

Managing UP, DOWN,

and All Around Under Adverse Conditions

Ronald Paul Hill, Ph.D.

New Challenges...

Most of us had budgets and performance goals/revenue projections prior to this recent downturn, but few of the senior executives we work for have the foresight to make the necessary adjustments to these new circumstances. As a result, we often operate under what are now perceived as *unreasonable expectations* that serve as constant reminders of our inability to do what is asked of us. Making things worse are *negative prognoses* that are all around us, providing constant reminders that things are not well within the larger economy or our industry or local market. On occasion, some outside person or other department will show signs of life and meet their previous goals, but it will look more like the *survival of the luckiest* rather than a marked change for the better of all. In the end, many employees experience *flagging morale* that leads to a *lack of confidence* in their likelihood to succeed.

...Old Solutions

Unfortunately, most reactions to such events may fail to resonate with the very people we need to encourage the most. Some managers ask that their charges *work harder (not smarter!)*, emphasizing the acceleration of basic practices that may have succeeded

before but have little to do with the existing environment. An additional problem with this tactic is that it requires employees to *do more (with less!)* as management stops filling vacant positions because of attrition or layoffs. Sometimes drastic measures are imposed that require a complete metamorphosis in orientation, leading to an *out with the old* ways of generating revenue or meeting goals in lieu of new ideas that make no sense at best or seem downright crazy at worst. These untenable conditions and expectations notwithstanding, senior management may ask that our employees *stay committed (on shaky ground!)* while failing to provide security or any other appropriate rationale for unflagging loyalty. Of course, some managers, supervisors, and employees have been around long enough to have *seen it before (why again?)*, but these experiences leave most others wondering why we were unprepared with more workable plans and solutions.

Alternative Perspectives

Obviously, different ways of approaching such circumstance are necessary in order to survive or (potentially) thrive. The principle ideas involve managing down, managing up, and managing self. They are discussed in turn.

Managing one's reports may require increased vigilance and awareness. For example, rather than avoiding *difficult conversations*, they should occur as soon as possible to spare managers, as well as employees, anxiety associated with anticipation. Managers also should establish themselves as *information centers* that provide the latest news on a timely basis so backroom gossip that often exaggerates the situation can be minimized. These discussions should be conversational, and employees must receive *honest inoculations* about the potential negative consequences of future events so they can properly prepare. No matter how bad things get, however, management must epitomize *positive modelling* in their department so that others learn how to overcome adversity in



support of organizational priorities.

Managing up the corporate ladder may require finesse and sensitivity. Many supervisors feel the need to hunker down during crises, which may isolate them from necessary communications even with superiors. Instead, all employees should seek **regular interactions** with those above that allow them to show their continued enthusiasm for and ability to do their jobs. They should position themselves as point persons for **local knowledge** and as an indispensable resource for understanding latent potential opportunities. This ability may allow for **renegotiated goal setting** whereby supervisors are made aware of what to expect when they review future performance measures and see productivity in a different light. Regardless, this situation calls for discussions of **innovative solutions**, reminding managers that their employees may be good sources for better ways of doing business.

Managing self may require reflection and understanding. No matter what one says or how one behaves, it is vitally important that they have **honest self talk** in order to

assess dangers to their personal circumstances. To maintain dignity and confidence when failure seems likely, managers and employees alike can always look **back and forward to remember** they have a history of success and that the situation will change eventually. Furthermore, they should concentrate on **input versus output**, with the realization that they only control what they do and not how people respond. Supervisors giving **small rewards for small successes** likely will reinforce serious effort in the face of serious threats.

Moving Forward

In the final analysis, managers and supervisors must continue to generate positive activity that leads to organizational success. The tactics described here must be part of an integrated effort that reorients firms. With little relief in sight, the old adage to take it **one day at a time** seems appropriate so that the focus is on sustained efforts rather than long-term obstacles. Advising your employees to **take some chances** is more appropriate than ever when ordinary

ways of doing business no longer work. Additionally, **celebrate all successes** no matter what their size and impact to renew the culture of achievement. Realize that change will continue to occur and the people you count on most may not be there tomorrow, so **prepare for transitions** in order to minimize disruptions and maximize future gains. ■

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To register for the IPI Annual Conference & Exposition to hear Dr. Hill's keynote presentation and take advantage of the 70+ educational sessions available, please visit www.parking.org/conference.

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will help them cope with events as they arise that serve themselves as well as their companies. I have been truly gratified by the feedback and success stories communicated to me.

IPI: What three things can attendees expect to take away from your presentation?

Dr. Hill: First, realize that you are not alone. The powerful feeling in the room helps everyone see that these situations are widely shared. Second, you will learn that difficult circumstances do not necessarily require extraordinary measures. Sometimes, a simple and honest solution is best. Third, I am a resource that is available. Anyone who attends my session can send me an email over the next 30 days for comment. For many, it helps to have someone outside their organizations as a resource.

IPI: You are doing something unusual with your Q&A time during the session. Can you please give further details about it?

Dr. Hill: I want to give your members the opportunity to receive immediate feedback to their questions. At most of my talks, folks will come by afterwards because they have pressing problems that need immediate attention. Unfortunately, I'm usually ushered in and out. Immediately following my session, your group is stationing me at the Member Services Center (booth #315) in the expo hall which will allow for an extended interac-

tive one-on-one opportunity to answer all questions and provide specific insight. I really applaud your leadership for your forward-thinking session planning, and look forward to speaking to as many attendees as I can!

IPI: If there was one question you could ask a parking professional, what would it be?

Dr. Hill: What is your biggest challenge and how have you tried to make progress solving it? I would venture a guess right now—is it hiring and maintaining a competent workforce? How about receiving the resources from more senior management in order to do the job right?

IPI: Have you ever been in any interesting parking situations?

Dr. Hill: Well, I was a "player" in high school! Just kidding! Seriously, my most interesting valet story is about a time my wife took ill at an event downtown and we needed to leave right away. The parking attendant placed us in the front of the line and retrieved our car right away. Of course, he got a larger than usual tip. But, I was blown away at his genuine concern and willingness to break protocol to serve us. I hope your membership realizes all the good they do for people. So many events and ordinary aspects of our lives are experienced for the better when our parking needs go well. Can they see how important they really are?