

If you know a company — customer, supplier, friend, or your own — that could benefit from improved operations, let us know. Your best interest is our best interest.

The Finish Strong® monthly e-newsletter is for business leaders who recognize Operations as a strategic function that creates competitive advantage, profitability and brand loyalty in the marketplace.

NEVER WASTE A CRISIS

The current economic situation is front of mind for most of us. It's safe to assume that it is important to all the stakeholders of your company. Leverage this crisis to strengthen relationships, organizational capabilities, and market position.

Employees: Provide information on the federal mortgage loan modification process; provide an unbiased credit counseling seminar, be flexible if they've needed to take a second job. Keep them as informed about your business outlook as you can. Don't get so involved in your own challenges that you overlook the very real concerns of your employees. Show that you care about them too. You need their focus and cooperation.

Customers: Evaluate the future of the markets you serve. Based on that, meet with customers (current and target) to discuss the business relationship. This is a great opportunity to develop the basis of a real partnership that can help you grow profitably together. Know their financial condition -- help where you can with extended terms and pricing but don't get caught financing a bankruptcy in progress. Work with them to share lower margins on work you can obtain together rather than both of you lose volume and opportunity because you didn't collaborate. Find out what they need from you to get more profitable business themselves. Help them understand how to reduce their costs with you.

Suppliers: See "customers" above. Understand where risk exists, and how you can manage it. Seek out collaborative opportunities that can benefit multiple organizations.

Management and Leadership: Don't define the future by what you see today. Focus on a profitable and growing tomorrow despite current uncertainty. The certainty you had last summer was misplaced, and the turbulence you face today will not last forever. Obviously survival is key, but beyond that there is opportunity. The decisions you make now can have ramifications for years to come. Take this time as one to position your organization to gain market share, new markets, and profitability when the turnaround begins. Whether it is 6 months from now, or 6 years, the economy will begin to recover. The players will be different, and the rules of the game changed. Be ready, not reactive.

Community: Your community needs you now more than ever. If you can, encourage donation of "excess" worker-days to the food bank or other community causes. If it's unpaid time off for your employees, give them an extra half-day vacation when your sales have returned to "normal" levels. Keep your building and grounds clean, continue community activities, and develop your staff by encouraging their volunteer activities with professional organizations.

IF THEY CAN, YOU CAN TOO

The Cuyahoga County (OH) justice systems reports (Plain Dealer, February 22, 2009, pg B1):

"...streamlining the flow of cases through the [indictment] system have been so successful that the jail population is below capacity for the first time in decades. A prisoner's average stay in jail, which used to last weeks or months, has dropped to three days... [the director of corrections] estimates ... the county will save as much as \$8 million a year previously paid to jails in other counties for prisoner board and care."

None of us look to government for how to run our businesses (at least I hope that's true!), but if lethargic monoliths like this are improving successfully, there's no excuse for you not to.

There exists no perfect organization, which means each and every one can improve.

continued

FINISH STRONG®*The Starting Pistol*

Helen Keller:

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

Dr. Rollo May:

“Commitment is healthiest when it’s not without doubt but in spite of doubt.”

The Tape

Rebecca Morgan:

“...and operational excellence requires that you know what you are doing.”