

Being Positive: Testing helps in difficult times

We don't underestimate the pressure that economic conditions put on individual organisations, managers and workers. But sometimes bad news is self-fulfilling. The media keep pumping it out. What about some practical help?

Tests are essentials in times like these. They help you lift the pressure, perform better now and when the upturn comes, improve management and keep the people you want to keep. Put simply, they help you with the business of business.

How ?

Recruitment

First, everything doesn't shut down. Whatever the conditions, you still need to run your business. You have to recruit people, even if less frequently. In good times a mistaken appointment is bearable. In bad times it can be catastrophic. So, you need to get it right.

Two of the sources of real competitive advantage are blocked: product and service innovation – because it's expensive; price cutting – because everybody's doing it. So, you get your differentiation through people: their customer attitudes, attention to detail, efficiency and service standards.

Finally with nearly 2 million unemployed you going to get more applicants for each job some of them inappropriate. You have to spend a lot of administration time just going through long lists.

Tests are made for times like these because they make your decisions more accurate, enable you to fill key positions quickly and reduce the amount of non-productive time spent getting to your short list. In fact test use usually goes up during difficult economic times because they help in critical business performance.

Development

Development does two things. First it keeps important ambitious staff with you when you can't reward them in other ways. Generation Y wants to learn. But development and training are expensive, and budgets are usually cut back at times like these. Tests are cost-effective, comparatively cheap development activities in themselves. Offer existing staff a good, non-threatening test with feedback and you're investing in their growth. You need to introduce them carefully but they'll have benefits for you and them. And the process costs a lot less than a training course.

Second, development prepares your organisation for the future. Research shows that companies who continued to develop people during the last recession got back to full speed more quickly when the upturn happened than those who cut people spent. The investors gained competitive advantage. Developing peoples personal skills pays dividends.

Leadership and Management

Downturns don't come every year – thank goodness ! When they do arrive, they test managers and leaders to the limit. Many younger managers may have no experience of difficult times to draw on. They may never have announced redundancies or held redundancy interviews; they may only have delivered morale-raising speeches in good times; they may not have had to report poor results to a board or held a genuinely high stakes disciplinary issue.

Professional manager and leader behaviour is essential to weathering a recession. It's as important as focusing sales efforts, managing financial resources and maintaining customer closeness. If managers are inexperienced in these areas, then understanding themselves and acquiring crucial softer skills – appropriate communication, a genuine ability to read their staff – pays back tenfold.

This is where testing comes in. Using the correct reports generated by PPA, backed up by a trained, experienced manager or consultant is a fast track course for leading in difficult times. But this is a big subject and we've talked about it in more detail in our article [GETTING PEOPLE ON-SIDE](#) which you can access [here](#).

Summing Up

Tests lift the pressure because they help create an effective team around you: new employees who accelerate up to speed; key workers secure in their job; staff who are engaged. Instead of being part of the problem, people become part of the solution

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