

LEVINE ON LEADERSHIP

Ways to reach the zone of hope – and stay there

During the last several weeks there hasn't been much good economic news. But the time has come for us to move forward and be hopeful that things will improve, and they will.

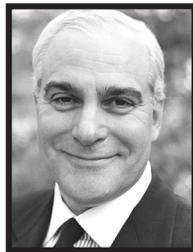
I start every day on a positive note. I have stopped watching the news in the morning; it was starting my day with too many negatives. When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I think, "Something good is going to happen today." And something good generally does.

There is no room for self-doubt in today's economy. Whether you are a leader of a business or a family, you must be hopeful, stay positive and look for the opportunities that are out there. If you have been laid off, once you get over the anger and disappointment of your situation, you need to go out and find a job. Work as hard as you can and keep moving.

"What we need to do now is go back to fundamentals," President Barack Obama said recently, referring to how to approach our economic challenges. I couldn't agree more. Every business is built around fundamentals that are important to the health of the organization and every individual can focus on the fundamentals to achieve greater success. Here are a few specific fundamentals I would recommend focusing on right now.

Prioritize what you want to achieve

You need to think sequentially and prioritize your strategic agenda. Create a plan for what you want to achieve in a given week, month or quarter.



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Remember that employees look up to you for leadership and count on you to keep moving forward through difficult times. When things turn around, your company or team will be in a prime place to reap the benefits of a stronger economy.

President Obama says he is confident that the economy will be revived and he is hopeful. But he must prioritize how he will deal with so many different crises at the same time – economic, health care and education. My sense is that without prioritization, success could be hindered.

Work through problems collaboratively

Once you have prioritized your strategic focus, solve problems collaboratively. Bear in mind that many initiatives take time to work through, so have clarity upfront and work through them diligently and thoroughly. Rally your team around a retreat or team meeting and then have clear accountabilities for next steps and a team of leaders who are responsible for follow through. Working in teams can energize people and provide exceptional thinking to take you to the next level.

Listen intently and actively

You can't be tone deaf in this economic environment. Pay close attention to all feedback, especially the negative. If you hear negative feedback, fix the problem if it is coming from reliable and respected sources. If the feedback is from negative or toxic people, perhaps these people should not be on your team

as they are destroying what you are trying to build.

The last thing any business needs today is someone who isn't on board with the rest of your team and is corrupting those around them. If you have a toxic person in your organization, don't sacrifice your team for the malcontent.

Be flexible and customer-service focused

The world has changed and so have customer expectations. Your customers most likely want something different from you now than they did six months ago. You should be kicking your customer service up a notch.

In our company, this has led to stronger results and more gratifying customer relationships.

For example, when our client in Denver needs advice on various issues, instead of having conference calls, we fly to Denver to meet with them personally. Yes, it is more costly, but we are connecting with them on critical issues and building a relationship that goes beyond expectations, which is especially important in today's economy.

Smart executives adjust to customer needs and get their employees and teams on board quickly, anticipate customer needs and live by the mantra "Whatever it takes." The era of entitlement is over. Now is the time to work hard, come up with innovative ideas, keep moving forward to the zone of hope and stay there.

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