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ReBUILDING Teams and Employee Trust After Layoffs

Layoffs continue to plague many companies in the Charlotte area. However, recent reports by local economists suggest an end to the recession by late October or November, by current projections. Many businesses are also looking to turn their attentions back to business growth and development. Mobilizing the workforce and building productivity on fewer resources will be critical to the success of all businesses. But the last year has severely impacted trust between companies and employees.

Businesses now have the monumental task of reestablishing teams and team work after displacing thousands of workers. Those workers represented operational assets. They were colleagues, teammates, and friends of those who remain. These layoffs not only impacted poor performers or the least tenured; these layoffs represented a violation of the unspoken contract between corporations and many of their best contributors leaving the remaining workers in the juxtaposition between the uncertain present and the unpredictable future. The contract

between company and employee has been shattered in ways Enron and Worldcom had not approached.

Morale is down. It's time for us to rally back; get our heads in the game. The road to recovery is not impossible, just challenging. If this were a baseball game, we would call the team to the dugout and announce, "this game is not over unless we sit on the bench and give up. Our job is to hit, run, and score. Let's do this for Johnny! [All of us are Johnny.] Let's do this for our home town!"

Leaders and managers must now begin to move their remaining workers toward reestablishing the broken links left by displaced teammates and friends. The road toward trust will not be easy. Stacey Randall at Charlotte-based SBR Consulting offers, "Now is always a good time to start rebuilding trust. You don't need a recession to start but unfortunately it is when most companies begin". Leadership and trust go hand in hand; trustworthy leaders have more success in building collaborative, high function-

ing teams. According to Randall, "trust always ranks at the top, if not the number one, important attribute for employees. It is built through open, constant communication and transparency".

We honor our fallen by continuing the battle. The time has come for corporate teams to return to the ropes courses and teambuilding workshops and seminars, to rebuilding personal relationships; find new ways to trust each other. To get started, Randall recommends leaders should "be setting the stage for growth, providing a vision, timeline and framework for responding to the changing economic variables." Creating employee buy-in also ranks high on the list. The bottom-line is rebuilding starts and ends at the top.

Tips for Rebuilding Trust

By Stacey Randall

- Utilize employee surveys, focus groups, and safe meeting for employees to vent. Blowing off steam relieves unspoken tension and helps workers focus on rebuilding.
- Take employee feedback seriously. Take this lightly or blow it off to your own peril or detriment
- Increase visibility and communication by senior leaders, especially the CEO. Respond openly and honestly to employee feedback.
- Consider weekly, monthly or quarterly check-ins on the health of your company or industry. Acknowledge what is in the media and how it affects the organization.
- Empathize. If your employees experience a layoff, hiring freeze, or pay cut. Acknowledge the impact on their quality of life, workload and morale.

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