

Must-Do Tips No 59 – Leadership’s Role: BD In Recession Pt. 5

Recession presents leaders and would-be leaders with the biggest of challenges. If you believe, as ex-New York mayor Rudi Giuliani put it, that "leaders need to be optimists: their vision is beyond the present", then leadership is in very short supply at the moment in many professional service environments. The fundamental principles that make for excellent leaders are under extreme pressure. In many firms, leadership in 2009 has consisted merely of digging a deep-enough trench in which to hide the remainder of the firm's assets (largely its employees) until the recessionary barrage subsides. Keep your head down or you might get it shot off.

And how does all this play out in the world of professional service business development and marketing? In pretty similar fashion. So this month, we offer three fundamental principles applied to the current climate, and the process and practice of successfully influencing individuals to achieve their and the firm's goals (which is after all what leadership is).

A more comprehensive treatment of these issues can be yours in the article **Leadership's role in recession**. This is available **free** to Must-Do Tips readers - just press 'Reply' and type **Leadership's role in recession**. If you would like a copy of the first four articles in the series, just hit 'Reply' and type either **Recognise the impact of recession (Part 1)**, **Re-orientating you and the firm (Part 2)**, **The blueprint for existing clients (Part 3)**, or **The blueprint for prospective clients (Part 4)**. If you wish to receive **all** of these and the rest of the series as it is published, press 'Reply' and type **Business development in recession series**.

Tip 1 – setting an honest example

This is a very difficult one at the firm-wide level. Employees (associates, support staff) are losing their jobs in many firms yet the actions of some senior management teams do not help at all, as their bunker mentality results in the perception that 'fat cat' partners, the owners of the business, are not suffering because nothing is being said or explained. Yet we know that partners are also being 'managed out' and/or having their income expectations trimmed significantly.

In recession, the best firms (and leaders within them) are being as **honest** (the number one leadership attribute in most surveys) and **open** as they can about the fact and demonstrably that EVERYONE is taking a hit; and that the pressure is (or should be) on for the firm's leaders to deliver an example that people will follow.

Here, in our opinion, they should start with the maxim that "whatever gets measured gets done (and invested in)" - a prime value for the hard times that also deserves its place in the good ones.

Tip 2 - challenge the process

Understandably, part of the trench mentality that we observe is a focus on the 'hygiene' factors - primarily a message to teams that their first job is to cut costs and concentrate on lower cost client development - in essence, improving service and a very limited amount of marketing to existing clients. Yet good leadership is also about having the strength of mind and conviction to challenge the accepted way. Our fear is that too many good practice and business development ideas are not even seeing the light of day, let alone making it to appraisal, because firms (and their leaders) are not challenging but hunkering.

Tip 3 - encourage & communicate

There is an old adage that "everything communicates" (even and especially silence, as Tip 1 demonstrates). Some of the most powerful leadership behaviours that we have witnessed are providing encouragement through the messages - overt and otherwise - that they send to professionals and staff. Like the conscious decision of an executive board (communicated to everyone) to address only client issues in its regular meetings. Financial and other internal issues are addressed in a different forum. Like investment in leadership and commercial skills programmes for senior and junior professionals at a time when the recessionary orthodoxy demands that costs are cut; supported by measurement systems that link client supportive behaviours directly to reward.

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Best regards.

JAMES NEWBERRY

People Scope, 6 River Court, Chartham, Canterbury CT4 7JN, United Kingdom. Telephone: 01227 730411.

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