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Tips to Succeed During Economic Turmoil

As the global economy is in turmoil, almost all businesses are thinking about how to succeed during this turmoil. In some cases, businesses are struggling to survive and in need of turnaround strategies. In other cases, the business is achieving targets but concerned about future growth. Or, the business might be in a position of strength vs. its competition and ready to leverage its strength to take advantage of opportunities that arise during the turmoil. In each of these cases, there are several tips / proven strategies to achieve success.

First, in face of all the uncertainty, remember to value people. There is no doubt that people can be your #1 asset during these times. Instead of considering your first move in a down period to cut people, be contrarian - value them. Involve the team in what is occurring in your business, get everyone's ideas, pay for performance/ tie bonuses and rewards to successful cost savings and revenue generation ideas - take the opportunity to leverage your #1 asset. Not only will your people notice, but your customers will notice as well. Happy, engaged employees result in happy customers.

Second, value your customers and suppliers. Take extra time to understand your customers' and suppliers' situations and find out how you and your company can help your customer and/or supplier be one of the companies that takes advantage of the economic turmoil to achieve profitable growth. It doesn't have to be the obvious win-lose type choices (improved pricing, terms etc) - instead search for the partnership win-win ideas. Sometimes a simple brainstorming session can achieve enormous value. Or develop a plan that provides a win for both companies by learning more about each other's business/ needs. For example, with the rising gas prices, there might be an opportunity to share truckloads or set up a backhaul to utilize an empty truck on its return trip - there are endless options.

Third, re-evaluate and focus the '80/20' of your efforts on your key profit drivers. It is easy to become distracted on 1000 priorities that all seem important. Take a step back. Analyze what is driving bottom line results and what is important to your business strategy. Do not over-analyze. If it is not immediately obvious, throw out your reports and walk the facility or office. Look around, talk with people - it will become obvious. Then, FOCUS your efforts and your team on impacting those key profit drivers. Don't forget - profit drivers are not all cost savings. Many times, increasing revenue can achieve a more significant impact than reducing cost. Do not be afraid to invest reasonably in what will significantly impact key profit drivers.

These tips sound too obvious to achieve significant results; however, in my experience, it is the obvious yet not necessarily easy-to-implement solutions that drive results. It is also typically the fundamentals (not the latest technologies and fads) that can provide the largest impact. So, if these ideas achieve bottom line results, why don't more companies follow this path? It isn't necessarily the simple, easy road; instead, it takes courage, belief and trust in your people and hard work. However, the results will speak for themselves.

Lisa's Tips: Implementing Processes

In my experience, processes are discussed and debated expertly; however, many times, they fail in execution. It isn't that the process is faulty; instead, it is process discipline and consistency that fails. So, I've included a few tips to successfully implement processes:

1. Communicate and clarify - many times, it requires communicating a process many times before it is absorbed. In addition to repetition, varying types of communication and the use of examples aids communication success.
2. Also communicate and clarify the required targets - it is not sufficient to communicate the process without communicating the objectives/ targets. For example, if the production efficiency target is 90% yet the team thinks 80% is the norm, the process could be perfectly understood and still not successful.
3. Explain the whys - why is the process valuable to the company, department, other employees, etc? What occurs if the process breaks down? Why does it matter?
4. Ask for input and suggestions - listen, respond to all input and suggestions, incorporate the ones that make sense to prioritize currently. Repeat
5. Develop metrics to track progress - there is no use running a race if you do not understand where you are in relation to the finish line.
6. Follow up - typically everyone has too many priorities and can become overwhelmed. It is important to follow up to make sure everyone understands the process, why it is important, the goals/ targets and how they are performing.
7. Provide tools - if the process requires systems and/or tools, make sure the team not only has the tools, but has also been trained on the tools and has had an opportunity to provide feedback/ request changes required to succeed.
8. Hold the team accountable - the team will perform far differently if they know they are accountable to deliver the process (not only accountable to their manager but to their teammates)
9. Remember to recognize and reward success - although financial rewards must be tied to performance, there are many forms of rewards and recognition that can have significant impact without spending a penny. A simple thank you can go further than you can imagine.

Recommended Reading

"[How to Get Ideas](#)" by Jack Foster - it is an entertaining book on how to generate ideas. Especially for those of us not typically high in creativity, this book provides ideas and proven techniques for generating ideas. Since creativity and idea generation is a fundamental element in everyday life and in business, I figure even if you learn one technique that helps generate ideas, it is worth reading.

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