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Make attitude, action and 'A' game your guidelines

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Recent economic events have weakened business confidence and reduced business spending.

Economists joke that a recession is when your neighbor loses their job, and a depression is when you lose your job.

Many economists say a recession is a decline in gross national product for two or more consecutive quarters, and a depression is a decline of greater than 10 percent. Even with a 10 percent decline, 90 percent of your customers and prospects most likely still are buying.

It's still a great time to be selling, because history confirms many competitors cut back on marketing and sales efforts in challenging times.

For example, American auto manufacturers have cut promotions during recessions to preserve profit margins. However, Japanese auto manufacturers manage for long-term growth rather than short-term profit. They've supported aggressive selling and marketing efforts, resulting in increased sales even in slow markets.

Many companies that aggressively pursued marketing and sales during the 1930s are ones we recognize today, such as Proctor & Gamble and General Electric.

If your market sector is in retreat or likely to suffer, there are three musts for every seller, sales manager and sales team. Summarize them by using the acronym of "AAA."

First, you must maintain a positive, can-do attitude. Second, double your activity. And third, you must bring your "A" game.

- **Attitude** — Confidence, conviction, resilience and goal orientation make up a good attitude. But it's inevitable that those attributes will slip at times for even the best salespeople or sales team, creating self-doubt and/or a slump.

Arnold Palmer's father said, "Whatever game you play, 90 percent of success is from the shoulders up." You might not be responsible for events that bring you down, but it's your responsibility to bring yourself up.

If something negative does happen to you, get an accountability partner, talk it out, be aware of your self-talk, journal, be appreciative and do other things that will get you back on track.

Nothing can help someone with the wrong attitude, but no one can stop someone with the right one. Make humor your constant companion. Maintaining the right attitude is so important, no manager or company should keep any seller who isn't resilient and capable of maintaining a positive attitude. And every seller should avoid whining and look for new ways to make sales.

- **Activity** — Keep the axiom, "Ideas are a dime a dozen, but action is priceless," in the front of your mind at all times. Write it down where you can see it several times a day.

Every seller and manager must accept that more effort will be required in the coming months. Try to double your sales activity. Make twice as many prospecting calls, ask for twice as many referrals, ask more questions and participate in twice as many networking events. Shoot for twice as many appointments.

Don't fall into the trap, however, of just doing twice as many proposals and presentations. Remember that you're increasing activity to find more prospects that are qualified. Don't waste resources giving proposals and presentations to buyers who aren't ready to buy.

Dramatically increasing activity means you must get organized, set priorities, and stop letting email and other distractions manage your day. It also means that you spend time making contact with prospects when they're available, even if you must do administrative work, proposals and recordkeeping at night or at other nonproductive times.

You'll reap two major benefits. First, you'll have greater success and an improved attitude because of your more professional behavior. It's like working out. You may not want to do it, but you always feel better afterwards.

- **"A" game** — Nothing less will do. It's not business as usual.

Don't go the extra mile on behavior and bring a great attitude — just to risk failure with weak skills. It's survival of the fittest in tougher times.

Great athletes watch game tapes to get better. Likewise, every seller should prebrief and debrief sales calls. Work on every single step of your sales process and selling tools. Strengthen existing relationships with appreciation, added value, and honest and direct

communication.

But don't assume your relationships will keep their business. Many decision makers will have little choice but to cut costs, so have those discussions before it's too late to reverse their decisions.

Gain real evidence of stated needs and clearly identify decision criteria. Be thorough in qualifying budgets and decision processes. Sharpen your skills so your presentation will be more memorable and separate you from competitors.

Bring value and credibility by knowing your customer's business and marketplace as much as possible.

Now isn't the time to stress over numbers, quotas and sales targets. Now is the time for sellers and managers to focus on positive attitudes, increasing activity and skill development. The rest will take care of itself.

"A" game, attitude and activity should be the mantra for everyone who wants to be successful now.

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