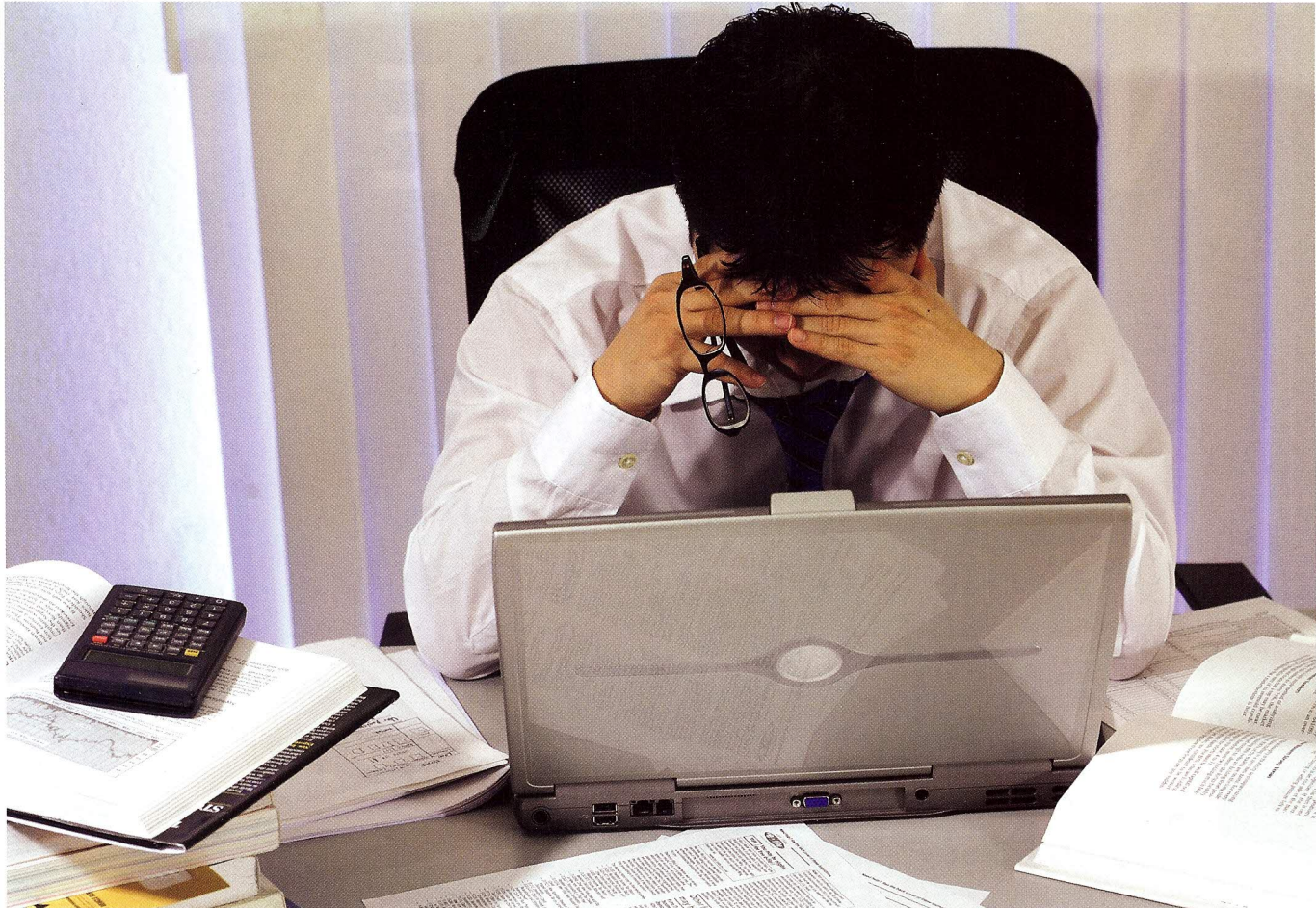


THE KEY TO SURVIVING A SHIFTING ECONOMY



Re-motivate middle management. No one seems to suffer more than those in the middle of any situation do. Give some thought to the middle managers who could use a little team spirit and a little pat on the back for being the glue holding it all together.

Salespeople are now having to work much harder and longer to make even the smallest sale. In fact, it seems many industries are feeling this trend and the morale, attitude and action of employees all over are reflecting the apparent downturn in the economy. Sellers are fearful of trying to sell; buyers are fearful of making a big buy; and employees are hearing it from consumers daily.

The truth is, the economy has shifted. Some would say it has gone back to normal. When a company's staff starts to feel the crunch and believe things are bad, employees who feel their job is on the line may give up caring how the business performs. Employees surrounded by negative customers or rejection day in and day out may begin to believe what they hear and pass it on—accurately or otherwise.

THE GLASS IS HALF-FULL

The time is now to help those who feel they have fallen. Change the morale from "it's all going down" to "things can be turned around." The effort a business owner makes may be the most important task they have ever done to save the company, the department and the employees from making a mad dash to the door for greener pastures. If the team has fallen, and doesn't know how to get up, try these steps:

Rally the troops. Much of what began as grapevine fodder in organizations is a function of miscommunication. One look or one memo can create an avalanche of damage and attitude issues. Rally the troops and openly discuss what is going on with the business. What are the trends? What is affecting the business economically? Why is a product line being changed and why are prices being lowered or

changed? If they are a part of the process and have all the information they need to know, employees are much less likely to create their own answers to keep from feeling lost in the dark.

Refocus training. Part of what helps an organization is training to keep up with the new skills needed and new advancements made. However, training is a \$51-billion industry and much of what organizations offer is not what will fix the problem. For example, time management training will not help employees overcome the fear of continued rejection, which may be the real reason they are not meeting their quota. A refocused training plan begins with a complete analysis of where the problems lie. This may mean a slightly higher investment up front, but offers lasting results long after the downtimes have gone.

Get to know who they really are. Under stress, people will reach for and use traits and behaviours not normally seen. If an employee shows an attitude problem when the stress level is high and change is frequent, but not when times are good, it is possible mere raised awareness will alleviate the problem. Being aware of what an employee does under stress will help the business owner and the employee be more rational and productive—at all times.

Bring in an outside source. Parents know what happens when a child asks them a question. The child thinks their parents' opinions cannot possibly have any validity. Yet if the neighbour or a complete stranger provides the same answer, they seem to have real insight. The same is true in business. The voices of familiar faces lose their value over time and when an outside source comes in and shares similar information in a different way, their credibility is automatically greater. Bring in a consultant, an advisor or a trainer who is trusted to diagnose and deliver a solution to the problems the business faces.

Re-motivate middle management. No one seems to suffer more than those in the middle of any situation. Middle management, when times are tough, get it

from senior levels when asked for more numbers and better results. But they also hear it from the employee level in complaints, attrition or personal issues preventing performance. Give some thought to the middle managers who could use a little team spirit and a little pat on the back for being the glue holding it all together.

Whether the times seem good or bad, the perception of fellow staff members is the reality they face every day. What is done during downtimes shows the character, strength and conviction of the business owner's beliefs. 💧



Monica Wofford, CSP, brings more than 18 years of experience as a business consultant, trainer and speaker to Monica Wofford International. Her Orlando-based training firm provides one-on-one coaching, profile assessments and consulting on training problems

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THE AWARENESS OF WHAT AN EMPLOYEE DOES UNDER STRESS WILL HELP THE BUSINESS OWNER AND THE EMPLOYEE TO BE MORE RATIONAL AND PRODUCTIVE—AT ALL TIMES.

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