

## Motivation in times of trouble

The Wall Street Journal recently had an article about home lender Countrywide Financial's full-on team motivation.

Countrywide, one of the world's major mortgage servicing companies, has been hit recently a major credit crunch in the world's credit markets, forcing changes in the way mortgages are made. For some years now, flexible rate mortgages were written that would allow people to qualify for a higher mortgage than they would have qualified for under fixed-rate mortgage standards. As real estate has taken a downturn in some areas and as adjustable mortgages started to see interest rate hikes, that has put pressure on people who thought they would be able to refinance their mortgages into a fixed rate.

As a result, many mortgage companies have taken an earnings hit – and Countrywide, being a big mortgage packager, has been one of those that was hit.

Countrywide is my home loan servicer, I should say right off the bat – and I like the company. But I like them even more after reading the WSJ story. That's because Countrywide refuses to give up. They are mobilizing their staff in order to put the challenges behind them. Even for me, a totally disinterested party, it is difficult to read the text of their conference call to their staff members without getting stoked.

All of a sudden, I sort of wish I could be on their staff for a day – just to try and make a difference addressing their challenges.

That's the way it is with good motivation – it motivates even the passerby.

And in times of trouble, particularly, that's the kind of motivation companies should have. That's the kind of motivation that can make the difference between "make" and "break."

I was watching the war movie "The Longest Day" the other night. I've seen this movie so many times that I can almost quote the German dialogue – and I don't speak German. But the thing that always gets to me are the true stories of leaders that motivated their troops to higher heights. One of those leaders was a general by the name of Norman Cota. In the midst of the bloodbath that was unfolding on Omaha Beach, Cota motivated the troops with a most unlikely method – he walked upright down the beach, calling them to action, even though everyone around him was crouched down and avoiding machine gun fire from the defending German army.

By his actions, Cota, along with other military leaders on that beach, motivated men to do better – and he did it at a time where it made a significant difference. His actions probably saved hundreds or thousands of American lives that day – simply by motivating people to become their best selves.

More than any other time, motivating others in times of trial and stress is essential – and it's the mark of a true leader to have that ability to motivate.

In a time of trial, organizations, like people, come under stress. And just as how an physician's intervention at a critical time of sickness, such as during a heart attack, can make a major difference, the intervention of a leader can make a major difference when an organization is at a critical time.

How can this be done?

Here are a few guidelines for leaders at stressful times:

1. **Recognize the challenge** – don't soft-peddle it, but don't make it appear to be unconquerable, either. The people you are talking to already know what the challenge is – but they want to hear it from you.
2. **Express faith in the group's ability to address the challenge.** They want to hear this – tell it to them. If it'll take growth to address it, tell them that, as well – but make it clear you have faith in their abilities to do it.
3. **Call the group to action.** Tell them what you're going to do, and ask for their commitment to do it.
4. **Make it inspirational.** Throw away the Powerpoint presentations for now – talk to them, raise your voice, motivate them. Be more like a football coach, less like a boss.
5. **Give them a plan of action.** Motivation without education is useless. Give them a plan, and ask them to refine it, comment on it, even challenge it. But give them someplace to start.
6. **Thank them for it.** Gratitude goes a long way – no matter what the challenge. Most staffs never really get gratitude from their leaders, but they want it. They want it bad. You need them to understand how much you appreciate them.
7. **If you're not the right person to lead them, get someone who is.** You might not be the right leader for stressful times. You have two choices – you can either find a leader who might replace you (I'd look within the company first) or you can become the leader they need.

I'm sure there are other steps that some leaders might take – but take a look at some of the great leaders in history. I think you'll find that many of the greatest used quite a few of these points.

There's an old adage that still rings true: "Tough times don't last. Tough people do."

Copyright, 2007, by Daryl R. Gibson and Salesstar.com. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted for the non-commercial redistribution of this document as long as it remains intact with this copyright and all other lines. This license does not extend to the use of this material in a compilation, whether for profit or non-profit use. Join us at <http://www.salesstar.com>.