

PSYCHOLOGIES

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I run a successful small business, but like many, we're finding life tough at the moment. I've made some efforts already to cut costs and become more efficient without laying-off any staff, but I am finding it very difficult to discuss the realities of the recession with my more senior staff, who, I sense might understandably regard me with some suspicion in the current climate. I know there must be other ways we can work which are more cost effective. I feel very strongly that I need to do more to increase the performance levels of my workforce without using the recession as the way to motivate them, as some people are bound to accuse me of motivation through fear. Can you advise on how to go about this? Things have to change but I am anxious that people should support me.

Teams need to have certain characteristics to be able to perform exceptionally well. I've focused on a few of those, with some ideas for steps to help build business performance during these challenging times.

You don't say if there's anything specific that may have created a sense of suspicion or whether this is simply a symptom of people's general nervousness at the moment. Do check though to see if there's anything specific there that needs to be cleared up. Otherwise, it sounds as if this is an opportunity to build stronger, more trusting relationships with some of your team. Of course this can take time and there are many ways to go about it but I'm suggesting a couple of steps you can take to get the ball rolling; during tough times teams look to their leadership to be visible, clear and consistent. Remember that people will make up things if you hide away and if your communication with them isn't clear and consistent. However, at of the work you'll need to do as a business starts with you as its most senior leader, and your goal is to enlist the support and commitment from your staff to find the solutions for you. Often some of the very best ideas come from the people in the front-line of the business! So walk around; don't hide – and be sure to take the time to speak to everyone at some point. This will help you to gauge the mood of the business faster and to address any issues quickly.

The first thing to do is get really clear yourself on where the business is now, what it needs for you be confident that you can survive the current turmoil, and what commitments are you prepared to make personally to both grow business and help to cut costs?

Create a sense of alignment around a common goal: you don't say how your organisation is structured but I'm guessing you have a smaller number of direct reports that you could get together to start the ball rolling: You might prepare a 'state of the nation' speech which will:

- **acknowledge where the business has been successful – be sure to attribute successes appropriately to these people and the people they manage.**
- **create a context for the work you're going to ask your managers and their staff to do with you i.e. find cost-savings and/or new customer opportunities.**
- **provide a consistent message for them to pass to their teams – what do you want them to do next? How do they pass their ideas to you? For example, via a suggestion box/their manager? Is there a small reward or some other benefit for successful implementation?**

Give Positive Feedback. Teams need a positive and optimistic environment to perform at their best so positive feedback is a good way to encourage this. As well as being sure to do this individually, you can also do this as a larger team and think about combining it

with regular team updates. This means you can provide ongoing clarity and reassurance about the future and recognise those people who are really contributing to performance.

And finally, do be open and prepared to think flexibly; one of the things I've been most surprised at is the creativity that larger organisations are deploying to avoid lay-offs. extended part-paid holiday for example.

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