

Stay Upbeat in Down Times

by Richard Ensman

Facing tough times? Although difficult circumstances present many challenges to publishers, perhaps the greatest challenge is maintaining a positive, even enthusiastic, workplace atmosphere. How? Here are twenty simple ways to create a dynamic business atmosphere during good times and bad. Select a few, and build a business environment to encourage and motivate your staff.

1. *Celebrate success.* Whether it is a major book sales victory, or simply an administrative accomplishment, take note and smile. Successes, large and small, boost morale.
2. *Break tasks into components.* When things seem tough, obstacles seem insurmountable. When obstacles loom, separate tasks into discrete activities with specific timelines. The result: more realistic goals.
3. *Maintain open communication lines.* Ask staff how things are going. They appreciate expressions of interest, and their information may be vital.
4. *Confront rumors.* The minute you hear a rumor, squash it. Either admit its truth with the best face possible, or dismiss it clearly and publicly.
5. *Acknowledge uncertainty.* When you cannot predict how things will go in the months ahead, say so. Those around you will appreciate your candor.
6. *Offer updates.* Keep your people informed. Provide reports at every staff meeting. Post sales and profit statistics on employee bulletin boards.
7. *Seek updates.* Obtain regular reports from staff. Check sales statistics. Keep your eye on the numbers. Glean every last bit of information about the health of the business.
8. *Invest in training.* During slow periods, staff may have the time to upgrade their skills. Use the time productively for formal training.
9. *Promote continuous learning.* Encourage employees to read, to seek education on their own, and to become involved in professional organizations.
10. *Foster teamwork.* Involve your staff in problem-solving. Sound communication, group-based tasks and goals, and employee empowerment can bring newfound commitment to the work at hand.
11. *Have fun at work.* Maintain an upbeat spirit. Play music. Hold pizza or ice cream breaks. Host a meeting in a pleasant location.
12. *Seek advice.* Identify persons who can offer suggestions, both inside and outside the publishing house. Pose the thorniest problems to them.
13. *Give advice.* Boost credibility and performance by helping others: employees who want to learn new skills or upgrade their own performance, peers in non-competing organizations, and association members attending trade meetings or conferences.
14. *Stay clear and direct.* A clear and confident communication style helps inspire confidence in others.
15. *Be available.* Let employees see you. Be ready to answer questions at any time.
16. *Seek hidden talents.* Look for value-added skills employees can bring to the business. Does the sales clerk have a hidden talent for ad design? Does the receptionist handle customer service problems well? You may find powerful new skills available, at little or no cost.
17. *Be grateful.* When times are tough, nothing beats a simple thank you or another small token of appreciation.
18. *Look for feedback.* Constantly ask those around you: "How are we doing? What can we do better?" Listen to their responses.
19. *Offer leadership opportunities.* Encourage staff to assume leadership—as team chairs or project managers, for example. The result: greater commitment and more participation in problem solving.
20. *Feel good about your work.* When things are tough, remember your past successes. Remember the vast reservoir of skills you and your staff bring to the table each day. Remain forward-looking and optimistic, and share your enthusiasm with the people around you. The goal: long-term business vitality and growth. ♦

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