

Finding the Upside to

By: Allan Forbis, Planning and Development



Downsizing

In light of the current budget picture, everyone is being asked to find ways to cut back, spend less and save more. It's never easy, especially when it's likely that you've already tightened the belt once, twice, or maybe three times before. The fact is though, for most of us, reducing cost, boosting efficiency and improving productivity has always been part of our job.

And, as it turns out, finding creative ways to survive in tough times is a sign of strength, not weakness. More importantly, it shows that you're willing to do what it takes to get the job done. Those who do it well possess a skill that others envy and top management relies upon. In sports, the best coaches are those who consistently get the most out of their players. It's that way for work teams too.

Believe it or not, working together with your employees to formulate belt-tightening strategies *can* have an up side. Few of us can come up with, or implement cost saving measures that have a mammoth impact all on our own. However, when everyone on the team begins to take ownership in the problem and pitch in, even the smallest cost-saving measures can quickly add up.

Many times, pitching in to find and implement these measures can even improve the cohesion, confidence, loyalty and mutual respect that already exists between you and your team.

But how do you get employees "fired up" enough to stay focused on doing the work that needs to be done (often with fewer people), while at the same time, asking them to help you implement ways to improve work processes, conserve resources and make do with less?

A recent survey of 1000 employees and 300 executives conducted by the New York consulting firm, Towers Perrin, may offer some insight. Their survey found that more than any other factor, an employee's motivation is most affected by the competence of their immediate supervisor, by their workload and by finding challenge and recognition in their jobs. Ultimately, in the words of Towers Perrin, "What's important to employees is a sense of competence and self-worth, a degree of control over their work lives, a sense of challenge and contribution, and evidence that their immediate supervisor has a genuine appreciation for what they do."

If you believe Towers Perrin's survey has merit, it opens the door to some encouraging ideas on how to achieve "more with less" from the employees you're supervising:

1. Challenge your employees with broader areas of responsibility. Many employees can and want to do more if and when they are given added opportunities and challenges. At first glance, this might look like your attempting to add to your team's already busy workload. In reality, you may be supplying many of your employees with just what they need by helping them develop to even greater levels of achievement. You'll find out quickly who is ready for the challenge and who is not. Just remember that

not everyone is looking to expand his or her professional horizons. Be ready to work with those who do and continue to appreciate the work of those who don't.

2. Don't panic if you can't immediately fill a vacancy. Use this circumstance to see if the job can still be done as well or better by someone else or in another way. Since it's likely you may not get the chance to fill the vacancy for a while, put on your "thinking cap" to see how effectively you can use the resources you have left to boost efficiency and improve productivity. As an old proverb explains, "Sometimes it takes circumstance to force us to do something we should have done on our own anyway."

3. Explore flexible work assignments (i.e. job-sharing, part-time positions). You may be able to help an employee achieve what he or she actually wants and control cost to the organization at the same time. As a select group of employees look for ways to balance their home and family lives with their need to stay active in the workforce, the idea of alternate work schedules and half-time positions grown in popularity more each year. It's possible you may have one or two employees ready to explore this option on your team right now.

4. Treat people right. Give your employees what you expect to get from them in return. How you treat people affects their level of commitment and productivity more than any other factor. Respect, consideration and sensitivity are free. Use them early and often.

5. Pay attention to morale. How people feel about themselves, their work and their boss dramatically determines the amount of effort they are willing to put into their job. If you see people walking into walls because their heads are drooping too low to see where they are going, it could mean that it's time for an intervention. Use staff meetings and one-on-ones to uncover any concerns your employees may have about their job security, or work processes in general. While you may not be able to answer each question to everyone's satisfaction, your willingness to try can work wonders.

6. Emphasize teamwork. Teaming multiplies talent. Most people work harder as part of a team than they do by themselves. If you think this is true of the people who work with you, consistently look for ways to use teamwork as a means to provide greater service delivery and to increase the chances that your employees might come up with even more cost saving strategies by putting their collective heads together.

Once conserving resources and containing costs become a habit, any team member is capable and likely to work at peak performance. It's up to the supervisor to make it happen. Like many other things, cost effectiveness and stretching resources are choices. As the supervisor of your team, what choices will you make to find the upside to downsizing today?

[Click here](#) to return to the Front Page.