

Ten Tips to HR for Surviving the Economic Downturn

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The current state of the economy is worrisome to everyone. Each day seems to bring a plethora of new headlines, new layoff reports and dire predictions for the future. Now is the time for HR to lead, to be part of the discussion, and to prove its value to each organization. Here are 10 quick tips to help you do just that.

1. Strategize, strategize, strategize

Robust and meticulous planning and strategies will help keep you and your staff focused on the big picture and the mission. Clarity of purpose will be the hallmark of a successful HR department.

2. Anticipate and plan for possible downsizing

Be realistic. Look at your business (including potential growth and contraction), be part of the management team in anticipating possible downsizing, and have a plan for what that would mean in terms of position control, buyouts and early retirements, and reassignments. HR needs to have a seat at the table.

3. Metrics and Reporting

Use metrics to validate your strategies and their effectiveness. Demonstrate your team's success in sourcing and selecting great employees. Develop clear reporting and make sure those with a need to know see what a great job you are doing.

4. Process

Now is the time to carefully scrutinize your recruitment process, making sure it is candidate friendly and part of the solution, not the problem. Key hires will still be part of the equation, even in down times.

5. Team responsibilities

Now, more than ever, examine what your team members are doing and ensure that the responsibilities make sense and enable the team to be proactive, effective and accountable.

6. Be prepared to cut

Whether that be budget cuts, programs, media, resources or staff, reductions may be necessary. Plan proactively so that these reductions have minimal effect on your department, your staff and your services.

7. Pay attention to your customers

Work closely with your internal customers, both those you have hired and hiring managers, to ensure your department is proactive, tuned in and switched on to their needs. Recognize your external customers, the applicants, with superior customer service and seamless response.

8. Communicate, communicate, communicate

The economy is worrisome to everyone. Make sure you are clear and realistic with your staff and your employees. Reassure, but be realistic. Listen, listen, listen. Put on all your HR hats—counselor, friend, cheerleader, leader, advocate and be there for your team and your employees.

9. Retention will become even more crucial

Now is the time to keep your intellectual capital, and retain those invaluable employees who can be most productive. Company efficiency and output depend on those who can be the most nimble in moving objectives forward. Even in economic downturns, your top performers can move—and will—if no effort is made to keep them.

10. Foster training and career pathing

Be mindful of knowledge transfer and its importance to your organization's viability. Use mentors, provide clear career paths and enhance inter-generational communication and learning. Orientation, onboarding and continued learning opportunities will continue to be important.