

Weathering the Storm

By Jim Parrie, Ph.D., CPF

The framing industry is facing what could be a difficult summer season.

While you can't control any of these external factors, you can control your attitude and how you react to the situation. Rudy Giuliani has said, "Leaders need to be optimists. Their vision is beyond the present." Leaders must stay the course and follow their vision. They are individuals who can get others to take action that they would not normally take on their own. It is up to leaders to guide their teams through challenging times.

Putting Things in Perspective

During the late 1970s businesses failed at an alarming rate. Inflation was out of control, and interest rates topped 15 percent. Adjusted for inflation, gas cost more than it does today. A few short years later, the U.S. experienced one of the biggest economic booms in its history. The difficult times ended up creating great opportunities. Weak competitors were weeded out; the survivors were leaner, stronger, and smarter.

Even though some feel that the current economic weakness is overstated, by the time the slowdown is over, there will be survivors but there will also be casualties. The question is, will your company be a survivor or a statistic?

Your employees will be confronted with higher living costs and an onslaught of negative news. It will be up to you to keep your people focused and motivated. Customer satisfaction will be critical, and you won't be able to afford any drop-off in quality, service, or productivity because each customer will become more and more valuable as each day passes.

Here are some ideas gathered from such military leaders as Colin Powell and George Patton that can be applied to production framing:

1. Find reasons to encourage and celebrate. Your team will be faced with enough bad news and reasons to feel down. Use group or factory meetings to celebrate victories, even the small ones. In tough times there are plenty of reasons to ride people and there are fewer reasons to praise. Look hard to find the victories.
2. Have open and frank discussions about the economy, the industry, your market, and your company. The rumor mill (regarding layoffs, cutbacks, etc.) tends to go into overdrive when things are bad; nip all rumors in the bud. Your people would rather you be upfront and honest.
3. Have guest speakers or free entertainment at your meetings. Most factory meetings turn into bland discussions of procedures and operational issues. Have your workman's comp agent come and give a talk on topics like back safety. Some of them can be entertaining. If you really want to lighten things up, have an amateur magician do a 10-minute magic show. Employees will not be motivated to come to a meeting or work if all they hear is bad news and get beat up. Making your work environment fun doesn't cost, and it can generate tremendous profits.
4. Get everyone behind a cause or event. Your team

True leadership means providing a vision of the future, creating a plan to get there, and showing your company how to arrive there successfully

can adopt a charity or cause. It can help keep your workers focused, create a stronger team, and help build morale. Some companies have used the Final Four, American Idol, or even popular TV shows as events to generate a "buzz" at work.

5. Develop individualized motivation plans. Talk with key team members about the types of projects, training, experiences, or mentors they would like to have. Times may be tough for people to get jobs, but your best people are also the most marketable. One of the main reasons people leave or are unmotivated is that they don't feel valued by their managers or company.

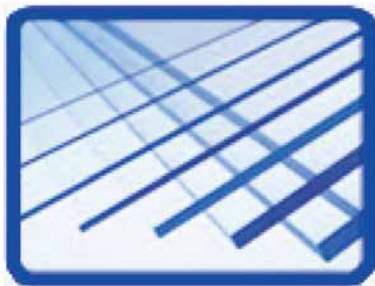
Keep them fired up!

The framing industry has been going through a period of consolidation, and there is probably more to come. This news can affect the attitude of both leader(s) and employees. Some symptoms of low morale are employee health problems, leaves of absence, absenteeism, and increased errors.

Here are some suggestions to help you motivate your people and keep them fired up in these challenging economic times:

1. Clearly state your vision for the company. Let them know how the company is performing and how close you are to accomplishing the company goals. You really need to let your people know exactly what is happening.

ACRYLIC
FOR PICTURE FRAMES
CLEAR, NON-GLARE, UV
1.5MM TO 3MM THICK
FULL SHEETS & CUT TO SIZE
8 X 10 TO 48 X 96



CALL FOR A QUOTE TODAY!

METAL PICTURE FRAMES

P O BOX 1201
WEST CALDWELL, NJ 07007
PHONE: 973-641-7533
FAX: 973-882-0936
E-MAIL: klevittnj@hotmail.com

Information is power, and ignorance breeds fear.

2. Do not let them see you sweat. No limit poker is hugely popular right now. If you haven't done so already, tune into ESPN2 and watch a game for a few minutes. Even with \$500,000 pots on the table, not one player flinches. They always remain calm, cool, and collected. Your employees need that type of game face from you. If they see you panic, they will panic, too. And you will have a mass exodus. Your employees are your most prized assets. Do not let your assets walk out the door.
3. Don't get sucked into doom and gloom. "Everything you hear could be true. But lead your team to the understanding that even during the darkest times, many do well, and you intend to be one of them. Your team needs to shift out of a dark view and into one with brighter possibilities. When people say, 'We can't because,' the response should always be, 'How can we?' With enough repetition, people will soon come to understand that results can be achieved no matter what the circumstances." (Adapted from *2-Way Compass*.)
3. Ask for your employees' help. George Patton was one of the greatest generals in U.S. history. Even though he was a fierce leader, he listened to his troops and would use that information to adapt his battle plan. Many people think they know best and block out what their people tell them as "noise."
4. Use the productivity of your people as a way for them to participate in your company and its survival. Tell them what the goal for the next quarter or year will be and how they can help the company not only survive but also prosper. Make them part of the solution.
5. Organize small, inexpensive get-togethers. You may not be able to afford raises or bonuses this summer, but you can afford to rent a movie or pull one from your collection. Take some time, make some popcorn, and watch a movie with your troops. Choose a movie with a specific message that you can use to help motivate your team. Some suggestions would be Rocky, We Are Marshall, Hoosiers, and Independence Day. The purpose is to help build morale, a little bonding, and to get the message across that anything is possible with the right attitude and teamwork.



1929 County Street
P.O. Box 3049
South Attleboro, MA 02703-0912
1-800-8CRAFT8 - 508-761-7917
Fax: 508-399-7240

Manufacturing quality Hardware
in the U.S.A. since 1950



Have you been searching for small Hinges, Screws, Turnbuckles, Hangers or other hard to find Hardware? From one of a kind frames to large volume production, Craft Inc. is the answer for all your Hardware and Equipment needs.

Tired of having to meet a minimum order requirement when you only need a few parts? Look no further than the E-store at www.craft-inc.com. Over 98% of our products ship from stock on the day ordered or the following business day.

There's **NO MINIMUM** when orders are placed online

Visit us on the web at www.craft-inc.com

When the going gets tough

For the past five to seven years the production framing industry has been consolidating and outsourcing production services. As framing companies have striven to improve their efficiency, they have required more work from fewer people. A top priority is having effective leaders and managers who can propel their companies to new heights.

This is the beginning of a new era of leadership in the industry, and most of the new generation has really never experienced a tough economy. In some ways, the current downturn is a carbon copy of the past. Most production companies have plenty of worker bees but lack leaders. Leadership is the most valuable skill, and the following attributes are absolutely critical during challenging times:

- Choose to lead
- Be the person others choose to follow
- Provide vision for the future
- Provide inspiration
- Make other people feel important and appreciated
- Live your values and behave ethically
- Set the pace through your expectations and example
- Establish an environment of continuous improvement
- Provide opportunities for people to grow, both personally and professionally
- Care and act with compassion. While denial is the natural response when things get tough, ignoring the emotions of your team members only causes greater challenges.

“Appreciate the little steps along the way during challenging times. Let your team know that you appreciate not only the things they do, but also who they are and the efforts they make. Build fun into your appreciation. Good organizations, departments, and managers thrive during rough times because they learn to hone their skills like never before. They’ve discovered that it’s the bad times that make them so much better during the good times.”
(Adapted from *Motivating Employees During Tough Times* by Roxanne Emmerich.)

Learning from the real battlefield

General Colin Powell, former secretary of state, has long been admired not just for his military mind or moral code but also for his ability to lead even during challenging times. He says, “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them.” He has also said, “Being responsible means sometimes pissing people off.”

You may have to make tough decisions over the next few months, and some people may not like them. But, as a leader, you have to weigh the costs and benefits of the few versus the many. Some people use Powell’s view as a way to justify browbeating employees. In today’s world tyrannical leaders quickly find themselves alone on a sinking ship. You cannot build your company alone; you need a team. Therefore, if you have to make unpopular decisions, you

need to balance that with optimism, great leadership, and letting your people know that you care about them as individuals.

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commanding general of Desert Storm, has given many speeches on leadership. He warns against confusing management with leadership, stating that managers manage things while leaders lead people. Leadership is about people; therefore the challenge of leadership is to “inspire people to willingly do that which they would normally not do.” Those who can do this possess the most important leadership quality, character.

General George Patton knew how to lead during adverse times. His WW II troops battled in sub-zero weather with no supplies, fuel shortages, and a formidable enemy, yet they prevailed. Patton did this by keeping his troops focused and motivated. Here are a few of his simple rules:

- Do more than is required. When the minimum requirements have been met, true leaders are just getting started. They know excellence comes from doing more than people expect of you.
- Act beyond your fears. Do not deny fear. Learn to live with it. Courage is a learned skill.
- Maintain a quick-acting line of communication. Do not put too many assistants between you and those you lead. Directly communicate with the lower ranks so you know their needs.
- Be generous with praise. Being generous with praise, both in private and in public, will build loyalty.
- Take action. When a decision needs to be made, make it. Subordinates fear indecision in their leaders.

Setting vision and tone

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, is a business legend. Even though he was seen as a great manager, his focus was on leadership. He felt managers need to manage less. “Once the vision is established, the right resources are in place and confidence is on a crest of a wave, managers need to get out of the way and let the workers get on with it.” Welch felt that leaders should set a general framework for their team, with a vision congruent with the overall goals of the organization, but that they should avoid too detailed plans because it can stifle the ability to change.

Tough times are not the time to slack off. When your staff sees you working hard, they will begin to work. Successful leaders never ask others to do things that they have not done or are not prepared to do themselves. Real leadership is about providing a vision of the future, creating a plan to get there, and showing how to do things to reach the future successfully. ■

Jim Parrie, Ph.D., CPF, a 30-year veteran of the framing industry, has owned and operated small frame shops, galleries, and wholesale operations to high volume OEM facilities. Currently, he owns Millennial Technologies & Consulting International, a consulting firm to high volume framers, retail chains, and manufacturers throughout the world.