



Heroes Are Not Made When Life Is Easy

by Rick Davis

By now you have heard more bad news about the housing economy than you care to know. The overall economic outlook isn't making you any more optimistic. There is at least one piece of good news you can take from all of this. You can use this challenging time to shine as a leader.

Leadership is not a title on a business card. It can only be earned with credibility. You have probably had a manager, a leader only in title, who was so uninspiring that you wouldn't cross the street with a glass of water if he were on fire. You have also had a manager, perhaps even a co-worker, for whom you would jump through fire to help. So, clearly you understand the difference between "credibility leadership" and "leadership in title only." We should all strive to be leaders by credibility.

The challenging state of our industry provides you with the ideal opportunity to earn credibility by demonstrating your calm in the face of a storm. Every great leader in history proved his or her mettle by the way they endured and overcame difficult challenges. Here is your chance to deal with the economic downturn.

Step 1: Face Facts

For the most recent compilation of housing starts data from the U.S. Census Bureau, visit www.buildingleaders.com/housingstarts.html. Not surprisingly, the picture is not rosy and, in fact, shows the worst trending in 30 years. Single-family housing starts are paced at 674,000 in May, down 60 percent from 2005. To make matters worse, many economists are predicting that 2009 will be no better and might be even worse.

The West is down half a million housing starts from the 2005 peak and the Midwest is down nearly 70 percent, no doubt a reverberation of the auto industry woes. The Florida housing bubble burst quite a while ago, and that is reflected in the significant downturn in the Southeast. But there is some good news for New England and the Northeast; housing starts are not significantly off compared to the averages of the previous decade.

The bottom line is that the industry is down and someone is going to lose, perhaps everyone. To establish your leadership credentials, consider that shouting and demanding bet-



ter results is hardly any way to ensure sales growth given the significant challenges of the day.

Step 2: Do What You Can Do

Teach people what they can do in the face of this economic storm — in fact the only thing they can do as salespeople — keep selling! Now is the time when you can have your salespeople gather more information about the market. Some people call it prospecting. Let's just call it getting

more information. Either way now is the time to keep a close watch on market opportunities.

Merge Marketing and Sales Efforts

You should also work diligently to merge the marketing and sales efforts philosophically. The job of marketing is essentially to provide sales leads by maximizing exposure of your company. Because of budget cutbacks, the allocation of assets to the marketing department may need to be reduced. But this doesn't mean that marketing efforts have to stop. Your salespeople should recognize that their job is to continue to promote your brand while striving to fill the sales pipeline with leads.

If you're a reroofer, then consider that many of your potential clients are in need or desire a new roof for their home along with other planned improvements. But like many people in the market today, they are apprehensive because of the economic outlook. Thus your objective should be to engage them in a conversation and position yourself as the first company they will call when the timing is right. Forget the one-call close during these challenging times and take names!

If you supply contractors, remember that they are facing the same challenges as you. The market is tough and they are trying to keep afloat while weathering the storm. Now is the time to strike up new relationships and get to know prospects in the market. Conscientiously strive to understand whom they are buying from so you can be ready to assist in the event that your competitor drops the ball or closes shop. Success is about the numbers and amount of prospects you can put in the pipeline, whether in good times or bad.

Focus your efforts on counting the leads that your salespeople bring in. Even if you can't control the results and guarantee sales increases, at least you can control the amount of leads that you generate. By increasing and tracking leads, you can generate momentum and increase the number of sales opportunities currently available. Don't wait for leads to come to you. Go get them and track your effectiveness.

Bottom Line: Keep Selling

These are tough times. There is not a company in our industry that is not feeling pressure from the market, my company being no exception. But there is one thing you can always do and must do. Keep selling. Fight the battle with dignity. That's your job. Heroes are made when the going gets tough. Do your job well in the tough times,

regardless of the results, and you'll be a better leader for it in the long run. **R**

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