough times separate the boys from the men and the girls from the women.

If you have already made layoffs, the remaining company employees may need an "atta boy" or "atta girl" more now than ever. Remember, they are doing their jobs plus the jobs of their former coworkers.

If you have already done annual reviews, set aside time to meet with your staff and key managers individually. Have a cup of coffee with them; check in to see how they are *really* doing. Let them know you appreciate the extra time and effort for "getting that proposal done" or that "shipment sent on-time to an important customer."

Reward your staff as best as you can. Your staff is doing the best they can during tough times. Let them know you appreciate their efforts. When business improves, your staff will remember how you treated them rather than seize the opportunity to look for another job.

3. Review your expenditures with a strategic versus an emotional eye.

Below is a short list of things you might address:

- When reductions in staff are necessary, use your employee performance reviews to help make decisions. Be certain you assess who your underperformers are. Of course, encourage your best people.

Don't gradually reduce your staff. Several lay-offs occurring on a single day is best. One person a week or one person every month can cause fear and anxiety for your remaining employees. You don't want a fear-based culture.

Consider giving the laid-off employee Outplacement Assistance. During the lay-off meeting, you can tell them you have hired an Outplacement Service to assist them in finding a new job. Outplacement helps the former employee create a top-notch job search and gets them looking forward quickly.

- Keep your employee benefits. Benefits can be expensive but they can make you competitive in attracting great employees. If you cut benefits now, reinstating them may cost you more than keeping them until business improves.
- Reassess your technical expenses. This isn't the time to overspend on technology. If you are paying for software licenses, you might approach the vendor for a better deal. Renegotiate software maintenance agreements.
- Sell, market, sell. Often, companies cut their sales and marketing budgets when sales are slow. Successful companies take advantage of a bad economy. Retrench and move forward. Take action. Create an attitude that contributes to winning new business and maintaining old business. It's too easy to roll over and accept losses.

Lastly, remember: **good and bad times come and go**. Success is all about how you handle Plan B. Focus on what matters most... *one day at a time*. This can help you sleep, improve your morale, affect your employees' view of you as a leader, and help you enjoy the holidays.