

Member's Quarterly

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Feature

Staying Tough in Tough Times

Will this one ever come to an end?

It's now well over two years in the midst of the global pandemic. So many people have lost their jobs and are finding nowhere to turn. A multitude of businesses shut their doors as they could not survive. Major downtown centres across Canada are facing the largest vacancy in decades and everything is being affected.

This article is not intended to be doom and gloom. The tough times always pass. The intent is to focus on leadership and how to be tough. I really think that leaders should not wait for tough times to then get "tough." Even in more affluent times, it is necessary to be tough and continue to grow. So, what does it mean to be "tough"?

I met with a young retired CEO of a very successful oil and gas supply company who had been a client for 20 years. I asked him, "Now that you can look back more objectively, what would you do differently with your company, if you could do it over?" His reply came quickly- he said that the number one thing was that he would have worked harder on the culture of the company.

It is really no different than being a parent. If things are going well – the kids are getting good grades, not getting into trouble – does that mean you loosen the rules and the purse strings, or do you continue to show respect, care and love to ensure things keep going well? The same thing happens with organizations – leaders must keep a thick skin and be "tough" through both good and bad times. Focusing on the culture is a must.

Exactly what does "being tough" look like? Here are six key ingredients:

1. Be crystal clear on the corporate values.

This determines the culture you want and gives you a transparent sounding board for all decisions. These should be aligned with your personal values. Otherwise, you are working for the wrong organization.

2. Keep a positive attitude. Your attitude is determined by you, not others. It also affects expectations and behaviours of everyone you lead. Be grateful no matter what – this will strengthen all positive emotions and allow you to control negative emotions like anger. Remember that it is impossible to be grateful and negative at the same time.

3. Take a hard look at your people smarts (emotional intelligence). There are always areas to improve and this will help your people stay focused and engaged.

4. Be prepared. It's the boy scout motto. This means thinking ahead on how you will communicate tough decisions. It will also help you set goals that are focused on growing the company, no matter what.

5. Be driven and humble at the same time. Driven does not mean being a bulldozer and humble does not mean being a pushover. It does mean, however, sticking to the plan and listening to what your company is telling you.

6. Focus your energy on what you can improve. Waiting for commodity prices to turn around is futile. Looking at what you can control is smart – and tough.

"And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about."

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