

# Leaders need to take control

## REMAIN TRUE TO YOUR CORPORATE CULTURE EVEN THOUGH IT MAY BE TOUGH.

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**(W)** While South Africa may have fared much better than Europe, the United States or Asia, now that the country has entered its first recession in seventeen years, the tough economic climate is increasing pressure on the bottom line. Companies that are not meeting budgets, and those that are losing business, are often forced to retrench employees. This can impact very negatively on the management dynamic and it can also create the perception among employees that the organisational culture has changed.

Some employees, particularly those at a senior level who are often forced to implement these decisions, may feel so demoralised by the perceived shift in organisational culture, that they start seeking alternative employment.

Adhering to the corporate culture and organisational values in a tough operating climate, while very difficult, is something that leaders should strive to do as this creates stability in an uncertain operating environment.

Leaders should never lose sight of the fact that the company's value statements encapsulate what has historically been important to the organisation. As Dr Robert Rodriguez observes, "Culture defines the proper way to think, act and behave within your company. This helps to convey the message of how things are done in a specific environment. Culture describes how we do things around here. Culture is often referred to as the personality of your company."

If managers and leaders truly believe in these values, they need to ensure that they live and manage these during good and tough times alike. It is imperative that employees, clients and stakeholders perceive consistency in their leaders' behaviour and absolute congruency in terms of organisational values.

There is often a vacuum in communication when leaders do not have good news to communicate. Silence, unfortunately, creates fertile ground for third party conversations to germinate, fuelling skepticism, insecurity, and rumours. To prevent this situation from arising, it is imperative that leaders communicate even more frequently than usual, even if the news is not good.

If, for example, costs need to be cut, communication should be as inclusive as possible. Employees need to feel part of the decision, and not the

cause of the decision. Leaders need to engage their employees: they also need to listen to them. Many employees have very good ideas and would love to contribute and assist the business. It is important to recognise when leaders do not conduct themselves as they usually do, or behave out of character, employees soon start making their own deductions, based on their own perceptions. Here, I am reminded of the words of General Dwight Eisenhower, "I never saw a pessimistic general win a battle."

Unfortunately, uncertainty easily permeates the entire organisation. Employees start feeling insecure, demoralised and demotivated. This inevitably impacts negatively on productivity and service levels and on the bottom line. Leaders should manage the performance of their people on an ongoing basis, and not only when times are tough. If leaders are managing performance and recognising hard workers and achievers on a continuous basis, employees do not need to speculate whether they are valued by their boss, as this is reinforced on a regular basis.

The meltdown in financial markets has created an opportunity for leaders to take control.

Leaders need to "walk the talk" in a positive and a constructive manner. Admittedly, this can be very difficult. The economy is hurting, and unrealistic expectations should not be created.

Now, more so than in the past, leaders need to demonstrate that their business is well-managed and that things are under control. *(HRf)*