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Leadership Lessons for Tough Times

"During a crisis – whether it's an immediate crisis like a robbery, or natural disaster or longer term like an economic downturn – it's normal human behavior to look for a leader," maintains Taye H. Cairnes, President of Taye H. Cairnes, Inc. "Most of us are looking for and feel safer when someone takes charge and says, in effect, *follow me.*" Most people don't even question whether or not that leader knows what they're doing. We want someone to take charge during these emotional times. That's why it's important that as leaders you are tied to your value system when taking charge. "People will follow a leader during hard times whether they're leading them down the tube or into a better place. History gives thousands of examples of this," points out Cairnes. "Don't change your value system in the middle of a crisis. If client service has always been critical, it should still be. If rewarding employees has always been part of a plan, it should continue to be." John Glenn, Rudy Giuliani, and the Miracle Team of the 1980 Olympics are examples of people who brought out the best in themselves when the odds were against them. "Your leadership team will decide if now is the time to hunker down and give an atmosphere of fear or now is the time to go gangbusters," says Cairnes.

Employees Need Leadership and Support

People look for more leadership and support during the tough times. "Human beings are wired to move towards pleasure and away from pain. Tough times bring pain and we look for someone to get us to a happier place," Cairnes continues. "We look to our leaders to make us feel good and make us feel secure." Leaders set the weather pattern for the office. They decide if it's cloudy or sunny. A sunny weather pattern makes everyone feel at ease and happier about being at work. It doesn't mean that difficult times will just go away. It means we feel more secure about weathering them. "There are times when we have to come up with a new sense of normal," says Cairnes. **Example:** It's an ordinary day. You decide to walk down the hall and get a cup of coffee. On the way, you pass your boss. She doesn't make eye contact. She looks frustrated. What's more, she doesn't acknowledge you even though you're sure she saw you. In that situation, most people will assume their boss is mad at them over something. Chances are their boss isn't thinking about them at all. But we are self-centered creatures and we think it's about us. "The feeling an employee has in that scenario is amplified tenfold during tough times. Perception is reality," Cairnes says. "We are often the authors of our own misery. Effective, positive leadership challenges those notions." Especially now, leaders need to be cognizant of their own attitudes.

Provide an Atmosphere That Motivates

While you can't "make people motivated", you can provide an atmosphere where motivation flourishes. "You do this by creating a culture of respect. Actively seek out ways to show employees that they matter to you," says Cairnes. It's your choice whether you treat people as 'more than' or 'less than.' If you treat them as less than, then that's how they behave. Treat them as more than, then that's what you get. "Yes, times are tough right now. My mother used to say that *life is like a V.* You only go so far down before there is only one place to go... that is up," Cairnes says. "We cannot control the economy – it's the V – but we can control how we react to it. If leadership allows an atmosphere of doom and gloom, that will snowball. People will dread coming to work, productivity will fall, errors will increase."

Motivated people....

- Help create a fun, positive environment
- Solve problems
- Enrich the workplace
- Create positive client interactions
- Will go the extra mile during hard times
- Improve the morale of those around them
- Build client loyalty

Leadership Lessons for Tough Times, con't.

Get Rid of the Negativity

"Pretend that you have this magic balloon that can't be popped. You enter a room where there is a lot of negativity. Fill up that balloon with positive, motivating ideas, situations, and energy," Cairnes continues. "You just blow up that balloon so big there is no room for negativity. The best way to keep fear levels down is to keep positive energy up. The way you keep positive energy up is by being open to new ideas, creating fun, building people up, and creating a culture of respect. The more positive energy you put into this magic balloon the less room you have for negativity. "At the same time, I want to be realistic. Acknowledge the challenges. Acknowledge what bumps in the road that your institution may be encountering," Cairnes says. This can be our time to lie down and give up or our time to shine. Gossip and rumor mongering will take over if there is nothing else to fill the void. Anticipation of what can go wrong is the biggest monster in the closet right now. Open the door and let the light in." To motivate and keep fear level down, try these ideas:

Have a contest for...

- The best quote of the week.
- What are some things we can do to have fun?
- What are some ways we can make this a better institution for our clients?
- What are some ways we can lighten the atmosphere for our institution... music, candles, decorations?

Taye Cairnes is an engaging, humorous and to-the-point trainer of people in all levels of leadership. Whether you are a participant in one of Taye's numerous sessions, or an attendee of one of her dynamic key note addresses, the experience is similar to sitting down with a friend who understands the root of your challenges and can help you find more productive paths to reaching your leadership goals. Taye is available for training on leadership, customer service, sales, etc. For more information, please see her web site at: www.tayecairnes.com.

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