



WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH THE TOUGH CAN OVERREACT

If the fallout from Lehman Brothers did anything positive, it taught us to live with the unexpected. Most firms, as a consequence of the era, have learned to thrive through efficiency and responsiveness to the higher demands of customers. We now live in the most complex social, economic and political period since World War Two. Change from the East and the West, along with continued global economic uncertainty and the searing pace of technological and social change, make it difficult to see just which crisis to tackle next.

Being able to live with insecurity and ambiguity is a central leadership competency. So too is the ability to manage through difficult times in a calm and considerate manner. How will those first appointed in to leadership roles in the last five years cope as markets swirl and snarl? Less experienced managers can overreact to adverse conditions, doubling down on their employees or behaving in other irrational ways. Its at this point employees already feeling the heat of battle, can disengage and the spiral begins.

We set out here four ways for leaders to keep their shape in a crisis and bring their teams out the other side of adversity.

1. Trust your team, don't put them in chains

Your employees are just as aware as you when adversity strikes. They may not have the finer detail or be fully aware of the consequences, but they see 80% of it. Don't stop communicating, step it up. Don't hide the challenge, share it and ask for their help in framing a solution. Don't ratchet up pressure mistakingly assuming "they don't get it". They do. Excessively direct narrative shifts pressure to stress, stress kills creativity and commitment.

2. Don't confuse emotional intelligence with emotional pleading

Unbridled use of passion and pleas have little impact on a team facing a difficult time. Standing on a desk and addressing the room may seem like the act of a fired up leader, but it is simply a leader on fire. Sudden shifts in emotional behaviour will unnerve your team and reduce their ability to work through a challenge. The team's engagement is key to them creating and assessing new initiatives and solutions. Outbursts scream, out of control.

3. Make it safe

Be open with team members, sometimes tough decisions need to be made. While that cannot be avoided, leaving space for

negative speculation can be. Make sure you are being seen to listen to feedback and ideas. Encourage all contribution no matter how outrageous or challenging it may initially seem. Keep an eye out for anyone struggling with basic tasks, it might mean they are over anxious.

4. It's never personal

Life isn't fair, leadership certainly isn't. Higher standards are expected of leaders than of other team members. Being challenged as a leader, when you already feel under pressure, can be a raw experience. Being confrontational in response or letting conflict arise may cause you to lose your team at the very point you most need their support. Deflect such challenges towards other team members asking for their views and reducing the steam while you regain composure. If they all agree with the challenger, you may have to rethink your current solution anyway.

You never really know how you are going to fare in a crisis, until the crisis surrounds you. Rather than becoming more controlling, grow your awareness. Drive the behaviours you want others to exhibit by demonstrating them yourself. Above all, keep your shape and keep it safe for the people you lead.