



Make This Your Best Year Ever!

"This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today."

-Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Are you afraid? These are difficult days we are facing and the biggest problem we face is our own fear. Fear of poverty. Fear of failure. Fear of disaster. President Franklin Roosevelt said in his first inauguration speech, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Today we face very similar circumstances in the world. We face a recessed economy. We face worldwide terror. We face regimes that are dedicated to the extermination of other countries. What will you do in response to the daily barrage of bad news? How can you conquer the fears we face today?

1. Look for the best in new ideas. Have you ever seen a good idea and said, "I wish I'd thought of that."? I know I have. The truth is, the process of coming up with good ideas is more attitude than aptitude. An open-minded, creative person looks for ideas anywhere he can. Read every moment you can. Most people won't read an entire book this year. If you set a goal of reading a book every month it will put you ahead of your competition. Embrace failure. Failure often produces the energy to go out and try it another way. Thomas Edison, one of the world's greatest inventors, discovered some of his best inventions after other ideas went wrong and he found another use for them. Ivory soap and Noxzema were created out of failed attempts at something else.

If you keep an open mind and explore every idea presented to you, your people will follow your example and the new ideas you discover together will contribute to your success. I see ideas every day for financial organizations, health care groups and construction companies to name a few. I have become an idea collector. People will always pay good for good information, and pay great for great information. Be a resource.

2. Cultivate a consistent positive attitude. Today, business leaders are "farming" their territory in the efforts to yield a plentiful crop. If you want a full garden, you have to plow, plant, water, trim and weed frequently throughout the year. If you want a successful life it won't happen over night. It, too, takes time

and work. If you don't pay attention to your crop, weeds will infect it and you'll have a life of negative attitudes. Sure, the economy needs great improvement, but a great leader looks for opportunities.

There is a reason that Chick-Fil-A, McDonald's and Walmart are making profits when their competition isn't. In fact, Chick-Fil-A posted its 16th year of consecutive growth in 2008 and its 12th year of double digit increases (this is a fast food restaurant that is only open 6 days each week – they are closed on Sundays). This corporation is looking for positive results and finding them. Focus on the positive and don't feed the weeds.

3. Look for the best in everyone. Have you ever noticed that when you buy a new car, you notice others of that same model and year on the road? They didn't just appear, they were there all along. You just started noticing them. In the same way, train yourself to look for the best in everyone you do business with. When you consistently look for the best in others, their good traits will have a positive affect on your life and leadership. Goethe said, "Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be, and he will become as he can and should be." People will live up or down to the image you project on them. You as a leader should always look for the best in your people.

4. Act like the person you wish to become. Start thinking positively by acting positively. Who do you admire? What type of person do you wish to become? What qualities do you want in your life? Start behaving like the person you want to be. Don't wait until you feel like taking action, take it! You can form a habit of seizing the moment and taking a positive attitude right now. Begin thinking positive about situations that you are confronted with. Your health will improve. Model this attitude for your employees. Watch their reaction and see how it spreads throughout the organization. You will see your organization's health improve also.

5. Decide not to quit. Most leaders fail because they give up too easily. Persistence is important to me. I have been hired by several clients because they said they admired my persistence. It hasn't always been easy, though. During a down time several friends tried to get me to give up and consider another line of work. But one close friend reminded me of a speech by a great statesman and orator: Winston Churchill. One of Churchill's most famous speeches was simply this: "Never, never, never give up!" Are you putting everything you have into your job? If you aren't, maybe that's why your workers aren't. If they feel you've given up on a project or another worker, the attitude spreads and they adopt it as a lifestyle.

By the way, no one ever got ahead by "scaling back." Scaling back always leads to defeat. Name an army that ever won a battle by retreating and giving up

territory. Name a football team that ever won a championship by playing it safe. No one ever got rich stinging and waiting. The aggressive leaders are the ones making the deals, increasing ROI and will survive and thrive in the months ahead.

6. Take risks. Risk takers are worth more to good organizations than those who play it safe. In fact statistics show that more people are let go because they wouldn't take a risk. Ask any broker and he or she will tell you that the stocks that produce the most reward are the riskiest ones. Sure, it takes a lot of courage to invest in them but the richest people are the most courageous. Orchard owners will tell you that the best fruit is way out on the limb. You have to go out far to get the best.

Last month listened intently as my daughter's Taiko Karate instructor told his class about how he came to this country from Japan 35 years ago and started his school. It was a major risk to take. Today through dedication and persistence he has multiple classes every evening with at least 5 sensei instructors leading each class. Don't be afraid to stretch your comfort zone. Push yourself and you will be amazed at how far you will go...and grow!

7. Serve others well. Bob Dylan said, "You gotta serve somebody." Dedicating yourself to the service of others is the greatest way to move ahead in business. The success of the National Speaker's Association is grounded in a commitment begun by its founder, Cavett Robert. Cavett spent his life helping others to be their best. He founded the NSA on the principle of enlarging the pie, rather than seeing how it could be cut up. Volunteer your time in local causes that lift others up. Model servanthood for your employees. Think about the stores, restaurants and businesses you like to do business with.

I met a hotel desk clerk who after one incredible act of service was promoted to hotel manager within a month. You'll find that they serve you effectively and continually make you feel important. Do what you said you would do, when you said you would do it and in the way you said you would do it – with a smile on your face. Base your organization on this principle and see the difference it will make in your customers and bottom line.

8. Use time wisely. As an executive coach I can safely say that most people who come to me for coaching want better management of their time. Time management is one of the biggest headaches leaders face every day. I have a friend who has his own successful sales training business. He hits on this all the time. He says that most sales aren't closed because time is wasted. Even his website says, "Why are you sitting there reading this page when you could be out selling something?" Procrastination kills not only time, but enthusiasm and drive as well. It will be great year if you use all of it judiciously. Why not start right now?

When it's time to market, market now. When it is time to do research, do it now. When it is time to aggressively make your move, move now!

9. Keep your sight set on your goal. In the ancient world, farmers often used a tree, stone or other stationary landmark to guide them in plowing their fields. It was important for a farmer to keep his eyes on that marker to plow a straight furrow. Don't let the little things take your eyes off of the goals you have set for yourself. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advised his followers, "Keep your eye on the prize!" Keep the main thing, the main thing. Workers need to be reminded of the goal at least every 30 days. Find creative ways to keep the company's vision statement or production goals for this year in front of everyone in new and different ways. Use contests and mnemonic devices to keep everyone focused.

10. Don't allow negative information or people to influence you. You can get very depressed staying glued to the news. No one seems to be happy and depression is rampant. There is always another business liquidation, another 7,000 employees laid off, more bad economic news, the list goes on. I have notices that the leaders who don't subscribe to the fear mongering in the media are the most successful. They forge ahead and MAKE things happen. I had the best January of my career in 2009, while many other speakers were folding their tents and talking gloom and doom. I spend every day growing my business, making contacts, exploring new ideas. I network with other speakers who are expanding and try to help the ones who are struggling. I listen to upbeat radio and music stations and avoid negative reporting and conversations. Surround yourself with positive people and information and you can't fail.

You have the choice of making this your best year ever or resigning yourself to defeat and stagnation. I speak with leaders every day who are sitting on the fence waiting for someone else to decide their own fate. You must realize that you are in control of your own destiny. Your dreams and desires are attainable only if you decide they are. This is your time to shine. What will you do?

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