

'Managing the downturn'

Top Tips from Hepworth HR

1. **Engage in dialogue with your employees** – communication is always cited as important within organisations of any size. But what does it mean exactly? One method of getting your employees 'on side' during the downturn is to engage them in DIALOGUE. You have an issue. Ask them what they think – consider their response. Ask then why they think or feel like that – listen to the response. Deliver your view based on this evidence – and then ask them for their response. Continue until you have exhausted all possibilities – then ask them what WE are going to do about the issue
2. **Review performance** – in times of stress, economic climate-induced or not, make sure that your employees have clear targets that they are committed to deliver. They may appear relaxed and on top of things, but if getting work becomes tough, then anxiety on job security sets in and you as the manager need to ensure that they remain focused
3. **Share your problems** – your employees will be as flexible as you want them to be if you have their trust and commitment. So don't immediately think about redundancies – ask employees how else you may be able to solve your issues and you might be surprised with the answers
4. **Use your status as an SME** – and this means that you should be able to make quicker, more informed decisions than the larger companies. Speed up your processes to allow quick wins and use the fact that you can move quickly to your advantage; you may also attract key skills and experiences from the jobs market – so use them flexibly, on contract or as self employed suppliers
5. **Train, train and train again** – with reducing workforces, you will need to get more flexible staff and this involves investing short term in training for long term benefit. There is a lot of cash out there to help you fund it and the bureaucracy need not get in the way – there are other SMEs that specialise in helping you through the paperwork!
6. **Develop, develop and develop again** – you will have to delegate more in order to front any sales and marketing campaign and so this will give your colleagues more opportunities to develop their experiences. Or you could decide to delegate the sales 'push' to previously untried employees – you never know their potential and now is a good time to try it out
7. **Manage the bigger picture** – don't forget strategy, however you define it. If you are the owner-manager or main director, you need to focus on the future and show leadership by entrusting day to day management to those best placed to do so. Move away from the detail, concentrate on the future and delegate with control

8. **Watch the pennies** – do you know how much you pay for staff in all aspects of work? What are your sickness payments? How much overtime? And what is the worklife balance cost on those extra hours? Employees consistently put money as important but only in the short-term – so, what really motivates your team and how might you pay them differently to get that commitment?
9. **Don't procrastinate** – know what your measurable outputs REALLY are and when they are both good and bad. Be decisive through involvement to ensure that you have the full picture, but do it quickly. There is nothing worse for employees to feel powerless when they can see that the firm is suffering (the reality) and they are told that 'everything is fine' (the rhetoric)
10. **Engage all those connected with your business** – so in the jargon this means all possible stakeholders. Make sure they know who you are and where you are with your business and make that a priority. Get advice and do not be afraid to ask for it, even if you feel you 'know' the answer. Networking really helps in this and you get business through it too!

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