

Thank God For a Good Recession: 7 No Fail Strategies to Pull Ahead During Tough Times

By Roxanne Emmerich

Fortunes are made during recessions—it's the perfect time to pull ahead of competitors. Challenging times require that we raise the bar on expectations and that we celebrate the accomplishment of those expectations. Here are seven you need to implement NOW.

1) Be a Giver...NOT a Taker

Your relationship with current customers, prospective customers, and centers of influence should be based on giving. They should hear from you every 90 days—lest they forget you and acquaint themselves with your competition. Send informational mailings like a “Top 10 Tips for Preparing for the School Season” sheet. Including coupons from one of your retail customers are great ways to add value to the correspondence. A “taker” approach—sending “buy me,” four-color, glossy brochures— will create almost no response. Givers always get better results than takers.

2) Clarify Measurable Expectations

A Business Week survey asked individuals, “Are you one of the Top 10% of performers in your company?”

The percentage answering “yes”:

- Middle managers: 84%
- Females: 89%
- Males: 91%
- Age 55+: 93%
- Work for company with less than 50 employees: 96%
- Executives: 97%

Welcome to Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking—and all the children are above average! Seems like a delusional view of our contribution is the norm.

This begs the question: How do you help people understand what quantifiable measurements they should be scoring themselves on so they can assess their contributions intelligently?

The need for “critical driver” numbers and quantifiable results for each position is imperative. A sales associate who knows his or her critical performance drivers and how they will be measured each week is newly empowered to assess his or her true contribution.

Every team member should have exact measurements in place to help them understand how they rank in relation to your expectations using approximately five “critical driver” areas. It will help your people ground themselves in reality and create “real” plans for progress toward precise goals.

3) Execute, Execute, Execute

It's no surprise that the team with the most passion to get things done wins. It's time-tested. And those that throw their hearts over the bar manage to catapult over the heads of their competitors.

CEO Advisor LLC proves that execution is the key to success, sharing that "The execution ability of a team remains the single most important skill we see. Recently, 500 CEOs were asked to name their company's greatest competitive advantage. A majority 88% said it was that they executed better than their competitors."

If execution is so important, then what holds people back from doing it? A recent Harris Interactive survey discovered the following barriers that must be addressed by leaders and their teams:

The big picture is out of focus. Only 22% of workers are focused on organizational goals and only 23% precisely understand their organization's strategy and goals.

Goals are unclear. Only 10% of workers have clear, measurable, deadline-driven work goals.

No individual or group prioritization. Only 8% of workers systematically schedule their priorities. Only 60% of an individual worker's time is spent actually working on key goals. And only 14% of the average work groups' time focuses on top goals!

The bottom line? Great execution requires alignment, accountability and action. Execution isn't a pipe dream, but it does require investing the time and effort to create a playbook for the game, to study that playbook and of course, to get on the field and play. By providing your employees with more context and fostering more alignment, you'll actually empower the kind of understanding, accountability and excitement that make winning the execution game a lot more simple and easy.

4. Run A Tight Ship

Someone's late for a meeting. Nobody calls the person on it. Next week, three people are late. That's no coincidence. Eventually, there won't be a meeting in the entire organization that starts within 15 minutes of the scheduled time.

You have checklists required to make sure people are in compliance. Somebody skips it saying, "Gosh, I was busy, so I didn't do it." Suddenly nobody is doing checklists and your organization resembles the "friendly zoo."

What's wrong? When everybody knows the rules, but you don't hold each other accountable, organizations naturally become rule-free and loose.

If you look at every successful organization, you'll see groups in which team members respectfully call out other team members whenever service standards are compromised, deadlines are missed, or an honor code is violated.

Struggling organizations have folks who just want to be “nice.” They let it all go—which means, of course, that others will let THEM go when they mess up. Now the whole group is letting it all go—and in no time flat, you’re back to blaming the economy.

It is not management’s job alone to call people on their “stuff”—it is the role of every person within the organization. Only by doing so can you have any hope of progression. Repeating yesterday will NOT create different results. Management’s job is to make sure every person is offering constructive feedback and pushing each other to greatness.

5) Love Your Top 100 List—and Let Them Know It

While 80 percent of profits come from the top 20 percent of customers, why wouldn’t you create a rock-solid “contact every month” plan for your top 100 prospective and current customers? Not only will those customers appreciate your constant information sharing, small gifts, and special invitations, they will buy more from you, “sneeze” about you to others, and become evangelists with their friends. What better way to bring in more profitable accounts than to recruit your profitable accounts to be on your “sales team?”

6) Teach Your Employees the Discipline of Winning Behaviors

Do your employees have the disciplines and skills to compete against your toughest competitors? From knowing how to flip a customer from a conversation of price to one of value – your *Unique Selling Proposition* – and how to cross sell other products discretely and effectively. Winners of the *Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award* benchmarked that for every dollar invested in training their people, they received a 30-1 return. When one manager remarked that he didn’t train his people because they might leave, he didn’t think of the worse nightmare—what if they aren’t trained...and they stay? Now, that’s a scary thought.

7) Love Your Customers and Show It

Now more than ever, it’s vital to retain your customers and to find new ways to meet their needs. And the number one way to do this is to show them in tangible and intangible ways that you *really* care about them. A great way to do this is to organize and launch a “We Love Our Customers” program – it’s fun, it’s easy and it’s also a fantastic way to connect on an emotional level with people.

Research proves that customer loyalty can only be created when an emotional connection is established.

So make loving customers everyone’s job!

Get your team together to brainstorm new ways to show you care. Here’s just a few ideas to get you started:

- Have at least three people say, “See you tomorrow.” Or “Thanks for coming today” as each customer leaves making them feel welcome
- High five customers when they have a breakthrough like making a buying decision or come to a revelation—customers are people too. They want fun.
- Send notes to clients and call them often.
- Set standards for all customer service touch points and make sure to measure and celebrate results
- Have a few standards that are outrageously better than expected.

Have fun, collaborate, and use your imagination. Love your customers and your community and they will love you back!

And a One More Bonus...Understand the Game Is about Winning Hearts

...those of your employees and your customers. People buy for emotional reasons, and you must start first by winning over the hearts of your employees. Once your employees believe you are the best and the ONLY choice for your current and prospective customers, they will quickly win over your customers hearts.

Roxanne Emmerich's Thank God It's Monday!—How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love climbed to #1 on Amazon's bestseller list and made the New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists—all in the first week of its release. Roxanne is renowned for her ability to transform “ho-hum” workplaces into dynamic, results-oriented, “bring-it-on” cultures. Listen to the free 60-second audio with teammates each Monday to clean up the craziness in your workplace and focus on getting massive results. Sign up today at www.ThankGoditsMonday.com.