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Look Past the Torpedoes. Full Steam Ahead!

***How to make this economic downturn the best thing  
that ever happened to your company or career.***

**Novato, California (December 22, 2008)** – What if the experts are wrong? The pundits are warning us this may be the worst and longest recession in recent history. They tell us not to do anything because the economy is so bad.

History shows us that when things get bad, true leaders and smart money get glad. When the stock market collapses then smart money buys. When the Republicans turn away from their historical mandate to shrink the size of government and instead go on a huge spending spree, then shrewd Democrats rally behind a smooth talking candidate without a track record to win the presidency. When the other football team is not allowing you to gain any yardage on the ground, then you attack the weakest point of their pass defense. Wisdom recognizes “bad” does not mean all bad or forever bad, and so they are glad to take advantage of a seemingly dismal situation.

Wise people recognize that one aspect of keeping your focus while others are losing theirs is to look beyond your current challenges and push harder to achieve your objective. Admiral David Glasgow Farragut was a senior or "flag" officer of the United States Navy during the American Civil War who is remembered in history as saying, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!". Farragut's objective was to take over Mobile Bay, the Confederacy's last major port open on the Gulf of Mexico. The bay was full of tethered naval mines, which were known as torpedoes at the time. Farragut ordered his fleet to charge the bay.

When the monitor USS Tecumseh struck a mine and sank, the other ships began to pull back. Farragut could see his ships retreating from a high perch on his flagship, the USS Hartford. One of his men shouted through a trumpet to the USS Brooklyn, "*What's the trouble?*"

*"Torpedoes!"* was the reply. *"Damn the torpedoes!"* said Farragut, *"Four bells. Captain Drayton, go ahead! Jouett, full speed!"* The bulk of his fleet succeeded in entering the bay and won the ensuing battle.

So how can you succeed in a recession? There are two things to do: Fully engage your workforce so they are focused on your key objectives; and inspire their passion to achieve things greater than themselves so they overcome the torpedoes in the close water.

If you are focusing on money more than employees, then think again. Your workforce generates your revenue and controls your expenses. The fastest way to generate cash flow is to focus on better engaging your employees. Let's assume you have 20 employees and your annual sales are \$2 million. This means your average sales per employee is \$100,000. If you can increase employee productivity by 5 percent, then your sales should grow to 2.1 million. That's an extra \$100,000 in your bank account in the midst of a recession!

Here is the first step of a simple three-step process to better engage your employees:

Confirm expectations with your employees. Jud Boies, in his book, [The Right Side of the Equation](#), explains how to do this. As a leader, ask your direct reports what you need to do to become the best boss they ever had. These are their expectations, or if they were writing your job description, these might be your key performance indicators. Ask them to limit the list to around 5 items. Each item should be weighted so the total score of the list is 100%. The weighting emphasizes which behaviors they are expecting of you are most important. You do the same for them. Create a similar list for each person describing what that individual specifically has to do to be the best controller, salesperson... you have ever had.

Meet with each direct report one-on-one to discuss your lists. Confirm you understand each other clearly. Then enter a Task for each of your direct reports in Microsoft Outlook to consider your behaviors and confirm you are meeting their expectations on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Divide your number of direct reports by five and try to assign no more than two direct reports expectations to consider per workday.

The second step to fully engaging employees is to set clear, measurable goals based on your expectations or key performance indicators for them. We call this *Goals That Work* and the clear statement that defines achieving the goal is a *TARGET* statement. You can download an explanation of how to write *TARGET* statements as part of *Goals That Work* free on [www.SuccessWithPeople.com](http://www.SuccessWithPeople.com).

The last step to fully engaging employees is to extend their *Goals That Work* into defining their key priorities for each week. We do this by defining a Success Plan comprised of weekly *Do It Now* objectives. *Do It Now* objectives are the most important activities for them to complete each week, based on their *Goals That Work*. Each *Do It Now* activity has a due date (Monday, Tuesday...). You can download a sample *Success Plan* (version 2) free on [www.SuccessWithPeople.com](http://www.SuccessWithPeople.com).

Follow these steps manually or in our [MANAGEtoWIN](#) employee performance management/HRIS software and you will see improvement in your employee's focus on key priorities within two weeks.

This terrible recession that everyone is lamenting about started in December 2007 and is expected to last 18 months. If that prediction is correct, then the recession is almost over. It will end in six months. Therefore NOW is the best time to build momentum in your organization so your workforce takes advantage of the improvement in the economy when it occurs. Only then will you sail past the torpedoes and secure your future.

**About David Russell, CEO, [www.SuccessWithPeople.com](http://www.SuccessWithPeople.com)**

David Russell is CEO of Success With People and author of two books on how leaders can overcome their addiction to poor management habits. He specializes in helping small-midsize companies increase profits by systematically utilizing employees. His clients include Microsoft, Cisco, Intel, Ingram Micro, Tech Data and Catalyst Telecom. He also works with global nonprofits such as Opportunity International and Christian Children's Fund.

**About Success with People**

[Success With People](http://www.SuccessWithPeople.com), Inc. offers coaching, consulting, assessments and services focused on

helping entrepreneurs, managers and business owners manage people and priorities more effectively. Our driving passion is to develop life-changing solutions to big problems.

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