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MANAGING FOR GOOD RESULTS IN TOUGH TIMES

How do you get your employees to focus on work when the market and economy have everyone frightened? How do you encourage people to be productive when their emotions are vacillating between rage, dismay, helplessness and financial worry? It is not an easy task. The major challenge is to control what you can. You can control your reactions to this climate. If you have management authority, people are looking to you for your response. Here are ways to restore peace and productivity to your workplace.

Give people time. This is a shock. Many people are seeing money invested for the future simply disappear. They may need more frequent breaks. There will be a lull in productivity. More sick time may be used. Expect it.

Encourage employees to get help. If you have an Employee's Assistance Program (EAP) or counseling services, encourage people to use them. Some of your employees may suffer from stress. Others may need to deal with family members or close friends who have lost significant amounts of money, lost a home or been laid off. Refer your employees to professionals who are trained to help them get through these types of situations. With the constant conjecture from the media, you may also want to limit TV watching, phone calls and internet at work.

To the extent possible stop the gossip and speculation. People will need to talk and there is a need for information. However, too much time spent talking about the financial and political climate is not productive. Remind employees that there are top people in charge of making difficult decisions.

Consider bringing in outside help. If your work environment seems to be suffering, you may want to bring in a stress management counselor. If productivity is low, you may want to hire a facilitator to help people focus on what this financial crunch means to your business right now and what you are going to need to think about for the future. If people are concerned about retirement and meeting daily expenses, it may be time to bring in a financial counselor.

Have a cause that people can rally behind. Consider sponsoring a clothing drive, donating blood, raising money, writing encouraging cards to people in the armed forces or bringing holiday gifts for the less fortunate.

There is good news. You just may have to listen and look harder for it. Offer prizes for stories which discuss the good going on the community.

Sing the praises of your own hometown heroes. There are people who are doing amazing things around you to support both the community and to keep business going as usual. Some are help-

ing the homeless, others have offered services around recent hurricanes and still others are making this world a better place. Notice and appreciate those folks. Those employees who continue doing a good job, even during this chaotic time, deserved to be recognized.

Try to turn the attention to the good that is being done. Unlike reaction to the terrorist attacks, there is a more positive attitude about financial rescue. Many state the current economic challenges can be overcome. Experts are on the job. Attention is finally being focused on the financial state of our government. Countries understand that what happens to the United States economy affects them as well and are pledging their support to a solution.

Watch your own attitude and response to situations. As a leader, all eyes are on you. People are watching your body language and listening to everything you say with scrutiny. You do set the example and the attitude for the office. Communication from key people is critical at this point. Tell your people that you don't know how this may affect the business, but it has been around through worst situations. Remind your folks that it is up to everyone in this office to pull together and do what can be done to get business in the door and keep the business you have. There is a need to watch expenses and where you spend your time. Recovery will rest on what Americans do best: stay positive, find a creative solution and work with determination until the problem is solved.

.A recognized authority on negotiations, workplace issues, and persuasive communication, Linda Byars Swindling, is an author, a mediator, a Certified Speaking Professional and a "recovering" attorney. She works with business owners and key executives as a chair for Vistage and through her speaking company, Passports to Success. Linda can be reached at www.lindaswindling.com or 972-416-3652.